

The Novels of Thomas Hardy - Volume 3

Thomas Hardy

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THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE

This is Hardy's sixth published novel, which first appeared in the magazine *Belgravia*, a publication known for sensationalism, and the novel was presented in twelve monthly installments from January to December 1878. Due to the novel's controversial themes, Hardy had some difficulty finding a publisher. In the twentieth century, *The Return of the Native* became one of Hardy's most admired novels.

Hardy, 1908

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PREFACE

The date at which the following events are assumed to have occurred may be set down as between 1840 and 1850, when the old watering place herein called “Budmouth” still retained sufficient afterglow from its Georgian gaiety and prestige to lend it an absorbing attractiveness to the romantic and imaginative soul of a lonely dweller inland.

Under the general name of “Egdon Heath,” which has been given to the sombre scene of the story, are united or typified heaths of various real names, to the number of at least a dozen; these being virtually one in character and aspect, though their original unity, or partial unity, is now somewhat disguised by intrusive strips and slices brought under the plough with varying degrees of success, or planted to woodland.

It is pleasant to dream that some spot in the extensive tract whose southwestern quarter is here described, may be the heath of that traditionary King of Wessex — Lear.

July, 1895.

“To sorrow

I bade good morrow,
And thought to leave her far away behind;
But cheerly, cheerly,
She loves me dearly;
She is so constant to me, and so kind.
I would deceive her,
And so leave her,
But ah! she is so constant and so kind.”

BOOK ONE

THE THREE WOMEN

CHAPTER 1

A Face on Which Time Makes but Little Impression

A Saturday afternoon in November was approaching the time of twilight, and the vast tract of unenclosed wild known as Egdon Heath embrowned itself moment by moment. Overhead the hollow stretch of whitish cloud shutting out the sky was as a tent which had the whole heath for its floor.

The heaven being spread with this pallid screen and the earth with the darkest vegetation, their meeting-line at the horizon was clearly marked. In such contrast the heath wore the appearance of an instalment of night which had taken up its place before its astronomical hour was come: darkness had to a great extent arrived hereon, while day stood distinct in the sky. Looking upwards, a furze-cutter would have been inclined to continue work; looking down, he would have decided to finish his faggot and go home. The distant rims of the world and of the firmament seemed to be a division in time no less than a division in matter. The face of the heath by its mere complexion added half an hour to evening; it could in like manner retard the dawn, sadden noon, anticipate the frowning of storms scarcely generated, and intensify the opacity of a moonless midnight to a cause of shaking and dread.

In fact, precisely at this transitional point of its nightly roll into darkness the great and particular glory of the Egdon waste began, and nobody could be said to understand the heath who had not been there at such a time. It could best be felt when it could not clearly be seen, its complete effect and explanation lying in this and the succeeding hours before the next dawn; then, and only then, did it tell its true tale. The spot was, indeed, a near relation of night, and when night showed itself an apparent tendency to gravitate together could be perceived in its shades and the scene. The sombre stretch of rounds and hollows seemed to rise and meet the evening gloom in pure sympathy, the heath exhaling darkness as rapidly as the heavens precipitated it. And so the obscurity

in the air and the obscurity in the land closed together in a black fraternization towards which each advanced halfway.

The place became full of a watchful intentness now; for when other things sank bloodied to sleep the heath appeared slowly to awake and listen. Every night its Titanic form seemed to await something; but it had waited thus, unmoved, during so many centuries, through the crises of so many things, that it could only be imagined to await one last crisis — the final overthrow.

It was a spot which returned upon the memory of those who loved it with an aspect of peculiar and kindly congruity. Smiling champagnes of flowers and fruit hardly do this, for they are permanently harmonious only with an existence of better reputation as to its issues than the present. Twilight combined with the scenery of Egdon Heath to evolve a thing majestic without severity, impressive without showiness, emphatic in its admonitions, grand in its simplicity. The qualifications which frequently invest the facade of a prison with far more dignity than is found in the facade of a palace double its size lent to this heath a sublimity in which spots renowned for beauty of the accepted kind are utterly wanting. Fair prospects wed happily with fair times; but alas, if times be not fair! Men have oftener suffered from, the mockery of a place too smiling for their reason than from the oppression of surroundings oversadly tinged. Haggard Egdon appealed to a subtler and scarcer instinct, to a more recently learnt emotion, than that which responds to the sort of beauty called charming and fair.

Indeed, it is a question if the exclusive reign of this orthodox beauty is not approaching its last quarter. The new Vale of Tempe may be a gaunt waste in Thule; human souls may find themselves in closer and closer harmony with external things wearing a sombreness distasteful to our race when it was young. The time seems near, if it has not actually arrived, when the chastened sublimity of a moor, a sea, or a mountain will be all of nature that is absolutely in keeping with the moods of the more thinking among mankind. And ultimately, to the commonest tourist, spots like Iceland may become what the vineyards and myrtle gardens of South Europe are to him now; and Heidelberg and Baden be passed unheeded as he hastens from the Alps to the sand dunes of Scheveningen.

The most thoroughgoing ascetic could feel that he had a natural right to wander on Egdon — he was keeping within the line of legitimate indulgence when he laid himself open to influences such as these. Colours and beauties so far subdued were, at least, the birthright of all. Only in summer days of highest feather did its mood touch the level of gaiety. Intensity was more usually reached by way of the solemn than by way of the brilliant, and such a sort of intensity was often arrived at during winter darkness, tempests, and mists. Then Egdon was aroused to reciprocity; for the storm was its lover, and the wind its friend. Then it became the home of strange phantoms; and it was found to be the hitherto unrecognized original of those wild regions of obscurity which are vaguely felt to be compassing us about in midnight dreams of flight and disaster, and are never thought of after the dream till revived by scenes like this.

It was at present a place perfectly accordant with man's nature — neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly; neither commonplace, unmeaning, nor tame; but, like man, slighted and enduring; and withal singularly colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony. As with some persons who have long lived apart, solitude seemed to look out of its countenance. It had a lonely face, suggesting tragical possibilities.

This obscure, obsolete, superseded country figures in Domesday. Its condition is recorded therein as that of heathy, furzy, briary wilderness — "Bruaria." Then follows the length and breadth in leagues; and, though some uncertainty exists as to the exact extent of this ancient lineal measure, it appears from the figures that the area of Egdon down to the present day has but little diminished. "Turbaria Bruaria" — the right of cutting heath-turf — occurs in charters relating to the district. "Overgrown with heth and mosse," says Leland of the same dark sweep of country.

Here at least were intelligible facts regarding landscape — far-reaching proofs productive of genuine satisfaction. The untameable, Ishmaelitish thing that Egdon now was it always had been. Civilization was its enemy; and ever since the beginning of vegetation its soil had worn the same antique brown dress, the natural and invariable garment of the particular formation. In its venerable one coat lay a certain vein of satire on human vanity in clothes. A person on a heath in raiment of modern cut and colours has more or less an anomalous look. We seem to want the oldest and simplest human clothing where the clothing of the earth is so primitive.

To recline on a stump of thorn in the central valley of Egdon, between afternoon and night, as now, where the eye could reach nothing of the world outside the summits and shoulders of heathland which filled the whole circumference of its glance, and to know that everything around and underneath had been from prehistoric times as unaltered as the stars overhead, gave ballast to the mind adrift on change, and harassed by the irrepressible New. The great inviolate place had an ancient permanence which the sea cannot claim. Who can say of a particular sea that it is old? Distilled by the sun, kneaded by the moon, it is renewed in a year, in a day, or in an hour. The sea changed, the fields changed, the rivers, the villages, and the people changed, yet Egdon remained. Those surfaces were neither so steep as to be destructible by weather, nor so flat as to be the victims of floods and deposits. With the exception of an aged highway, and a still more aged barrow presently to be referred to — themselves almost crystallized to natural products by long continuance — even the trifling irregularities were not caused by pickaxe, plough, or spade, but remained as the very finger-touches of the last geological change.

The above-mentioned highway traversed the lower levels of the heath, from one horizon to another. In many portions of its course it overlaid an old vicinal way, which branched from the great Western road of the Romans, the Via Iceniana, or Ikenild Street, hard by. On the evening under consideration it would have been noticed that, though the gloom had increased sufficiently to confuse the minor features of the heath, the white surface of the road remained almost as clear as ever.

CHAPTER 2

Humanity Appears upon the Scene, Hand in Hand with Trouble

Along the road walked an old man. He was white-headed as a mountain, bowed in the shoulders, and faded in general aspect. He wore a glazed hat, an ancient boat-cloak, and shoes; his brass buttons bearing an anchor upon their face. In his hand was a silver-headed walking stick, which he used as a veritable third leg, perseveringly dotting the ground with its point at every few inches' interval. One would have said that he had been, in his day, a naval officer of some sort or other.

Before him stretched the long, laborious road, dry, empty, and white. It was quite open to the heath on each side, and bisected that vast dark surface like the parting-line on a head of black hair, diminishing and bending away on the furthest horizon.

The old man frequently stretched his eyes ahead to gaze over the tract that he had yet to traverse. At length he discerned, a long distance in front of him, a moving spot, which appeared to be a vehicle, and it proved to be going the same way as that in which he himself was journeying. It was the single atom of life that the scene contained, and it only served to render the general loneliness more evident. Its rate of advance was slow, and the old man gained upon it sensibly.

When he drew nearer he perceived it to be a spring van, ordinary in shape, but singular in colour, this being a lurid red. The driver walked beside it; and, like his van, he was completely red. One dye of that tincture covered his clothes, the cap upon his head, his boots, his face, and his hands. He was not temporarily overlaid with the colour; it permeated him.

The old man knew the meaning of this. The traveller with the cart was a reddleman — a person whose vocation it was to supply farmers with redding for their sheep. He was one of a class rapidly becoming extinct in Wessex, filling at present in the rural world the place which, during the last century, the dodo occupied in the world of animals. He is a curious, interesting, and nearly perished link between obsolete forms of life and those which generally prevail.

The decayed officer, by degrees, came up alongside his fellow-wayfarer, and wished him good evening. The reddleman turned his head, and replied in sad and occupied tones. He was young, and his face, if not exactly handsome, approached so near to handsome that nobody would have contradicted an assertion that it really was so in its natural colour. His eye, which glared so strangely through his stain, was in itself attractive — keen as that of a bird of prey, and blue as autumn mist. He had neither whisker nor moustache, which allowed the soft curves of the lower part of his face to be apparent. His lips were thin, and though, as it seemed, compressed by thought, there was a pleasant twitch at their corners now and then. He was clothed throughout in a tight-fitting suit of corduroy, excellent in quality, not much worn, and well-chosen for its purpose, but deprived of its original colour by his trade. It showed to advantage the good shape of his figure. A certain well-to-do air about the man suggested that he was not poor for his degree. The natural query of an observer would have been,

Why should such a promising being as this have hidden his prepossessing exterior by adopting that singular occupation?

After replying to the old man's greeting he showed no inclination to continue in talk, although they still walked side by side, for the elder traveller seemed to desire company. There were no sounds but that of the booming wind upon the stretch of tawny herbage around them, the crackling wheels, the tread of the men, and the footsteps of the two shaggy ponies which drew the van. They were small, hardy animals, of a breed between Galloway and Exmoor, and were known as "heath-croppers" here.

Now, as they thus pursued their way, the reddleman occasionally left his companion's side, and, stepping behind the van, looked into its interior through a small window. The look was always anxious. He would then return to the old man, who made another remark about the state of the country and so on, to which the reddleman again abstractedly replied, and then again they would lapse into silence. The silence conveyed to neither any sense of awkwardness; in these lonely places wayfarers, after a first greeting, frequently plod on for miles without speech; contiguity amounts to a tacit conversation where, otherwise than in cities, such contiguity can be put an end to on the merest inclination, and where not to put an end to it is intercourse in itself.

Possibly these two might not have spoken again till their parting, had it not been for the reddleman's visits to his van. When he returned from his fifth time of looking in the old man said, "You have something inside there besides your load?"

"Yes."

"Somebody who wants looking after?"

"Yes."

Not long after this a faint cry sounded from the interior. The reddleman hastened to the back, looked in, and came away again.

"You have a child there, my man?"

"No, sir, I have a woman."

"The deuce you have! Why did she cry out?"

"Oh, she has fallen asleep, and not being used to traveling, she's uneasy, and keeps dreaming."

"A young woman?"

"Yes, a young woman."

"That would have interested me forty years ago. Perhaps she's your wife?"

"My wife!" said the other bitterly. "She's above mating with such as I. But there's no reason why I should tell you about that."

"That's true. And there's no reason why you should not. What harm can I do to you or to her?"

The reddleman looked in the old man's face. "Well, sir," he said at last, "I knew her before today, though perhaps it would have been better if I had not. But she's nothing to me, and I am nothing to her; and she wouldn't have been in my van if any better carriage had been there to take her."

"Where, may I ask?"

“At Anglebury.”

“I know the town well. What was she doing there?”

“Oh, not much — to gossip about. However, she’s tired to death now, and not at all well, and that’s what makes her so restless. She dropped off into a nap about an hour ago, and ‘twill do her good.”

“A nice-looking girl, no doubt?”

“You would say so.”

The other traveller turned his eyes with interest towards the van window, and, without withdrawing them, said, “I presume I might look in upon her?”

“No,” said the reddleman abruptly. “It is getting too dark for you to see much of her; and, more than that, I have no right to allow you. Thank God she sleeps so well, I hope she won’t wake till she’s home.”

“Who is she? One of the neighbourhood?”

“‘Tis no matter who, excuse me.”

“It is not that girl of Blooms-End, who has been talked about more or less lately? If so, I know her; and I can guess what has happened.”

“‘Tis no matter...Now, sir, I am sorry to say that we shall soon have to part company. My ponies are tired, and I have further to go, and I am going to rest them under this bank for an hour.”

The elder traveller nodded his head indifferently, and the reddleman turned his horses and van in upon the turf, saying, “Good night.” The old man replied, and proceeded on his way as before.

The reddleman watched his form as it diminished to a speck on the road and became absorbed in the thickening films of night. He then took some hay from a truss which was slung up under the van, and, throwing a portion of it in front of the horses, made a pad of the rest, which he laid on the ground beside his vehicle. Upon this he sat down, leaning his back against the wheel. From the interior a low soft breathing came to his ear. It appeared to satisfy him, and he musingly surveyed the scene, as if considering the next step that he should take.

To do things musingly, and by small degrees, seemed, indeed, to be a duty in the Egdon valleys at this transitional hour, for there was that in the condition of the heath itself which resembled protracted and halting dubiousness. It was the quality of the repose appertaining to the scene. This was not the repose of actual stagnation, but the apparent repose of incredible slowness. A condition of healthy life so nearly resembling the torpor of death is a noticeable thing of its sort; to exhibit the inertness of the desert, and at the same time to be exercising powers akin to those of the meadow, and even of the forest, awakened in those who thought of it the attentiveness usually engendered by understatement and reserve.

The scene before the reddleman’s eyes was a gradual series of ascents from the level of the road backward into the heart of the heath. It embraced hillocks, pits, ridges, acclivities, one behind the other, till all was finished by a high hill cutting against the still light sky. The traveller’s eye hovered about these things for a time, and finally

settled upon one noteworthy object up there. It was a barrow. This bossy projection of earth above its natural level occupied the loftiest ground of the loneliest height that the heath contained. Although from the vale it appeared but as a wart on an Atlantean brow, its actual bulk was great. It formed the pole and axis of this heathery world.

As the resting man looked at the barrow he became aware that its summit, hitherto the highest object in the whole prospect round, was surmounted by something higher. It rose from the semiglobular mound like a spike from a helmet. The first instinct of an imaginative stranger might have been to suppose it the person of one of the Celts who built the barrow, so far had all of modern date withdrawn from the scene. It seemed a sort of last man among them, musing for a moment before dropping into eternal night with the rest of his race.

There the form stood, motionless as the hill beneath. Above the plain rose the hill, above the hill rose the barrow, and above the barrow rose the figure. Above the figure was nothing that could be mapped elsewhere than on a celestial globe.

Such a perfect, delicate, and necessary finish did the figure give to the dark pile of hills that it seemed to be the only obvious justification of their outline. Without it, there was the dome without the lantern; with it the architectural demands of the mass were satisfied. The scene was strangely homogeneous, in that the vale, the upland, the barrow, and the figure above it amounted only to unity. Looking at this or that member of the group was not observing a complete thing, but a fraction of a thing.

The form was so much like an organic part of the entire motionless structure that to see it move would have impressed the mind as a strange phenomenon. Immobility being the chief characteristic of that whole which the person formed portion of, the discontinuance of immobility in any quarter suggested confusion.

Yet that is what happened. The figure perceptibly gave up its fixity, shifted a step or two, and turned round. As if alarmed, it descended on the right side of the barrow, with the glide of a water-drop down a bud, and then vanished. The movement had been sufficient to show more clearly the characteristics of the figure, and that it was a woman's.

The reason of her sudden displacement now appeared. With her dropping out of sight on the right side, a newcomer, bearing a burden, protruded into the sky on the left side, ascended the tumulus, and deposited the burden on the top. A second followed, then a third, a fourth, a fifth, and ultimately the whole barrow was peopled with burdened figures.

The only intelligible meaning in this sky-backed pantomime of silhouettes was that the woman had no relation to the forms who had taken her place, was sedulously avoiding these, and had come thither for another object than theirs. The imagination of the observer clung by preference to that vanished, solitary figure, as to something more interesting, more important, more likely to have a history worth knowing than these newcomers, and unconsciously regarded them as intruders. But they remained, and established themselves; and the lonely person who hitherto had been queen of the solitude did not at present seem likely to return.

CHAPTER 3

The Custom of the Country

Had a looker-on been posted in the immediate vicinity of the barrow, he would have learned that these persons were boys and men of the neighbouring hamlets. Each, as he ascended the barrow, had been heavily laden with furze faggots, carried upon the shoulder by means of a long stake sharpened at each end for impaling them easily — two in front and two behind. They came from a part of the heath a quarter of a mile to the rear, where furze almost exclusively prevailed as a product.

Every individual was so involved in furze by his method of carrying the faggots that he appeared like a bush on legs till he had thrown them down. The party had marched in trail, like a travelling flock of sheep; that is to say, the strongest first, the weak and young behind.

The loads were all laid together, and a pyramid of furze thirty feet in circumference now occupied the crown of the tumulus, which was known as Rainbarrow for many miles round. Some made themselves busy with matches, and in selecting the driest tufts of furze, others in loosening the bramble bonds which held the faggots together. Others, again, while this was in progress, lifted their eyes and swept the vast expanse of country commanded by their position, now lying nearly obliterated by shade. In the valleys of the heath nothing save its own wild face was visible at any time of day; but this spot commanded a horizon enclosing a tract of far extent, and in many cases lying beyond the heath country. None of its features could be seen now, but the whole made itself felt as a vague stretch of remoteness.

While the men and lads were building the pile, a change took place in the mass of shade which denoted the distant landscape. Red suns and tufts of fire one by one began to arise, flecking the whole country round. They were the bonfires of other parishes and hamlets that were engaged in the same sort of commemoration. Some were distant, and stood in a dense atmosphere, so that bundles of pale straw-like beams radiated around them in the shape of a fan. Some were large and near, glowing scarlet-red from the shade, like wounds in a black hide. Some were Maenades, with winy faces and blown hair. These tintured the silent bosom of the clouds above them and lit up their ephemeral caves, which seemed thenceforth to become scalding caldrons. Perhaps as many as thirty bonfires could be counted within the whole bounds of the district; and as the hour may be told on a clock-face when the figures themselves are invisible, so did the men recognize the locality of each fire by its angle and direction, though nothing of the scenery could be viewed.

The first tall flame from Rainbarrow sprang into the sky, attracting all eyes that had been fixed on the distant conflagrations back to their own attempt in the same kind. The cheerful blaze streaked the inner surface of the human circle — now increased by other stragglers, male and female — with its own gold livery, and even overlaid the dark turf around with a lively luminousness, which softened off into obscurity where the barrow rounded downwards out of sight. It showed the barrow to be the segment

of a globe, as perfect as on the day when it was thrown up, even the little ditch remaining from which the earth was dug. Not a plough had ever disturbed a grain of that stubborn soil. In the heath's barrenness to the farmer lay its fertility to the historian. There had been no obliteration, because there had been no tending.

It seemed as if the bonfire-makers were standing in some radiant upper story of the world, detached from and independent of the dark stretches below. The heath down there was now a vast abyss, and no longer a continuation of what they stood on; for their eyes, adapted to the blaze, could see nothing of the deeps beyond its influence. Occasionally, it is true, a more vigorous flare than usual from their faggots sent darting lights like aides-de-camp down the inclines to some distant bush, pool, or patch of white sand, kindling these to replies of the same colour, till all was lost in darkness again. Then the whole black phenomenon beneath represented Limbo as viewed from the brink by the sublime Florentine in his vision, and the muttered articulations of the wind in the hollows were as complaints and petitions from the "souls of mighty worth" suspended therein.

It was as if these men and boys had suddenly dived into past ages, and fetched therefrom an hour and deed which had before been familiar with this spot. The ashes of the original British pyre which blazed from that summit lay fresh and undisturbed in the barrow beneath their tread. The flames from funeral piles long ago kindled there had shone down upon the lowlands as these were shining now. Festival fires to Thor and Woden had followed on the same ground and duly had their day. Indeed, it is pretty well known that such blazes as this the heathmen were now enjoying are rather the lineal descendants from jumbled Druidical rites and Saxon ceremonies than the invention of popular feeling about Gunpowder Plot.

Moreover to light a fire is the instinctive and resistant act of man when, at the winter ingress, the curfew is sounded throughout Nature. It indicates a spontaneous, Promethean rebelliousness against that fiat that this recurrent season shall bring foul times, cold darkness, misery and death. Black chaos comes, and the fettered gods of the earth say, Let there be light.

The brilliant lights and sooty shades which struggled upon the skin and clothes of the persons standing round caused their lineaments and general contours to be drawn with Dureresque vigour and dash. Yet the permanent moral expression of each face it was impossible to discover, for as the nimble flames towered, nodded, and swooped through the surrounding air, the blots of shade and flakes of light upon the countenances of the group changed shape and position endlessly. All was unstable; quivering as leaves, evanescent as lightning. Shadowy eye-sockets, deep as those of a death's head, suddenly turned into pits of lustre: a lantern-jaw was cavernous, then it was shining; wrinkles were emphasized to ravines, or obliterated entirely by a changed ray. Nostrils were dark wells; sinews in old necks were gilt mouldings; things with no particular polish on them were glazed; bright objects, such as the tip of a furze-hook one of the men carried, were as glass; eyeballs glowed like little lanterns. Those whom Nature had depicted as

merely quaint became grotesque, the grotesque became preternatural; for all was in extremity.

Hence it may be that the face of an old man, who had like others been called to the heights by the rising flames, was not really the mere nose and chin that it appeared to be, but an appreciable quantity of human countenance. He stood complacently sunning himself in the heat. With a speaker, or stake, he tossed the outlying scraps of fuel into the conflagration, looking at the midst of the pile, occasionally lifting his eyes to measure the height of the flame, or to follow the great sparks which rose with it and sailed away into darkness. The beaming sight, and the penetrating warmth, seemed to breed in him a cumulative cheerfulness, which soon amounted to delight. With his stick in his hand he began to jig a private minuet, a bunch of copper seals shining and swinging like a pendulum from under his waistcoat: he also began to sing, in the voice of a bee up a flue —

“The king’ call’d down’ his no-bles all’,
By one’, by two’, by three’;
Earl Mar’-shal, I’ll’ go shrive’-the queen’,
And thou’ shalt wend’ with me’.
“A boon’, a boon’, quoth Earl’ Mar-shal’,
And fell’ on his bend’-ded knee’,
That what’-so-e’er’ the queen’ shall say’,
No harm’ there-of’ may be’.”

Want of breath prevented a continuance of the song; and the breakdown attracted the attention of a firm-standing man of middle age, who kept each corner of his crescent-shaped mouth rigorously drawn back into his cheek, as if to do away with any suspicion of mirthfulness which might erroneously have attached to him.

“A fair stave, Grandfer Cante; but I am afeard ‘tis too much for the mouldy weasand of such a old man as you,” he said to the wrinkled reveller. “Dostn’t wish th’ wast three sixes again, Grandfer, as you was when you first learnt to sing it?”

“Hey?” said Grandfer Cante, stopping in his dance.

“Dostn’t wish wast young again, I say? There’s a hole in thy poor bellows nowadays seemingly.”

“But there’s good art in me? If I couldn’t make a little wind go a long ways I should seem no younger than the most aged man, should I, Timothy?”

“And how about the new-married folks down there at the Quiet Woman Inn?” the other inquired, pointing towards a dim light in the direction of the distant highway, but considerably apart from where the reddleman was at that moment resting. “What’s the rights of the matter about ‘em? You ought to know, being an understanding man.”

“But a little rakish, hey? I own to it. Master Cante is that, or he’s nothing. Yet ‘tis a gay fault, neighbour Fairway, that age will cure.”

“I heard that they were coming home tonight. By this time they must have come. What besides?”

“The next thing is for us to go and wish ‘em joy, I suppose?”

“Well, no.”

“No? Now, I thought we must. I must, or ‘twould be very unlike me — the first in every spree that’s going!

“Do thou’ put on’ a fri’-ar’s coat’,
And I’ll’ put on’ a-no’-ther,
And we’ will to’ Queen Ele’anor go’,
Like Fri’ar and’ his bro’ther.

I met Mis’ess Yeobright, the young bride’s aunt, last night, and she told me that her son Clym was coming home a’ Christmas. Wonderful clever, ‘a believe — ah, I should like to have all that’s under that young man’s hair. Well, then, I spoke to her in my well-known merry way, and she said, ‘O that what’s shaped so venerable should talk like a fool!’ — that’s what she said to me. I don’t care for her, be jowned if I do, and so I told her. ‘Be jowned if I care for ‘ee,’ I said. I had her there — hey?”

“I rather think she had you,” said Fairway.

“No,” said Grandfer Cantle, his countenance slightly flagging. “‘Tisn’t so bad as that with me?”

“Seemingly ‘tis, however, is it because of the wedding that Clym is coming home a’ Christmas — to make a new arrangement because his mother is now left in the house alone?”

“Yes, yes — that’s it. But, Timothy, hearken to me,” said the Grandfer earnestly. “Though known as such a joker, I be an understanding man if you catch me serious, and I am serious now. I can tell ‘ee lots about the married couple. Yes, this morning at six o’clock they went up the country to do the job, and neither vell nor mark have been seen of ‘em since, though I reckon that this afternoon has brought ‘em home again man and woman — wife, that is. Isn’t it spoke like a man, Timothy, and wasn’t Mis’ess Yeobright wrong about me?”

“Yes, it will do. I didn’t know the two had walked together since last fall, when her aunt forbad the banns. How long has this new set-to been in mangling then? Do you know, Humphrey?”

“Yes, how long?” said Grandfer Cantle smartly, likewise turning to Humphrey. “I ask that question.”

“Ever since her aunt altered her mind, and said she might have the man after all,” replied Humphrey, without removing his eyes from the fire. He was a somewhat solemn young fellow, and carried the hook and leather gloves of a furze-cutter, his legs, by reason of that occupation, being sheathed in bulging leggings as stiff as the Philistine’s greaves of brass. “That’s why they went away to be married, I count. You see, after kicking up such a nunny-watch and forbidding the banns ‘twould have made Mis’ess Yeobright seem foolish-like to have a banging wedding in the same parish all as if she’d never gainsaid it.”

“Exactly — seem foolish-like; and that’s very bad for the poor things that be so, though I only guess as much, to be sure,” said Grandfer Cantle, still strenuously preserving a sensible bearing and mien.

“Ah, well, I was at church that day,” said Fairway, “which was a very curious thing to happen.”

“If ‘twasn’t my name’s Simple,” said the Grandfer emphatically. “I ha’n’t been there to-year; and now the winter is a-coming on I won’t say I shall.”

“I ha’n’t been these three years,” said Humphrey; “for I’m so dead sleepy of a Sunday; and ‘tis so terrible far to get there; and when you do get there ‘tis such a mortal poor chance that you’ll be chose for up above, when so many bain’t, that I bide at home and don’t go at all.”

“I not only happened to be there,” said Fairway, with a fresh collection of emphasis, “but I was sitting in the same pew as Mis’ess Yeobright. And though you may not see it as such, it fairly made my blood run cold to hear her. Yes, it is a curious thing; but it made my blood run cold, for I was close at her elbow.” The speaker looked round upon the bystanders, now drawing closer to hear him, with his lips gathered tighter than ever in the rigorousness of his descriptive moderation.

“‘Tis a serious job to have things happen to ‘ee there,” said a woman behind.

“‘Ye are to declare it,’ was the parson’s words,” Fairway continued. “And then up stood a woman at my side — a-touching of me. ‘Well, be damned if there isn’t Mis’ess Yeobright a-standing up,’ I said to myself. Yes, neighbours, though I was in the temple of prayer that’s what I said. ‘Tis against my conscience to curse and swear in company, and I hope any woman here will overlook it. Still what I did say I did say, and ‘twould be a lie if I didn’t own it.”

“So ‘twould, neighbour Fairway.”

“‘Be damned if there isn’t Mis’ess Yeobright a-standing up,’ I said,” the narrator repeated, giving out the bad word with the same passionless severity of face as before, which proved how entirely necessity and not gusto had to do with the iteration. “And the next thing I heard was, ‘I forbid the banns,’ from her. ‘I’ll speak to you after the service,’ said the parson, in quite a homely way — yes, turning all at once into a common man no holier than you or I. Ah, her face was pale! Maybe you can call to mind that monument in Weatherbury church — the cross-legged soldier that have had his arm knocked away by the schoolchildren? Well, he would about have matched that woman’s face, when she said, ‘I forbid the banns.’”

The audience cleared their throats and tossed a few stalks into the fire, not because these deeds were urgent, but to give themselves time to weigh the moral of the story.

“I’m sure when I heard they’d been forbid I felt as glad as if anybody had gied me sixpence,” said an earnest voice — that of Olly Dowden, a woman who lived by making heath brooms, or besoms. Her nature was to be civil to enemies as well as to friends, and grateful to all the world for letting her remain alive.

“And now the maid have married him just the same,” said Humphrey.

“After that Mis’ess Yeobright came round and was quite agreeable,” Fairway resumed, with an unheeding air, to show that his words were no appendage to Humphrey’s, but the result of independent reflection.

“Supposing they were ashamed, I don’t see why they shouldn’t have done it here-right,” said a wide-spread woman whose stays creaked like shoes whenever she stooped or turned. “‘Tis well to call the neighbours together and to hae a good racket once now and then; and it may as well be when there’s a wedding as at tide-times. I don’t care for close ways.”

“Ah, now, you’d hardly believe it, but I don’t care for gay weddings,” said Timothy Fairway, his eyes again travelling round. “I hardly blame Thomasin Yeobright and neighbour Wildeve for doing it quiet, if I must own it. A wedding at home means five and six-handed reels by the hour; and they do a man’s legs no good when he’s over forty.”

“True. Once at the woman’s house you can hardly say nay to being one in a jig, knowing all the time that you be expected to make yourself worth your victuals.”

“You be bound to dance at Christmas because ‘tis the time o’ year; you must dance at weddings because ‘tis the time o’ life. At christenings folk will even smuggle in a reel or two, if ‘tis no further on than the first or second chiel. And this is not naming the songs you’ve got to sing...For my part I like a good hearty funeral as well as anything. You’ve as splendid victuals and drink as at other parties, and even better. And it don’t wear your legs to stumps in talking over a poor fellow’s ways as it do to stand up in hornpipes.”

“Nine folks out of ten would own ‘twas going too far to dance then, I suppose?” suggested Grandfer Cantle.

“‘Tis the only sort of party a staid man can feel safe at after the mug have been round a few times.”

“Well, I can’t understand a quiet ladylike little body like Tamsin Yeobright caring to be married in such a mean way,” said Susan Nunsuch, the wide woman, who preferred the original subject. “‘Tis worse than the poorest do. And I shouldn’t have cared about the man, though some may say he’s good-looking.”

“To give him his due he’s a clever, learned fellow in his way — a’most as clever as Clym Yeobright used to be. He was brought up to better things than keeping the Quiet Woman. An engineer — that’s what the man was, as we know; but he threw away his chance, and so ‘a took a public house to live. His learning was no use to him at all.”

“Very often the case,” said Olly, the besom-maker. “And yet how people do strive after it and get it! The class of folk that couldn’t use to make a round O to save their bones from the pit can write their names now without a sputter of the pen, oftentimes without a single blot — what do I say? — why, almost without a desk to lean their stomachs and elbows upon.”

“True — ‘tis amazing what a polish the world have been brought to,” said Humphrey.

“Why, afore I went a soldier in the Bang-up Locals (as we was called), in the year four,” chimed in Grandfer Cantle brightly, “I didn’t know no more what the world was like than the commonest man among ye. And now, jown it all, I won’t say what I bain’t fit for, hey?”

“Couldst sign the book, no doubt,” said Fairway, “if wast young enough to join hands with a woman again, like Wildeve and Mis’ess Tamsin, which is more than Humph there could do, for he follows his father in learning. Ah, Humph, well I can mind when I was married how I zid thy father’s mark staring me in the face as I went to put down my name. He and your mother were the couple married just afore we were and there stood they father’s cross with arms stretched out like a great banging scarecrow. What a terrible black cross that was — thy father’s very likeness in en! To save my soul I couldn’t help laughing when I zid en, though all the time I was as hot as dog-days, what with the marrying, and what with the woman a-hanging to me, and what with Jack Changley and a lot more chaps grinning at me through church window. But the next moment a strawmote would have knocked me down, for I called to mind that if thy father and mother had had high words once, they’d been at it twenty times since they’d been man and wife, and I zid myself as the next poor stunpoll to get into the same mess...Ah — well, what a day ‘twas!”

“Wildeve is older than Tamsin Yeobright by a good-few summers. A pretty maid too she is. A young woman with a home must be a fool to tear her smock for a man like that.”

The speaker, a peat- or turf-cutter, who had newly joined the group, carried across his shoulder the singular heart-shaped spade of large dimensions used in that species of labour, and its well-whetted edge gleamed like a silver bow in the beams of the fire.

“A hundred maidens would have had him if he’d asked ‘em,” said the wide woman.

“Didst ever know a man, neighbour, that no woman at all would marry?” inquired Humphrey.

“I never did,” said the turf-cutter.

“Nor I,” said another.

“Nor I,” said Grandfer Cantle.

“Well, now, I did once,” said Timothy Fairway, adding more firmness to one of his legs. “I did know of such a man. But only once, mind.” He gave his throat a thorough rake round, as if it were the duty of every person not to be mistaken through thickness of voice. “Yes, I knew of such a man,” he said.

“And what ghastly gallicrow might the poor fellow have been like, Master Fairway?” asked the turf-cutter.

“Well, ‘a was neither a deaf man, nor a dumb man, nor a blind man. What ‘a was I don’t say.”

“Is he known in these parts?” said Olly Dowden.

“Hardly,” said Timothy; “but I name no name...Come, keep the fire up there, youngsters.”

“Whatever is Christian Cantle’s teeth a-chattering for?” said a boy from amid the smoke and shades on the other side of the blaze. “Be ye a-cold, Christian?”

A thin jibbering voice was heard to reply, “No, not at all.”

“Come forward, Christian, and show yourself. I didn’t know you were here,” said Fairway, with a humane look across towards that quarter.

Thus requested, a faltering man, with reedy hair, no shoulders, and a great quantity of wrist and ankle beyond his clothes, advanced a step or two by his own will, and was pushed by the will of others half a dozen steps more. He was Grandfer Cantle’s youngest son.

“What be ye quaking for, Christian?” said the turf-cutter kindly.

“I’m the man.”

“What man?”

“The man no woman will marry.”

“The deuce you be!” said Timothy Fairway, enlarging his gaze to cover Christian’s whole surface and a great deal more, Grandfer Cantle meanwhile staring as a hen stares at the duck she has hatched.

“Yes, I be he; and it makes me afeard,” said Christian. “D’ye think ‘twill hurt me? I shall always say I don’t care, and swear to it, though I do care all the while.”

“Well, be damned if this isn’t the queerest start ever I know’d,” said Mr. Fairway. “I didn’t mean you at all. There’s another in the country, then! Why did ye reveal yer misfortune, Christian?”

“‘Twas to be if ‘twas, I suppose. I can’t help it, can I?” He turned upon them his painfully circular eyes, surrounded by concentric lines like targets.

“No, that’s true. But ‘tis a melancholy thing, and my blood ran cold when you spoke, for I felt there were two poor fellows where I had thought only one. ‘Tis a sad thing for ye, Christian. How’st know the women won’t hae thee?”

“I’ve asked ‘em.”

“Sure I should never have thought you had the face. Well, and what did the last one say to ye? Nothing that can’t be got over, perhaps, after all?”

“‘Get out of my sight, you slack-twisted, slim-looking maphrotight fool,’ was the woman’s words to me.”

“Not encouraging, I own,” said Fairway. “‘Get out of my sight, you slack-twisted, slim-looking maphrotight fool,’ is rather a hard way of saying No. But even that might be overcome by time and patience, so as to let a few grey hairs show themselves in the hussy’s head. How old be you, Christian?”

“Thirty-one last tatie-digging, Mister Fairway.”

“Not a boy — not a boy. Still there’s hope yet.”

“That’s my age by baptism, because that’s put down in the great book of the Judgment that they keep in church vestry; but Mother told me I was born some time afore I was christened.”

“Ah!”

“But she couldn’t tell when, to save her life, except that there was no moon.”

“No moon — that’s bad. Hey, neighbours, that’s bad for him!”

“Yes, ‘tis bad,” said Grandfer Cantle, shaking his head.

“Mother know’d ‘twas no moon, for she asked another woman that had an almanac, as she did whenever a boy was born to her, because of the saying, ‘No moon, no man,’ which made her afeared every man-child she had. Do ye really think it serious, Mister Fairway, that there was no moon?”

“Yes. ‘No moon, no man.’ ‘Tis one of the truest sayings ever spit out. The boy never comes to anything that’s born at new moon. A bad job for thee, Christian, that you should have showed your nose then of all days in the month.”

“I suppose the moon was terrible full when you were born?” said Christian, with a look of hopeless admiration at Fairway.

“Well, ‘a was not new,” Mr. Fairway replied, with a disinterested gaze.

“I’d sooner go without drink at Lammas-tide than be a man of no moon,” continued Christian, in the same shattered recitative. “‘Tis said I be only the rames of a man, and no good for my race at all; and I suppose that’s the cause o’t.”

“Ay,” said Grandfer Cattle, somewhat subdued in spirit; “and yet his mother cried for scores of hours when ‘a was a boy, for fear he should outgrow hissself and go for a soldier.”

“Well, there’s many just as bad as he.” said Fairway.

“Wethers must live their time as well as other sheep, poor soul.”

“So perhaps I shall rub on? Ought I to be afeared o’ nights, Master Fairway?”

“You’ll have to lie alone all your life; and ‘tis not to married couples but to single sleepers that a ghost shows himself when ‘a do come. One has been seen lately, too. A very strange one.”

“No — don’t talk about it if ‘tis agreeable of ye not to! ‘Twill make my skin crawl when I think of it in bed alone. But you will — ah, you will, I know, Timothy; and I shall dream all night o’t! A very strange one? What sort of a spirit did ye mean when ye said, a very strange one, Timothy? — no, no — don’t tell me.”

“I don’t half believe in spirits myself. But I think it ghostly enough — what I was told. ‘Twas a little boy that zid it.”

“What was it like? — no, don’t — ”

“A red one. Yes, most ghosts be white; but this is as if it had been dipped in blood.”

Christian drew a deep breath without letting it expand his body, and Humphrey said, “Where has it been seen?”

“Not exactly here; but in this same heth. But ‘tisn’t a thing to talk about. What do ye say,” continued Fairway in brisker tones, and turning upon them as if the idea had not been Grandfer Cattle’s — “what do you say to giving the new man and wife a bit of a song tonight afore we go to bed — being their wedding-day? When folks are just married ‘tis as well to look glad o’t, since looking sorry won’t unjoin ‘em. I am no drinker, as we know, but when the womenfolk and youngsters have gone home we can drop down across to the Quiet Woman, and strike up a ballet in front of the married folks’ door. ‘Twill please the young wife, and that’s what I should like to do, for many’s the skinful I’ve had at her hands when she lived with her aunt at Blooms-End.”

“Hey? And so we will!” said Grandfer Cantle, turning so briskly that his copper seals swung extravagantly. “I’m as dry as a kex with biding up here in the wind, and I haven’t seen the colour of drink since nammet-time today. ‘Tis said that the last brew at the Woman is very pretty drinking. And, neighbours, if we should be a little late in the finishing, why, tomorrow’s Sunday, and we can sleep it off?”

“Grandfer Cantle! you take things very careless for an old man,” said the wide woman.

“I take things careless; I do — too careless to please the women! Klk! I’ll sing the ‘Jovial Crew,’ or any other song, when a weak old man would cry his eyes out. Jown it; I am up for anything.

“The king’ look’d o’-ver his left’ shoul-der’,
And a grim’ look look’-ed hee’,
Earl Mar’-shal, he said’, but for’ my oath’
Or hang’-ed thou’ shouldst bee’.”

“Well, that’s what we’ll do,” said Fairway. “We’ll give ‘em a song, an’ it please the Lord. What’s the good of Thomasin’s cousin Clym a-coming home after the deed’s done? He should have come afore, if so be he wanted to stop it, and marry her himself.”

“Perhaps he’s coming to bide with his mother a little time, as she must feel lonely now the maid’s gone.”

“Now, ‘tis very odd, but I never feel lonely — no, not at all,” said Grandfer Cantle. “I am as brave in the nighttime as a’ admiral!”

The bonfire was by this time beginning to sink low, for the fuel had not been of that substantial sort which can support a blaze long. Most of the other fires within the wide horizon were also dwindling weak. Attentive observation of their brightness, colour, and length of existence would have revealed the quality of the material burnt, and through that, to some extent the natural produce of the district in which each bonfire was situate. The clear, kingly effulgence that had characterized the majority expressed a heath and furze country like their own, which in one direction extended an unlimited number of miles; the rapid flares and extinctions at other points of the compass showed the lightest of fuel — straw, beanstalks, and the usual waste from arable land. The most enduring of all — steady unaltering eyes like Planets — signified wood, such as hazel-branches, thorn-faggots, and stout billets. Fires of the last-mentioned materials were rare, and though comparatively small in magnitude beside the transient blazes, now began to get the best of them by mere long continuance. The great ones had perished, but these remained. They occupied the remotest visible positions — sky-backed summits rising out of rich coppice and plantation districts to the north, where the soil was different, and heath foreign and strange.

Save one; and this was the nearest of any, the moon of the whole shining throng. It lay in a direction precisely opposite to that of the little window in the vale below. Its nearness was such that, notwithstanding its actual smallness, its glow infinitely transcended theirs.

This quiet eye had attracted attention from time to time; and when their own fire had become sunken and dim it attracted more; some even of the wood fires more recently lighted had reached their decline, but no change was perceptible here.

"To be sure, how near that fire is!" said Fairway. "Seemingly. I can see a fellow of some sort walking round it. Little and good must be said of that fire, surely."

"I can throw a stone there," said the boy.

"And so can I!" said Grandfer Cantle.

"No, no, you can't, my sonnies. That fire is not much less than a mile off, for all that 'a seems so near."

"'Tis in the heath, but no furze," said the turf-cutter.

"'Tis cleft-wood, that's what 'tis," said Timothy Fairway. "Nothing would burn like that except clean timber. And 'tis on the knap afore the old captain's house at Mistover. Such a queer mortal as that man is! To have a little fire inside your own bank and ditch, that nobody else may enjoy it or come anigh it! And what a zany an old chap must be, to light a bonfire when there's no youngsters to please."

"Cap'n Vye has been for a long walk today, and is quite tired out," said Grandfer Cantle, "so 'tisn't likely to be he."

"And he would hardly afford good fuel like that," said the wide woman.

"Then it must be his granddaughter," said Fairway. "Not that a body of her age can want a fire much."

"She is very strange in her ways, living up there by herself, and such things please her," said Susan.

"She's a well-favoured maid enough," said Humphrey the furze-cutter, "especially when she's got one of her dandy gowns on."

"That's true," said Fairway. "Well, let her bonfire burn an't will. Ours is well-nigh out by the look o't."

"How dark 'tis now the fire's gone down!" said Christian Cantle, looking behind him with his hare eyes. "Don't ye think we'd better get home-along, neighbours? The heth isn't haunted, I know; but we'd better get home...Ah, what was that?"

"Only the wind," said the turf-cutter.

"I don't think Fifth-of-Novembers ought to be kept up by night except in towns. It should be by day in outstep, ill-accounted places like this!"

"Nonsense, Christian. Lift up your spirits like a man! Susy, dear, you and I will have a jig — hey, my honey? — before 'tis quite too dark to see how well-favoured you be still, though so many summers have passed since your husband, a son of a witch, snapped you up from me."

This was addressed to Susan Nunsuch; and the next circumstance of which the beholders were conscious was a vision of the matron's broad form whisking off towards the space whereon the fire had been kindled. She was lifted bodily by Mr. Fairway's arm, which had been flung round her waist before she had become aware of his intention. The site of the fire was now merely a circle of ashes flecked with red embers and sparks, the furze having burnt completely away. Once within the circle he whirled her

round and round in a dance. She was a woman noisily constructed; in addition to her enclosing framework of whalebone and lath, she wore pattens summer and winter, in wet weather and in dry, to preserve her boots from wear; and when Fairway began to jump about with her, the clicking of the pattens, the creaking of the stays, and her screams of surprise, formed a very audible concert.

“I’ll crack thy numskull for thee, you mandy chap!” said Mrs. Nunsuch, as she helplessly danced round with him, her feet playing like drumsticks among the sparks. “My ankles were all in a fever before, from walking through that prickly furze, and now you must make ‘em worse with these vlankers!”

The vagary of Timothy Fairway was infectious. The turf-cutter seized old Olly Dowden, and, somewhat more gently, pousetted with her likewise. The young men were not slow to imitate the example of their elders, and seized the maids; Grandfer Cattle and his stick jiggled in the form of a three-legged object among the rest; and in half a minute all that could be seen on Rainbarrow was a whirling of dark shapes amid a boiling confusion of sparks, which leapt around the dancers as high as their waists. The chief noises were women’s shrill cries, men’s laughter, Susan’s stays and pattens, Olly Dowden’s “heu-heu-heu!” and the strumming of the wind upon the furze-bushes, which formed a kind of tune to the demoniac measure they trod. Christian alone stood aloof, uneasily rocking himself as he murmured, “They ought not to do it — how the vlankers do fly! ‘tis tempting the Wicked one, ‘tis.”

“What was that?” said one of the lads, stopping.

“Ah — where?” said Christian, hastily closing up to the rest.

The dancers all lessened their speed.

“‘Twas behind you, Christian, that I heard it — down here.”

“Yes — ’tis behind me!” Christian said. “Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, bless the bed that I lie on; four angels guard — ”

“Hold your tongue. What is it?” said Fairway.

“Hoi-i-i-i!” cried a voice from the darkness.

“Halloo-o-o-o!” said Fairway.

“Is there any cart track up across here to Mis’ess Yeobright’s, of Blooms-End?” came to them in the same voice, as a long, slim indistinct figure approached the barrow.

“Ought we not to run home as hard as we can, neighbours, as ‘tis getting late?” said Christian. “Not run away from one another, you know; run close together, I mean.” “Scrape up a few stray locks of furze, and make a blaze, so that we can see who the man is,” said Fairway.

When the flame arose it revealed a young man in tight raiment, and red from top to toe. “Is there a track across here to Mis’ess Yeobright’s house?” he repeated.

“Ay — keep along the path down there.”

“I mean a way two horses and a van can travel over?”

“Well, yes; you can get up the vale below here with time. The track is rough, but if you’ve got a light your horses may pick along wi’ care. Have ye brought your cart far up, neighbour reddleman?”

"I've left it in the bottom, about half a mile back, I stepped on in front to make sure of the way, as 'tis night-time, and I han't been here for so long."

"Oh, well you can get up," said Fairway. "What a turn it did give me when I saw him!" he added to the whole group, the reddleman included. "Lord's sake, I thought, whatever fiery mommet is this come to trouble us? No slight to your looks, reddleman, for ye bain't bad-looking in the groundwork, though the finish is queer. My meaning is just to say how curious I felt. I half thought it 'twas the devil or the red ghost the boy told of."

"It gied me a turn likewise," said Susan Nunsuch, "for I had a dream last night of a death's head."

"Don't ye talk o't no more," said Christian. "If he had a handkerchief over his head he'd look for all the world like the Devil in the picture of the Temptation."

"Well, thank you for telling me," said the young reddleman, smiling faintly. "And good night t'ye all."

He withdrew from their sight down the barrow.

"I fancy I've seen that young man's face before," said Humphrey. "But where, or how, or what his name is, I don't know."

The reddleman had not been gone more than a few minutes when another person approached the partially revived bonfire. It proved to be a well-known and respected widow of the neighbourhood, of a standing which can only be expressed by the word genteel. Her face, encompassed by the blackness of the receding heath, showed whitely, and with-out half-lights, like a cameo.

She was a woman of middle-age, with well-formed features of the type usually found where perspicacity is the chief quality enthroned within. At moments she seemed to be regarding issues from a Nebo denied to others around. She had something of an estranged mien; the solitude exhaled from the heath was concentrated in this face that had risen from it. The air with which she looked at the heathmen betokened a certain unconcern at their presence, or at what might be their opinions of her for walking in that lonely spot at such an hour, thus indirectly implying that in some respect or other they were not up to her level. The explanation lay in the fact that though her husband had been a small farmer she herself was a curate's daughter, who had once dreamt of doing better things.

Persons with any weight of character carry, like planets, their atmospheres along with them in their orbits; and the matron who entered now upon the scene could, and usually did, bring her own tone into a company. Her normal manner among the heathfolk had that reticence which results from the consciousness of superior communicative power. But the effect of coming into society and light after lonely wandering in darkness is a sociability in the comer above its usual pitch, expressed in the features even more than in words.

"Why, 'tis Mis'ess Yeobright," said Fairway. "Mis'ess Yeobright, not ten minutes ago a man was here asking for you — a reddleman."

"What did he want?" said she.

"He didn't tell us."

"Something to sell, I suppose; what it can be I am at a loss to understand."

"I am glad to hear that your son Mr. Clym is coming home at Christmas, ma'am," said Sam, the turf-cutter. "What a dog he used to be for bonfires!"

"Yes. I believe he is coming," she said.

"He must be a fine fellow by this time," said Fairway.

"He is a man now," she replied quietly.

"'Tis very lonesome for 'ee in the heth tonight, mis'ess," said Christian, coming from the seclusion he had hitherto maintained. "Mind you don't get lost. Egdon Heth is a bad place to get lost in, and the winds do huffle queerer tonight than ever I heard 'em afore. Them that know Egdon best have been pixy-led here at times."

"Is that you, Christian?" said Mrs. Yeobright. "What made you hide away from me?"

"'Twas that I didn't know you in this light, mis'ess; and being a man of the mournfullest make, I was scared a little, that's all. Oftentimes if you could see how terrible down I get in my mind, 'twould make 'ee quite nervous for fear I should die by my hand."

"You don't take after your father," said Mrs. Yeobright, looking towards the fire, where Grandfer Cantle, with some want of originality, was dancing by himself among the sparks, as the others had done before.

"Now, Grandfer," said Timothy Fairway, "we are ashamed of ye. A reverent old patriarch man as you be — seventy if a day — to go hornpiping like that by yourself!"

"A harrowing old man, Mis'ess Yeobright," said Christian despondingly. "I wouldn't live with him a week, so playward as he is, if I could get away."

"'Twould be more seemly in ye to stand still and welcome Mis'ess Yeobright, and you the venerablest here, Grandfer Cantle," said the besom-woman.

"Faith, and so it would," said the reveller checking himself repentantly. "I've such a bad memory, Mis'ess Yeobright, that I forget how I'm looked up to by the rest of 'em. My spirits must be wonderful good, you'll say? But not always. 'Tis a weight upon a man to be looked up to as commander, and I often feel it."

"I am sorry to stop the talk," said Mrs. Yeobright. "But I must be leaving you now. I was passing down the Anglebury Road, towards my niece's new home, who is returning tonight with her husband; and seeing the bonfire and hearing Olly's voice among the rest I came up here to learn what was going on. I should like her to walk with me, as her way is mine."

"Ay, sure, ma'am, I'm just thinking of moving," said Olly.

"Why, you'll be safe to meet the reddleman that I told ye of," said Fairway. "He's only gone back to get his van. We heard that your niece and her husband were coming straight home as soon as they were married, and we are going down there shortly, to give 'em a song o' welcome."

"Thank you indeed," said Mrs. Yeobright.

"But we shall take a shorter cut through the furze than you can go with long clothes; so we won't trouble you to wait."

“Very well — are you ready, Olly?”

“Yes, ma’am. And there’s a light shining from your niece’s window, see. It will help to keep us in the path.”

She indicated the faint light at the bottom of the valley which Fairway had pointed out; and the two women descended the tumulus.

CHAPTER 4

The Halt on the Turnpike Road

Down, downward they went, and yet further down — their descent at each step seeming to outmeasure their advance. Their skirts were scratched noisily by the furze, their shoulders brushed by the ferns, which, though dead and dry, stood erect as when alive, no sufficient winter weather having as yet arrived to beat them down. Their Tartarean situation might by some have been called an imprudent one for two unattended women. But these shaggy recesses were at all seasons a familiar surrounding to Olly and Mrs. Yeobright; and the addition of darkness lends no frightfulness to the face of a friend.

“And so Tamsin has married him at last,” said Olly, when the incline had become so much less steep that their foot-steps no longer required undivided attention.

Mrs. Yeobright answered slowly, “Yes; at last.”

“How you will miss her — living with ‘ee as a daughter, as she always have.”

“I do miss her.”

Olly, though without the tact to perceive when remarks were untimely, was saved by her very simplicity from rendering them offensive. Questions that would have been resented in others she could ask with impunity. This accounted for Mrs. Yeobright’s acquiescence in the revival of an evidently sore subject.

“I was quite strook to hear you’d agreed to it, ma’am, that I was,” continued the besom-maker.

“You were not more struck by it than I should have been last year this time, Olly. There are a good many sides to that wedding. I could not tell you all of them, even if I tried.”

“I felt myself that he was hardly solid-going enough to mate with your family. Keeping an inn — what is it? But ‘a’s clever, that’s true, and they say he was an engineering gentleman once, but has come down by being too outwardly given.”

“I saw that, upon the whole, it would be better she should marry where she wished.”

“Poor little thing, her feelings got the better of her, no doubt. ‘Tis nature. Well, they may call him what they will — he’ve several acres of heth-ground broke up here, besides the public house, and the heth-croppers, and his manners be quite like a gentleman’s. And what’s done cannot be undone.”

“It cannot,” said Mrs. Yeobright. “See, here’s the wagon-track at last. Now we shall get along better.”

The wedding subject was no further dwelt upon; and soon a faint diverging path was reached, where they parted company, Olly first begging her companion to remind Mr. Wildeve that he had not sent her sick husband the bottle of wine promised on the occasion of his marriage. The besom-maker turned to the left towards her own house, behind a spur of the hill, and Mrs. Yeobright followed the straight track, which further on joined the highway by the Quiet Woman Inn, whither she supposed her niece to have returned with Wildeve from their wedding at Anglebury that day.

She first reached Wildeve's Patch, as it was called, a plot of land redeemed from the heath, and after long and laborious years brought into cultivation. The man who had discovered that it could be tilled died of the labour; the man who succeeded him in possession ruined himself in fertilizing it. Wildeve came like Amerigo Vespucci, and received the honours due to those who had gone before.

When Mrs. Yeobright had drawn near to the inn, and was about to enter, she saw a horse and vehicle some two hundred yards beyond it, coming towards her, a man walking alongside with a lantern in his hand. It was soon evident that this was the reddleman who had inquired for her. Instead of entering the inn at once, she walked by it and towards the van.

The conveyance came close, and the man was about to pass her with little notice, when she turned to him and said, "I think you have been inquiring for me? I am Mrs. Yeobright of Blooms-End."

The reddleman started, and held up his finger. He stopped the horses, and beckoned to her to withdraw with him a few yards aside, which she did, wondering.

"You don't know me, ma'am, I suppose?" he said.

"I do not," said she. "Why, yes, I do! You are young Venn — your father was a dairyman somewhere here?"

"Yes; and I knew your niece, Miss Tamsin, a little. I have something bad to tell you."

"About her — no! She has just come home, I believe, with her husband. They arranged to return this afternoon — to the inn beyond here."

"She's not there."

"How do you know?"

"Because she's here. She's in my van," he added slowly.

"What new trouble has come?" murmured Mrs. Yeobright, putting her hand over her eyes.

"I can't explain much, ma'am. All I know is that, as I was going along the road this morning, about a mile out of Anglebury, I heard something trotting after me like a doe, and looking round there she was, white as death itself. 'Oh, Diggory Venn!' she said, 'I thought 'twas you — will you help me? I am in trouble.'"

"How did she know your Christian name?" said Mrs. Yeobright doubtingly.

"I had met her as a lad before I went away in this trade. She asked then if she might ride, and then down she fell in a faint. I picked her up and put her in, and there she has been ever since. She has cried a good deal, but she has hardly spoke; all she has

told me being that she was to have been married this morning. I tried to get her to eat something, but she couldn't; and at last she fell asleep."

"Let me see her at once," said Mrs. Yeobright, hastening towards the van.

The reddleman followed with the lantern, and, stepping up first, assisted Mrs. Yeobright to mount beside him. On the door being opened she perceived at the end of the van an extemporized couch, around which was hung apparently all the drapery that the reddleman possessed, to keep the occupant of the little couch from contact with the red materials of his trade. A young girl lay thereon, covered with a cloak. She was asleep, and the light of the lantern fell upon her features.

A fair, sweet, and honest country face was revealed, reposing in a nest of wavy chestnut hair. It was between pretty and beautiful. Though her eyes were closed, one could easily imagine the light necessarily shining in them as the culmination of the luminous workmanship around. The groundwork of the face was hopefulness; but over it now lay like a foreign substance a film of anxiety and grief. The grief had been there so shortly as to have abstracted nothing of the bloom, and had as yet but given a dignity to what it might eventually undermine. The scarlet of her lips had not had time to abate, and just now it appeared still more intense by the absence of the neighbouring and more transient colour of her cheek. The lips frequently parted, with a murmur of words. She seemed to belong rightly to a madrigal — to require viewing through rhyme and harmony.

One thing at least was obvious: she was not made to be looked at thus. The reddleman had appeared conscious of as much, and, while Mrs. Yeobright looked in upon her, he cast his eyes aside with a delicacy which well became him. The sleeper apparently thought so too, for the next moment she opened her own.

The lips then parted with something of anticipation, something more of doubt; and her several thoughts and fractions of thoughts, as signalled by the changes on her face, were exhibited by the light to the utmost nicety. An ingenuous, transparent life was disclosed, as if the flow of her existence could be seen passing within her. She understood the scene in a moment.

"O yes, it is I, Aunt," she cried. "I know how frightened you are, and how you cannot believe it; but all the same, it is I who have come home like this!"

"Tamsin, Tamsin!" said Mrs. Yeobright, stooping over the young woman and kissing her. "O my dear girl!"

Thomasin was now on the verge of a sob, but by an unexpected self-command she uttered no sound. With a gentle panting breath she sat upright.

"I did not expect to see you in this state, any more than you me," she went on quickly. "Where am I, Aunt?"

"Nearly home, my dear. In Egdon Bottom. What dreadful thing is it?"

"I'll tell you in a moment. So near, are we? Then I will get out and walk. I want to go home by the path."

“But this kind man who has done so much will, I am sure, take you right on to my house?” said the aunt, turning to the reddleman, who had withdrawn from the front of the van on the awakening of the girl, and stood in the road.

“Why should you think it necessary to ask me? I will, of course,” said he.

“He is indeed kind,” murmured Thomasin. “I was once acquainted with him, Aunt, and when I saw him today I thought I should prefer his van to any conveyance of a stranger. But I’ll walk now. Reddleman, stop the horses, please.”

The man regarded her with tender reluctance, but stopped them

Aunt and niece then descended from the van, Mrs. Yeobright saying to its owner, “I quite recognize you now. What made you change from the nice business your father left you?”

“Well, I did,” he said, and looked at Thomasin, who blushed a little. “Then you’ll not be wanting me any more tonight, ma’am?”

Mrs. Yeobright glanced around at the dark sky, at the hills, at the perishing bonfires, and at the lighted window of the inn they had neared. “I think not,” she said, “since Thomasin wishes to walk. We can soon run up the path and reach home — we know it well.”

And after a few further words they parted, the reddleman moving onwards with his van, and the two women remaining standing in the road. As soon as the vehicle and its driver had withdrawn so far as to be beyond all possible reach of her voice, Mrs. Yeobright turned to her niece.

“Now, Thomasin,” she said sternly, “what’s the meaning of this disgraceful performance?”

CHAPTER 5

Perplexity among Honest People

Thomasin looked as if quite overcome by her aunt’s change of manner. “It means just what it seems to mean: I am — not married,” she replied faintly. “Excuse me — for humiliating you, Aunt, by this mishap — I am sorry for it. But I cannot help it.”

“Me? Think of yourself first.”

“It was nobody’s fault. When we got there the parson wouldn’t marry us because of some trifling irregularity in the license.”

“What irregularity?”

“I don’t know. Mr. Wildeve can explain. I did not think when I went away this morning that I should come back like this.” It being dark, Thomasin allowed her emotion to escape her by the silent way of tears, which could roll down her cheek unseen.

“I could almost say that it serves you right — if I did not feel that you don’t deserve it,” continued Mrs. Yeobright, who, possessing two distinct moods in close contiguity, a gentle mood and an angry, flew from one to the other without the least warning.

“Remember, Thomasin, this business was none of my seeking; from the very first, when you began to feel foolish about that man, I warned you he would not make you happy. I felt it so strongly that I did what I would never have believed myself capable of doing — stood up in the church, and made myself the public talk for weeks. But having once consented, I don’t submit to these fancies without good reason. Marry him you must after this.”

“Do you think I wish to do otherwise for one moment?” said Thomasin, with a heavy sigh. “I know how wrong it was of me to love him, but don’t pain me by talking like that, Aunt! You would not have had me stay there with him, would you? — and your house is the only home I have to return to. He says we can be married in a day or two.”

“I wish he had never seen you.”

“Very well; then I will be the miserablest woman in the world, and not let him see me again. No, I won’t have him!”

“It is too late to speak so. Come with me. I am going to the inn to see if he has returned. Of course I shall get to the bottom of this story at once. Mr. Wildeve must not suppose he can play tricks upon me, or any belonging to me.”

“It was not that. The license was wrong, and he couldn’t get another the same day. He will tell you in a moment how it was, if he comes.”

“Why didn’t he bring you back?”

“That was me!” again sobbed Thomasin. “When I found we could not be married I didn’t like to come back with him, and I was very ill. Then I saw Diggory Venn, and was glad to get him to take me home. I cannot explain it any better, and you must be angry with me if you will.”

“I shall see about that,” said Mrs. Yeobright; and they turned towards the inn, known in the neighbourhood as the Quiet Woman, the sign of which represented the figure of a matron carrying her head under her arm, beneath which gruesome design was written the couplet so well known to frequenters of the inn: —

SINCE THE WOMAN’S QUIET LET NO MAN BREED A RIOT.(1)

(1) The inn which really bore this sign and legend stood some miles to the northwest of the present scene, wherein the house more immediately referred to is now no longer an inn; and the surroundings are much changed. But another inn, some of whose features are also embodied in this description, the RED LION at Winfrith, still remains as a haven for the wayfarer (1912).

The front of the house was towards the heath and Rainbarrow, whose dark shape seemed to threaten it from the sky. Upon the door was a neglected brass plate, bearing the unexpected inscription, “Mr. Wildeve, Engineer” — a useless yet cherished relic from the time when he had been started in that profession in an office at Budmouth by those who had hoped much from him, and had been disappointed. The garden was

at the back, and behind this ran a still deep stream, forming the margin of the heath in that direction, meadow-land appearing beyond the stream.

But the thick obscurity permitted only skylines to be visible of any scene at present. The water at the back of the house could be heard, idly spinning whirlpools in its creep between the rows of dry feather-headed reeds which formed a stockade along each bank. Their presence was denoted by sounds as of a congregation praying humbly, produced by their rubbing against each other in the slow wind.

The window, whence the candlelight had shone up the vale to the eyes of the bonfire group, was uncurtained, but the sill lay too high for a pedestrian on the outside to look over it into the room. A vast shadow, in which could be dimly traced portions of a masculine contour, blotted half the ceiling.

“He seems to be at home,” said Mrs. Yeobright.

“Must I come in, too, Aunt?” asked Thomasin faintly. “I suppose not; it would be wrong.”

“You must come, certainly — to confront him, so that he may make no false representations to me. We shall not be five minutes in the house, and then we’ll walk home.”

Entering the open passage, she tapped at the door of the private parlour, unfastened it, and looked in.

The back and shoulders of a man came between Mrs. Yeobright’s eyes and the fire. Wildeve, whose form it was, immediately turned, arose, and advanced to meet his visitors.

He was quite a young man, and of the two properties, form and motion, the latter first attracted the eye in him. The grace of his movement was singular — it was the pantomimic expression of a lady-killing career. Next came into notice the more material qualities, among which was a profuse crop of hair impending over the top of his face, lending to his forehead the high-cornered outline of an early Gothic shield; and a neck which was smooth and round as a cylinder. The lower half of his figure was of light build. Altogether he was one in whom no man would have seen anything to admire, and in whom no woman would have seen anything to dislike.

He discerned the young girl’s form in the passage, and said, “Thomasin, then, has reached home. How could you leave me in that way, darling?” And turning to Mrs. Yeobright — “It was useless to argue with her. She would go, and go alone.”

“But what’s the meaning of it all?” demanded Mrs. Yeobright haughtily.

“Take a seat,” said Wildeve, placing chairs for the two women. “Well, it was a very stupid mistake, but such mistakes will happen. The license was useless at Anglebury. It was made out for Budmouth, but as I didn’t read it I wasn’t aware of that.”

“But you had been staying at Anglebury?”

“No. I had been at Budmouth — till two days ago — and that was where I had intended to take her; but when I came to fetch her we decided upon Anglebury, forgetting that a new license would be necessary. There was not time to get to Budmouth afterwards.”

"I think you are very much to blame," said Mrs. Yeobright.

"It was quite my fault we chose Anglebury," Thomasin pleaded. "I proposed it because I was not known there."

"I know so well that I am to blame that you need not remind me of it," replied Wildeve shortly.

"Such things don't happen for nothing," said the aunt. "It is a great slight to me and my family; and when it gets known there will be a very unpleasant time for us. How can she look her friends in the face tomorrow? It is a very great injury, and one I cannot easily forgive. It may even reflect on her character."

"Nonsense," said Wildeve.

Thomasin's large eyes had flown from the face of one to the face of the other during this discussion, and she now said anxiously, "Will you allow me, Aunt, to talk it over alone with Damon for five minutes? Will you, Damon?"

"Certainly, dear," said Wildeve, "if your aunt will excuse us." He led her into an adjoining room, leaving Mrs. Yeobright by the fire.

As soon as they were alone, and the door closed, Thomasin said, turning up her pale, tearful face to him, "It is killing me, this, Damon! I did not mean to part from you in anger at Anglebury this morning; but I was frightened and hardly knew what I said. I've not let Aunt know how much I suffered today; and it is so hard to command my face and voice, and to smile as if it were a slight thing to me; but I try to do so, that she may not be still more indignant with you. I know you could not help it, dear, whatever Aunt may think."

"She is very unpleasant."

"Yes," Thomasin murmured, "and I suppose I seem so now...Damon, what do you mean to do about me?"

"Do about you?"

"Yes. Those who don't like you whisper things which at moments make me doubt you. We mean to marry, I suppose, don't we?"

"Of course we do. We have only to go to Budmouth on Monday, and we marry at once."

"Then do let us go! — O Damon, what you make me say!" She hid her face in her handkerchief. "Here am I asking you to marry me, when by rights you ought to be on your knees imploring me, your cruel mistress, not to refuse you, and saying it would break your heart if I did. I used to think it would be pretty and sweet like that; but how different!"

"Yes, real life is never at all like that."

"But I don't care personally if it never takes place," she added with a little dignity; "no, I can live without you. It is Aunt I think of. She is so proud, and thinks so much of her family respectability, that she will be cut down with mortification if this story should get abroad before — it is done. My cousin Clym, too, will be much wounded."

"Then he will be very unreasonable. In fact, you are all rather unreasonable."

Thomasin coloured a little, and not with love. But whatever the momentary feeling which caused that flush in her, it went as it came, and she humbly said, "I never mean to be, if I can help it. I merely feel that you have my aunt to some extent in your power at last."

"As a matter of justice it is almost due to me," said Wildeve. "Think what I have gone through to win her consent; the insult that it is to any man to have the banns forbidden — the double insult to a man unlucky enough to be cursed with sensitiveness, and blue demons, and Heaven knows what, as I am. I can never forget those banns. A harsher man would rejoice now in the power I have of turning upon your aunt by going no further in the business."

She looked wistfully at him with her sorrowful eyes as he said those words, and her aspect showed that more than one person in the room could deplore the possession of sensitiveness. Seeing that she was really suffering he seemed disturbed and added, "This is merely a reflection you know. I have not the least intention to refuse to complete the marriage, Tamsie mine — I could not bear it."

"You could not, I know!" said the fair girl, brightening. "You, who cannot bear the sight of pain in even an insect, or any disagreeable sound, or unpleasant smell even, will not long cause pain to me and mine."

"I will not, if I can help it."

"Your hand upon it, Damon."

He carelessly gave her his hand.

"Ah, by my crown, what's that?" he said suddenly.

There fell upon their ears the sound of numerous voices singing in front of the house. Among these, two made themselves prominent by their peculiarity: one was a very strong bass, the other a wheezy thin piping. Thomasin recognized them as belonging to Timothy Fairway and Grandfer Cantle respectively.

"What does it mean — it is not skimmity-riding, I hope?" she said, with a frightened gaze at Wildeve.

"Of course not; no, it is that the heath-folk have come to sing to us a welcome. This is intolerable!" He began pacing about, the men outside singing cheerily —

"He told' her that she' was the joy' of his life', And if' she'd con-sent' he would make her his wife'; She could' not refuse' him; to church' so they went', Young Will was forgot', and young Sue' was content'; And then' was she kiss'd' and set down' on his knee', No man' in the world' was so lov'-ing as he'!"

Mrs. Yeobright burst in from the outer room. "Thomasin, Thomasin!" she said, looking indignantly at Wildeve; "here's a pretty exposure! Let us escape at once. Come!"

It was, however, too late to get away by the passage. A rugged knocking had begun upon the door of the front room. Wildeve, who had gone to the window, came back.

"Stop!" he said imperiously, putting his hand upon Mrs. Yeobright's arm. "We are regularly besieged. There are fifty of them out there if there's one. You stay in this room with Thomasin; I'll go out and face them. You must stay now, for my sake, till they are gone, so that it may seem as if all was right. Come, Tamsie dear, don't go

making a scene — we must marry after this; that you can see as well as I. Sit still, that's all — and don't speak much. I'll manage them. Blundering fools!"

He pressed the agitated girl into a seat, returned to the outer room and opened the door. Immediately outside, in the passage, appeared Grandfer Cattle singing in concert with those still standing in front of the house. He came into the room and nodded abstractedly to Wildeve, his lips still parted, and his features excruciatingly strained in the emission of the chorus. This being ended, he said heartily, "Here's welcome to the new-made couple, and God bless 'em!"

"Thank you," said Wildeve, with dry resentment, his face as gloomy as a thunder-storm.

At the Grandfer's heels now came the rest of the group, which included Fairway, Christian, Sam the turf-cutter, Humphrey, and a dozen others. All smiled upon Wildeve, and upon his tables and chairs likewise, from a general sense of friendliness towards the articles as well as towards their owner.

"We be not here afore Mrs. Yeobright after all," said Fairway, recognizing the matron's bonnet through the glass partition which divided the public apartment they had entered from the room where the women sat. "We struck down across, d'ye see, Mr. Wildeve, and she went round by the path."

"And I see the young bride's little head!" said Grandfer, peeping in the same direction, and discerning Thomasin, who was waiting beside her aunt in a miserable and awkward way. "Not quite settled in yet — well, well, there's plenty of time."

Wildeve made no reply; and probably feeling that the sooner he treated them the sooner they would go, he produced a stone jar, which threw a warm halo over matters at once.

"That's a drop of the right sort, I can see," said Grandfer Cattle, with the air of a man too well-mannered to show any hurry to taste it.

"Yes," said Wildeve, "'tis some old mead. I hope you will like it."

"O ay!" replied the guests, in the hearty tones natural when the words demanded by politeness coincide with those of deepest feeling. "There isn't a prettier drink under the sun."

"I'll take my oath there isn't," added Grandfer Cattle. "All that can be said against mead is that 'tis rather heady, and apt to lie about a man a good while. But tomorrow's Sunday, thank God."

"I feel'd for all the world like some bold soldier after I had had some once," said Christian.

"You shall feel so again," said Wildeve, with condescension, "Cups or glasses, gentlemen?"

"Well, if you don't mind, we'll have the beaker, and pass 'en round; 'tis better than heling it out in dribbles."

"Jown the slippery glasses," said Grandfer Cattle. "What's the good of a thing that you can't put down in the ashes to warm, hey, neighbours; that's what I ask?"

"Right, Grandfer," said Sam; and the mead then circulated.

“Well,” said Timothy Fairway, feeling demands upon his praise in some form or other, “‘tis a worthy thing to be married, Mr. Wildeve; and the woman you’ve got is a diamond, so says I. Yes,” he continued, to Grandfer Cantle, raising his voice so as to be heard through the partition, “her father (inclining his head towards the inner room) was as good a feller as ever lived. He always had his great indignation ready against anything underhand.”

“Is that very dangerous?” said Christian.

“And there were few in these parts that were upsides with him,” said Sam. “Whenever a club walked he’d play the clarinet in the band that marched before ‘em as if he’d never touched anything but a clarinet all his life. And then, when they got to church door he’d throw down the clarinet, mount the gallery, snatch up the bass viol, and rozum away as if he’d never played anything but a bass viol. Folk would say — folk that knowed what a true stave was — ‘Surely, surely that’s never the same man that I saw handling the clarinet so masterly by now!’”

“I can mind it,” said the furze-cutter. “‘Twas a wonderful thing that one body could hold it all and never mix the fingering.”

“There was Kingsbere church likewise,” Fairway recommenced, as one opening a new vein of the same mine of interest.

Wildeve breathed the breath of one intolerably bored, and glanced through the partition at the prisoners.

“He used to walk over there of a Sunday afternoon to visit his old acquaintance Andrew Brown, the first clarinet there; a good man enough, but rather screechy in his music, if you can mind?”

“‘A was.”

“And neighbour Yeobright would take Andrey’s place for some part of the service, to let Andrey have a bit of a nap, as any friend would naturally do.”

“As any friend would,” said Grandfer Cantle, the other listeners expressing the same accord by the shorter way of nodding their heads.

“No sooner was Andrey asleep and the first whiff of neighbour Yeobright’s wind had got inside Andrey’s clarinet than everyone in church feelled in a moment there was a great soul among ‘em. All heads would turn, and they’d say, ‘Ah, I thought ‘twas he!’ One Sunday I can well mind — a bass viol day that time, and Yeobright had brought his own. ‘Twas the Hundred-and-thirty-third to ‘Lydia’; and when they’d come to ‘Ran down his beard and o’er his robes its costly moisture shed,’ neighbour Yeobright, who had just warmed to his work, drove his bow into them strings that glorious grand that he e’en a’most sawed the bass viol into two pieces. Every winder in church rattled as if ‘twere a thunderstorm. Old Pa’son Williams lifted his hands in his great holy surplice as natural as if he’d been in common clothes, and seemed to say hisself, ‘O for such a man in our parish!’ But not a soul in Kingsbere could hold a candle to Yeobright.”

“Was it quite safe when the winder shook?” Christian inquired.

He received no answer, all for the moment sitting rapt in admiration of the performance described. As with Farinelli’s singing before the princesses, Sheridan’s renowned

Begum Speech, and other such examples, the fortunate condition of its being for ever lost to the world invested the deceased Mr. Yeobright's tour de force on that memorable afternoon with a cumulative glory which comparative criticism, had that been possible, might considerably have shorn down.

"He was the last you'd have expected to drop off in the prime of life," said Humphrey.

"Ah, well; he was looking for the earth some months afore he went. At that time women used to run for smocks and gown-pieces at Greenhill Fair, and my wife that is now, being a long-legged slithering maid, hardly husband-high, went with the rest of the maidens, for 'a was a good, runner afore she got so heavy. When she came home I said — we were then just beginning to walk together — 'What have ye got, my honey?' 'I've won — well, I've won — a gown-piece,' says she, her colours coming up in a moment. 'Tis a smock for a crown, I thought; and so it turned out. Ay, when I think what she'll say to me now without a mossel of red in her face, it do seem strange that 'a wouldn't say such a little thing then..However, then she went on, and that's what made me bring up the story. Well, whatever clothes I've won, white or figured, for eyes to see or for eyes not to see' ('a could do a pretty stroke of modesty in those days), 'I'd sooner have lost it than have seen what I have. Poor Mr. Yeobright was took bad directly he reached the fair ground, and was forced to go home again.' That was the last time he ever went out of the parish."

"A faltered on from one day to another, and then we heard he was gone."

"D'ye think he had great pain when 'a died?" said Christian.

"O no — quite different. Nor any pain of mind. He was lucky enough to be God A'mighty's own man."

"And other folk — d'ye think 'twill be much pain to 'em, Mister Fairway?"

"That depends on whether they be afeard."

"I bain't afeard at all, I thank God!" said Christian strenuously. "I'm glad I bain't, for then 'twon't pain me...I don't think I be afeard — or if I be I can't help it, and I don't deserve to suffer. I wish I was not afeard at all!"

There was a solemn silence, and looking from the window, which was unshuttered and unblinded, Timothy said, "Well, what a fess little bonfire that one is, out by Cap'n Vye's! 'Tis burning just the same now as ever, upon my life."

All glances went through the window, and nobody noticed that Wildeve disguised a brief, telltale look. Far away up the sombre valley of heath, and to the right of Rainbarrow, could indeed be seen the light, small, but steady and persistent as before.

"It was lighted before ours was," Fairway continued; "and yet every one in the country round is out afore 'n."

"Perhaps there's meaning in it!" murmured Christian.

"How meaning?" said Wildeve sharply.

Christian was too scattered to reply, and Timothy helped him.

"He means, sir, that the lonesome dark-eyed creature up there that some say is a witch — ever I should call a fine young woman such a name — is always up to some odd conceit or other; and so perhaps 'tis she."

"I'd be very glad to ask her in wedlock, if she'd hae me and take the risk of her wild dark eyes ill-wishing me," said Grandfer Cantle staunchly.

"Don't ye say it, Father!" implored Christian.

"Well, be dazed if he who do marry the maid won't hae an uncommon picture for his best parlour," said Fairway in a liquid tone, placing down the cup of mead at the end of a good pull.

"And a partner as deep as the North Star," said Sam, taking up the cup and finishing the little that remained. "Well, really, now I think we must be moving," said Humphrey, observing the emptiness of the vessel.

"But we'll gie 'em another song?" said Grandfer Cantle. "I'm as full of notes as a bird!"

"Thank you, Grandfer," said Wildeve. "But we will not trouble you now. Some other day must do for that — when I have a party."

"Be jown'd if I don't learn ten new songs for't, or I won't learn a line!" said Grandfer Cantle. "And you may be sure I won't disappoint ye by biding away, Mr. Wildeve."

"I quite believe you," said that gentleman.

All then took their leave, wishing their entertainer long life and happiness as a married man, with recapitulations which occupied some time. Wildeve attended them to the door, beyond which the deep-dyed upward stretch of heath stood awaiting them, an amplitude of darkness reigning from their feet almost to the zenith, where a definite form first became visible in the lowering forehead of Rainbarrow. Diving into the dense obscurity in a line headed by Sam the turf-cutter, they pursued their trackless way home.

When the scratching of the furze against their leggings had fainted upon the ear, Wildeve returned to the room where he had left Thomasin and her aunt. The women were gone.

They could only have left the house in one way, by the back window; and this was open.

Wildeve laughed to himself, remained a moment thinking, and idly returned to the front room. Here his glance fell upon a bottle of wine which stood on the mantelpiece. "Ah — old Dowden!" he murmured; and going to the kitchen door shouted, "Is anybody here who can take something to old Dowden?"

There was no reply. The room was empty, the lad who acted as his factotum having gone to bed. Wildeve came back put on his hat, took the bottle, and left the house, turning the key in the door, for there was no guest at the inn tonight. As soon as he was on the road the little bonfire on Mistover Knap again met his eye.

"Still waiting, are you, my lady?" he murmured.

However, he did not proceed that way just then; but leaving the hill to the left of him, he stumbled over a rutted road that brought him to a cottage which, like all other habitations on the heath at this hour, was only saved from being visible by a faint shine from its bedroom window. This house was the home of Olly Dowden, the besom-maker, and he entered.

The lower room was in darkness; but by feeling his way he found a table, whereon he placed the bottle, and a minute later emerged again upon the heath. He stood and looked northeast at the undying little fire — high up above him, though not so high as Rainbarrow.

We have been told what happens when a woman deliberates; and the epigram is not always terminable with woman, provided that one be in the case, and that a fair one. Wildeve stood, and stood longer, and breathed perplexedly, and then said to himself with resignation, “Yes — by Heaven, I must go to her, I suppose!”

Instead of turning in the direction of home he pressed on rapidly by a path under Rainbarrow towards what was evidently a signal light.

CHAPTER 6

The Figure against the Sky

When the whole Egdon concourse had left the site of the bonfire to its accustomed loneliness, a closely wrapped female figure approached the barrow from that quarter of the heath in which the little fire lay. Had the reddleman been watching he might have recognized her as the woman who had first stood there so singularly, and vanished at the approach of strangers. She ascended to her old position at the top, where the red coals of the perishing fire greeted her like living eyes in the corpse of day. There she stood still around her stretching the vast night atmosphere, whose incomplete darkness in comparison with the total darkness of the heath below it might have represented a venial beside a mortal sin.

That she was tall and straight in build, that she was lady-like in her movements, was all that could be learnt of her just now, her form being wrapped in a shawl folded in the old cornerwise fashion, and her head in a large kerchief, a protection not superfluous at this hour and place. Her back was towards the wind, which blew from the northwest; but whether she had avoided that aspect because of the chilly gusts which played about her exceptional position, or because her interest lay in the southeast, did not at first appear.

Her reason for standing so dead still as the pivot of this circle of heath-country was just as obscure. Her extraordinary fixity, her conspicuous loneliness, her heedlessness of night, betokened among other things an utter absence of fear. A tract of country unaltered from that sinister condition which made Caesar anxious every year to get clear of its glooms before the autumnal equinox, a kind of landscape and weather which leads travellers from the South to describe our island as Homer’s Cimmerian land, was not, on the face of it, friendly to women.

It might reasonably have been supposed that she was listening to the wind, which rose somewhat as the night advanced, and laid hold of the attention. The wind, indeed, seemed made for the scene, as the scene seemed made for the hour. Part of its tone was quite special; what was heard there could be heard nowhere else. Gusts in innumerable

series followed each other from the northwest, and when each one of them raced past the sound of its progress resolved into three. Treble, tenor, and bass notes were to be found therein. The general ricochet of the whole over pits and prominences had the gravest pitch of the chime. Next there could be heard the baritone buzz of a holly tree. Below these in force, above them in pitch, a dwindled voice strove hard at a husky tune, which was the peculiar local sound alluded to. Thinner and less immediately traceable than the other two, it was far more impressive than either. In it lay what may be called the linguistic peculiarity of the heath; and being audible nowhere on earth off a heath, it afforded a shadow of reason for the woman's tenseness, which continued as unbroken as ever.

Throughout the blowing of these plaintive November winds that note bore a great resemblance to the ruins of human song which remain to the throat of fourscore and ten. It was a worn whisper, dry and papery, and it brushed so distinctly across the ear that, by the accustomed, the material minutiae in which it originated could be realised as by touch. It was the united products of infinitesimal vegetable causes, and these were neither stems, leaves, fruit, blades, prickles, lichen, nor moss.

They were the mummied heathbells of the past summer, originally tender and purple, now washed colourless by Michaelmas rains, and dried to dead skins by October suns. So low was an individual sound from these that a combination of hundreds only just emerged from silence, and the myriads of the whole declivity reached the woman's ear but as a shrivelled and intermittent recitative. Yet scarcely a single accent among the many afloat tonight could have such power to impress a listener with thoughts of its origin. One inwardly saw the infinity of those combined multitudes; and perceived that each of the tiny trumpets was seized on entered, scoured and emerged from by the wind as thoroughly as if it were as vast as a crater.

"The spirit moved them." A meaning of the phrase forced itself upon the attention; and an emotional listener's fetichistic mood might have ended in one of more advanced quality. It was not, after all, that the left-hand expanse of old blooms spoke, or the right-hand, or those of the slope in front; but it was the single person of something else speaking through each at once.

Suddenly, on the barrow, there mingled with all this wild rhetoric of night a sound which modulated so naturally into the rest that its beginning and ending were hardly to be distinguished. The bluffs, and the bushes, and the heather-bells had broken silence; at last, so did the woman; and her articulation was but as another phrase of the same discourse as theirs. Thrown out on the winds it became twined in with them, and with them it flew away.

What she uttered was a lengthened sighing, apparently at something in her mind which had led to her presence here. There was a spasmodic abandonment about it as if, in allowing herself to utter the sound the woman's brain had authorized what it could not regulate. One point was evident in this; that she had been existing in a suppressed state, and not in one of languor, or stagnation.

Far away down the valley the faint shine from the window of the inn still lasted on; and a few additional moments proved that the window, or what was within it, had more to do with the woman's sigh than had either her own actions or the scene immediately around. She lifted her left hand, which held a closed telescope. This she rapidly extended, as if she were well accustomed to the operation, and raising it to her eye directed it towards the light beaming from the inn.

The handkerchief which had hooded her head was now a little thrown back, her face being somewhat elevated. A profile was visible against the dull monochrome of cloud around her; and it was as though side shadows from the features of Sappho and Mrs. Siddons had converged upwards from the tomb to form an image like neither but suggesting both. This, however, was mere superficiality. In respect of character a face may make certain admissions by its outline; but it fully confesses only in its changes. So much is this the case that what is called the play of the features often helps more in understanding a man or woman than the earnest labours of all the other members together. Thus the night revealed little of her whose form it was embracing, for the mobile parts of her countenance could not be seen.

At last she gave up her spying attitude, closed the telescope, and turned to the decaying embers. From these no appreciable beams now radiated, except when a more than usually smart gust brushed over their faces and raised a fitful glow which came and went like the blush of a girl. She stooped over the silent circle, and selecting from the brands a piece of stick which bore the largest live coal at its end, brought it to where she had been standing before.

She held the brand to the ground, blowing the red coal with her mouth at the same time; till it faintly illuminated the sod, and revealed a small object, which turned out to be an hourglass, though she wore a watch. She blew long enough to show that the sand had all slipped through.

"Ah!" she said, as if surprised.

The light raised by her breath had been very fitful, and a momentary irradiation of flesh was all that it had disclosed of her face. That consisted of two matchless lips and a cheek only, her head being still enveloped. She threw away the stick, took the glass in her hand, the telescope under her arm, and moved on.

Along the ridge ran a faint foot-track, which the lady followed. Those who knew it well called it a path; and, while a mere visitor would have passed it unnoticed even by day, the regular haunters of the heath were at no loss for it at midnight. The whole secret of following these incipient paths, when there was not light enough in the atmosphere to show a turnpike road, lay in the development of the sense of touch in the feet, which comes with years of night-rambling in little-trodden spots. To a walker practised in such places a difference between impact on maiden herbage, and on the crippled stalks of a slight footway, is perceptible through the thickest boot or shoe.

The solitary figure who walked this beat took no notice of the windy tune still played on the dead heathbells. She did not turn her head to look at a group of dark

creatures further on, who fled from her presence as she skirted a ravine where they fed. They were about a score of the small wild ponies known as heath-croppers. They roamed at large on the undulations of Egdon, but in numbers too few to detract much from the solitude.

The pedestrian noticed nothing just now, and a clue to her abstraction was afforded by a trivial incident. A bramble caught hold of her skirt, and checked her progress. Instead of putting it off and hastening along, she yielded herself up to the pull, and stood passively still. When she began to extricate herself it was by turning round and round, and so unwinding the prickly switch. She was in a desponding reverie.

Her course was in the direction of the small undying fire which had drawn the attention of the men on Rainbarrow and of Wildeve in the valley below. A faint illumination from its rays began to glow upon her face, and the fire soon revealed itself to be lit, not on the level ground, but on a salient corner or redan of earth, at the junction of two converging bank fences. Outside was a ditch, dry except immediately under the fire, where there was a large pool, bearded all round by heather and rushes. In the smooth water of the pool the fire appeared upside down.

The banks meeting behind were bare of a hedge, save such as was formed by disconnected tufts of furze, standing upon stems along the top, like impaled heads above a city wall. A white mast, fitted up with spars and other nautical tackle, could be seen rising against the dark clouds whenever the flames played brightly enough to reach it. Altogether the scene had much the appearance of a fortification upon which had been kindled a beacon fire.

Nobody was visible; but ever and anon a whitish something moved above the bank from behind, and vanished again. This was a small human hand, in the act of lifting pieces of fuel into the fire, but for all that could be seen the hand, like that which troubled Belshazzar, was there alone. Occasionally an ember rolled off the bank, and dropped with a hiss into the pool.

At one side of the pool rough steps built of clods enabled everyone who wished to do so to mount the bank; which the woman did. Within was a paddock in an uncultivated state, though bearing evidence of having once been tilled; but the heath and fern had insidiously crept in, and were reasserting their old supremacy. Further ahead were dimly visible an irregular dwelling-house, garden, and outbuildings, backed by a clump of firs.

The young lady — for youth had revealed its presence in her buoyant bound up the bank — walked along the top instead of descending inside, and came to the corner where the fire was burning. One reason for the permanence of the blaze was now manifest: the fuel consisted of hard pieces of wood, cleft and sawn — the knotty boles of old thorn trees which grew in twos and threes about the hillsides. A yet unconsumed pile of these lay in the inner angle of the bank; and from this corner the upturned face of a little boy greeted her eyes. He was dilatorily throwing up a piece of wood into the fire every now and then, a business which seemed to have engaged him a considerable part of the evening, for his face was somewhat weary.

"I am glad you have come, Miss Eustacia," he said, with a sigh of relief. "I don't like biding by myself."

"Nonsense. I have only been a little way for a walk. I have been gone only twenty minutes."

"It seemed long," murmured the sad boy. "And you have been so many times."

"Why, I thought you would be pleased to have a bonfire. Are you not much obliged to me for making you one?"

"Yes; but there's nobody here to play wi' me."

"I suppose nobody has come while I've been away?"

"Nobody except your grandfather — he looked out of doors once for 'ee. I told him you were walking round upon the hill to look at the other bonfires."

"A good boy."

"I think I hear him coming again, miss."

An old man came into the remoter light of the fire from the direction of the home-
stead. He was the same who had overtaken the reddleman on the road that afternoon. He looked wistfully to the top of the bank at the woman who stood there, and his teeth, which were quite unimpaired, showed like parian from his parted lips.

"When are you coming indoors, Eustacia?" he asked. "'Tis almost bedtime. I've been home these two hours, and am tired out. Surely 'tis somewhat childish of you to stay out playing at bonfires so long, and wasting such fuel. My precious thorn roots, the rarest of all firing, that I laid by on purpose for Christmas — you have burnt 'em nearly all!"

"I promised Johnny a bonfire, and it pleases him not to let it go out just yet," said Eustacia, in a way which told at once that she was absolute queen here. "Grandfather, you go in to bed. I shall follow you soon. You like the fire, don't you, Johnny?"

The boy looked up doubtfully at her and murmured, "I don't think I want it any longer."

Her grandfather had turned back again, and did not hear the boy's reply. As soon as the white-haired man had vanished she said in a tone of pique to the child, "Ungrateful little boy, how can you contradict me? Never shall you have a bonfire again unless you keep it up now. Come, tell me you like to do things for me, and don't deny it."

The repressed child said, "Yes, I do, miss," and continued to stir the fire perfunctorily.

"Stay a little longer and I will give you a crooked six-pence," said Eustacia, more gently. "Put in one piece of wood every two or three minutes, but not too much at once. I am going to walk along the ridge a little longer, but I shall keep on coming to you. And if you hear a frog jump into the pond with a flounce like a stone thrown in, be sure you run and tell me, because it is a sign of rain."

"Yes, Eustacia."

"Miss Vye, sir."

"Miss Vy — stacia."

"That will do. Now put in one stick more."

The little slave went on feeding the fire as before. He seemed a mere automaton, galvanized into moving and speaking by the wayward Eustacia's will. He might have been the brass statue which Albertus Magnus is said to have animated just so far as to make it chatter, and move, and be his servant.

Before going on her walk again the young girl stood still on the bank for a few instants and listened. It was to the full as lonely a place as Rainbarrow, though at rather a lower level; and it was more sheltered from wind and weather on account of the few firs to the north. The bank which enclosed the homestead, and protected it from the lawless state of the world without, was formed of thick square clods, dug from the ditch on the outside, and built up with a slight batter or incline, which forms no slight defense where hedges will not grow because of the wind and the wilderness, and where wall materials are unattainable. Otherwise the situation was quite open, commanding the whole length of the valley which reached to the river behind Wildeve's house. High above this to the right, and much nearer thitherward than the Quiet Woman Inn, the blurred contour of Rainbarrow obstructed the sky.

After her attentive survey of the wild slopes and hollow ravines a gesture of impatience escaped Eustacia. She vented petulant words every now and then, but there were sighs between her words, and sudden listenings between her sighs. Descending from her perch she again sauntered off towards Rainbarrow, though this time she did not go the whole way.

Twice she reappeared at intervals of a few minutes and each time she said —

“Not any flounce into the pond yet, little man?”

“No, Miss Eustacia,” the child replied.

“Well,” she said at last, “I shall soon be going in, and then I will give you the crooked sixpence, and let you go home.”

“Thank'ee, Miss Eustacia,” said the tired stoker, breathing more easily. And Eustacia again strolled away from the fire, but this time not towards Rainbarrow. She skirted the bank and went round to the wicket before the house, where she stood motionless, looking at the scene.

Fifty yards off rose the corner of the two converging banks, with the fire upon it; within the bank, lifting up to the fire one stick at a time, just as before, the figure of the little child. She idly watched him as he occasionally climbed up in the nook of the bank and stood beside the brands. The wind blew the smoke, and the child's hair, and the corner of his pinafore, all in the same direction; the breeze died, and the pinafore and hair lay still, and the smoke went up straight.

While Eustacia looked on from this distance the boy's form visibly started — he slid down the bank and ran across towards the white gate.

“Well?” said Eustacia.

“A hopfrog have jumped into the pond. Yes, I heard 'en!”

“Then it is going to rain, and you had better go home. You will not be afraid?” She spoke hurriedly, as if her heart had leapt into her throat at the boy's words.

“No, because I shall hae the crooked sixpence.”

“Yes, here it is. Now run as fast as you can — not that way — through the garden here. No other boy in the heath has had such a bonfire as yours.”

The boy, who clearly had had too much of a good thing, marched away into the shadows with alacrity. When he was gone Eustacia, leaving her telescope and hourglass by the gate, brushed forward from the wicket towards the angle of the bank, under the fire.

Here, screened by the outwork, she waited. In a few moments a splash was audible from the pond outside. Had the child been there he would have said that a second frog had jumped in; but by most people the sound would have been likened to the fall of a stone into the water. Eustacia stepped upon the bank.

“Yes?” she said, and held her breath.

Thereupon the contour of a man became dimly visible against the low-reaching sky over the valley, beyond the outer margin of the pool. He came round it and leapt upon the bank beside her. A low laugh escaped her — the third utterance which the girl had indulged in tonight. The first, when she stood upon Rainbarrow, had expressed anxiety; the second, on the ridge, had expressed impatience; the present was one of triumphant pleasure. She let her joyous eyes rest upon him without speaking, as upon some wondrous thing she had created out of chaos.

“I have come,” said the man, who was Wildeve. “You give me no peace. Why do you not leave me alone? I have seen your bonfire all the evening.” The words were not without emotion, and retained their level tone as if by a careful equipoise between imminent extremes.

At this unexpectedly repressing manner in her lover the girl seemed to repress herself also. “Of course you have seen my fire,” she answered with languid calmness, artificially maintained. “Why shouldn’t I have a bonfire on the Fifth of November, like other denizens of the heath?”

“I knew it was meant for me.”

“How did you know it? I have had no word with you since you — you chose her, and walked about with her, and deserted me entirely, as if I had never been yours life and soul so irretrievably!”

“Eustacia! could I forget that last autumn at this same day of the month and at this same place you lighted exactly such a fire as a signal for me to come and see you? Why should there have been a bonfire again by Captain Vye’s house if not for the same purpose?”

“Yes, yes — I own it,” she cried under her breath, with a drowsy fervour of manner and tone which was quite peculiar to her. “Don’t begin speaking to me as you did, Damon; you will drive me to say words I would not wish to say to you. I had given you up, and resolved not to think of you any more; and then I heard the news, and I came out and got the fire ready because I thought that you had been faithful to me.”

“What have you heard to make you think that?” said Wildeve, astonished.

“That you did not marry her!” she murmured exultingly. “And I knew it was because you loved me best, and couldn’t do it...Damon, you have been cruel to me to go away,

and I have said I would never forgive you. I do not think I can forgive you entirely, even now — it is too much for a woman of any spirit to quite overlook.”

“If I had known you wished to call me up here only to reproach me, I wouldn’t have come.”

“But I don’t mind it, and I do forgive you now that you have not married her, and have come back to me!”

“Who told you that I had not married her?”

“My grandfather. He took a long walk today, and as he was coming home he overtook some person who told him of a broken-off wedding — he thought it might be yours, and I knew it was.”

“Does anybody else know?”

“I suppose not. Now Damon, do you see why I lit my signal fire? You did not think I would have lit it if I had imagined you to have become the husband of this woman. It is insulting my pride to suppose that.”

Wildeva was silent; it was evident that he had supposed as much.

“Did you indeed think I believed you were married?” she again demanded earnestly. “Then you wronged me; and upon my life and heart I can hardly bear to recognize that you have such ill thoughts of me! Damon, you are not worthy of me — I see it, and yet I love you. Never mind, let it go — I must bear your mean opinion as best I may...It is true, is it not,” she added with ill-concealed anxiety, on his making no demonstration, “that you could not bring yourself to give me up, and are still going to love me best of all?”

“Yes; or why should I have come?” he said touchily. “Not that fidelity will be any great merit in me after your kind speech about my unworthiness, which should have been said by myself if by anybody, and comes with an ill grace from you. However, the curse of inflammability is upon me, and I must live under it, and take any snub from a woman. It has brought me down from engineering to innkeeping — what lower stage it has in store for me I have yet to learn.” He continued to look upon her gloomily.

She seized the moment, and throwing back the shawl so that the firelight shone full upon her face and throat, said with a smile, “Have you seen anything better than that in your travels?”

Eustacia was not one to commit herself to such a position without good ground. He said quietly, “No.”

“Not even on the shoulders of Thomasin?”

“Thomasin is a pleasing and innocent woman.”

“That’s nothing to do with it,” she cried with quick passionateness. “We will leave her out; there are only you and me now to think of.” After a long look at him she resumed with the old quiescent warmth, “Must I go on weakly confessing to you things a woman ought to conceal; and own that no words can express how gloomy I have been because of that dreadful belief I held till two hours ago — that you had quite deserted me?”

“I am sorry I caused you that pain.”

“But perhaps it is not wholly because of you that I get gloomy,” she archly added. “It is in my nature to feel like that. It was born in my blood, I suppose.”

“Hypochondriasis.”

“Or else it was coming into this wild heath. I was happy enough at Budmouth. O the times, O the days at Budmouth! But Egdon will be brighter again now.”

“I hope it will,” said Wildeve moodily. “Do you know the consequence of this recall to me, my old darling? I shall come to see you again as before, at Rainbarrow.”

“Of course you will.”

“And yet I declare that until I got here tonight I intended, after this one good-bye, never to meet you again.”

“I don’t thank you for that,” she said, turning away, while indignation spread through her like subterranean heat. “You may come again to Rainbarrow if you like, but you won’t see me; and you may call, but I shall not listen; and you may tempt me, but I won’t give myself to you any more.”

“You have said as much before, sweet; but such natures as yours don’t so easily adhere to their words. Neither, for the matter of that, do such natures as mine.”

“This is the pleasure I have won by my trouble,” she whispered bitterly. “Why did I try to recall you? Damon, a strange warring takes place in my mind occasionally. I think when I become calm after you woundings, ‘Do I embrace a cloud of common fog after all?’ You are a chameleon, and now you are at your worst colour. Go home, or I shall hate you!”

He looked absently towards Rainbarrow while one might have counted twenty, and said, as if he did not much mind all this, “Yes, I will go home. Do you mean to see me again?”

“If you own to me that the wedding is broken off because you love me best.”

“I don’t think it would be good policy,” said Wildeve, smiling. “You would get to know the extent of your power too clearly.”

“But tell me!”

“You know.”

“Where is she now?”

“I don’t know. I prefer not to speak of her to you. I have not yet married her; I have come in obedience to your call. That is enough.”

“I merely lit that fire because I was dull, and thought I would get a little excitement by calling you up and triumphing over you as the Witch of Endor called up Samuel. I determined you should come; and you have come! I have shown my power. A mile and half hither, and a mile and half back again to your home — three miles in the dark for me. Have I not shown my power?”

He shook his head at her. “I know you too well, my Eustacia; I know you too well. There isn’t a note in you which I don’t know; and that hot little bosom couldn’t play such a cold-blooded trick to save its life. I saw a woman on Rainbarrow at dusk looking down towards my house. I think I drew out you before you drew out me.”

The revived embers of an old passion glowed clearly in Wildeve now; and he leant forward as if about to put his face towards her cheek.

“O no,” she said, intractably moving to the other side of the decayed fire. “What did you mean by that?”

“Perhaps I may kiss your hand?”

“No, you may not.”

“Then I may shake your hand?”

“No.”

“Then I wish you good night without caring for either. Good-bye, good-bye.”

She returned no answer, and with the bow of a dancing-master he vanished on the other side of the pool as he had come.

Eustacia sighed — it was no fragile maiden sigh, but a sigh which shook her like a shiver. Whenever a flash of reason darted like an electric light upon her lover — as it sometimes would — and showed his imperfections, she shivered thus. But it was over in a second, and she loved on. She knew that he trifled with her; but she loved on. She scattered the half-burnt brands, went indoors immediately, and up to her bedroom without a light. Amid the rustles which denoted her to be undressing in the darkness other heavy breaths frequently came; and the same kind of shudder occasionally moved through her when, ten minutes later, she lay on her bed asleep.

CHAPTER 7

Queen of Night

Eustacia Vye was the raw material of a divinity. On Olympus she would have done well with a little preparation. She had the passions and instincts which make a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a model woman. Had it been possible for the earth and mankind to be entirely in her grasp for a while, she had handled the distaff, the spindle, and the shears at her own free will, few in the world would have noticed the change of government. There would have been the same inequality of lot, the same heaping up of favours here, of contumely there, the same generosity before justice, the same perpetual dilemmas, the same captious alteration of caresses and blows that we endure now.

She was in person full-limbed and somewhat heavy; without ruddiness, as without pallor; and soft to the touch as a cloud. To see her hair was to fancy that a whole winter did not contain darkness enough to form its shadow — it closed over her forehead like nightfall extinguishing the western glow.

Her nerves extended into those tresses, and her temper could always be softened by stroking them down. When her hair was brushed she would instantly sink into stillness and look like the Sphinx. If, in passing under one of the Egdon banks, any of its thick skeins were caught, as they sometimes were, by a prickly tuft of the large

Ulex Europoeus — which will act as a sort of hairbrush — she would go back a few steps, and pass against it a second time.

She had pagan eyes, full of nocturnal mysteries, and their light, as it came and went, and came again, was partially hampered by their oppressive lids and lashes; and of these the under lid was much fuller than it usually is with English women. This enabled her to indulge in reverie without seeming to do so — she might have been believed capable of sleeping without closing them up. Assuming that the souls of men and women were visible essences, you could fancy the colour of Eustacia's soul to be flamelike. The sparks from it that rose into her dark pupils gave the same impression.

The mouth seemed formed less to speak than to quiver, less to quiver than to kiss. Some might have added, less to kiss than to curl. Viewed sideways, the closing-line of her lips formed, with almost geometric precision, the curve so well known in the arts of design as the *cima-recta*, or ogee. The sight of such a flexible bend as that on grim Egdon was quite an apparition. It was felt at once that the mouth did not come over from Sleswig with a band of Saxon pirates whose lips met like the two halves of a muffin. One had fancied that such lip-curves were mostly lurking underground in the South as fragments of forgotten marbles. So fine were the lines of her lips that, though full, each corner of her mouth was as clearly cut as the point of a spear. This keenness of corner was only blunted when she was given over to sudden fits of gloom, one of the phases of the night-side of sentiment which she knew too well for her years.

Her presence brought memories of such things as Bourbon roses, rubies, and tropical midnight; her moods recalled lotus-eaters and the march in *Athalie*; her motions, the ebb and flow of the sea; her voice, the viola. In a dim light, and with a slight rearrangement of her hair, her general figure might have stood for that of either of the higher female deities. The new moon behind her head, an old helmet upon it, a diadem of accidental dewdrops round her brow, would have been adjuncts sufficient to strike the note of Artemis, Athena, or Hera respectively, with as close an approximation to the antique as that which passes muster on many respected canvases.

But celestial imperiousness, love, wrath, and fervour had proved to be somewhat thrown away on netherward Egdon. Her power was limited, and the consciousness of this limitation had biassed her development. Egdon was her Hades, and since coming there she had imbibed much of what was dark in its tone, though inwardly and eternally unreconciled thereto. Her appearance accorded well with this smouldering rebelliousness, and the shady splendour of her beauty was the real surface of the sad and stifled warmth within her. A true Tartarean dignity sat upon her brow, and not factitiously or with marks of constraint, for it had grown in her with years.

Across the upper part of her head she wore a thin fillet of black velvet, restraining the luxuriance of her shady hair, in a way which added much to this class of majesty by irregularly clouding her forehead. "Nothing can embellish a beautiful face more than a narrow band drawn over the brow," says Richter. Some of the neighbouring girls wore coloured ribbon for the same purpose, and sported metallic ornaments elsewhere;

but if anyone suggested coloured ribbon and metallic ornaments to Eustacia Vye she laughed and went on.

Why did a woman of this sort live on Egdon Heath? Budmouth was her native place, a fashionable seaside resort at that date. She was the daughter of the bandmaster of a regiment which had been quartered there — a Corfiote by birth, and a fine musician — who met his future wife during her trip thither with her father the captain, a man of good family. The marriage was scarcely in accord with the old man's wishes, for the bandmaster's pockets were as light as his occupation. But the musician did his best; adopted his wife's name, made England permanently his home, took great trouble with his child's education, the expenses of which were defrayed by the grandfather, and throve as the chief local musician till her mother's death, when he left off thriving, drank, and died also. The girl was left to the care of her grandfather, who, since three of his ribs became broken in a shipwreck, had lived in this airy perch on Egdon, a spot which had taken his fancy because the house was to be had for next to nothing, and because a remote blue tinge on the horizon between the hills, visible from the cottage door, was traditionally believed to be the English Channel. She hated the change; she felt like one banished; but here she was forced to abide.

Thus it happened that in Eustacia's brain were juxtaposed the strangest assortment of ideas, from old time and from new. There was no middle distance in her perspective — romantic recollections of sunny afternoons on an esplanade, with military bands, officers, and gallants around, stood like gilded letters upon the dark tablet of surrounding Egdon. Every bizarre effect that could result from the random intertwining of watering-place glitter with the grand solemnity of a heath, was to be found in her. Seeing nothing of human life now, she imagined all the more of what she had seen.

Where did her dignity come from? By a latent vein from Alcinous' line, her father hailing from Phaeacia's isle? — or from Fitzalan and De Vere, her maternal grandfather having had a cousin in the peerage? Perhaps it was the gift of Heaven — a happy convergence of natural laws. Among other things opportunity had of late years been denied her of learning to be undignified, for she lived lonely. Isolation on a heath renders vulgarity well-nigh impossible. It would have been as easy for the heath-ponies, bats, and snakes to be vulgar as for her. A narrow life in Budmouth might have completely demeaned her.

The only way to look queenly without realms or hearts to queen it over is to look as if you had lost them; and Eustacia did that to a triumph. In the captain's cottage she could suggest mansions she had never seen. Perhaps that was because she frequented a vaster mansion than any of them, the open hills. Like the summer condition of the place around her, she was an embodiment of the phrase "a populous solitude" — apparently so listless, void, and quiet, she was really busy and full.

To be loved to madness — such was her great desire. Love was to her the one cordial which could drive away the eating loneliness of her days. And she seemed to long for the abstraction called passionate love more than for any particular lover.

She could show a most reproachful look at times, but it was directed less against human beings than against certain creatures of her mind, the chief of these being Destiny, through whose interference she dimly fancied it arose that love alighted only on gliding youth — that any love she might win would sink simultaneously with the sand in the glass. She thought of it with an ever-growing consciousness of cruelty, which tended to breed actions of reckless unconventionality, framed to snatch a year's, a week's, even an hour's passion from anywhere while it could be won. Through want of it she had sung without being merry, possessed without enjoying, outshone without triumphing. Her loneliness deepened her desire. On Egdon, coldest and meanest kisses were at famine prices, and where was a mouth matching hers to be found?

Fidelity in love for fidelity's sake had less attraction for her than for most women; fidelity because of love's grip had much. A blaze of love, and extinction, was better than a lantern glimmer of the same which should last long years. On this head she knew by prevision what most women learn only by experience — she had mentally walked round love, told the towers thereof, considered its palaces, and concluded that love was but a doleful joy. Yet she desired it, as one in a desert would be thankful for brackish water.

She often repeated her prayers; not at particular times, but, like the unaffectedly devout, when she desired to pray. Her prayer was always spontaneous, and often ran thus, "O deliver my heart from this fearful gloom and loneliness; send me great love from somewhere, else I shall die."

Her high gods were William the Conqueror, Strafford, and Napoleon Buonaparte, as they had appeared in the Lady's History used at the establishment in which she was educated. Had she been a mother she would have christened her boys such names as Saul or Sisera in preference to Jacob or David, neither of whom she admired. At school she had used to side with the Philistines in several battles, and had wondered if Pontius Pilate were as handsome as he was frank and fair.

Thus she was a girl of some forwardness of mind, indeed, weighed in relation to her situation among the very rearward of thinkers, very original. Her instincts towards social non-conformity were at the root of this. In the matter of holidays, her mood was that of horses who, when turned out to grass, enjoy looking upon their kind at work on the highway. She only valued rest to herself when it came in the midst of other people's labour. Hence she hated Sundays when all was at rest, and often said they would be the death of her. To see the heathmen in their Sunday condition, that is, with their hands in their pockets, their boots newly oiled, and not laced up (a particularly Sunday sign), walking leisurely among the turves and furze-faggots they had cut during the week, and kicking them critically as if their use were unknown, was a fearful heaviness to her. To relieve the tedium of this untimely day she would overhaul the cupboards containing her grandfather's old charts and other rubbish, humming Saturday-night ballads of the country people the while. But on Saturday nights she would frequently sing a psalm, and it was always on a weekday that she read the Bible, that she might be unoppressed with a sense of doing her duty.

Such views of life were to some extent the natural begettings of her situation upon her nature. To dwell on a heath without studying its meanings was like wedding a foreigner without learning his tongue. The subtle beauties of the heath were lost to Eustacia; she only caught its vapours. An environment which would have made a contented woman a poet, a suffering woman a devotee, a pious woman a psalmist, even a giddy woman thoughtful, made a rebellious woman saturnine.

Eustacia had got beyond the vision of some marriage of inexpressible glory; yet, though her emotions were in full vigour, she cared for no meaner union. Thus we see her in a strange state of isolation. To have lost the godlike conceit that we may do what we will, and not to have acquired a homely zest for doing what we can, shows a grandeur of temper which cannot be objected to in the abstract, for it denotes a mind that, though disappointed, forswears compromise. But, if congenial to philosophy, it is apt to be dangerous to the commonwealth. In a world where doing means marrying, and the commonwealth is one of hearts and hands, the same peril attends the condition.

And so we see our Eustacia — for at times she was not altogether unlovable — arriving at that stage of enlightenment which feels that nothing is worth while, and filling up the spare hours of her existence by idealising Wildeve for want of a better object. This was the sole reason of his ascendancy: she knew it herself. At moments her pride rebelled against her passion for him, and she even had longed to be free. But there was only one circumstance which could dislodge him, and that was the advent of a greater man.

For the rest, she suffered much from depression of spirits, and took slow walks to recover them, in which she carried her grandfather's telescope and her grandmother's hourglass — the latter because of a peculiar pleasure she derived from watching a material representation of time's gradual glide away. She seldom schemed, but when she did scheme, her plans showed rather the comprehensive strategy of a general than the small arts called womanish, though she could utter oracles of Delphian ambiguity when she did not choose to be direct. In heaven she will probably sit between the Heloises and the Cleopatras.

CHAPTER 8

Those Who Are Found Where There Is Said to Be Nobody

As soon as the sad little boy had withdrawn from the fire he clasped the money tight in the palm of his hand, as if thereby to fortify his courage, and began to run. There was really little danger in allowing a child to go home alone on this part of Egdon Heath. The distance to the boy's house was not more than three-eighths of a mile, his father's cottage, and one other a few yards further on, forming part of the small hamlet of Mistover Knap: the third and only remaining house was that of Captain Vye and Eustacia, which stood quite away from the small cottages and was the loneliest of lonely houses on these thinly populated slopes.

He ran until he was out of breath, and then, becoming more courageous, walked leisurely along, singing in an old voice a little song about a sailor-boy and a fair one, and bright gold in store. In the middle of this the child stopped — from a pit under the hill ahead of him shone a light, whence proceeded a cloud of floating dust and a smacking noise.

Only unusual sights and sounds frightened the boy. The shrivelled voice of the heath did not alarm him, for that was familiar. The thornbushes which arose in his path from time to time were less satisfactory, for they whistled gloomily, and had a ghastly habit after dark of putting on the shapes of jumping madmen, sprawling giants, and hideous cripples. Lights were not uncommon this evening, but the nature of all of them was different from this. Discretion rather than terror prompted the boy to turn back instead of passing the light, with a view of asking Miss Eustacia Vye to let her servant accompany him home.

When the boy had reascended to the top of the valley he found the fire to be still burning on the bank, though lower than before. Beside it, instead of Eustacia's solitary form, he saw two persons, the second being a man. The boy crept along under the bank to ascertain from the nature of the proceedings if it would be prudent to interrupt so splendid a creature as Miss Eustacia on his poor trivial account.

After listening under the bank for some minutes to the talk he turned in a perplexed and doubting manner and began to withdraw as silently as he had come. That he did not, upon the whole, think it advisable to interrupt her conversation with Wildeve, without being prepared to bear the whole weight of her displeasure, was obvious.

Here was a Scyllaeo-Charybdean position for a poor boy. Pausing when again safe from discovery, he finally decided to face the pit phenomenon as the lesser evil. With a heavy sigh he retraced the slope, and followed the path he had followed before.

The light had gone, the rising dust had disappeared — he hoped for ever. He marched resolutely along, and found nothing to alarm him till, coming within a few yards of the sandpit, he heard a slight noise in front, which led him to halt. The halt was but momentary, for the noise resolved itself into the steady bites of two animals grazing.

"Two he'th-croppers down here," he said aloud. "I have never known 'em come down so far afore."

The animals were in the direct line of his path, but that the child thought little of; he had played round the fetlocks of horses from his infancy. On coming nearer, however, the boy was somewhat surprised to find that the little creatures did not run off, and that each wore a clog, to prevent his going astray; this signified that they had been broken in. He could now see the interior of the pit, which, being in the side of the hill, had a level entrance. In the innermost corner the square outline of a van appeared, with its back towards him. A light came from the interior, and threw a moving shadow upon the vertical face of gravel at the further side of the pit into which the vehicle faced.

The child assumed that this was the cart of a gipsy, and his dread of those wanderers reached but to that mild pitch which titillates rather than pains. Only a few inches of mud wall kept him and his family from being gipsies themselves. He skirted the gravel pit at a respectful distance, ascended the slope, and came forward upon the brow, in order to look into the open door of the van and see the original of the shadow.

The picture alarmed the boy. By a little stove inside the van sat a figure red from head to heels — the man who had been Thomasin's friend. He was darning a stocking, which was red like the rest of him. Moreover, as he darned he smoked a pipe, the stem and bowl of which were red also.

At this moment one of the heath-croppers feeding in the outer shadows was audibly shaking off the clog attached to its foot. Aroused by the sound, the reddleman laid down his stocking, lit a lantern which hung beside him, and came out from the van. In sticking up the candle he lifted the lantern to his face, and the light shone into the whites of his eyes and upon his ivory teeth, which, in contrast with the red surrounding, lent him a startling aspect enough to the gaze of a juvenile. The boy knew too well for his peace of mind upon whose lair he had lighted. Uglier persons than gipsies were known to cross Egdon at times, and a reddleman was one of them.

"How I wish 'twas only a gipsy!" he murmured.

The man was by this time coming back from the horses. In his fear of being seen the boy rendered detection certain by nervous motion. The heather and peat stratum overhung the brow of the pit in mats, hiding the actual verge. The boy had stepped beyond the solid ground; the heather now gave way, and down he rolled over the scarp of grey sand to the very foot of the man.

The red man opened the lantern and turned it upon the figure of the prostrate boy.

"Who be ye?" he said.

"Johnny Nunsuch, master!"

"What were you doing up there?"

"I don't know."

"Watching me, I suppose?"

"Yes, master."

"What did you watch me for?"

"Because I was coming home from Miss Vye's bonfire."

"Beest hurt?"

"No."

"Why, yes, you be — your hand is bleeding. Come under my tilt and let me tie it up."

"Please let me look for my sixpence."

"How did you come by that?"

"Miss Vye gied it to me for keeping up her bonfire."

The sixpence was found, and the man went to the van, the boy behind, almost holding his breath.

The man took a piece of rag from a satchel containing sewing materials, tore off a strip, which, like everything else, was tinged red, and proceeded to bind up the wound.

“My eyes have got foggy-like — please may I sit down, master?” said the boy.

“To be sure, poor chap. ‘Tis enough to make you feel fainty. Sit on that bundle.”

The man finished tying up the gash, and the boy said, “I think I’ll go home now, master.”

“You are rather afraid of me. Do you know what I be?”

The child surveyed his vermilion figure up and down with much misgiving and finally said, “Yes.”

“Well, what?”

“The reddleman!” he faltered.

“Yes, that’s what I be. Though there’s more than one. You little children think there’s only one cuckoo, one fox, one giant, one devil, and one reddleman, when there’s lots of us all.”

“Is there? You won’t carry me off in your bags, will ye, master? ‘Tis said that the reddleman will sometimes.”

“Nonsense. All that reddlemen do is sell reddle. You see all these bags at the back of my cart? They are not full of little boys — only full of red stuff.”

“Was you born a reddleman?”

“No, I took to it. I should be as white as you if I were to give up the trade — that is, I should be white in time — perhaps six months; not at first, because ‘tis grow’d into my skin and won’t wash out. Now, you’ll never be afraid of a reddleman again, will ye?”

“No, never. Willy Orchard said he seed a red ghost here t’other day — perhaps that was you?”

“I was here t’other day.”

“Were you making that dusty light I saw by now?”

“Oh yes, I was beating out some bags. And have you had a good bonfire up there? I saw the light. Why did Miss Vye want a bonfire so bad that she should give you sixpence to keep it up?”

“I don’t know. I was tired, but she made me bide and keep up the fire just the same, while she kept going up across Rainbarrow way.”

“And how long did that last?”

“Until a hopfrog jumped into the pond.”

The reddleman suddenly ceased to talk idly. “A hopfrog?” he inquired. “Hopfrogs don’t jump into ponds this time of year.”

“They do, for I heard one.”

“Certain-sure?”

“Yes. She told me afore that I should hear’n; and so I did. They say she’s clever and deep, and perhaps she charmed ‘en to come.”

“And what then?”

“Then I came down here, and I was afeard, and I went back; but I didn’t like to speak to her, because of the gentleman, and I came on here again.”

“A gentleman — ah! What did she say to him, my man?”

“Told him she supposed he had not married the other woman because he liked his old sweetheart best; and things like that.”

“What did the gentleman say to her, my sonny?”

“He only said he did like her best, and how he was coming to see her again under Rainbarrow o’ nights.”

“Ha!” cried the reddleman, slapping his hand against the side of his van so that the whole fabric shook under the blow. “That’s the secret o’t!”

The little boy jumped clean from the stool.

“My man, don’t you be afraid,” said the dealer in red, suddenly becoming gentle. “I forgot you were here. That’s only a curious way reddlemen have of going mad for a moment; but they don’t hurt anybody. And what did the lady say then?”

“I can’t mind. Please, Master Reddleman, may I go home-along now?”

“Ay, to be sure you may. I’ll go a bit of ways with you.”

He conducted the boy out of the gravel pit and into the path leading to his mother’s cottage. When the little figure had vanished in the darkness the reddleman returned, resumed his seat by the fire, and proceeded to darn again.

CHAPTER 9

Love Leads a Shrewd Man into Strategy

Reddlemen of the old school are now but seldom seen. Since the introduction of railways Wessex farmers have managed to do without these Mephistophelian visitants, and the bright pigment so largely used by shepherds in preparing sheep for the fair is obtained by other routes. Even those who yet survive are losing the poetry of existence which characterized them when the pursuit of the trade meant periodical journeys to the pit whence the material was dug, a regular camping out from month to month, except in the depth of winter, a peregrination among farms which could be counted by the hundred, and in spite of this Arab existence the preservation of that respectability which is insured by the never-failing production of a well-lined purse.

Reddle spreads its lively hues over everything it lights on, and stamps unmistakably, as with the mark of Cain, any person who has handled it half an hour.

A child’s first sight of a reddleman was an epoch in his life. That blood-coloured figure was a sublimation of all the horrid dreams which had afflicted the juvenile spirit since imagination began. “The reddleman is coming for you!” had been the formulated threat of Wessex mothers for many generations. He was successfully supplanted for a while, at the beginning of the present century, by Buonaparte; but as process of time rendered the latter personage stale and ineffective the older phrase resumed its early

prominence. And now the reddleman has in his turn followed Buonaparte to the land of worn-out bogeys, and his place is filled by modern inventions.

The reddleman lived like a gipsy; but gipsies he scorned. He was about as thriving as travelling basket and mat makers; but he had nothing to do with them. He was more decently born and brought up than the cattledrovers who passed and repassed him in his wanderings; but they merely nodded to him. His stock was more valuable than that of pedlars; but they did not think so, and passed his cart with eyes straight ahead. He was such an unnatural colour to look at that the men of roundabouts and waxwork shows seemed gentlemen beside him; but he considered them low company, and remained aloof. Among all these squatters and folks of the road the reddleman continually found himself; yet he was not of them. His occupation tended to isolate him, and isolated he was mostly seen to be.

It was sometimes suggested that reddlemen were criminals for whose misdeeds other men wrongfully suffered — that in escaping the law they had not escaped their own consciences, and had taken to the trade as a lifelong penance. Else why should they have chosen it? In the present case such a question would have been particularly apposite. The reddleman who had entered Egdon that afternoon was an instance of the pleasing being wasted to form the ground-work of the singular, when an ugly foundation would have done just as well for that purpose. The one point that was forbidding about this reddleman was his colour. Freed from that he would have been as agreeable a specimen of rustic manhood as one would often see. A keen observer might have been inclined to think — which was, indeed, partly the truth — that he had relinquished his proper station in life for want of interest in it. Moreover, after looking at him one would have hazarded the guess that good nature, and an acuteness as extreme as it could be without verging on craft, formed the framework of his character.

While he darned the stocking his face became rigid with thought. Softer expressions followed this, and then again recurred the tender sadness which had sat upon him during his drive along the highway that afternoon. Presently his needle stopped. He laid down the stocking, arose from his seat, and took a leathern pouch from a hook in the corner of the van. This contained among other articles a brown-paper packet, which, to judge from the hinge-like character of its worn folds, seemed to have been carefully opened and closed a good many times. He sat down on a three-legged milking stool that formed the only seat in the van, and, examining his packet by the light of a candle, took thence an old letter and spread it open.

The writing had originally been traced on white paper, but the letter had now assumed a pale red tinge from the accident of its situation; and the black strokes of writing thereon looked like the twigs of a winter hedge against a vermilion sunset. The letter bore a date some two years previous to that time, and was signed “Thomasin Yeobright.” It ran as follows: —

DEAR DIGGORY VENN, — The question you put when you overtook me coming home from Pond-close gave me such a surprise that I am afraid I did not make you

exactly understand what I meant. Of course, if my aunt had not met me I could have explained all then at once, but as it was there was no chance. I have been quite uneasy since, as you know I do not wish to pain you, yet I fear I shall be doing so now in contradicting what I seemed to say then. I cannot, Diggory, marry you, or think of letting you call me your sweetheart. I could not, indeed, Diggory. I hope you will not much mind my saying this, and feel in a great pain. It makes me very sad when I think it may, for I like you very much, and I always put you next to my cousin Clym in my mind. There are so many reasons why we cannot be married that I can hardly name them all in a letter. I did not in the least expect that you were going to speak on such a thing when you followed me, because I had never thought of you in the sense of a lover at all. You must not becall me for laughing when you spoke; you mistook when you thought I laughed at you as a foolish man. I laughed because the idea was so odd, and not at you at all. The great reason with my own personal self for not letting you court me is, that I do not feel the things a woman ought to feel who consents to walk with you with the meaning of being your wife. It is not as you think, that I have another in my mind, for I do not encourage anybody, and never have in my life. Another reason is my aunt. She would not, I know, agree to it, even if I wished to have you. She likes you very well, but she will want me to look a little higher than a small dairy-farmer, and marry a professional man. I hope you will not set your heart against me for writing plainly, but I felt you might try to see me again, and it is better that we should not meet. I shall always think of you as a good man, and be anxious for your well-doing. I send this by Jane Orchard's little maid, — And remain Diggory, your faithful friend,
THOMASIN YEOBRIGHT.

To MR. VENN, Dairy-farmer.

Since the arrival of that letter, on a certain autumn morning long ago, the reddleman and Thomasin had not met till today. During the interval he had shifted his position even further from hers than it had originally been, by adopting the reddle trade; though he was really in very good circumstances still. Indeed, seeing that his expenditure was only one-fourth of his income, he might have been called a prosperous man.

Rejected suitors take to roaming as naturally as unhived bees; and the business to which he had cynically devoted himself was in many ways congenial to Venn. But his wanderings, by mere stress of old emotions, had frequently taken an Egdon direction, though he never intruded upon her who attracted him thither. To be in Thomasin's heath, and near her, yet unseen, was the one ewe-lamb of pleasure left to him.

Then came the incident of that day, and the reddleman, still loving her well, was excited by this accidental service to her at a critical juncture to vow an active devotion to her cause, instead of, as hitherto, sighing and holding aloof. After what had happened it was impossible that he should not doubt the honesty of Wildeve's intentions. But her hope was apparently centred upon him; and dismissing his regrets Venn determined to aid her to be happy in her own chosen way. That this way was, of all others, the most distressing to himself, was awkward enough; but the reddleman's love was generous.

His first active step in watching over Thomasin's interests was taken about seven o'clock the next evening and was dictated by the news which he had learnt from the sad boy. That Eustacia was somehow the cause of Wildeve's carelessness in relation to the marriage had at once been Venn's conclusion on hearing of the secret meeting between them. It did not occur to his mind that Eustacia's love signal to Wildeve was the tender effect upon the deserted beauty of the intelligence which her grandfather had brought home. His instinct was to regard her as a conspirator against rather than as an antecedent obstacle to Thomasin's happiness.

During the day he had been exceedingly anxious to learn the condition of Thomasin, but he did not venture to intrude upon a threshold to which he was a stranger, particularly at such an unpleasant moment as this. He had occupied his time in moving with his ponies and load to a new point in the heath, eastward to his previous station; and here he selected a nook with a careful eye to shelter from wind and rain, which seemed to mean that his stay there was to be a comparatively extended one. After this he returned on foot some part of the way that he had come; and, it being now dark, he diverged to the left till he stood behind a holly bush on the edge of a pit not twenty yards from Rainbarrow.

He watched for a meeting there, but he watched in vain. Nobody except himself came near the spot that night.

But the loss of his labour produced little effect upon the reddleman. He had stood in the shoes of Tantalus, and seemed to look upon a certain mass of disappointment as the natural preface to all realisations, without which preface they would give cause for alarm.

The same hour the next evening found him again at the same place; but Eustacia and Wildeve, the expected trysters, did not appear.

He pursued precisely the same course yet four nights longer, and without success. But on the next, being the day-week of their previous meeting, he saw a female shape floating along the ridge and the outline of a young man ascending from the valley. They met in the little ditch encircling the tumulus — the original excavation from which it had been thrown up by the ancient British people.

The reddleman, stung with suspicion of wrong to Thomasin, was aroused to strategy in a moment. He instantly left the bush and crept forward on his hands and knees. When he had got as close as he might safely venture without discovery he found that, owing to a cross-wind, the conversation of the trysting pair could not be overheard.

Near him, as in divers places about the heath, were areas strewn with large turves, which lay edgeways and upside down awaiting removal by Timothy Fairway, previous to the winter weather. He took two of these as he lay, and dragged them over him till one covered his head and shoulders, the other his back and legs. The reddleman would now have been quite invisible, even by daylight; the turves, standing upon him with the heather upwards, looked precisely as if they were growing. He crept along again, and the turves upon his back crept with him. Had he approached without any covering the chances are that he would not have been perceived in the dusk; approaching thus,

it was as though he burrowed underground. In this manner he came quite close to where the two were standing.

“Wish to consult me on the matter?” reached his ears in the rich, impetuous accents of Eustacia Vye. “Consult me? It is an indignity to me to talk so — I won’t bear it any longer!” She began weeping. “I have loved you, and have shown you that I loved you, much to my regret; and yet you can come and say in that frigid way that you wish to consult with me whether it would not be better to marry Thomasin. Better — of course it would be. Marry her — she is nearer to your own position in life than I am!”

“Yes, yes; that’s very well,” said Wildeve peremptorily. “But we must look at things as they are. Whatever blame may attach to me for having brought it about, Thomasin’s position is at present much worse than yours. I simply tell you that I am in a strait.”

“But you shall not tell me! You must see that it is only harassing me. Damon, you have not acted well; you have sunk in my opinion. You have not valued my courtesy — the courtesy of a lady in loving you — who used to think of far more ambitious things. But it was Thomasin’s fault.

“She won you away from me, and she deserves to suffer for it. Where is she staying now? Not that I care, nor where I am myself. Ah, if I were dead and gone how glad she would be! Where is she, I ask?”

“Thomasin is now staying at her aunt’s shut up in a bedroom, and keeping out of everybody’s sight,” he said indifferently.

“I don’t think you care much about her even now,” said Eustacia with sudden joyousness, “for if you did you wouldn’t talk so coolly about her. Do you talk so coolly to her about me? Ah, I expect you do! Why did you originally go away from me? I don’t think I can ever forgive you, except on one condition, that whenever you desert me, you come back again, sorry that you served me so.”

“I never wish to desert you.”

“I do not thank you for that. I should hate it to be all smooth. Indeed, I think I like you to desert me a little once now and then. Love is the dimmest thing where the lover is quite honest. O, it is a shame to say so; but it is true!” She indulged in a little laugh. “My low spirits begin at the very idea. Don’t you offer me tame love, or away you go!”

“I wish Tamsie were not such a confoundedly good little woman,” said Wildeve, “so that I could be faithful to you without injuring a worthy person. It is I who am the sinner after all; I am not worth the little finger of either of you.”

“But you must not sacrifice yourself to her from any sense of justice,” replied Eustacia quickly. “If you do not love her it is the most merciful thing in the long run to leave her as she is. That’s always the best way. There, now I have been unwomanly, I suppose. When you have left me I am always angry with myself for things that I have said to you.”

Wildeve walked a pace or two among the heather without replying. The pause was filled up by the intonation of a pollard thorn a little way to windward, the breezes

filtering through its unyielding twigs as through a strainer. It was as if the night sang dirges with clenched teeth.

She continued, half sorrowfully, "Since meeting you last, it has occurred to me once or twice that perhaps it was not for love of me you did not marry her. Tell me, Damon — I'll try to bear it. Had I nothing whatever to do with the matter?"

"Do you press me to tell?"

"Yes, I must know. I see I have been too ready to believe in my own power."

"Well, the immediate reason was that the license would not do for the place, and before I could get another she ran away. Up to that point you had nothing to do with it. Since then her aunt has spoken to me in a tone which I don't at all like."

"Yes, yes! I am nothing in it — I am nothing in it. You only trifle with me. Heaven, what can I, Eustacia Vye, be made of to think so much of you!"

"Nonsense; do not be so passionate...Eustacia, how we roved among these bushes last year, when the hot days had got cool, and the shades of the hills kept us almost invisible in the hollows!"

She remained in moody silence till she said, "Yes; and how I used to laugh at you for daring to look up to me! But you have well made me suffer for that since."

"Yes, you served me cruelly enough until I thought I had found someone fairer than you. A blessed find for me, Eustacia."

"Do you still think you found somebody fairer?"

"Sometimes I do, sometimes I don't. The scales are balanced so nicely that a feather would turn them."

"But don't you really care whether I meet you or whether I don't?" she said slowly.

"I care a little, but not enough to break my rest," replied the young man languidly. "No, all that's past. I find there are two flowers where I thought there was only one. Perhaps there are three, or four, or any number as good as the first...Mine is a curious fate. Who would have thought that all this could happen to me?"

She interrupted with a suppressed fire of which either love or anger seemed an equally possible issue, "Do you love me now?"

"Who can say?"

"Tell me; I will know it!"

"I do, and I do not," said he mischievously. "That is, I have my times and my seasons. One moment you are too tall, another moment you are too do-nothing, another too melancholy, another too dark, another I don't know what, except — that you are not the whole world to me that you used to be, my dear. But you are a pleasant lady to know and nice to meet, and I dare say as sweet as ever — almost."

Eustacia was silent, and she turned from him, till she said, in a voice of suspended mightiness, "I am for a walk, and this is my way."

"Well, I can do worse than follow you."

"You know you can't do otherwise, for all your moods and changes!" she answered defiantly. "Say what you will; try as you may; keep away from me all that you can —

you will never forget me. You will love me all your life long. You would jump to marry me!"

"So I would!" said Wildeve. "Such strange thoughts as I've had from time to time, Eustacia; and they come to me this moment. You hate the heath as much as ever; that I know."

"I do," she murmured deeply. "'Tis my cross, my shame, and will be my death!"

"I abhor it too," said he. "How mournfully the wind blows round us now!"

She did not answer. Its tone was indeed solemn and pervasive. Compound utterances addressed themselves to their senses, and it was possible to view by ear the features of the neighbourhood. Acoustic pictures were returned from the darkened scenery; they could hear where the tracts of heather began and ended; where the furze was growing stalky and tall; where it had been recently cut; in what direction the fir-clump lay, and how near was the pit in which the hollies grew; for these differing features had their voices no less than their shapes and colours.

"God, how lonely it is!" resumed Wildeve. "What are picturesque ravines and mists to us who see nothing else? Why should we stay here? Will you go with me to America? I have kindred in Wisconsin."

"That wants consideration."

"It seems impossible to do well here, unless one were a wild bird or a landscape-painter. Well?"

"Give me time," she softly said, taking his hand. "America is so far away. Are you going to walk with me a little way?"

As Eustacia uttered the latter words she retired from the base of the barrow, and Wildeve followed her, so that the reddleman could hear no more.

He lifted the turves and arose. Their black figures sank and disappeared from against the sky. They were as two horns which the sluggish heath had put forth from its crown, like a mollusc, and had now again drawn in.

The reddleman's walk across the vale, and over into the next where his cart lay, was not sprightly for a slim young fellow of twenty-four. His spirit was perturbed to aching. The breezes that blew around his mouth in that walk carried off upon them the accents of a commination.

He entered the van, where there was a fire in a stove. Without lighting his candle he sat down at once on the three-legged stool, and pondered on what he had seen and heard touching that still-loved one of his. He uttered a sound which was neither sigh nor sob, but was even more indicative than either of a troubled mind.

"My Tamsie," he whispered heavily. "What can be done? Yes, I will see that Eustacia Vye."

CHAPTER 10

A Desperate Attempt at Persuasion

The next morning, at the time when the height of the sun appeared very insignificant from any part of the heath as compared with the altitude of Rainbarrow, and when all the little hills in the lower levels were like an archipelago in a fog-formed Aegean, the reddleman came from the brambled nook which he had adopted as his quarters and ascended the slopes of Mistover Knap.

Though these shaggy hills were apparently so solitary, several keen round eyes were always ready on such a wintry morning as this to converge upon a passer-by. Feathered species sojourned here in hiding which would have created wonder if found elsewhere. A bustard haunted the spot, and not many years before this five and twenty might have been seen in Egdon at one time. Marsh-harriers looked up from the valley by Wildeve's. A cream-coloured courser had used to visit this hill, a bird so rare that not more than a dozen have ever been seen in England; but a barbarian rested neither night nor day till he had shot the African truant, and after that event cream-coloured coursers thought fit to enter Egdon no more.

A traveller who should walk and observe any of these visitants as Venn observed them now could feel himself to be in direct communication with regions unknown to man. Here in front of him was a wild mallard — just arrived from the home of the north wind. The creature brought within him an amplitude of Northern knowledge. Glacial catastrophes, snowstorm episodes, glittering auroral effects, Polaris in the zenith, Franklin underfoot — the category of his commonplaces was wonderful. But the bird, like many other philosophers, seemed as he looked at the reddleman to think that a present moment of comfortable reality was worth a decade of memories.

Venn passed on through these towards the house of the isolated beauty who lived up among them and despised them. The day was Sunday; but as going to church, except to be married or buried, was exceptional at Egdon, this made little difference. He had determined upon the bold stroke of asking for an interview with Miss Vye — to attack her position as Thomasin's rival either by art or by storm, showing therein, somewhat too conspicuously, the want of gallantry characteristic of a certain astute sort of men, from clowns to kings. The great Frederick making war on the beautiful Archduchess, Napoleon refusing terms to the beautiful Queen of Prussia, were not more dead to difference of sex than the reddleman was, in his peculiar way, in planning the displacement of Eustacia.

To call at the captain's cottage was always more or less an undertaking for the inferior inhabitants. Though occasionally chatty, his moods were erratic, and nobody could be certain how he would behave at any particular moment. Eustacia was reserved, and lived very much to herself. Except the daughter of one of the cotters, who was their servant, and a lad who worked in the garden and stable, scarcely anyone but themselves ever entered the house. They were the only genteel people of the district except the Yeobrights, and though far from rich, they did not feel that necessity for preserving a friendly face towards every man, bird, and beast which influenced their poorer neighbours.

When the reddleman entered the garden the old man was looking through his glass at the stain of blue sea in the distant landscape, the little anchors on his buttons twinkling in the sun. He recognized Venn as his companion on the highway, but made no remark on that circumstance, merely saying, "Ah, reddleman — you here? Have a glass of grog?"

Venn declined, on the plea of it being too early, and stated that his business was with Miss Vye. The captain surveyed him from cap to waistcoat and from waistcoat to leggings for a few moments, and finally asked him to go indoors.

Miss Vye was not to be seen by anybody just then; and the reddleman waited in the window-bench of the kitchen, his hands hanging across his divergent knees, and his cap hanging from his hands.

"I suppose the young lady is not up yet?" he presently said to the servant.

"Not quite yet. Folks never call upon ladies at this time of day."

"Then I'll step outside," said Venn. "If she is willing to see me, will she please send out word, and I'll come in."

The reddleman left the house and loitered on the hill adjoining. A considerable time elapsed, and no request for his presence was brought. He was beginning to think that his scheme had failed, when he beheld the form of Eustacia herself coming leisurely towards him. A sense of novelty in giving audience to that singular figure had been sufficient to draw her forth.

She seemed to feel, after a bare look at Diggory Venn, that the man had come on a strange errand, and that he was not so mean as she had thought him; for her close approach did not cause him to writhe uneasily, or shift his feet, or show any of those little signs which escape an ingenuous rustic at the advent of the uncommon in womankind. On his inquiring if he might have a conversation with her she replied, "Yes, walk beside me," and continued to move on.

Before they had gone far it occurred to the perspicacious reddleman that he would have acted more wisely by appearing less unimpressionable, and he resolved to correct the error as soon as he could find opportunity.

"I have made so bold, miss, as to step across and tell you some strange news which has come to my ears about that man."

"Ah! what man?"

He jerked his elbow to the southeast — the direction of the Quiet Woman.

Eustacia turned quickly to him. "Do you mean Mr. Wildeve?"

"Yes, there is trouble in a household on account of him, and I have come to let you know of it, because I believe you might have power to drive it away."

"I? What is the trouble?"

"It is quite a secret. It is that he may refuse to marry Thomasin Yeobright after all."

Eustacia, though set inwardly pulsing by his words, was equal to her part in such a drama as this. She replied coldly, "I do not wish to listen to this, and you must not expect me to interfere."

“But, miss, you will hear one word?”

“I cannot. I am not interested in the marriage, and even if I were I could not compel Mr. Wildeve to do my bidding.”

“As the only lady on the heath I think you might,” said Venn with subtle indirectness. “This is how the case stands. Mr. Wildeve would marry Thomasin at once, and make all matters smooth, if so be there were not another woman in the case. This other woman is some person he has picked up with, and meets on the heath occasionally, I believe. He will never marry her, and yet through her he may never marry the woman who loves him dearly. Now, if you, miss, who have so much sway over us menfolk, were to insist that he should treat your young neighbour Tamsin with honourable kindness and give up the other woman, he would perhaps do it, and save her a good deal of misery.”

“Ah, my life!” said Eustacia, with a laugh which unclosed her lips so that the sun shone into her mouth as into a tulip, and lent it a similar scarlet fire. “You think too much of my influence over menfolk indeed, reddleman. If I had such a power as you imagine I would go straight and use it for the good of anybody who has been kind to me — which Thomasin Yeobright has not particularly, to my knowledge.”

“Can it be that you really don’t know of it — how much she had always thought of you?”

“I have never heard a word of it. Although we live only two miles apart I have never been inside her aunt’s house in my life.”

The superciliousness that lurked in her manner told Venn that thus far he had utterly failed. He inwardly sighed and felt it necessary to unmask his second argument.

“Well, leaving that out of the question, ‘tis in your power, I assure you, Miss Vye, to do a great deal of good to another woman.”

She shook her head.

“Your comeliness is law with Mr. Wildeve. It is law with all men who see ‘ee. They say, ‘This well-favoured lady coming — what’s her name? How handsome!’ Handsomer than Thomasin Yeobright,” the reddleman persisted, saying to himself, “God forgive a rascal for lying!” And she was handsomer, but the reddleman was far from thinking so. There was a certain obscurity in Eustacia’s beauty, and Venn’s eye was not trained. In her winter dress, as now, she was like the tiger-beetle, which, when observed in dull situations, seems to be of the quietest neutral colour, but under a full illumination blazes with dazzling splendour.

Eustacia could not help replying, though conscious that she endangered her dignity thereby. “Many women are lovelier than Thomasin,” she said, “so not much attaches to that.”

The reddleman suffered the wound and went on: “He is a man who notices the looks of women, and you could twist him to your will like withywind, if you only had the mind.”

“Surely what she cannot do who has been so much with him I cannot do living up here away from him.”

The reddleman wheeled and looked her in the face. "Miss Vye!" he said.

"Why do you say that — as if you doubted me?" She spoke faintly, and her breathing was quick. "The idea of your speaking in that tone to me!" she added, with a forced smile of hauteur. "What could have been in your mind to lead you to speak like that?"

"Miss Vye, why should you make believe that you don't know this man? — I know why, certainly. He is beneath you, and you are ashamed."

"You are mistaken. What do you mean?"

The reddleman had decided to play the card of truth. "I was at the meeting by Rainbarrow last night and heard every word," he said. "The woman that stands between Wildeve and Thomasin is yourself."

It was a disconcerting lift of the curtain, and the mortification of Candaules' wife glowed in her. The moment had arrived when her lip would tremble in spite of herself, and when the gasp could no longer be kept down.

"I am unwell," she said hurriedly. "No — it is not that — I am not in a humour to hear you further. Leave me, please."

"I must speak, Miss Vye, in spite of paining you. What I would put before you is this. However it may come about — whether she is to blame, or you — her case is without doubt worse than yours. Your giving up Mr. Wildeve will be a real advantage to you, for how could you marry him? Now she cannot get off so easily — everybody will blame her if she loses him. Then I ask you — not because her right is best, but because her situation is worst — to give him up to her."

"No — I won't, I won't!" she said impetuously, quite forgetful of her previous manner towards the reddleman as an underling. "Nobody has ever been served so! It was going on well — I will not be beaten down — by an inferior woman like her. It is very well for you to come and plead for her, but is she not herself the cause of all her own trouble? Am I not to show favour to any person I may choose without asking permission of a parcel of cottagers? She has come between me and my inclination, and now that she finds herself rightly punished she gets you to plead for her!"

"Indeed," said Venn earnestly, "she knows nothing whatever about it. It is only I who ask you to give him up. It will be better for her and you both. People will say bad things if they find out that a lady secretly meets a man who has ill-used another woman."

"I have NOT injured her — he was mine before he was hers! He came back — because — because he liked me best!" she said wildly. "But I lose all self-respect in talking to you. What am I giving way to!"

"I can keep secrets," said Venn gently. "You need not fear. I am the only man who knows of your meetings with him. There is but one thing more to speak of, and then I will be gone. I heard you say to him that you hated living here — that Egdon Heath was a jail to you."

"I did say so. There is a sort of beauty in the scenery, I know; but it is a jail to me. The man you mention does not save me from that feeling, though he lives here. I should have cared nothing for him had there been a better person near."

The reddleman looked hopeful; after these words from her his third attempt seemed promising. "As we have now opened our minds a bit, miss," he said, "I'll tell you what I have got to propose. Since I have taken to the reddle trade I travel a good deal, as you know."

She inclined her head, and swept round so that her eyes rested in the misty vale beneath them.

"And in my travels I go near Budmouth. Now Budmouth is a wonderful place — wonderful — a great salt sheening sea bending into the land like a bow — thousands of gentlepeople walking up and down — bands of music playing — officers by sea and officers by land walking among the rest — out of every ten folks you meet nine of 'em in love."

"I know it," she said disdainfully. "I know Budmouth better than you. I was born there. My father came to be a military musician there from abroad. Ah, my soul, Budmouth! I wish I was there now."

The reddleman was surprised to see how a slow fire could blaze on occasion. "If you were, miss," he replied, "in a week's time you would think no more of Wildeve than of one of those he'th-croppers that we see yond. Now, I could get you there."

"How?" said Eustacia, with intense curiosity in her heavy eyes.

"My uncle has been for five and twenty years the trusty man of a rich widow-lady who has a beautiful house facing the sea. This lady has become old and lame, and she wants a young company-keeper to read and sing to her, but can't get one to her mind to save her life, though she've advertised in the papers, and tried half a dozen. She would jump to get you, and Uncle would make it all easy."

"I should have to work, perhaps?"

"No, not real work — you'd have a little to do, such as reading and that. You would not be wanted till New Year's Day."

"I knew it meant work," she said, drooping to languor again.

"I confess there would be a trifle to do in the way of amusing her; but though idle people might call it work, working people would call it play. Think of the company and the life you'd lead, miss; the gaiety you'd see, and the gentleman you'd marry. My uncle is to inquire for a trustworthy young lady from the country, as she don't like town girls."

"It is to wear myself out to please her! and I won't go. O, if I could live in a gay town as a lady should, and go my own ways, and do my own doings, I'd give the wrinkled half of my life! Yes, reddleman, that would I."

"Help me to get Thomasin happy, miss, and the chance shall be yours," urged her companion.

"Chance — 'tis no chance," she said proudly. "What can a poor man like you offer me, indeed? — I am going indoors. I have nothing more to say. Don't your horses want feeding, or your reddlebags want mending, or don't you want to find buyers for your goods, that you stay idling here like this?"

Venn spoke not another word. With his hands behind him he turned away, that she might not see the hopeless disappointment in his face. The mental clearness and power he had found in this lonely girl had indeed filled his manner with misgiving even from the first few minutes of close quarters with her. Her youth and situation had led him to expect a simplicity quite at the beck of his method. But a system of inducement which might have carried weaker country lasses along with it had merely repelled Eustacia. As a rule, the word Budmouth meant fascination on Egdon. That Royal port and watering place, if truly mirrored in the minds of the heathfolk, must have combined, in a charming and indescribable manner a Carthaginian bustle of building with Tarentine luxuriousness and Baian health and beauty. Eustacia felt little less extravagantly about the place; but she would not sink her independence to get there.

When Diggory Venn had gone quite away, Eustacia walked to the bank and looked down the wild and picturesque vale towards the sun, which was also in the direction of Wildeve's. The mist had now so far collapsed that the tips of the trees and bushes around his house could just be discerned, as if boring upwards through a vast white cobweb which cloaked them from the day. There was no doubt that her mind was inclined thitherward; indefinitely, fancifully — twining and untwining about him as the single object within her horizon on which dreams might crystallize. The man who had begun by being merely her amusement, and would never have been more than her hobby but for his skill in deserting her at the right moments, was now again her desire. Cessation in his love-making had revived her love. Such feeling as Eustacia had idly given to Wildeve was dammed into a flood by Thomasin. She had used to tease Wildeve, but that was before another had favoured him. Often a drop of irony into an indifferent situation renders the whole piquant.

“I will never give him up — never!” she said impetuously.

The reddleman's hint that rumour might show her to disadvantage had no permanent terror for Eustacia. She was as unconcerned at that contingency as a goddess at a lack of linen. This did not originate in inherent shamelessness, but in her living too far from the world to feel the impact of public opinion. Zenobia in the desert could hardly have cared what was said about her at Rome. As far as social ethics were concerned Eustacia approached the savage state, though in emotion she was all the while an epicure. She had advanced to the secret recesses of sensuousness, yet had hardly crossed the threshold of conventionality.

CHAPTER 11

The Dishonesty of an Honest Woman

The reddleman had left Eustacia's presence with desponding views on Thomasin's future happiness; but he was awakened to the fact that one other channel remained untried by seeing, as he followed the way to his van, the form of Mrs. Yeobright slowly walking towards the Quiet Woman. He went across to her; and could almost perceive

in her anxious face that this journey of hers to Wildeve was undertaken with the same object as his own to Eustacia.

She did not conceal the fact. "Then," said the reddleman, "you may as well leave it alone, Mrs. Yeobright."

"I half think so myself," she said. "But nothing else remains to be done besides pressing the question upon him."

"I should like to say a word first," said Venn firmly. "Mr. Wildeve is not the only man who has asked Thomasin to marry him; and why should not another have a chance? Mrs. Yeobright, I should be glad to marry your niece and would have done it any time these last two years. There, now it is out, and I have never told anybody before but herself."

Mrs. Yeobright was not demonstrative, but her eyes involuntarily glanced towards his singular though shapely figure.

"Looks are not everything," said the reddleman, noticing the glance. "There's many a calling that don't bring in so much as mine, if it comes to money; and perhaps I am not so much worse off than Wildeve. There is nobody so poor as these professional fellows who have failed; and if you shouldn't like my redness — well, I am not red by birth, you know; I only took to this business for a freak; and I might turn my hand to something else in good time."

"I am much obliged to you for your interest in my niece; but I fear there would be objections. More than that, she is devoted to this man."

"True; or I shouldn't have done what I have this morning."

"Otherwise there would be no pain in the case, and you would not see me going to his house now. What was Thomasin's answer when you told her of your feelings?"

"She wrote that you would object to me; and other things."

"She was in a measure right. You must not take this unkindly — I merely state it as a truth. You have been good to her, and we do not forget it. But as she was unwilling on her own account to be your wife, that settles the point without my wishes being concerned."

"Yes. But there is a difference between then and now, ma'am. She is distressed now, and I have thought that if you were to talk to her about me, and think favourably of me yourself, there might be a chance of winning her round, and getting her quite independent of this Wildeve's backward and forward play, and his not knowing whether he'll have her or no."

Mrs. Yeobright shook her head. "Thomasin thinks, and I think with her, that she ought to be Wildeve's wife, if she means to appear before the world without a slur upon her name. If they marry soon, everybody will believe that an accident did really prevent the wedding. If not, it may cast a shade upon her character — at any rate make her ridiculous. In short, if it is anyhow possible they must marry now."

"I thought that till half an hour ago. But, after all, why should her going off with him to Anglebury for a few hours do her any harm? Anybody who knows how pure she is will feel any such thought to be quite unjust. I have been trying this morning to

help on this marriage with Wildeve — yes, I, ma'am — in the belief that I ought to do it, because she was so wrapped up in him. But I much question if I was right, after all. However, nothing came of it. And now I offer myself.”

Mrs. Yeobright appeared disinclined to enter further into the question. “I fear I must go on,” she said. “I do not see that anything else can be done.”

And she went on. But though this conversation did not divert Thomasin’s aunt from her purposed interview with Wildeve, it made a considerable difference in her mode of conducting that interview. She thanked God for the weapon which the reddleman had put into her hands.

Wildeve was at home when she reached the inn. He showed her silently into the parlour, and closed the door. Mrs. Yeobright began —

“I have thought it my duty to call today. A new proposal has been made to me, which has rather astonished me. It will affect Thomasin greatly; and I have decided that it should at least be mentioned to you.”

“Yes? What is it?” he said civilly.

“It is, of course, in reference to her future. You may not be aware that another man has shown himself anxious to marry Thomasin. Now, though I have not encouraged him yet, I cannot conscientiously refuse him a chance any longer. I don’t wish to be short with you; but I must be fair to him and to her.”

“Who is the man?” said Wildeve with surprise.

“One who has been in love with her longer than she has with you. He proposed to her two years ago. At that time she refused him.”

“Well?”

“He has seen her lately, and has asked me for permission to pay his addresses to her. She may not refuse him twice.”

“What is his name?”

Mrs. Yeobright declined to say. “He is a man Thomasin likes,” she added, “and one whose constancy she respects at least. It seems to me that what she refused then she would be glad to get now. She is much annoyed at her awkward position.”

“She never once told me of this old lover.”

“The gentlest women are not such fools as to show EVERY card.”

“Well, if she wants him I suppose she must have him.”

“It is easy enough to say that; but you don’t see the difficulty. He wants her much more than she wants him; and before I can encourage anything of the sort I must have a clear understanding from you that you will not interfere to injure an arrangement which I promote in the belief that it is for the best. Suppose, when they are engaged, and everything is smoothly arranged for their marriage, that you should step between them and renew your suit? You might not win her back, but you might cause much unhappiness.”

“Of course I should do no such thing,” said Wildeve “But they are not engaged yet. How do you know that Thomasin would accept him?”

“That’s a question I have carefully put to myself; and upon the whole the probabilities are in favour of her accepting him in time. I flatter myself that I have some influence over her. She is pliable, and I can be strong in my recommendations of him.”

“And in your disparagement of me at the same time.”

“Well, you may depend upon my not praising you,” she said drily. “And if this seems like manoeuvring, you must remember that her position is peculiar, and that she has been hardly used. I shall also be helped in making the match by her own desire to escape from the humiliation of her present state; and a woman’s pride in these cases will lead her a very great way. A little managing may be required to bring her round; but I am equal to that, provided that you agree to the one thing indispensable; that is, to make a distinct declaration that she is to think no more of you as a possible husband. That will pique her into accepting him.”

“I can hardly say that just now, Mrs. Yeobright. It is so sudden.”

“And so my whole plan is interfered with! It is very inconvenient that you refuse to help my family even to the small extent of saying distinctly you will have nothing to do with us.”

Wildeve reflected uncomfortably. “I confess I was not prepared for this,” he said. “Of course I’ll give her up if you wish, if it is necessary. But I thought I might be her husband.”

“We have heard that before.”

“Now, Mrs. Yeobright, don’t let us disagree. Give me a fair time. I don’t want to stand in the way of any better chance she may have; only I wish you had let me know earlier. I will write to you or call in a day or two. Will that suffice?”

“Yes,” she replied, “provided you promise not to communicate with Thomasin without my knowledge.”

“I promise that,” he said. And the interview then terminated, Mrs. Yeobright returning homeward as she had come.

By far the greatest effect of her simple strategy on that day was, as often happens, in a quarter quite outside her view when arranging it. In the first place, her visit sent Wildeve the same evening after dark to Eustacia’s house at Mistover.

At this hour the lonely dwelling was closely blinded and shuttered from the chill and darkness without. Wildeve’s clandestine plan with her was to take a little gravel in his hand and hold it to the crevice at the top of the window shutter, which was on the outside, so that it should fall with a gentle rustle, resembling that of a mouse, between shutter and glass. This precaution in attracting her attention was to avoid arousing the suspicions of her grandfather.

The soft words, “I hear; wait for me,” in Eustacia’s voice from within told him that she was alone.

He waited in his customary manner by walking round the enclosure and idling by the pool, for Wildeve was never asked into the house by his proud though condescending mistress. She showed no sign of coming out in a hurry. The time wore on, and he

began to grow impatient. In the course of twenty minutes she appeared from round the corner, and advanced as if merely taking an airing.

“You would not have kept me so long had you known what I come about,” he said with bitterness. “Still, you are worth waiting for.”

“What has happened?” said Eustacia. “I did not know you were in trouble. I too am gloomy enough.”

“I am not in trouble,” said he. “It is merely that affairs have come to a head, and I must take a clear course.”

“What course is that?” she asked with attentive interest.

“And can you forget so soon what I proposed to you the other night? Why, take you from this place, and carry you away with me abroad.”

“I have not forgotten. But why have you come so unexpectedly to repeat the question, when you only promised to come next Saturday? I thought I was to have plenty of time to consider.”

“Yes, but the situation is different now.”

“Explain to me.”

“I don’t want to explain, for I may pain you.”

“But I must know the reason of this hurry.”

“It is simply my ardour, dear Eustacia. Everything is smooth now.”

“Then why are you so ruffled?”

“I am not aware of it. All is as it should be. Mrs. Yeobright — but she is nothing to us.”

“Ah, I knew she had something to do with it! Come, I don’t like reserve.”

“No — she has nothing. She only says she wishes me to give up Thomasin because another man is anxious to marry her. The woman, now she no longer needs me, actually shows off!” Wildeve’s vexation has escaped him in spite of himself.

Eustacia was silent a long while. “You are in the awkward position of an official who is no longer wanted,” she said in a changed tone.

“It seems so. But I have not yet seen Thomasin.”

“And that irritates you. Don’t deny it, Damon. You are actually nettled by this slight from an unexpected quarter.”

“Well?”

“And you come to get me because you cannot get her. This is certainly a new position altogether. I am to be a stop-gap.”

“Please remember that I proposed the same thing the other day.”

Eustacia again remained in a sort of stupefied silence. What curious feeling was this coming over her? Was it really possible that her interest in Wildeve had been so entirely the result of antagonism that the glory and the dream departed from the man with the first sound that he was no longer coveted by her rival? She was, then, secure of him at last. Thomasin no longer required him. What a humiliating victory! He loved her best, she thought; and yet — dared she to murmur such treacherous criticism ever so softly? — what was the man worth whom a woman inferior to herself did not value?

The sentiment which lurks more or less in all animate nature — that of not desiring the undesired of others — was lively as a passion in the supersubtle, epicurean heart of Eustacia. Her social superiority over him, which hitherto had scarcely ever impressed her, became unpleasantly insistent, and for the first time she felt that she had stooped in loving him.

“Well, darling, you agree?” said Wildeve.

“If it could be London, or even Budmouth, instead of America,” she murmured languidly. “Well, I will think. It is too great a thing for me to decide offhand. I wish I hated the heath less — or loved you more.”

“You can be painfully frank. You loved me a month ago warmly enough to go anywhere with me.”

“And you loved Thomasin.”

“Yes, perhaps that was where the reason lay,” he returned, with almost a sneer. “I don’t hate her now.”

“Exactly. The only thing is that you can no longer get her.”

“Come — no taunts, Eustacia, or we shall quarrel. If you don’t agree to go with me, and agree shortly, I shall go by myself.”

“Or try Thomasin again. Damon, how strange it seems that you could have married her or me indifferently, and only have come to me because I am — cheapest! Yes, yes — it is true. There was a time when I should have exclaimed against a man of that sort, and been quite wild; but it is all past now.”

“Will you go, dearest? Come secretly with me to Bristol, marry me, and turn our backs upon this dog-hole of England for ever? Say Yes.”

“I want to get away from here at almost any cost,” she said with weariness, “but I don’t like to go with you. Give me more time to decide.”

“I have already,” said Wildeve. “Well, I give you one more week.”

“A little longer, so that I may tell you decisively. I have to consider so many things. Fancy Thomasin being anxious to get rid of you! I cannot forget it.”

“Never mind that. Say Monday week. I will be here precisely at this time.”

“Let it be at Rainbarrow,” said she. “This is too near home; my grandfather may be walking out.”

“Thank you, dear. On Monday week at this time I will be at the Barrow. Till then good-bye.”

“Good-bye. No, no, you must not touch me now. Shaking hands is enough till I have made up my mind.”

Eustacia watched his shadowy form till it had disappeared. She placed her hand to her forehead and breathed heavily; and then her rich, romantic lips parted under that homely impulse — a yawn. She was immediately angry at having betrayed even to herself the possible evanescence of her passion for him. She could not admit at once that she might have overestimated Wildeve, for to perceive his mediocrity now was to admit her own great folly heretofore. And the discovery that she was the owner of a

disposition so purely that of the dog in the manger had something in it which at first made her ashamed.

The fruit of Mrs. Yeobright's diplomacy was indeed remarkable, though not as yet of the kind she had anticipated. It had appreciably influenced Wildeve, but it was influencing Eustacia far more. Her lover was no longer to her an exciting man whom many women strove for, and herself could only retain by striving with them. He was a superfluity.

She went indoors in that peculiar state of misery which is not exactly grief, and which especially attends the dawns of reason in the latter days of an ill-judged, transient love. To be conscious that the end of the dream is approaching, and yet has not absolutely come, is one of the most wearisome as well as the most curious stages along the course between the beginning of a passion and its end.

Her grandfather had returned, and was busily engaged in pouring some gallons of newly arrived rum into the square bottles of his square cellaret. Whenever these home supplies were exhausted he would go to the Quiet Woman, and, standing with his back to the fire, grog in hand, tell remarkable stories of how he had lived seven years under the waterline of his ship, and other naval wonders, to the natives, who hoped too earnestly for a treat of ale from the teller to exhibit any doubts of his truth.

He had been there this evening. "I suppose you have heard the Egdon news, Eustacia?" he said, without looking up from the bottles. "The men have been talking about it at the Woman as if it were of national importance."

"I have heard none," she said.

"Young Clym Yeobright, as they call him, is coming home next week to spend Christmas with his mother. He is a fine fellow by this time, it seems. I suppose you remember him?"

"I never saw him in my life."

"Ah, true; he left before you came here. I well remember him as a promising boy."

"Where has he been living all these years?"

"In that rookery of pomp and vanity, Paris, I believe."

BOOK TWO

THE ARRIVAL

CHAPTER 1

Tidings of the Comer

On the fine days at this time of the year, and earlier, certain ephemeral operations were apt to disturb, in their trifling way, the majestic calm of Egdon Heath. They were activities which, beside those of a town, a village, or even a farm, would have

appeared as the ferment of stagnation merely, a creeping of the flesh of somnolence. But here, away from comparisons, shut in by the stable hills, among which mere walking had the novelty of pageantry, and where any man could imagine himself to be Adam without the least difficulty, they attracted the attention of every bird within eyeshot, every reptile not yet asleep, and set the surrounding rabbits curiously watching from hillocks at a safe distance.

The performance was that of bringing together and building into a stack the furze faggots which Humphrey had been cutting for the captain's use during the foregoing fine days. The stack was at the end of the dwelling, and the men engaged in building it were Humphrey and Sam, the old man looking on.

It was a fine and quiet afternoon, about three o'clock; but the winter solstice having stealthily come on, the lowness of the sun caused the hour to seem later than it actually was, there being little here to remind an inhabitant that he must unlearn his summer experience of the sky as a dial. In the course of many days and weeks sunrise had advanced its quarters from northeast to southeast, sunset had receded from northwest to southwest; but Egdon had hardly heeded the change.

Eustacia was indoors in the dining-room, which was really more like a kitchen, having a stone floor and a gaping chimney-corner. The air was still, and while she lingered a moment here alone sounds of voices in conversation came to her ears directly down the chimney. She entered the recess, and, listening, looked up the old irregular shaft, with its cavernous hollows, where the smoke blundered about on its way to the square bit of sky at the top, from which the daylight struck down with a pallid glare upon the tatters of soot draping the flue as seaweed drapes a rocky fissure.

She remembered: the furze-stack was not far from the chimney, and the voices were those of the workers.

Her grandfather joined in the conversation. "That lad ought never to have left home. His father's occupation would have suited him best, and the boy should have followed on. I don't believe in these new moves in families. My father was a sailor, so was I, and so should my son have been if I had had one."

"The place he's been living at is Paris," said Humphrey, "and they tell me 'tis where the king's head was cut off years ago. My poor mother used to tell me about that business. 'Hummy,' she used to say, 'I was a young maid then, and as I was at home ironing Mother's caps one afternoon the parson came in and said, 'They've cut the king's head off, Jane; and what 'twill be next God knows.'"

"A good many of us knew as well as He before long," said the captain, chuckling. "I lived seven years under water on account of it in my boyhood — in that damned surgery of the Triumph, seeing men brought down to the cockpit with their legs and arms blown to Jericho...And so the young man has settled in Paris. Manager to a diamond merchant, or some such thing, is he not?"

"Yes, sir, that's it. 'Tis a blazing great business that he belongs to, so I've heard his mother say — like a king's palace, as far as diments go."

"I can well mind when he left home," said Sam.

“‘Tis a good thing for the feller,” said Humphrey. “A sight of times better to be selling diments than nobbling about here.”

“It must cost a good few shillings to deal at such a place.”

“A good few indeed, my man,” replied the captain. “Yes, you may make away with a deal of money and be neither drunkard nor glutton.”

“They say, too, that Clym Yeobright is become a real perusing man, with the strangest notions about things. There, that’s because he went to school early, such as the school was.”

“Strange notions, has he?” said the old man. “Ah, there’s too much of that sending to school in these days! It only does harm. Every gatepost and barn’s door you come to is sure to have some bad word or other chalked upon it by the young rascals — a woman can hardly pass for shame sometimes. If they’d never been taught how to write they wouldn’t have been able to scribble such villainy. Their fathers couldn’t do it, and the country was all the better for it.”

“Now, I should think, Cap’n, that Miss Eustacia had about as much in her head that comes from books as anybody about here?”

“Perhaps if Miss Eustacia, too, had less romantic nonsense in her head it would be better for her,” said the captain shortly; after which he walked away.

“I say, Sam,” observed Humphrey when the old man was gone, “she and Clym Yeobright would make a very pretty pigeon-pair — hey? If they wouldn’t I’ll be dazed! Both of one mind about niceties for certain, and learned in print, and always thinking about high doctrine — there couldn’t be a better couple if they were made o’ purpose. Clym’s family is as good as hers. His father was a farmer, that’s true; but his mother was a sort of lady, as we know. Nothing would please me better than to see them two man and wife.”

“They’d look very natty, arm-in-crook together, and their best clothes on, whether or no, if he’s at all the well-favoured fellow he used to be.”

“They would, Humphrey. Well, I should like to see the chap terrible much after so many years. If I knew for certain when he was coming I’d stroll out three or four miles to meet him and help carry anything for’n; though I suppose he’s altered from the boy he was. They say he can talk French as fast as a maid can eat blackberries; and if so, depend upon it we who have stayed at home shall seem no more than scroff in his eyes.”

“Coming across the water to Budmouth by steamer, isn’t he?”

“Yes; but how he’s coming from Budmouth I don’t know.”

“That’s a bad trouble about his cousin Thomasin. I wonder such a nice-notioned fellow as Clym likes to come home into it. What a nunnywatch we were in, to be sure, when we heard they weren’t married at all, after singing to ‘em as man and wife that night! Be dazed if I should like a relation of mine to have been made such a fool of by a man. It makes the family look small.”

“Yes. Poor maid, her heart has ached enough about it. Her health is suffering from it, I hear, for she will bide entirely indoors. We never see her out now, scampering over the furze with a face as red as a rose, as she used to do.”

“I’ve heard she wouldn’t have Wildevé now if he asked her.”

“You have? ‘Tis news to me.”

While the furze-gatherers had desultorily conversed thus Eustacia’s face gradually bent to the hearth in a profound reverie, her toe unconsciously tapping the dry turf which lay burning at her feet.

The subject of their discourse had been keenly interesting to her. A young and clever man was coming into that lonely heath from, of all contrasting places in the world, Paris. It was like a man coming from heaven. More singular still, the heathmen had instinctively coupled her and this man together in their minds as a pair born for each other.

That five minutes of overhearing furnished Eustacia with visions enough to fill the whole blank afternoon. Such sudden alternations from mental vacuity do sometimes occur thus quietly. She could never have believed in the morning that her colourless inner world would before night become as animated as water under a microscope, and that without the arrival of a single visitor. The words of Sam and Humphrey on the harmony between the unknown and herself had on her mind the effect of the invading Bard’s prelude in the Castle of Indolence, at which myriads of imprisoned shapes arose where had previously appeared the stillness of a void.

Involved in these imaginings she knew nothing of time. When she became conscious of externals it was dusk. The furze-rick was finished; the men had gone home. Eustacia went upstairs, thinking that she would take a walk at this her usual time; and she determined that her walk should be in the direction of Blooms-End, the birthplace of young Yeobright and the present home of his mother. She had no reason for walking elsewhere, and why should she not go that way? The scene of the daydream is sufficient for a pilgrimage at nineteen. To look at the palings before the Yeobrights’ house had the dignity of a necessary performance. Strange that such a piece of idling should have seemed an important errand.

She put on her bonnet, and, leaving the house, descended the hill on the side towards Blooms-End, where she walked slowly along the valley for a distance of a mile and a half. This brought her to a spot in which the green bottom of the dale began to widen, the furze bushes to recede yet further from the path on each side, till they were diminished to an isolated one here and there by the increasing fertility of the soil. Beyond the irregular carpet of grass was a row of white palings, which marked the verge of the heath in this latitude. They showed upon the dusky scene that they bordered as distinctly as white lace on velvet. Behind the white palings was a little garden; behind the garden an old, irregular, thatched house, facing the heath, and commanding a full view of the valley. This was the obscure, removed spot to which was about to return a man whose latter life had been passed in the French capital — the centre and vortex of the fashionable world.

CHAPTER 2

The People at Blooms-End Make Ready

All that afternoon the expected arrival of the subject of Eustacia's ruminations created a bustle of preparation at Blooms-End. Thomasin had been persuaded by her aunt, and by an instinctive impulse of loyalty towards her cousin Clym, to bestir herself on his account with an alacrity unusual in her during these most sorrowful days of her life. At the time that Eustacia was listening to the rick-makers' conversation on Clym's return, Thomasin was climbing into a loft over her aunt's fuelhouse, where the store-apples were kept, to search out the best and largest of them for the coming holiday-time.

The loft was lighted by a semicircular hole, through which the pigeons crept to their lodgings in the same high quarters of the premises; and from this hole the sun shone in a bright yellow patch upon the figure of the maiden as she knelt and plunged her naked arms into the soft brown fern, which, from its abundance, was used on Egdon in packing away stores of all kinds. The pigeons were flying about her head with the greatest unconcern, and the face of her aunt was just visible above the floor of the loft, lit by a few stray motes of light, as she stood halfway up the ladder, looking at a spot into which she was not climber enough to venture.

"Now a few russets, Tamsin. He used to like them almost as well as ribstones."

Thomasin turned and rolled aside the fern from another nook, where more mellow fruit greeted her with its ripe smell. Before picking them out she stopped a moment.

"Dear Clym, I wonder how your face looks now?" she said, gazing abstractedly at the pigeon-hole, which admitted the sunlight so directly upon her brown hair and transparent tissues that it almost seemed to shine through her.

"If he could have been dear to you in another way," said Mrs. Yeobright from the ladder, "this might have been a happy meeting."

"Is there any use in saying what can do no good, Aunt?"

"Yes," said her aunt, with some warmth. "To thoroughly fill the air with the past misfortune, so that other girls may take warning and keep clear of it."

Thomasin lowered her face to the apples again. "I am a warning to others, just as thieves and drunkards and gamblers are," she said in a low voice. "What a class to belong to! Do I really belong to them? 'Tis absurd! Yet why, Aunt, does everybody keep on making me think that I do, by the way they behave towards me? Why don't people judge me by my acts? Now, look at me as I kneel here, picking up these apples — do I look like a lost woman?... I wish all good women were as good as I!" she added vehemently.

"Strangers don't see you as I do," said Mrs. Yeobright; "they judge from false report. Well, it is a silly job, and I am partly to blame."

“How quickly a rash thing can be done!” replied the girl. Her lips were quivering, and tears so crowded themselves into her eyes that she could hardly distinguish apples from fern as she continued industriously searching to hide her weakness.

“As soon as you have finished getting the apples,” her aunt said, descending the ladder, “come down, and we’ll go for the holly. There is nobody on the heath this afternoon, and you need not fear being stared at. We must get some berries, or Clym will never believe in our preparations.”

Thomasin came down when the apples were collected, and together they went through the white palings to the heath beyond. The open hills were airy and clear, and the remote atmosphere appeared, as it often appears on a fine winter day, in distinct planes of illumination independently toned, the rays which lit the nearer tracts of landscape streaming visibly across those further off; a stratum of ensaffroned light was imposed on a stratum of deep blue, and behind these lay still remoter scenes wrapped in frigid grey.

They reached the place where the hollies grew, which was in a conical pit, so that the tops of the trees were not much above the general level of the ground. Thomasin stepped up into a fork of one of the bushes, as she had done under happier circumstances on many similar occasions, and with a small chopper that they had brought she began to lop off the heavily berried boughs.

“Don’t scratch your face,” said her aunt, who stood at the edge of the pit, regarding the girl as she held on amid the glistening green and scarlet masses of the tree. “Will you walk with me to meet him this evening?”

“I should like to. Else it would seem as if I had forgotten him,” said Thomasin, tossing out a bough. “Not that that would matter much; I belong to one man; nothing can alter that. And that man I must marry, for my pride’s sake.”

“I am afraid — ” began Mrs. Yeobright.

“Ah, you think, ‘That weak girl — how is she going to get a man to marry her when she chooses?’ But let me tell you one thing, Aunt: Mr. Wildeve is not a profligate man, any more than I am an improper woman. He has an unfortunate manner, and doesn’t try to make people like him if they don’t wish to do it of their own accord.”

“Thomasin,” said Mrs. Yeobright quietly, fixing her eye upon her niece, “do you think you deceive me in your defence of Mr. Wildeve?”

“How do you mean?”

“I have long had a suspicion that your love for him has changed its colour since you have found him not to be the saint you thought him, and that you act a part to me.”

“He wished to marry me, and I wish to marry him.”

“Now, I put it to you: would you at this present moment agree to be his wife if that had not happened to entangle you with him?”

Thomasin looked into the tree and appeared much disturbed. “Aunt,” she said presently, “I have, I think, a right to refuse to answer that question.”

“Yes, you have.”

“You may think what you choose. I have never implied to you by word or deed that I have grown to think otherwise of him, and I never will. And I shall marry him.”

“Well, wait till he repeats his offer. I think he may do it, now that he knows — something I told him. I don’t for a moment dispute that it is the most proper thing for you to marry him. Much as I have objected to him in bygone days, I agree with you now, you may be sure. It is the only way out of a false position, and a very galling one.”

“What did you tell him?”

“That he was standing in the way of another lover of yours.”

“Aunt,” said Thomasin, with round eyes, “what DO you mean?”

“Don’t be alarmed; it was my duty. I can say no more about it now, but when it is over I will tell you exactly what I said, and why I said it.”

Thomasin was perforce content.

“And you will keep the secret of my would-be marriage from Clym for the present?” she next asked.

“I have given my word to. But what is the use of it? He must soon know what has happened. A mere look at your face will show him that something is wrong.”

Thomasin turned and regarded her aunt from the tree. “Now, hearken to me,” she said, her delicate voice expanding into firmness by a force which was other than physical. “Tell him nothing. If he finds out that I am not worthy to be his cousin, let him. But, since he loved me once, we will not pain him by telling him my trouble too soon. The air is full of the story, I know; but gossips will not dare to speak of it to him for the first few days. His closeness to me is the very thing that will hinder the tale from reaching him early. If I am not made safe from sneers in a week or two I will tell him myself.”

The earnestness with which Thomasin spoke prevented further objections. Her aunt simply said, “Very well. He should by rights have been told at the time that the wedding was going to be. He will never forgive you for your secrecy.”

“Yes, he will, when he knows it was because I wished to spare him, and that I did not expect him home so soon. And you must not let me stand in the way of your Christmas party. Putting it off would only make matters worse.”

“Of course I shall not. I do not wish to show myself beaten before all Egdon, and the sport of a man like Wildeve. We have enough berries now, I think, and we had better take them home. By the time we have decked the house with this and hung up the mistletoe, we must think of starting to meet him.”

Thomasin came out of the tree, shook from her hair and dress the loose berries which had fallen thereon, and went down the hill with her aunt, each woman bearing half the gathered boughs. It was now nearly four o’clock, and the sunlight was leaving the vales. When the west grew red the two relatives came again from the house and plunged into the heath in a different direction from the first, towards a point in the distant highway along which the expected man was to return.

CHAPTER 3

How a Little Sound Produced a Great Dream

Eustacia stood just within the heath, straining her eyes in the direction of Mrs. Yeobright's house and premises. No light, sound, or movement was perceptible there. The evening was chilly; the spot was dark and lonely. She inferred that the guest had not yet come; and after lingering ten or fifteen minutes she turned again towards home.

She had not far retraced her steps when sounds in front of her betokened the approach of persons in conversation along the same path. Soon their heads became visible against the sky. They were walking slowly; and though it was too dark for much discovery of character from aspect, the gait of them showed that they were not workers on the heath. Eustacia stepped a little out of the foot-track to let them pass. They were two women and a man; and the voices of the women were those of Mrs. Yeobright and Thomasin.

They went by her, and at the moment of passing appeared to discern her dusky form. There came to her ears in a masculine voice, "Good night!"

She murmured a reply, glided by them, and turned round. She could not, for a moment, believe that chance, unrequested, had brought into her presence the soul of the house she had gone to inspect, the man without whom her inspection would not have been thought of.

She strained her eyes to see them, but was unable. Such was her intentness, however, that it seemed as if her ears were performing the functions of seeing as well as hearing. This extension of power can almost be believed in at such moments. The deaf Dr. Kitto was probably under the influence of a parallel fancy when he described his body as having become, by long endeavour, so sensitive to vibrations that he had gained the power of perceiving by it as by ears.

She could follow every word that the ramblers uttered. They were talking no secrets. They were merely indulging in the ordinary vivacious chat of relatives who have long been parted in person though not in soul. But it was not to the words that Eustacia listened; she could not even have recalled, a few minutes later, what the words were. It was to the alternating voice that gave out about one-tenth of them — the voice that had wished her good night. Sometimes this throat uttered Yes, sometimes it uttered No; sometimes it made inquiries about a time worn denizen of the place. Once it surprised her notions by remarking upon the friendliness and geniality written in the faces of the hills around.

The three voices passed on, and decayed and died out upon her ear. Thus much had been granted her; and all besides withheld. No event could have been more exciting. During the greater part of the afternoon she had been entrancing herself by imagining the fascination which must attend a man come direct from beautiful Paris — laden with its atmosphere, familiar with its charms. And this man had greeted her.

With the departure of the figures the profuse articulations of the women wasted away from her memory; but the accents of the other stayed on. Was there anything in

the voice of Mrs. Yeobright's son — for Clym it was — startling as a sound? No; it was simply comprehensive. All emotional things were possible to the speaker of that "good night." Eustacia's imagination supplied the rest — except the solution to one riddle. What COULD the tastes of that man be who saw friendliness and geniality in these shaggy hills?

On such occasions as this a thousand ideas pass through a highly charged woman's head; and they indicate themselves on her face; but the changes, though actual, are minute. Eustacia's features went through a rhythmical succession of them. She glowed; remembering the mendacity of the imagination, she flagged; then she freshened; then she fired; then she cooled again. It was a cycle of aspects, produced by a cycle of visions.

Eustacia entered her own house; she was excited. Her grandfather was enjoying himself over the fire, raking about the ashes and exposing the red-hot surface of the turves, so that their lurid glare irradiated the chimney-corner with the hues of a furnace.

"Why is it that we are never friendly with the Yeobrights?" she said, coming forward and stretching her soft hands over the warmth. "I wish we were. They seem to be very nice people."

"Be hanged if I know why," said the captain. "I liked the old man well enough, though he was as rough as a hedge. But you would never have cared to go there, even if you might have, I am well sure."

"Why shouldn't I?"

"Your town tastes would find them far too countrified. They sit in the kitchen, drink mead and elder-wine, and sand the floor to keep it clean. A sensible way of life; but how would you like it?"

"I thought Mrs. Yeobright was a ladylike woman? A curate's daughter, was she not?"

"Yes; but she was obliged to live as her husband did; and I suppose she has taken kindly to it by this time. Ah, I recollect that I once accidentally offended her, and I have never seen her since."

That night was an eventful one to Eustacia's brain, and one which she hardly ever forgot. She dreamt a dream; and few human beings, from Nebuchadnezzar to the Swaffham tinker, ever dreamt a more remarkable one. Such an elaborately developed, perplexing, exciting dream was certainly never dreamed by a girl in Eustacia's situation before. It had as many ramifications as the Cretan labyrinth, as many fluctuations as the northern lights, as much colour as a parterre in June, and was as crowded with figures as a coronation. To Queen Scheherazade the dream might have seemed not far removed from commonplace; and to a girl just returned from all the courts of Europe it might have seemed not more than interesting. But amid the circumstances of Eustacia's life it was as wonderful as a dream could be.

There was, however, gradually evolved from its transformation scenes a less extravagant episode, in which the heath dimly appeared behind the general brilliancy of the action. She was dancing to wondrous music, and her partner was the man in silver armour who had accompanied her through the previous fantastic changes, the visor of

his helmet being closed. The mazes of the dance were ecstatic. Soft whispering came into her ear from under the radiant helmet, and she felt like a woman in Paradise. Suddenly these two wheeled out from the mass of dancers, dived into one of the pools of the heath, and came out somewhere into an iridescent hollow, arched with rainbows. "It must be here," said the voice by her side, and blushing up she saw him removing his casque to kiss her. At that moment there was a cracking noise, and his figure fell into fragments like a pack of cards.

She cried aloud. "O that I had seen his face!"

Eustacia awoke. The cracking had been that of the window shutter downstairs, which the maid-servant was opening to let in the day, now slowly increasing to Nature's meagre allowance at this sickly time of the year. "O that I had seen his face!" she said again. "'Twas meant for Mr. Yeobright!"

When she became cooler she perceived that many of the phases of the dream had naturally arisen out of the images and fancies of the day before. But this detracted little from its interest, which lay in the excellent fuel it provided for newly kindled fervour. She was at the modulating point between indifference and love, at the stage called "having a fancy for." It occurs once in the history of the most gigantic passions, and it is a period when they are in the hands of the weakest will.

The perfervid woman was by this time half in love with a vision. The fantastic nature of her passion, which lowered her as an intellect, raised her as a soul. If she had had a little more self-control she would have attenuated the emotion to nothing by sheer reasoning, and so have killed it off. If she had had a little less pride she might have gone and circumambulated the Yeobrights' premises at Blooms-End at any maidenly sacrifice until she had seen him. But Eustacia did neither of these things. She acted as the most exemplary might have acted, being so influenced; she took an airing twice or thrice a day upon the Egdon hills, and kept her eyes employed.

The first occasion passed, and he did not come that way.

She promenaded a second time, and was again the sole wanderer there.

The third time there was a dense fog; she looked around, but without much hope. Even if he had been walking within twenty yards of her she could not have seen him.

At the fourth attempt to encounter him it began to rain in torrents, and she turned back.

The fifth sally was in the afternoon; it was fine, and she remained out long, walking to the very top of the valley in which Blooms-End lay. She saw the white paling about half a mile off; but he did not appear. It was almost with heart-sickness that she came home and with a sense of shame at her weakness. She resolved to look for the man from Paris no more.

But Providence is nothing if not coquettish; and no sooner had Eustacia formed this resolve than the opportunity came which, while sought, had been entirely withholden.

CHAPTER 4

Eustacia Is Led on to an Adventure

In the evening of this last day of expectation, which was the twenty-third of December, Eustacia was at home alone. She had passed the recent hour in lamenting over a rumour newly come to her ears — that Yeobright's visit to his mother was to be of short duration, and would end some time the next week. "Naturally," she said to herself. A man in the full swing of his activities in a gay city could not afford to linger long on Egdon Heath. That she would behold face to face the owner of the awakening voice within the limits of such a holiday was most unlikely, unless she were to haunt the environs of his mother's house like a robin, to do which was difficult and unseemly.

The customary expedient of provincial girls and men in such circumstances is church-going. In an ordinary village or country town one can safely calculate that, either on Christmas day or the Sunday contiguous, any native home for the holidays, who has not through age or ennui lost the appetite for seeing and being seen, will turn up in some pew or other, shining with hope, self-consciousness, and new clothes. Thus the congregation on Christmas morning is mostly a Tussaud collection of celebrities who have been born in the neighbourhood. Hither the mistress, left neglected at home all the year, can steal and observe the development of the returned lover who has forgotten her, and think as she watches him over her prayer book that he may throb with a renewed fidelity when novelties have lost their charm. And hither a comparatively recent settler like Eustacia may betake herself to scrutinize the person of a native son who left home before her advent upon the scene, and consider if the friendship of his parents be worth cultivating during his next absence in order to secure a knowledge of him on his next return.

But these tender schemes were not feasible among the scattered inhabitants of Egdon Heath. In name they were parishioners, but virtually they belonged to no parish at all. People who came to these few isolated houses to keep Christmas with their friends remained in their friends' chimney-corners drinking mead and other comforting liquors till they left again for good and all. Rain, snow, ice, mud everywhere around, they did not care to trudge two or three miles to sit wet-footed and splashed to the nape of their necks among those who, though in some measure neighbours, lived close to the church, and entered it clean and dry. Eustacia knew it was ten to one that Clym Yeobright would go to no church at all during his few days of leave, and that it would be a waste of labour for her to go driving the pony and gig over a bad road in hope to see him there.

It was dusk, and she was sitting by the fire in the dining-room or hall, which they occupied at this time of the year in preference to the parlour, because of its large hearth, constructed for turf-fires, a fuel the captain was partial to in the winter season. The only visible articles in the room were those on the window-sill, which showed their shapes against the low sky, the middle article being the old hourglass, and the other two a pair of ancient British urns which had been dug from a barrow near, and were

used as flowerpots for two razor-leaved cactuses. Somebody knocked at the door. The servant was out; so was her grandfather. The person, after waiting a minute, came in and tapped at the door of the room.

“Who’s there?” said Eustacia.

“Please, Cap’n Vye, will you let us — — ”

Eustacia arose and went to the door. “I cannot allow you to come in so boldly. You should have waited.”

“The cap’n said I might come in without any fuss,” was answered in a lad’s pleasant voice.

“Oh, did he?” said Eustacia more gently. “What do you want, Charley?”

“Please will your grandfather lend us his fuelhouse to try over our parts in, tonight at seven o’clock?”

“What, are you one of the Egdon mummers for this year?”

“Yes, miss. The cap’n used to let the old mummers practise here.”

“I know it. Yes, you may use the fuelhouse if you like,” said Eustacia languidly.

The choice of Captain Vye’s fuelhouse as the scene of rehearsal was dictated by the fact that his dwelling was nearly in the centre of the heath. The fuelhouse was as roomy as a barn, and was a most desirable place for such a purpose. The lads who formed the company of players lived at different scattered points around, and by meeting in this spot the distances to be traversed by all the comers would be about equally proportioned.

For mummers and mumming Eustacia had the greatest contempt. The mummers themselves were not afflicted with any such feeling for their art, though at the same time they were not enthusiastic. A traditional pastime is to be distinguished from a mere revival in no more striking feature than in this, that while in the revival all is excitement and fervour, the survival is carried on with a stolidity and absence of stir which sets one wondering why a thing that is done so perfunctorily should be kept up at all. Like Balaam and other unwilling prophets, the agents seem moved by an inner compulsion to say and do their allotted parts whether they will or no. This unweeing manner of performance is the true ring by which, in this refurbishing age, a fossilized survival may be known from a spurious reproduction.

The piece was the well-known play of Saint George, and all who were behind the scenes assisted in the preparations, including the women of each household. Without the co-operation of sisters and sweethearts the dresses were likely to be a failure; but on the other hand, this class of assistance was not without its drawbacks. The girls could never be brought to respect tradition in designing and decorating the armour; they insisted on attaching loops and bows of silk and velvet in any situation pleasing to their taste. Gorget, gusset, basinet, cuirass, gauntlet, sleeve, all alike in the view of these feminine eyes were practicable spaces whereon to sew scraps of fluttering colour.

It might be that Joe, who fought on the side of Christendom, had a sweetheart, and that Jim, who fought on the side of the Moslem, had one likewise. During the making of the costumes it would come to the knowledge of Joe’s sweetheart that Jim’s

was putting brilliant silk scallops at the bottom of her lover's surcoat, in addition to the ribbons of the visor, the bars of which, being invariably formed of coloured strips about half an inch wide hanging before the face, were mostly of that material. Joe's sweetheart straight-way placed brilliant silk on the scallops of the hem in question, and, going a little further, added ribbon tufts to the shoulder pieces. Jim's, not to be outdone, would affix bows and rosettes everywhere.

The result was that in the end the Valiant Soldier, of the Christian army, was distinguished by no peculiarity of accoutrement from the Turkish Knight; and what was worse, on a casual view Saint George himself might be mistaken for his deadly enemy, the Saracen. The guisers themselves, though inwardly regretting this confusion of persons, could not afford to offend those by whose assistance they so largely profited, and the innovations were allowed to stand.

There was, it is true, a limit to this tendency to uniformity. The Leech or Doctor preserved his character intact — his darker habiliments, peculiar hat, and the bottle of physic slung under his arm, could never be mistaken. And the same might be said of the conventional figure of Father Christmas, with his gigantic club, an older man, who accompanied the band as general protector in long night journeys from parish to parish, and was bearer of the purse.

Seven o'clock, the hour of the rehearsal, came round, and in a short time Eustacia could hear voices in the fuelhouse. To dissipate in some trifling measure her abiding sense of the murkiness of human life she went to the "linhay" or lean-to shed, which formed the root-store of their dwelling and abutted on the fuelhouse. Here was a small rough hole in the mud wall, originally made for pigeons, through which the interior of the next shed could be viewed. A light came from it now; and Eustacia stepped upon a stool to look in upon the scene.

On a ledge in the fuelhouse stood three tall rushlights and by the light of them seven or eight lads were marching about, haranguing, and confusing each other, in endeavours to perfect themselves in the play. Humphrey and Sam, the furze-and turf-cutters, were there looking on, so also was Timothy Fairway, who leant against the wall and prompted the boys from memory, interspersing among the set words remarks and anecdotes of the superior days when he and others were the Egdon mummers-elect that these lads were now.

"Well, ye be as well up to it as ever ye will be," he said. "Not that such mumming would have passed in our time. Harry as the Saracen should strut a bit more, and John needn't holler his inside out. Beyond that perhaps you'll do. Have you got all your clothes ready?"

"We shall by Monday."

"Your first outing will be Monday night, I suppose?"

"Yes. At Mrs. Yeobright's."

"Oh, Mrs. Yeobright's. What makes her want to see ye? I should think a middle-aged woman was tired of mumming."

“She’s got up a bit of a party, because ‘tis the first Christmas that her son Clym has been home for a long time.”

“To be sure, to be sure — her party! I am going myself. I almost forgot it, upon my life.”

Eustacia’s face flagged. There was to be a party at the Yeobrights’; she, naturally, had nothing to do with it. She was a stranger to all such local gatherings, and had always held them as scarcely appertaining to her sphere. But had she been going, what an opportunity would have been afforded her of seeing the man whose influence was penetrating her like summer sun! To increase that influence was coveted excitement; to cast it off might be to regain serenity; to leave it as it stood was tantalising.

The lads and men prepared to leave the premises, and Eustacia returned to her fireside. She was immersed in thought, but not for long. In a few minutes the lad Charley, who had come to ask permission to use the place, returned with the key to the kitchen. Eustacia heard him, and opening the door into the passage said, “Charley, come here.”

The lad was surprised. He entered the front room not without blushing; for he, like many, had felt the power of this girl’s face and form.

She pointed to a seat by the fire, and entered the other side of the chimney-corner herself. It could be seen in her face that whatever motive she might have had in asking the youth indoors would soon appear.

“Which part do you play, Charley — the Turkish Knight, do you not?” inquired the beauty, looking across the smoke of the fire to him on the other side.

“Yes, miss, the Turkish Knight,” he replied diffidently.

“Is yours a long part?”

“Nine speeches, about.”

“Can you repeat them to me? If so I should like to hear them.”

The lad smiled into the glowing turf and began —

“Here come I, a Turkish Knight,
Who learnt in Turkish land to fight,”

continuing the discourse throughout the scenes to the concluding catastrophe of his fall by the hand of Saint George.

Eustacia had occasionally heard the part recited before. When the lad ended she began, precisely in the same words, and ranted on without hitch or divergence till she too reached the end. It was the same thing, yet how different. Like in form, it had the added softness and finish of a Raffaele after Perugino, which, while faithfully reproducing the original subject, entirely distances the original art.

Charley’s eyes rounded with surprise. “Well, you be a clever lady!” he said, in admiration. “I’ve been three weeks learning mine.”

“I have heard it before,” she quietly observed. “Now, would you do anything to please me, Charley?”

“I’d do a good deal, miss.”

“Would you let me play your part for one night?”

“Oh, miss! But your woman’s gown — you couldn’t.”

“I can get boy’s clothes — at least all that would be wanted besides the mumming dress. What should I have to give you to lend me your things, to let me take your place for an hour or two on Monday night, and on no account to say a word about who or what I am? You would, of course, have to excuse yourself from playing that night, and to say that somebody — a cousin of Miss Vye’s — would act for you. The other mummers have never spoken to me in their lives so that it would be safe enough; and if it were not, I should not mind. Now, what must I give you to agree to this? Half a crown?”

The youth shook his head

“Five shillings?”

He shook his head again. “Money won’t do it,” he said, brushing the iron head of the firedog with the hollow of his hand.

“What will, then, Charley?” said Eustacia in a disappointed tone.

“You know what you forbade me at the Maypoling, miss,” murmured the lad, without looking at her, and still stroking the firedog’s head.

“Yes,” said Eustacia, with a little more hauteur. “You wanted to join hands with me in the ring, if I recollect?”

“Half an hour of that, and I’ll agree, miss.”

Eustacia regarded the youth steadfastly. He was three years younger than herself, but apparently not backward for his age. “Half an hour of what?” she said, though she guessed what.

“Holding your hand in mine.”

She was silent. “Make it a quarter of an hour,” she said

“Yes, Miss Eustacia — I will, if I may kiss it too. A quarter of an hour. And I’ll swear to do the best I can to let you take my place without anybody knowing. Don’t you think somebody might know your tongue, miss?”

“It is possible. But I will put a pebble in my mouth to make it less likely. Very well; you shall be allowed to have my hand as soon as you bring the dress and your sword and staff. I don’t want you any longer now.”

Charley departed, and Eustacia felt more and more interest in life. Here was something to do: here was some one to see, and a charmingly adventurous way to see him. “Ah,” she said to herself, “want of an object to live for — that’s all is the matter with me!”

Eustacia’s manner was as a rule of a slumberous sort, her passions being of the massive rather than the vivacious kind. But when aroused she would make a dash which, just for the time, was not unlike the move of a naturally lively person.

On the question of recognition she was somewhat indifferent. By the acting lads themselves she was not likely to be known. With the guests who might be assembled she was hardly so secure. Yet detection, after all, would be no such dreadful thing. The fact only could be detected, her true motive never. It would be instantly set down as the passing freak of a girl whose ways were already considered singular. That she was

doing for an earnest reason what would most naturally be done in jest was at any rate a safe secret.

The next evening Eustacia stood punctually at the fuelhouse door, waiting for the dusk which was to bring Charley with the trappings. Her grandfather was at home tonight, and she would be unable to ask her confederate indoors.

He appeared on the dark ridge of heathland, like a fly on a Negro, bearing the articles with him, and came up breathless with his walk.

“Here are the things,” he whispered, placing them upon the threshold. “And now, Miss Eustacia — ”

“The payment. It is quite ready. I am as good as my word.”

She leant against the door-post, and gave him her hand. Charley took it in both his own with a tenderness beyond description, unless it was like that of a child holding a captured sparrow.

“Why, there’s a glove on it!” he said in a deprecating way.

“I have been walking,” she observed.

“But, miss!”

“Well — it is hardly fair.” She pulled off the glove, and gave him her bare hand.

They stood together minute after minute, without further speech, each looking at the blackening scene, and each thinking his and her own thoughts.

“I think I won’t use it all up tonight,” said Charley devotedly, when six or eight minutes had been passed by him caressing her hand. “May I have the other few minutes another time?”

“As you like,” said she without the least emotion. “But it must be over in a week. Now, there is only one thing I want you to do — to wait while I put on the dress, and then to see if I do my part properly. But let me look first indoors.”

She vanished for a minute or two, and went in. Her grandfather was safely asleep in his chair. “Now, then,” she said, on returning, “walk down the garden a little way, and when I am ready I’ll call you.”

Charley walked and waited, and presently heard a soft whistle. He returned to the fuelhouse door.

“Did you whistle, Miss Vye?”

“Yes; come in,” reached him in Eustacia’s voice from a back quarter. “I must not strike a light till the door is shut, or it may be seen shining. Push your hat into the hole through to the wash-house, if you can feel your way across.”

Charley did as commanded, and she struck the light revealing herself to be changed in sex, brilliant in colours, and armed from top to toe. Perhaps she quailed a little under Charley’s vigorous gaze, but whether any shyness at her male attire appeared upon her countenance could not be seen by reason of the strips of ribbon which used to cover the face in mumming costumes, representing the barred visor of the mediaeval helmet.

"It fits pretty well," she said, looking down at the white overalls, "except that the tunic, or whatever you call it, is long in the sleeve. The bottom of the overalls I can turn up inside. Now pay attention."

Eustacia then proceeded in her delivery, striking the sword against the staff or lance at the minatory phrases, in the orthodox mumming manner, and strutting up and down. Charley seasoned his admiration with criticism of the gentlest kind, for the touch of Eustacia's hand yet remained with him.

"And now for your excuse to the others," she said. "Where do you meet before you go to Mrs. Yeobright's?"

"We thought of meeting here, miss, if you have nothing to say against it. At eight o'clock, so as to get there by nine."

"Yes. Well, you of course must not appear. I will march in about five minutes late, ready-dressed, and tell them that you can't come. I have decided that the best plan will be for you to be sent somewhere by me, to make a real thing of the excuse. Our two heath-croppers are in the habit of straying into the meads, and tomorrow evening you can go and see if they are gone there. I'll manage the rest. Now you may leave me."

"Yes, miss. But I think I'll have one minute more of what I am owed, if you don't mind."

Eustacia gave him her hand as before.

"One minute," she said, and counted on till she reached seven or eight minutes. Hand and person she then withdrew to a distance of several feet, and recovered some of her old dignity. The contract completed, she raised between them a barrier impenetrable as a wall.

"There, 'tis all gone; and I didn't mean quite all," he said, with a sigh.

"You had good measure," said she, turning away.

"Yes, miss. Well, 'tis over, and now I'll get home-along."

CHAPTER 5

Through the Moonlight

The next evening the mummers were assembled in the same spot, awaiting the entrance of the Turkish Knight.

"Twenty minutes after eight by the Quiet Woman, and Charley not come."

"Ten minutes past by Blooms-End."

"It wants ten minutes to, by Grandfer Cantle's watch."

"And 'tis five minutes past by the captain's clock."

On Egdon there was no absolute hour of the day. The time at any moment was a number of varying doctrines professed by the different hamlets, some of them having originally grown up from a common root, and then become divided by secession, some having been alien from the beginning. West Egdon believed in Blooms-End time, East

Egdon in the time of the Quiet Woman Inn. Grandfer Cantle's watch had numbered many followers in years gone by, but since he had grown older faiths were shaken. Thus, the mummers having gathered hither from scattered points each came with his own tenets on early and late; and they waited a little longer as a compromise.

Eustacia had watched the assemblage through the hole; and seeing that now was the proper moment to enter, she went from the "linhay" and boldly pulled the bobbin of the fuelhouse door. Her grandfather was safe at the Quiet Woman.

"Here's Charley at last! How late you be, Charley."

"'Tis not Charley," said the Turkish Knight from within his visor. "'Tis a cousin of Miss Vye's, come to take Charley's place from curiosity. He was obliged to go and look for the heath-croppers that have got into the meads, and I agreed to take his place, as he knew he couldn't come back here again tonight. I know the part as well as he."

Her graceful gait, elegant figure, and dignified manner in general won the mummers to the opinion that they had gained by the exchange, if the newcomer were perfect in his part.

"It don't matter — if you be not too young," said Saint George. Eustacia's voice had sounded somewhat more juvenile and fluty than Charley's.

"I know every word of it, I tell you," said Eustacia decisively. Dash being all that was required to carry her triumphantly through, she adopted as much as was necessary. "Go ahead, lads, with the try-over. I'll challenge any of you to find a mistake in me."

The play was hastily rehearsed, whereupon the other mummers were delighted with the new knight. They extinguished the candles at half-past eight, and set out upon the heath in the direction of Mrs. Yeobright's house at Bloom's-End.

There was a slight hoarfrost that night, and the moon, though not more than half full, threw a spirited and enticing brightness upon the fantastic figures of the mumming band, whose plumes and ribbons rustled in their walk like autumn leaves. Their path was not over Rainbarrow now, but down a valley which left that ancient elevation a little to the east. The bottom of the vale was green to a width of ten yards or thereabouts, and the shining facets of frost upon the blades of grass seemed to move on with the shadows of those they surrounded. The masses of furze and heath to the right and left were dark as ever; a mere half-moon was powerless to silver such sable features as theirs.

Half-an-hour of walking and talking brought them to the spot in the valley where the grass riband widened and led down to the front of the house. At sight of the place Eustacia who had felt a few passing doubts during her walk with the youths, again was glad that the adventure had been undertaken. She had come out to see a man who might possibly have the power to deliver her soul from a most deadly oppression. What was Wildeve? Interesting, but inadequate. Perhaps she would see a sufficient hero tonight.

As they drew nearer to the front of the house the mummers became aware that music and dancing were briskly flourishing within. Every now and then a long low note from the serpent, which was the chief wind instrument played at these times, advanced

further into the heath than the thin treble part, and reached their ears alone; and next a more than usual loud tread from a dancer would come the same way. With nearer approach these fragmentary sounds became pieced together, and were found to be the salient points of the tune called "Nancy's Fancy."

He was there, of course. Who was she that he danced with? Perhaps some unknown woman, far beneath herself in culture, was by the most subtle of lures sealing his fate this very instant. To dance with a man is to concentrate a twelvemonth's regulation fire upon him in the fragment of an hour. To pass to courtship without acquaintance, to pass to marriage without courtship, is a skipping of terms reserved for those alone who tread this royal road. She would see how his heart lay by keen observation of them all.

The enterprising lady followed the mumming company through the gate in the white paling, and stood before the open porch. The house was encrusted with heavy thatchings, which dropped between the upper windows; the front, upon which the moonbeams directly played, had originally been white; but a huge pyracanth now darkened the greater portion.

It became at once evident that the dance was proceeding immediately within the surface of the door, no apartment intervening. The brushing of skirts and elbows, sometimes the bumping of shoulders, could be heard against the very panels. Eustacia, though living within two miles of the place, had never seen the interior of this quaint old habitation. Between Captain Vye and the Yeobrights there had never existed much acquaintance, the former having come as a stranger and purchased the long-empty house at Mistover Knap not long before the death of Mrs. Yeobright's husband; and with that event and the departure of her son such friendship as had grown up became quite broken off.

"Is there no passage inside the door, then?" asked Eustacia as they stood within the porch.

"No," said the lad who played the Saracen. "The door opens right upon the front sitting-room, where the spree's going on."

"So that we cannot open the door without stopping the dance."

"That's it. Here we must bide till they have done, for they always bolt the back door after dark."

"They won't be much longer," said Father Christmas.

This assertion, however, was hardly borne out by the event. Again the instruments ended the tune; again they recommenced with as much fire and pathos as if it were the first strain. The air was now that one without any particular beginning, middle, or end, which perhaps, among all the dances which throng an inspired fiddler's fancy, best conveys the idea of the interminable — the celebrated "Devil's Dream." The fury of personal movement that was kindled by the fury of the notes could be approximately imagined by these outsiders under the moon, from the occasional kicks of toes and heels against the door, whenever the whirl round had been of more than customary velocity.

The first five minutes of listening was interesting enough to the mummers. The five minutes extended to ten minutes, and these to a quarter of an hour; but no signs of ceasing were audible in the lively "Dream." The bumping against the door, the laughter, the stamping, were all as vigorous as ever, and the pleasure in being outside lessened considerably.

"Why does Mrs. Yeobright give parties of this sort?" Eustacia asked, a little surprised to hear merriment so pronounced.

"It is not one of her bettermost parlour-parties. She's asked the plain neighbours and workpeople without drawing any lines, just to give 'em a good supper and such like. Her son and she wait upon the folks."

"I see," said Eustacia.

"'Tis the last strain, I think," said Saint George, with his ear to the panel. "A young man and woman have just swung into this corner, and he's saying to her, 'Ah, the pity; 'tis over for us this time, my own.'"

"Thank God," said the Turkish Knight, stamping, and taking from the wall the conventional lance that each of the mummers carried. Her boots being thinner than those of the young men, the hoar had damped her feet and made them cold.

"Upon my song 'tis another ten minutes for us," said the Valiant Soldier, looking through the keyhole as the tune modulated into another without stopping. "Grandfer Cantle is standing in this corner, waiting his turn."

"'Twon't be long; 'tis a six-handed reel," said the Doctor.

"Why not go in, dancing or no? They sent for us," said the Saracen.

"Certainly not," said Eustacia authoritatively, as she paced smartly up and down from door to gate to warm herself. "We should burst into the middle of them and stop the dance, and that would be unmannerly."

"He thinks himself somebody because he has had a bit more schooling than we," said the Doctor.

"You may go to the deuce!" said Eustacia.

There was a whispered conversation between three or four of them, and one turned to her.

"Will you tell us one thing?" he said, not without gentleness. "Be you Miss Vye? We think you must be."

"You may think what you like," said Eustacia slowly. "But honourable lads will not tell tales upon a lady."

"We'll say nothing, miss. That's upon our honour."

"Thank you," she replied.

At this moment the fiddles finished off with a screech, and the serpent emitted a last note that nearly lifted the roof. When, from the comparative quiet within, the mummers judged that the dancers had taken their seats, Father Christmas advanced, lifted the latch, and put his head inside the door.

"Ah, the mummers, the mummers!" cried several guests at once. "Clear a space for the mummers."

Humpbacked Father Christmas then made a complete entry, swinging his huge club, and in a general way clearing the stage for the actors proper, while he informed the company in smart verse that he was come, welcome or welcome not; concluding his speech with

“Make room, make room, my gallant boys,
And give us space to rhyme;
We’ve come to show Saint George’s play,
Upon this Christmas time.”

The guests were now arranging themselves at one end of the room, the fiddler was mending a string, the serpent-player was emptying his mouthpiece, and the play began. First of those outside the Valiant Soldier entered, in the interest of Saint George —

“Here come I, the Valiant Soldier;
Slasher is my name”;

and so on. This speech concluded with a challenge to the infidel, at the end of which it was Eustacia’s duty to enter as the Turkish Knight. She, with the rest who were not yet on, had hitherto remained in the moonlight which streamed under the porch. With no apparent effort or backwardness she came in, beginning —

“Here come I, a Turkish Knight,
Who learnt in Turkish land to fight;
I’ll fight this man with courage bold:
If his blood’s hot I’ll make it cold!”

During her declamation Eustacia held her head erect, and spoke as roughly as she could, feeling pretty secure from observation. But the concentration upon her part necessary to prevent discovery, the newness of the scene, the shine of the candles, and the confusing effect upon her vision of the ribboned visor which hid her features, left her absolutely unable to perceive who were present as spectators. On the further side of a table bearing candles she could faintly discern faces, and that was all.

Meanwhile Jim Starks as the Valiant Soldier had come forward, and, with a glare upon the Turk, replied —

“If, then, thou art that Turkish Knight,
Draw out thy sword, and let us fight!”

And fight they did; the issue of the combat being that the Valiant Soldier was slain by a preternaturally inadequate thrust from Eustacia, Jim, in his ardour for genuine histrionic art, coming down like a log upon the stone floor with force enough to dislocate his shoulder. Then, after more words from the Turkish Knight, rather too faintly delivered, and statements that he’d fight Saint George and all his crew, Saint George himself magnificently entered with the well-known flourish —

“Here come I, Saint George, the valiant man,
With naked sword and spear in hand,
Who fought the dragon and brought him to the slaughter,
And by this won fair Sabra, the King of Egypt’s
daughter;

What mortal man would dare to stand
Before me with my sword in hand?"

This was the lad who had first recognized Eustacia; and when she now, as the Turk, replied with suitable defiance, and at once began the combat, the young fellow took especial care to use his sword as gently as possible. Being wounded, the Knight fell upon one knee, according to the direction. The Doctor now entered, restored the Knight by giving him a draught from the bottle which he carried, and the fight was again resumed, the Turk sinking by degrees until quite overcome — dying as hard in this venerable drama as he is said to do at the present day.

This gradual sinking to the earth was, in fact, one reason why Eustacia had thought that the part of the Turkish Knight, though not the shortest, would suit her best. A direct fall from upright to horizontal, which was the end of the other fighting characters, was not an elegant or decorous part for a girl. But it was easy to die like a Turk, by a dogged decline.

Eustacia was now among the number of the slain, though not on the floor, for she had managed to sink into a sloping position against the clock-case, so that her head was well elevated. The play proceeded between Saint George, the Saracen, the Doctor, and Father Christmas; and Eustacia, having no more to do, for the first time found leisure to observe the scene round, and to search for the form that had drawn her hither.

CHAPTER 6

The Two Stand Face to Face

The room had been arranged with a view to the dancing, the large oak table having been moved back till it stood as a breastwork to the fireplace. At each end, behind, and in the chimney-corner were grouped the guests, many of them being warm-faced and panting, among whom Eustacia cursorily recognized some well-to-do persons from beyond the heath. Thomasin, as she had expected, was not visible, and Eustacia recollected that a light had shone from an upper window when they were outside — the window, probably, of Thomasin's room. A nose, chin, hands, knees, and toes projected from the seat within the chimney opening, which members she found to unite in the person of Grandfer Cantle, Mrs. Yeobright's occasional assistant in the garden, and therefore one of the invited. The smoke went up from an Etna of peat in front of him, played round the notches of the chimney-crook, struck against the salt-box, and got lost among the fitches.

Another part of the room soon riveted her gaze. At the other side of the chimney stood the settle, which is the necessary supplement to a fire so open that nothing less than a strong breeze will carry up the smoke. It is, to the hearths of old-fashioned cavernous fireplaces, what the east belt of trees is to the exposed country estate, or the north wall to the garden. Outside the settle candles gutter, locks of hair wave, young

women shiver, and old men sneeze. Inside is Paradise. Not a symptom of a draught disturbs the air; the sitters' backs are as warm as their faces, and songs and old tales are drawn from the occupants by the comfortable heat, like fruit from melon plants in a frame.

It was, however, not with those who sat in the settle that Eustacia was concerned. A face showed itself with marked distinctness against the dark-tanned wood of the upper part. The owner, who was leaning against the settle's outer end, was Clement Yeobright, or Clym, as he was called here; she knew it could be nobody else. The spectacle constituted an area of two feet in Rembrandt's intensest manner. A strange power in the lounge's appearance lay in the fact that, though his whole figure was visible, the observer's eye was only aware of his face.

To one of middle age the countenance was that of a young man, though a youth might hardly have seen any necessity for the term of immaturity. But it was really one of those faces which convey less the idea of so many years as its age than of so much experience as its store. The number of their years may have adequately summed up Jared, Mahalaleel, and the rest of the antediluvians, but the age of a modern man is to be measured by the intensity of his history.

The face was well shaped, even excellently. But the mind within was beginning to use it as a mere waste tablet whereon to trace its idiosyncrasies as they developed themselves. The beauty here visible would in no long time be ruthlessly over-run by its parasite, thought, which might just as well have fed upon a plainer exterior where there was nothing it could harm. Had Heaven preserved Yeobright from a wearing habit of meditation, people would have said, "A handsome man." Had his brain unfolded under sharper contours they would have said, "A thoughtful man." But an inner strenuousness was preying upon an outer symmetry, and they rated his look as singular.

Hence people who began by beholding him ended by perusing him. His countenance was overlaid with legible meanings. Without being thought-worn he yet had certain marks derived from a perception of his surroundings, such as are not unfrequently found on men at the end of the four or five years of endeavour which follow the close of placid pupilage. He already showed that thought is a disease of flesh, and indirectly bore evidence that ideal physical beauty is incompatible with emotional development and a full recognition of the coil of things. Mental luminousness must be fed with the oil of life, even though there is already a physical need for it; and the pitiful sight of two demands on one supply was just showing itself here.

When standing before certain men the philosopher regrets that thinkers are but perishable tissue, the artist that perishable tissue has to think. Thus to deplore, each from his point of view, the mutually destructive interdependence of spirit and flesh would have been instinctive with these in critically observing Yeobright.

As for his look, it was a natural cheerfulness striving against depression from without, and not quite succeeding. The look suggested isolation, but it revealed something more. As is usual with bright natures, the deity that lies ignominiously chained within an ephemeral human carcase shone out of him like a ray.

The effect upon Eustacia was palpable. The extraordinary pitch of excitement that she had reached beforehand would, indeed, have caused her to be influenced by the most commonplace man. She was troubled at Yeobright's presence.

The remainder of the play ended — the Saracen's head was cut off, and Saint George stood as victor. Nobody commented, any more than they would have commented on the fact of mushrooms coming in autumn or snowdrops in spring. They took the piece as phlegmatically as did the actors themselves. It was a phase of cheerfulness which was, as a matter of course, to be passed through every Christmas; and there was no more to be said.

They sang the plaintive chant which follows the play, during which all the dead men rise to their feet in a silent and awful manner, like the ghosts of Napoleon's soldiers in the *Midnight Review*. Afterwards the door opened, and Fairway appeared on the threshold, accompanied by Christian and another. They had been waiting outside for the conclusion of the play, as the players had waited for the conclusion of the dance.

"Come in, come in," said Mrs. Yeobright; and Clym went forward to welcome them. "How is it you are so late? Grandfer Cantle has been here ever so long, and we thought you'd have come with him, as you live so near one another."

"Well, I should have come earlier," Mr. Fairway said and paused to look along the beam of the ceiling for a nail to hang his hat on; but, finding his accustomed one to be occupied by the mistletoe, and all the nails in the walls to be burdened with bunches of holly, he at last relieved himself of the hat by ticklishly balancing it between the candle-box and the head of the clock-case. "I should have come earlier, ma'am," he resumed, with a more composed air, "but I know what parties be, and how there's none too much room in folks' houses at such times, so I thought I wouldn't come till you'd got settled a bit."

"And I thought so too, Mrs. Yeobright," said Christian earnestly, "but Father there was so eager that he had no manners at all, and left home almost afore 'twas dark. I told him 'twas barely decent in a' old man to come so oversoon; but words be wind."

"Klk! I wasn't going to bide waiting about, till half the game was over! I'm as light as a kite when anything's going on!" crowed Grandfer Cantle from the chimneyseat.

Fairway had meanwhile concluded a critical gaze at Yeobright. "Now, you may not believe it," he said to the rest of the room, "but I should never have knowed this gentleman if I had met him anywhere off his own he'th — he's altered so much."

"You too have altered, and for the better, I think Timothy," said Yeobright, surveying the firm figure of Fairway.

"Master Yeobright, look me over too. I have altered for the better, haven't I, hey?" said Grandfer Cantle, rising and placing himself something above half a foot from Clym's eye, to induce the most searching criticism.

"To be sure we will," said Fairway, taking the candle and moving it over the surface of the Grandfer's countenance, the subject of his scrutiny irradiating himself with light and pleasant smiles, and giving himself jerks of juvenility.

"You haven't changed much," said Yeobright.

"If there's any difference, Grandfer is younger," appended Fairway decisively.

"And yet not my own doing, and I feel no pride in it," said the pleased ancient. "But I can't be cured of my vagaries; them I plead guilty to. Yes, Master Cantle always was that, as we know. But I am nothing by the side of you, Mister Clym."

"Nor any o' us," said Humphrey, in a low rich tone of admiration, not intended to reach anybody's ears.

"Really, there would have been nobody here who could have stood as decent second to him, or even third, if I hadn't been a soldier in the Bang-up Locals (as we was called for our smartness)," said Grandfer Cantle. "And even as 'tis we all look a little scammish beside him. But in the year four 'twas said there wasn't a finer figure in the whole South Wessex than I, as I looked when dashing past the shop-winders with the rest of our company on the day we ran out o' Budmouth because it was thoughted that Boney had landed round the point. There was I, straight as a young poplar, wi' my firelock, and my bagnet, and my spatterdashes, and my stock sawing my jaws off, and my accoutrements sheening like the seven stars! Yes, neighbours, I was a pretty sight in my soldiering days. You ought to have seen me in four!"

"'Tis his mother's side where Master Clym's figure comes from, bless ye," said Timothy. "I know'd her brothers well. Longer coffins were never made in the whole country of South Wessex, and 'tis said that poor George's knees were crumpled up a little e'en as 'twas."

"Coffins, where?" inquired Christian, drawing nearer. "Have the ghost of one appeared to anybody, Master Fairway?"

"No, no. Don't let your mind so mislead your ears, Christian; and be a man," said Timothy reproachfully.

"I will." said Christian. "But now I think o't my shadder last night seemed just the shape of a coffin. What is it a sign of when your shade's like a coffin, neighbours? It can't be nothing to be afeared of, I suppose?"

"Afeared, no!" said the Grandfer. "Faith, I was never afeared of nothing except Boney, or I shouldn't ha' been the soldier I was. Yes, 'tis a thousand pities you didn't see me in four!"

By this time the mummers were preparing to leave; but Mrs. Yeobright stopped them by asking them to sit down and have a little supper. To this invitation Father Christmas, in the name of them all, readily agreed.

Eustacia was happy in the opportunity of staying a little longer. The cold and frosty night without was doubly frigid to her. But the lingering was not without its difficulties. Mrs. Yeobright, for want of room in the larger apartment, placed a bench for the mummers halfway through the pantry door, which opened from the sitting-room. Here they seated themselves in a row, the door being left open — thus they were still virtually in the same apartment. Mrs. Yeobright now murmured a few words to her son, who crossed the room to the pantry door, striking his head against the mistletoe as he passed, and brought the mummers beef and bread, cake pastry, mead,

and elder-wine, the waiting being done by him and his mother, that the little maid-servant might sit as guest. The mummers doffed their helmets, and began to eat and drink.

“But you will surely have some?” said Clym to the Turkish Knight, as he stood before that warrior, tray in hand. She had refused, and still sat covered, only the sparkle of her eyes being visible between the ribbons which covered her face.

“None, thank you,” replied Eustacia.

“He’s quite a youngster,” said the Saracen apologetically, “and you must excuse him. He’s not one of the old set, but have jined us because t’other couldn’t come.”

“But he will take something?” persisted Yeobright. “Try a glass of mead or elder-wine.”

“Yes, you had better try that,” said the Saracen. “It will keep the cold out going home-along.”

Though Eustacia could not eat without uncovering her face she could drink easily enough beneath her disguise. The elder-wine was accordingly accepted, and the glass vanished inside the ribbons.

At moments during this performance Eustacia was half in doubt about the security of her position; yet it had a fearful joy. A series of attentions paid to her, and yet not to her but to some imaginary person, by the first man she had ever been inclined to adore, complicated her emotions indescribably. She had loved him partly because he was exceptional in this scene, partly because she had determined to love him, chiefly because she was in desperate need of loving somebody after wearying of Wildeve. Believing that she must love him in spite of herself, she had been influenced after the fashion of the second Lord Lyttleton and other persons, who have dreamed that they were to die on a certain day, and by stress of a morbid imagination have actually brought about that event. Once let a maiden admit the possibility of her being stricken with love for someone at a certain hour and place, and the thing is as good as done.

Did anything at this moment suggest to Yeobright the sex of the creature whom that fantastic guise inclosed, how extended was her scope both in feeling and in making others feel, and how far her compass transcended that of her companions in the band? When the disguised Queen of Love appeared before Aeneas a preternatural perfume accompanied her presence and betrayed her quality. If such a mysterious emanation ever was projected by the emotions of an earthly woman upon their object, it must have signified Eustacia’s presence to Yeobright now. He looked at her wistfully, then seemed to fall into a reverie, as if he were forgetting what he observed. The momentary situation ended, he passed on, and Eustacia sipped her wine without knowing what she drank. The man for whom she had pre-determined to nourish a passion went into the small room, and across it to the further extremity.

The mummers, as has been stated, were seated on a bench, one end of which extended into the small apartment, or pantry, for want of space in the outer room. Eustacia, partly from shyness, had chosen the midmost seat, which thus commanded a view of the interior of the pantry as well as the room containing the guests. When

Clym passed down the pantry her eyes followed him in the gloom which prevailed there. At the remote end was a door which, just as he was about to open it for himself, was opened by somebody within; and light streamed forth.

The person was Thomasin, with a candle, looking anxious, pale, and interesting. Yeobright appeared glad to see her, and pressed her hand. "That's right, Tamsie," he said heartily, as though recalled to himself by the sight of her, "you have decided to come down. I am glad of it."

"Hush — no, no," she said quickly. "I only came to speak to you."

"But why not join us?"

"I cannot. At least I would rather not. I am not well enough, and we shall have plenty of time together now you are going to be home a good long holiday."

"It isn't nearly so pleasant without you. Are you really ill?"

"Just a little, my old cousin — here," she said, playfully sweeping her hand across her heart.

"Ah, Mother should have asked somebody else to be present tonight, perhaps?"

"O no, indeed. I merely stepped down, Clym, to ask you — " Here he followed her through the doorway into the private room beyond, and, the door closing, Eustacia and the mummer who sat next to her, the only other witness of the performance, saw and heard no more.

The heat flew to Eustacia's head and cheeks. She instantly guessed that Clym, having been home only these two or three days, had not as yet been made acquainted with Thomasin's painful situation with regard to Wildeve; and seeing her living there just as she had been living before he left home, he naturally suspected nothing. Eustacia felt a wild jealousy of Thomasin on the instant. Though Thomasin might possibly have tender sentiments towards another man as yet, how long could they be expected to last when she was shut up here with this interesting and travelled cousin of hers? There was no knowing what affection might not soon break out between the two, so constantly in each other's society, and not a distracting object near. Clym's boyish love for her might have languished, but it might easily be revived again.

Eustacia was nettled by her own contrivances. What a sheer waste of herself to be dressed thus while another was shining to advantage! Had she known the full effect of the encounter she would have moved heaven and earth to get here in a natural manner. The power of her face all lost, the charm of her emotions all disguised, the fascinations of her coquetry denied existence, nothing but a voice left to her; she had a sense of the doom of Echo. "Nobody here respects me," she said. She had overlooked the fact that, in coming as a boy among other boys, she would be treated as a boy. The slight, though of her own causing, and self-explanatory, she was unable to dismiss as unwittingly shown, so sensitive had the situation made her.

Women have done much for themselves in histrionic dress. To look far below those who, like a certain fair personator of Polly Peachum early in the last century, and another of Lydia Languish early in this, (1) have won not only love but ducal coronets into the bargain, whole shoals of them have reached to the initial satisfaction of getting

love almost whence they would. But the Turkish Knight was denied even the chance of achieving this by the fluttering ribbons which she dared not brush aside.

(1) Written in 1877.

Yeobright returned to the room without his cousin. When within two or three feet of Eustacia he stopped, as if again arrested by a thought. He was gazing at her. She looked another way, disconcerted, and wondered how long this purgatory was to last. After lingering a few seconds he passed on again.

To court their own discomfiture by love is a common instinct with certain perfervid women. Conflicting sensations of love, fear, and shame reduced Eustacia to a state of the utmost uneasiness. To escape was her great and immediate desire. The other mummets appeared to be in no hurry to leave; and murmuring to the lad who sat next to her that she preferred waiting for them outside the house, she moved to the door as imperceptibly as possible, opened it, and slipped out.

The calm, lone scene reassured her. She went forward to the palings and leant over them, looking at the moon. She had stood thus but a little time when the door again opened. Expecting to see the remainder of the band Eustacia turned; but no — Clym Yeobright came out as softly as she had done, and closed the door behind him.

He advanced and stood beside her. "I have an odd opinion," he said, "and should like to ask you a question. Are you a woman — or am I wrong?"

"I am a woman."

His eyes lingered on her with great interest. "Do girls often play as mummets now? They never used to."

"They don't now."

"Why did you?"

"To get excitement and shake off depression," she said in low tones.

"What depressed you?"

"Life."

"That's a cause of depression a good many have to put up with."

"Yes."

A long silence. "And do you find excitement?" asked Clym at last.

"At this moment, perhaps."

"Then you are vexed at being discovered?"

"Yes; though I thought I might be."

"I would gladly have asked you to our party had I known you wished to come. Have I ever been acquainted with you in my youth?"

"Never."

"Won't you come in again, and stay as long as you like?"

"No. I wish not to be further recognized."

"Well, you are safe with me." After remaining in thought a minute he added gently, "I will not intrude upon you longer. It is a strange way of meeting, and I will not ask why I find a cultivated woman playing such a part as this." She did not volunteer the reason which he seemed to hope for, and he wished her good night, going thence round

to the back of the house, where he walked up and down by himself for some time before re-entering.

Eustacia, warmed with an inner fire, could not wait for her companions after this. She flung back the ribbons from her face, opened the gate, and at once struck into the heath. She did not hasten along. Her grandfather was in bed at this hour, for she so frequently walked upon the hills on moonlight nights that he took no notice of her comings and goings, and, enjoying himself in his own way, left her to do likewise. A more important subject than that of getting indoors now engrossed her. Yeobright, if he had the least curiosity, would infallibly discover her name. What then? She first felt a sort of exultation at the way in which the adventure had terminated, even though at moments between her exultations she was abashed and blushful. Then this consideration recurred to chill her: What was the use of her exploit? She was at present a total stranger to the Yeobright family. The unreasonable nimbus of romance with which she had encircled that man might be her misery. How could she allow herself to become so infatuated with a stranger? And to fill the cup of her sorrow there would be Thomasin, living day after day in inflammable proximity to him; for she had just learnt that, contrary to her first belief, he was going to stay at home some considerable time.

She reached the wicket at Mistover Knap, but before opening it she turned and faced the heath once more. The form of Rainbarrow stood above the hills, and the moon stood above Rainbarrow. The air was charged with silence and frost. The scene reminded Eustacia of a circumstance which till that moment she had totally forgotten. She had promised to meet Wildeve by the Barrow this very night at eight, to give a final answer to his pleading for an elopement.

She herself had fixed the evening and the hour. He had probably come to the spot, waited there in the cold, and been greatly disappointed.

“Well, so much the better — it did not hurt him,” she said serenely. Wildeve had at present the rayless outline of the sun through smoked glass, and she could say such things as that with the greatest facility.

She remained deeply pondering; and Thomasin’s winning manner towards her cousin arose again upon Eustacia’s mind.

“O that she had been married to Damon before this!” she said. “And she would if it hadn’t been for me! If I had only known — if I had only known!”

Eustacia once more lifted her deep stormy eyes to the moonlight, and, sighing that tragic sigh of hers which was so much like a shudder, entered the shadow of the roof. She threw off her trappings in the outhouse, rolled them up, and went indoors to her chamber.

CHAPTER 7

A Coalition between Beauty and Oddness

The old captain's prevailing indifference to his granddaughter's movements left her free as a bird to follow her own courses; but it so happened that he did take upon himself the next morning to ask her why she had walked out so late.

"Only in search of events, Grandfather," she said, looking out of the window with that drowsy latency of manner which discovered so much force behind it whenever the trigger was pressed.

"Search of events — one would think you were one of the bucks I knew at one-and-twenty."

"It is lonely here."

"So much the better. If I were living in a town my whole time would be taken up in looking after you. I fully expected you would have been home when I returned from the Woman."

"I won't conceal what I did. I wanted an adventure, and I went with the mummers. I played the part of the Turkish Knight."

"No, never? Ha, ha! Good gad! I didn't expect it of you, Eustacia."

"It was my first performance, and it certainly will be my last. Now I have told you — and remember it is a secret."

"Of course. But, Eustacia, you never did — ha! ha! Dammy, how 'twould have pleased me forty years ago! But remember, no more of it, my girl. You may walk on the heath night or day, as you choose, so that you don't bother me; but no figuring in breeches again."

"You need have no fear for me, Grandpapa."

Here the conversation ceased, Eustacia's moral training never exceeding in severity a dialogue of this sort, which, if it ever became profitable to good works, would be a result not dear at the price. But her thoughts soon strayed far from her own personality; and, full of a passionate and indescribable solicitude for one to whom she was not even a name, she went forth into the amplitude of tanned wild around her, restless as Ahasuerus the Jew. She was about half a mile from her residence when she beheld a sinister redness arising from a ravine a little way in advance — dull and lurid like a flame in sunlight and she guessed it to signify Diggory Venn.

When the farmers who had wished to buy in a new stock of redden during the last month had inquired where Venn was to be found, people replied, "On Egdon Heath." Day after day the answer was the same. Now, since Egdon was populated with heath-croppers and furze-cutters rather than with sheep and shepherds, and the downs where most of the latter were to be found lay some to the north, some to the west of Egdon, his reason for camping about there like Israel in Zin was not apparent. The position was central and occasionally desirable. But the sale of redden was not Diggory's primary object in remaining on the heath, particularly at so late a period of the year, when most travellers of his class had gone into winter quarters.

Eustacia looked at the lonely man. Wildeve had told her at their last meeting that Venn had been thrust forward by Mrs. Yeobright as one ready and anxious to take his place as Thomasin's betrothed. His figure was perfect, his face young and well outlined,

his eye bright, his intelligence keen, and his position one which he could readily better if he chose. But in spite of possibilities it was not likely that Thomasin would accept this Ishmaelish creature while she had a cousin like Yeobright at her elbow, and Wildeve at the same time not absolutely indifferent. Eustacia was not long in guessing that poor Mrs. Yeobright, in her anxiety for her niece's future, had mentioned this lover to stimulate the zeal of the other. Eustacia was on the side of the Yeobrights now, and entered into the spirit of the aunt's desire.

"Good morning, miss," said the reddleman, taking off his cap of hareskin, and apparently bearing her no ill-will from recollection of their last meeting.

"Good morning, reddleman," she said, hardly troubling to lift her heavily shaded eyes to his. "I did not know you were so near. Is your van here too?"

Venn moved his elbow towards a hollow in which a dense brake of purple-stemmed brambles had grown to such vast dimensions as almost to form a dell. Brambles, though churlish when handled, are kindly shelter in early winter, being the latest of the deciduous bushes to lose their leaves.

The roof and chimney of Venn's caravan showed behind the tracery and tangles of the brake.

"You remain near this part?" she asked with more interest.

"Yes, I have business here."

"Not altogether the selling of reddle?"

"It has nothing to do with that."

"It has to do with Miss Yeobright?"

Her face seemed to ask for an armed peace, and he therefore said frankly, "Yes, miss; it is on account of her."

"On account of your approaching marriage with her?"

Venn flushed through his stain. "Don't make sport of me, Miss Vye," he said.

"It isn't true?"

"Certainly not."

She was thus convinced that the reddleman was a mere *pis aller* in Mrs. Yeobright's mind; one, moreover, who had not even been informed of his promotion to that lowly standing. "It was a mere notion of mine," she said quietly; and was about to pass by without further speech, when, looking round to the right, she saw a painfully well-known figure serpentining upwards by one of the little paths which led to the top where she stood. Owing to the necessary windings of his course his back was at present towards them. She glanced quickly round; to escape that man there was only one way. Turning to Venn, she said, "Would you allow me to rest a few minutes in your van? The banks are damp for sitting on."

"Certainly, miss; I'll make a place for you."

She followed him behind the dell of brambles to his wheeled dwelling into which Venn mounted, placing the three-legged stool just within the door.

"That is the best I can do for you," he said, stepping down and retiring to the path, where he resumed the smoking of his pipe as he walked up and down.

Eustacia bounded into the vehicle and sat on the stool, ensconced from view on the side towards the trackway. Soon she heard the brushing of other feet than the reddleman's, a not very friendly "Good day" uttered by two men in passing each other, and then the dwindling of the foot-fall of one of them in a direction onwards. Eustacia stretched her neck forward till she caught a glimpse of a receding back and shoulders; and she felt a wretched twinge of misery, she knew not why. It was the sickening feeling which, if the changed heart has any generosity at all in its composition, accompanies the sudden sight of a once-loved one who is beloved no more.

When Eustacia descended to proceed on her way the reddleman came near. "That was Mr. Wildeve who passed, miss," he said slowly, and expressed by his face that he expected her to feel vexed at having been sitting unseen.

"Yes, I saw him coming up the hill," replied Eustacia. "Why should you tell me that?" It was a bold question, considering the reddleman's knowledge of her past love; but her undemonstrative manner had power to repress the opinions of those she treated as remote from her.

"I am glad to hear that you can ask it," said the reddleman bluntly. "And, now I think of it, it agrees with what I saw last night."

"Ah — what was that?" Eustacia wished to leave him, but wished to know.

"Mr. Wildeve stayed at Rainbarrow a long time waiting for a lady who didn't come."

"You waited too, it seems?"

"Yes, I always do. I was glad to see him disappointed. He will be there again tonight."

"To be again disappointed. The truth is, reddleman, that that lady, so far from wishing to stand in the way of Thomasin's marriage with Mr. Wildeve, would be very glad to promote it."

Venn felt much astonishment at this avowal, though he did not show it clearly; that exhibition may greet remarks which are one remove from expectation, but it is usually withheld in complicated cases of two removes and upwards. "Indeed, miss," he replied.

"How do you know that Mr. Wildeve will come to Rainbarrow again tonight?" she asked.

"I heard him say to himself that he would. He's in a regular temper."

Eustacia looked for a moment what she felt, and she murmured, lifting her deep dark eyes anxiously to his, "I wish I knew what to do. I don't want to be uncivil to him; but I don't wish to see him again; and I have some few little things to return to him."

"If you choose to send 'em by me, miss, and a note to tell him that you wish to say no more to him, I'll take it for you quite privately. That would be the most straightforward way of letting him know your mind."

"Very well," said Eustacia. "Come towards my house, and I will bring it out to you."

She went on, and as the path was an infinitely small parting in the shaggy locks of the heath, the reddleman followed exactly in her trail. She saw from a distance that the captain was on the bank sweeping the horizon with his telescope; and bidding Venn to wait where he stood she entered the house alone.

In ten minutes she returned with a parcel and a note, and said, in placing them in his hand, "Why are you so ready to take these for me?"

"Can you ask that?"

"I suppose you think to serve Thomasin in some way by it. Are you as anxious as ever to help on her marriage?"

Venn was a little moved. "I would sooner have married her myself," he said in a low voice. "But what I feel is that if she cannot be happy without him I will do my duty in helping her to get him, as a man ought."

Eustacia looked curiously at the singular man who spoke thus. What a strange sort of love, to be entirely free from that quality of selfishness which is frequently the chief constituent of the passion, and sometimes its only one! The reddleman's disinterestedness was so well deserving of respect that it overshot respect by being barely comprehended; and she almost thought it absurd.

"Then we are both of one mind at last," she said.

"Yes," replied Venn gloomily. "But if you would tell me, miss, why you take such an interest in her, I should be easier. It is so sudden and strange."

Eustacia appeared at a loss. "I cannot tell you that, reddleman," she said coldly.

Venn said no more. He pocketed the letter, and, bowing to Eustacia, went away.

Rainbarrow had again become blended with night when Wildeve ascended the long acclivity at its base. On his reaching the top a shape grew up from the earth immediately behind him. It was that of Eustacia's emissary. He slapped Wildeve on the shoulder. The feverish young inn-keeper and ex-engineer started like Satan at the touch of Ithuriel's spear.

"The meeting is always at eight o'clock, at this place," said Venn, "and here we are — we three."

"We three?" said Wildeve, looking quickly round.

"Yes; you, and I, and she. This is she." He held up the letter and parcel.

Wildeve took them wonderingly. "I don't quite see what this means," he said. "How do you come here? There must be some mistake."

"It will be cleared from your mind when you have read the letter. Lanterns for one." The reddleman struck a light, kindled an inch of tallow-candle which he had brought, and sheltered it with his cap.

"Who are you?" said Wildeve, discerning by the candle-light an obscure rubicundity of person in his companion. "You are the reddleman I saw on the hill this morning — why, you are the man who — —"

"Please read the letter."

"If you had come from the other one I shouldn't have been surprised," murmured Wildeve as he opened the letter and read. His face grew serious.

TO MR. WILDEVE.

After some thought I have decided once and for all that we must hold no further communication. The more I consider the matter the more I am convinced that there must be an end to our acquaintance. Had you been uniformly faithful to me throughout

these two years you might now have some ground for accusing me of heartlessness; but if you calmly consider what I bore during the period of your desertion, and how I passively put up with your courtship of another without once interfering, you will, I think, own that I have a right to consult my own feelings when you come back to me again. That these are not what they were towards you may, perhaps, be a fault in me, but it is one which you can scarcely reproach me for when you remember how you left me for Thomasin.

The little articles you gave me in the early part of our friendship are returned by the bearer of this letter. They should rightly have been sent back when I first heard of your engagement to her.

EUSTACIA.

By the time that Wildeve reached her name the blankness with which he had read the first half of the letter intensified to mortification. "I am made a great fool of, one way and another," he said pettishly. "Do you know what is in this letter?"

The reddleman hummed a tune.

"Can't you answer me?" asked Wildeve warmly.

"Ru-um-tum-tum," sang the reddleman.

Wildeve stood looking on the ground beside Venn's feet, till he allowed his eyes to travel upwards over Diggory's form, as illuminated by the candle, to his head and face. "Ha-ha! Well, I suppose I deserve it, considering how I have played with them both," he said at last, as much to himself as to Venn. "But of all the odd things that ever I knew, the oddest is that you should so run counter to your own interests as to bring this to me."

"My interests?"

"Certainly. 'Twas your interest not to do anything which would send me courting Thomasin again, now she has accepted you — or something like it. Mrs. Yeobright says you are to marry her. 'Tisn't true, then?"

"Good Lord! I heard of this before, but didn't believe it. When did she say so?"

Wildeve began humming as the reddleman had done.

"I don't believe it now," cried Venn.

"Ru-um-tum-tum," sang Wildeve.

"O Lord — how we can imitate!" said Venn contemptuously. "I'll have this out. I'll go straight to her."

Diggory withdrew with an emphatic step, Wildeve's eye passing over his form in withering derision, as if he were no more than a heath-cropper. When the reddleman's figure could no longer be seen, Wildeve himself descended and plunged into the rayless hollow of the vale.

To lose the two women — he who had been the well-beloved of both — was too ironical an issue to be endured. He could only decently save himself by Thomasin; and once he became her husband, Eustacia's repentance, he thought, would set in for a long and bitter term. It was no wonder that Wildeve, ignorant of the new man at the back of the scene, should have supposed Eustacia to be playing a part. To believe that

the letter was not the result of some momentary pique, to infer that she really gave him up to Thomasin, would have required previous knowledge of her transfiguration by that man's influence. Who was to know that she had grown generous in the greediness of a new passion, that in coveting one cousin she was dealing liberally with another, that in her eagerness to appropriate she gave way?

Full of this resolve to marry in haste, and wring the heart of the proud girl, Wildeve went his way.

Meanwhile Diggory Venn had returned to his van, where he stood looking thoughtfully into the stove. A new vista was opened up to him. But, however promising Mrs. Yeobright's views of him might be as a candidate for her niece's hand, one condition was indispensable to the favour of Thomasin herself, and that was a renunciation of his present wild mode of life. In this he saw little difficulty.

He could not afford to wait till the next day before seeing Thomasin and detailing his plan. He speedily plunged himself into toilet operations, pulled a suit of cloth clothes from a box, and in about twenty minutes stood before the van-lantern as a reddleman in nothing but his face, the vermilion shades of which were not to be removed in a day. Closing the door and fastening it with a padlock, Venn set off towards Blooms-End.

He had reached the white palings and laid his hand upon the gate when the door of the house opened, and quickly closed again. A female form had glided in. At the same time a man, who had seemingly been standing with the woman in the porch, came forward from the house till he was face to face with Venn. It was Wildeve again.

"Man alive, you've been quick at it," said Diggory sarcastically.

"And you slow, as you will find," said Wildeve. "And," lowering his voice, "you may as well go back again now. I've claimed her, and got her. Good night, reddleman!" Thereupon Wildeve walked away.

Venn's heart sank within him, though it had not risen unduly high. He stood leaning over the palings in an indecisive mood for nearly a quarter of an hour. Then he went up the garden path, knocked, and asked for Mrs. Yeobright.

Instead of requesting him to enter she came to the porch. A discourse was carried on between them in low measured tones for the space of ten minutes or more. At the end of the time Mrs. Yeobright went in, and Venn sadly retraced his steps into the heath. When he had again regained his van he lit the lantern, and with an apathetic face at once began to pull off his best clothes, till in the course of a few minutes he reappeared as the confirmed and irretrievable reddleman that he had seemed before.

CHAPTER 8

Firmness Is Discovered in a Gentle Heart

On that evening the interior of Blooms-End, though cosy and comfortable, had been rather silent. Clym Yeobright was not at home. Since the Christmas party he had gone on a few days' visit to a friend about ten miles off.

The shadowy form seen by Venn to part from Wildevé in the porch, and quickly withdraw into the house, was Thomasin's. On entering she threw down a cloak which had been carelessly wrapped round her, and came forward to the light, where Mrs. Yeobright sat at her work-table, drawn up within the settle, so that part of it projected into the chimney-corner.

"I don't like your going out after dark alone, Tamsin," said her aunt quietly, without looking up from her work. "I have only been just outside the door."

"Well?" inquired Mrs. Yeobright, struck by a change in the tone of Thomasin's voice, and observing her. Thomasin's cheek was flushed to a pitch far beyond that which it had reached before her troubles, and her eyes glittered.

"It was HE who knocked," she said.

"I thought as much."

"He wishes the marriage to be at once."

"Indeed! What — is he anxious?" Mrs. Yeobright directed a searching look upon her niece. "Why did not Mr. Wildevé come in?"

"He did not wish to. You are not friends with him, he says. He would like the wedding to be the day after tomorrow, quite privately; at the church of his parish — not at ours."

"Oh! And what did you say?"

"I agreed to it," Thomasin answered firmly. "I am a practical woman now. I don't believe in hearts at all. I would marry him under any circumstances since — since Clym's letter."

A letter was lying on Mrs. Yeobright's work-basket, and at Thomasin's words her aunt reopened it, and silently read for the tenth time that day: —

What is the meaning of this silly story that people are circulating about Thomasin and Mr. Wildevé? I should call such a scandal humiliating if there was the least chance of its being true. How could such a gross falsehood have arisen? It is said that one should go abroad to hear news of home, and I appear to have done it. Of course I contradict the tale everywhere; but it is very vexing, and I wonder how it could have originated. It is too ridiculous that such a girl as Thomasin could so mortify us as to get jilted on the wedding day. What has she done?

"Yes," Mrs. Yeobright said sadly, putting down the letter. "If you think you can marry him, do so. And since Mr. Wildevé wishes it to be unceremonious, let it be that too. I can do nothing. It is all in your own hands now. My power over your welfare came to an end when you left this house to go with him to Anglebury." She continued, half in bitterness, "I may almost ask, why do you consult me in the matter at all? If you had gone and married him without saying a word to me, I could hardly have been angry — simply because, poor girl, you can't do a better thing."

"Don't say that and dishearten me."

"You are right — I will not."

"I do not plead for him, Aunt. Human nature is weak, and I am not a blind woman to insist that he is perfect. I did think so, but I don't now. But I know my course, and you know that I know it. I hope for the best."

"And so do I, and we will both continue to," said Mrs. Yeobright, rising and kissing her. "Then the wedding, if it comes off, will be on the morning of the very day Clym comes home?"

"Yes. I decided that it ought to be over before he came. After that you can look him in the face, and so can I. Our concealments will matter nothing."

Mrs. Yeobright moved her head in thoughtful assent, and presently said, "Do you wish me to give you away? I am willing to undertake that, you know, if you wish, as I was last time. After once forbidding the banns I think I can do no less."

"I don't think I will ask you to come," said Thomasin reluctantly, but with decision. "It would be unpleasant, I am almost sure. Better let there be only strangers present, and none of my relations at all. I would rather have it so. I do not wish to do anything which may touch your credit, and I feel that I should be uncomfortable if you were there, after what has passed. I am only your niece, and there is no necessity why you should concern yourself more about me."

"Well, he has beaten us," her aunt said. "It really seems as if he had been playing with you in this way in revenge for my humbling him as I did by standing up against him at first."

"O no, Aunt," murmured Thomasin.

They said no more on the subject then. Diggory Venn's knock came soon after; and Mrs. Yeobright, on returning from her interview with him in the porch, carelessly observed, "Another lover has come to ask for you."

"No?"

"Yes, that queer young man Venn."

"Asks to pay his addresses to me?"

"Yes; and I told him he was too late."

Thomasin looked silently into the candle-flame. "Poor Diggory!" she said, and then aroused herself to other things.

The next day was passed in mere mechanical deeds of preparation, both the women being anxious to immerse themselves in these to escape the emotional aspect of the situation. Some wearing apparel and other articles were collected anew for Thomasin, and remarks on domestic details were frequently made, so as to obscure any inner misgivings about her future as Wildeve's wife.

The appointed morning came. The arrangement with Wildeve was that he should meet her at the church to guard against any unpleasant curiosity which might have affected them had they been seen walking off together in the usual country way.

Aunt and niece stood together in the bedroom where the bride was dressing. The sun, where it could catch it, made a mirror of Thomasin's hair, which she always wore braided. It was braided according to a calendar system — the more important the day the more numerous the strands in the braid. On ordinary working-days she braided

it in threes; on ordinary Sundays in fours; at Maypolings, gipsyings, and the like, she braided it in fives. Years ago she had said that when she married she would braid it in sevens. She had braided it in sevens today.

"I have been thinking that I will wear my blue silk after all," she said. "It is my wedding day, even though there may be something sad about the time. I mean," she added, anxious to correct any wrong impression, "not sad in itself, but in its having had great disappointment and trouble before it."

Mrs. Yeobright breathed in a way which might have been called a sigh. "I almost wish Clym had been at home," she said. "Of course you chose the time because of his absence."

"Partly. I have felt that I acted unfairly to him in not telling him all; but, as it was done not to grieve him, I thought I would carry out the plan to its end, and tell the whole story when the sky was clear."

"You are a practical little woman," said Mrs. Yeobright, smiling. "I wish you and he — no, I don't wish anything. There, it is nine o'clock," she interrupted, hearing a whizz and a dinging downstairs.

"I told Damon I would leave at nine," said Thomasin, hastening out of the room.

Her aunt followed. When Thomasin was going up the little walk from the door to the wicket-gate, Mrs. Yeobright looked reluctantly at her, and said, "It is a shame to let you go alone."

"It is necessary," said Thomasin.

"At any rate," added her aunt with forced cheerfulness, "I shall call upon you this afternoon, and bring the cake with me. If Clym has returned by that time he will perhaps come too. I wish to show Mr. Wildeve that I bear him no ill-will. Let the past be forgotten. Well, God bless you! There, I don't believe in old superstitions, but I'll do it." She threw a slipper at the retreating figure of the girl, who turned, smiled, and went on again.

A few steps further, and she looked back. "Did you call me, Aunt?" she tremulously inquired. "Good-bye!"

Moved by an uncontrollable feeling as she looked upon Mrs. Yeobright's worn, wet face, she ran back, when her aunt came forward, and they met again. "O — Tamsie," said the elder, weeping, "I don't like to let you go."

"I — I am — " Thomasin began, giving way likewise. But, quelling her grief, she said "Good-bye!" again and went on.

Then Mrs. Yeobright saw a little figure wending its way between the scratching furze-bushes, and diminishing far up the valley — a pale-blue spot in a vast field of neutral brown, solitary and undefended except by the power of her own hope.

But the worst feature in the case was one which did not appear in the landscape; it was the man.

The hour chosen for the ceremony by Thomasin and Wildeve had been so timed as to enable her to escape the awkwardness of meeting her cousin Clym, who was returning the same morning. To own to the partial truth of what he had heard would be

distressing as long as the humiliating position resulting from the event was unimproved. It was only after a second and successful journey to the altar that she could lift up her head and prove the failure of the first attempt a pure accident.

She had not been gone from Blooms-End more than half an hour when Yeobright came by the meads from the other direction and entered the house.

"I had an early breakfast," he said to his mother after greeting her. "Now I could eat a little more."

They sat down to the repeated meal, and he went on in a low, anxious voice, apparently imagining that Thomasin had not yet come downstairs, "What's this I have heard about Thomasin and Mr. Wildeve?"

"It is true in many points," said Mrs. Yeobright quietly; "but it is all right now, I hope." She looked at the clock.

"True?"

"Thomasin is gone to him today."

Clym pushed away his breakfast. "Then there is a scandal of some sort, and that's what's the matter with Thomasin. Was it this that made her ill?"

"Yes. Not a scandal — a misfortune. I will tell you all about it, Clym. You must not be angry, but you must listen, and you'll find that what we have done has been done for the best."

She then told him the circumstances. All that he had known of the affair before he returned from Paris was that there had existed an attachment between Thomasin and Wildeve, which his mother had at first discountenanced, but had since, owing to the arguments of Thomasin, looked upon in a little more favourable light. When she, therefore, proceeded to explain all he was greatly surprised and troubled.

"And she determined that the wedding should be over before you came back," said Mrs. Yeobright, "that there might be no chance of her meeting you, and having a very painful time of it. That's why she has gone to him; they have arranged to be married this morning."

"But I can't understand it," said Yeobright, rising. "'Tis so unlike her. I can see why you did not write to me after her unfortunate return home. But why didn't you let me know when the wedding was going to be — the first time?"

"Well, I felt vexed with her just then. She seemed to me to be obstinate; and when I found that you were nothing in her mind I vowed that she should be nothing in yours. I felt that she was only my niece after all; I told her she might marry, but that I should take no interest in it, and should not bother you about it either."

"It wouldn't have been bothering me. Mother, you did wrong."

"I thought it might disturb you in your business, and that you might throw up your situation, or injure your prospects in some way because of it, so I said nothing. Of course, if they had married at that time in a proper manner, I should have told you at once."

"Tamsin actually being married while we are sitting here!"

“Yes. Unless some accident happens again, as it did the first time. It may, considering he’s the same man.”

“Yes, and I believe it will. Was it right to let her go? Suppose Wildeve is really a bad fellow?”

“Then he won’t come, and she’ll come home again.”

“You should have looked more into it.”

“It is useless to say that,” his mother answered with an impatient look of sorrow. “You don’t know how bad it has been here with us all these weeks, Clym. You don’t know what a mortification anything of that sort is to a woman. You don’t know the sleepless nights we’ve had in this house, and the almost bitter words that have passed between us since that Fifth of November. I hope never to pass seven such weeks again. Tamsin has not gone outside the door, and I have been ashamed to look anybody in the face; and now you blame me for letting her do the only thing that can be done to set that trouble straight.”

“No,” he said slowly. “Upon the whole I don’t blame you. But just consider how sudden it seems to me. Here was I, knowing nothing; and then I am told all at once that Tamsie is gone to be married. Well, I suppose there was nothing better to do. Do you know, Mother,” he continued after a moment or two, looking suddenly interested in his own past history, “I once thought of Tamsin as a sweetheart? Yes, I did. How odd boys are! And when I came home and saw her this time she seemed so much more affectionate than usual, that I was quite reminded of those days, particularly on the night of the party, when she was unwell. We had the party just the same — was not that rather cruel to her?”

“It made no difference. I had arranged to give one, and it was not worth while to make more gloom than necessary. To begin by shutting ourselves up and telling you of Tamsin’s misfortunes would have been a poor sort of welcome.”

Clym remained thinking. “I almost wish you had not had that party,” he said; “and for other reasons. But I will tell you in a day or two. We must think of Tamsin now.”

They lapsed into silence. “I’ll tell you what,” said Yeobright again, in a tone which showed some slumbering feeling still. “I don’t think it kind to Tamsin to let her be married like this, and neither of us there to keep up her spirits or care a bit about her. She hasn’t disgraced herself, or done anything to deserve that. It is bad enough that the wedding should be so hurried and unceremonious, without our keeping away from it in addition. Upon my soul, ‘tis almost a shame. I’ll go.”

“It is over by this time,” said his mother with a sigh; “unless they were late, or he — ”

“Then I shall be soon enough to see them come out. I don’t quite like your keeping me in ignorance, Mother, after all. Really, I half hope he has failed to meet her!”

“And ruined her character?”

“Nonsense — that wouldn’t ruin Thomasin.”

He took up his hat and hastily left the house. Mrs. Yeobright looked rather unhappy, and sat still, deep in thought. But she was not long left alone. A few minutes later Clym came back again, and in his company came Diggory Venn.

"I find there isn't time for me to get there," said Clym.

"Is she married?" Mrs. Yeobright inquired, turning to the reddleman a face in which a strange strife of wishes, for and against, was apparent.

Venn bowed. "She is, ma'am."

"How strange it sounds," murmured Clym.

"And he didn't disappoint her this time?" said Mrs. Yeobright.

"He did not. And there is now no slight on her name. I was hastening ath'art to tell you at once, as I saw you were not there."

"How came you to be there? How did you know it?" she asked.

"I have been in that neighbourhood for some time, and I saw them go in," said the reddleman. "Wildevé came up to the door, punctual as the clock. I didn't expect it of him." He did not add, as he might have added, that how he came to be in that neighbourhood was not by accident; that, since Wildevé's resumption of his right to Thomasin, Venn, with the thoroughness which was part of his character, had determined to see the end of the episode.

"Who was there?" said Mrs. Yeobright.

"Nobody hardly. I stood right out of the way, and she did not see me." The reddleman spoke huskily, and looked into the garden.

"Who gave her away?"

"Miss Vye."

"How very remarkable! Miss Vye! It is to be considered an honour, I suppose?"

"Who's Miss Vye?" said Clym.

"Captain Vye's granddaughter, of Mistover Knap."

"A proud girl from Budmouth," said Mrs. Yeobright. "One not much to my liking. People say she's a witch, but of course that's absurd."

The reddleman kept to himself his acquaintance with that fair personage, and also that Eustacia was there because he went to fetch her, in accordance with a promise he had given as soon as he learnt that the marriage was to take place. He merely said, in continuation of the story — —

"I was sitting on the churchyard wall when they came up, one from one way, the other from the other; and Miss Vye was walking thereabouts, looking at the headstones. As soon as they had gone in I went to the door, feeling I should like to see it, as I knew her so well. I pulled off my boots because they were so noisy, and went up into the gallery. I saw then that the parson and clerk were already there."

"How came Miss Vye to have anything to do with it, if she was only on a walk that way?"

"Because there was nobody else. She had gone into the church just before me, not into the gallery. The parson looked round before beginning, and as she was the only one near he beckoned to her, and she went up to the rails. After that, when it came

to signing the book, she pushed up her veil and signed; and Tamsin seemed to thank her for her kindness." The reddleman told the tale thoughtfully for there lingered upon his vision the changing colour of Wildeve, when Eustacia lifted the thick veil which had concealed her from recognition and looked calmly into his face. "And then," said Diggory sadly, "I came away, for her history as Tamsin Yeobright was over."

"I offered to go," said Mrs. Yeobright regretfully. "But she said it was not necessary."

"Well, it is no matter," said the reddleman. "The thing is done at last as it was meant to be at first, and God send her happiness. Now I'll wish you good morning."

He placed his cap on his head and went out.

From that instant of leaving Mrs. Yeobright's door, the reddleman was seen no more in or about Egdon Heath for a space of many months. He vanished entirely. The nook among the brambles where his van had been standing was as vacant as ever the next morning, and scarcely a sign remained to show that he had been there, excepting a few straws, and a little redness on the turf, which was washed away by the next storm of rain.

The report that Diggory had brought of the wedding, correct as far as it went, was deficient in one significant particular, which had escaped him through his being at some distance back in the church. When Thomasin was tremblingly engaged in signing her name Wildeve had flung towards Eustacia a glance that said plainly, "I have punished you now." She had replied in a low tone — and he little thought how truly — "You mistake; it gives me sincerest pleasure to see her your wife today."

BOOK THREE

THE FASCINATION

CHAPTER 1

"My Mind to Me a Kingdom Is"

In Clym Yeobright's face could be dimly seen the typical countenance of the future. Should there be a classic period to art hereafter, its Pheidias may produce such faces. The view of life as a thing to be put up with, replacing that zest for existence which was so intense in early civilizations, must ultimately enter so thoroughly into the constitution of the advanced races that its facial expression will become accepted as a new artistic departure. People already feel that a man who lives without disturbing a curve of feature, or setting a mark of mental concern anywhere upon himself, is too far removed from modern perceptiveness to be a modern type. Physically beautiful men — the glory of the race when it was young — are almost an anachronism now; and we may wonder whether, at some time or other, physically beautiful women may not be an anachronism likewise.

The truth seems to be that a long line of disillusioned centuries has permanently displaced the Hellenic idea of life, or whatever it may be called. What the Greeks only suspected we know well; what their Aeschylus imagined our nursery children feel. That old-fashioned revelling in the general situation grows less and less possible as we uncover the defects of natural laws, and see the quandary that man is in by their operation.

The lineaments which will get embodied in ideals based upon this new recognition will probably be akin to those of Yeobright. The observer's eye was arrested, not by his face as a picture, but by his face as a page; not by what it was, but by what it recorded. His features were attractive in the light of symbols, as sounds intrinsically common become attractive in language, and as shapes intrinsically simple become interesting in writing.

He had been a lad of whom something was expected. Beyond this all had been chaos. That he would be successful in an original way, or that he would go to the dogs in an original way, seemed equally probable. The only absolute certainty about him was that he would not stand still in the circumstances amid which he was born.

Hence, when his name was casually mentioned by neighbouring yeomen, the listener said, "Ah, Clym Yeobright — what is he doing now?" When the instinctive question about a person is, What is he doing? it is felt that he will be found to be, like most of us, doing nothing in particular. There is an indefinite sense that he must be invading some region of singularity, good or bad. The devout hope is that he is doing well. The secret faith is that he is making a mess of it. Half a dozen comfortable market-men, who were habitual callers at the Quiet Woman as they passed by in their carts, were partial to the topic. In fact, though they were not Egdon men, they could hardly avoid it while they sucked their long clay tubes and regarded the heath through the window. Clym had been so inwoven with the heath in his boyhood that hardly anybody could look upon it without thinking of him. So the subject recurred: if he were making a fortune and a name, so much the better for him; if he were making a tragical figure in the world, so much the better for a narrative.

The fact was that Yeobright's fame had spread to an awkward extent before he left home. "It is bad when your fame outruns your means," said the Spanish Jesuit Gracian. At the age of six he had asked a Scripture riddle: "Who was the first man known to wear breeches?" and applause had resounded from the very verge of the heath. At seven he painted the Battle of Waterloo with tiger-lily pollen and black-currant juice, in the absence of water-colours. By the time he reached twelve he had in this manner been heard of as artist and scholar for at least two miles round. An individual whose fame spreads three or four thousand yards in the time taken by the fame of others similarly situated to travel six or eight hundred, must of necessity have something in him. Possibly Clym's fame, like Homer's, owed something to the accidents of his situation; nevertheless famous he was.

He grew up and was helped out in life. That waggery of fate which started Clive as a writing clerk, Gay as a linen-draper, Keats as a surgeon, and a thousand others in

a thousand other odd ways, banished the wild and ascetic heath lad to a trade whose sole concern was with the especial symbols of self-indulgence and vainglory.

The details of this choice of a business for him it is not necessary to give. At the death of his father a neighbouring gentleman had kindly undertaken to give the boy a start, and this assumed the form of sending him to Budmouth. Yeobright did not wish to go there, but it was the only feasible opening. Thence he went to London; and thence, shortly after, to Paris, where he had remained till now.

Something being expected of him, he had not been at home many days before a great curiosity as to why he stayed on so long began to arise in the heath. The natural term of a holiday had passed, yet he still remained. On the Sunday morning following the week of Thomasin's marriage a discussion on this subject was in progress at a hair-cutting before Fairway's house. Here the local barbering was always done at this hour on this day, to be followed by the great Sunday wash of the inhabitants at noon, which in its turn was followed by the great Sunday dressing an hour later. On Egdon Heath Sunday proper did not begin till dinner-time, and even then it was a somewhat battered specimen of the day.

These Sunday-morning hair-cuttings were performed by Fairway; the victim sitting on a chopping-block in front of the house, without a coat, and the neighbours gossiping around, idly observing the locks of hair as they rose upon the wind after the snip, and flew away out of sight to the four quarters of the heavens. Summer and winter the scene was the same, unless the wind were more than usually blustering, when the stool was shifted a few feet round the corner. To complain of cold in sitting out of doors, hatless and coatless, while Fairway told true stories between the cuts of the scissors, would have been to pronounce yourself no man at once. To flinch, exclaim, or move a muscle of the face at the small stabs under the ear received from those instruments, or at scarifications of the neck by the comb, would have been thought a gross breach of good manners, considering that Fairway did it all for nothing. A bleeding about the poll on Sunday afternoons was amply accounted for by the explanation. "I have had my hair cut, you know."

The conversation on Yeobright had been started by a distant view of the young man rambling leisurely across the heath before them.

"A man who is doing well elsewhere wouldn't bide here two or three weeks for nothing," said Fairway. "He's got some project in 's head — depend upon that."

"Well, 'a can't keep a diment shop here," said Sam.

"I don't see why he should have had them two heavy boxes home if he had not been going to bide; and what there is for him to do here the Lord in heaven knows."

Before many more surmises could be indulged in Yeobright had come near; and seeing the hair-cutting group he turned aside to join them. Marching up, and looking critically at their faces for a moment, he said, without introduction, "Now, folks, let me guess what you have been talking about."

"Ay, sure, if you will," said Sam.

"About me."

“Now, it is a thing I shouldn’t have dreamed of doing, otherwise,” said Fairway in a tone of integrity; “but since you have named it, Master Yeobright, I’ll own that we was talking about ‘ee. We were wondering what could keep you home here mollyhorning about when you have made such a world-wide name for yourself in the nick-nack trade — now, that’s the truth o’t.”

“I’ll tell you,” said Yeobright with unexpected earnestness. “I am not sorry to have the opportunity. I’ve come home because, all things considered, I can be a trifle less useless here than anywhere else. But I have only lately found this out. When I first got away from home I thought this place was not worth troubling about. I thought our life here was contemptible. To oil your boots instead of blacking them, to dust your coat with a switch instead of a brush — was there ever anything more ridiculous? I said.”

“So ‘tis; so ‘tis!”

“No, no — you are wrong; it isn’t.”

“Beg your pardon, we thought that was your maning?”

“Well, as my views changed my course became very depressing. I found that I was trying to be like people who had hardly anything in common with myself. I was endeavouring to put off one sort of life for another sort of life, which was not better than the life I had known before. It was simply different.”

“True; a sight different,” said Fairway.

“Yes, Paris must be a taking place,” said Humphrey. “Grand shop-winders, trumpets, and drums; and here be we out of doors in all winds and weathers — ”

“But you mistake me,” pleaded Clym. “All this was very depressing. But not so depressing as something I next perceived — that my business was the idlest, vainest, most effeminate business that ever a man could be put to. That decided me — I would give it up and try to follow some rational occupation among the people I knew best, and to whom I could be of most use. I have come home; and this is how I mean to carry out my plan. I shall keep a school as near to Egdon as possible, so as to be able to walk over here and have a night-school in my mother’s house. But I must study a little at first, to get properly qualified. Now, neighbours, I must go.”

And Clym resumed his walk across the heath.

“He’ll never carry it out in the world,” said Fairway. “In a few weeks he’ll learn to see things otherwise.”

“‘Tis good-hearted of the young man,” said another. “But, for my part, I think he had better mind his business.”

CHAPTER 2

The New Course Causes Disappointment

Yeobright loved his kind. He had a conviction that the want of most men was knowledge of a sort which brings wisdom rather than affluence. He wished to raise the

class at the expense of individuals rather than individuals at the expense of the class. What was more, he was ready at once to be the first unit sacrificed.

In passing from the bucolic to the intellectual life the intermediate stages are usually two at least, frequently many more; and one of those stages is almost sure to be worldly advanced. We can hardly imagine bucolic placidity quickening to intellectual aims without imagining social aims as the transitional phase. Yeobright's local peculiarity was that in striving at high thinking he still cleaved to plain living — nay, wild and meagre living in many respects, and brotherliness with clowns.

He was a John the Baptist who took ennoblement rather than repentance for his text. Mentally he was in a provincial future, that is, he was in many points abreast with the central town thinkers of his date. Much of this development he may have owed to his studious life in Paris, where he had become acquainted with ethical systems popular at the time.

In consequence of this relatively advanced position, Yeobright might have been called unfortunate. The rural world was not ripe for him. A man should be only partially before his time — to be completely to the vanward in aspirations is fatal to fame. Had Philip's warlike son been intellectually so far ahead as to have attempted civilization without bloodshed, he would have been twice the godlike hero that he seemed, but nobody would have heard of an Alexander.

In the interests of renown the forwardness should lie chiefly in the capacity to handle things. Successful propagandists have succeeded because the doctrine they bring into form is that which their listeners have for some time felt without being able to shape. A man who advocates aesthetic effort and deprecates social effort is only likely to be understood by a class to which social effort has become a stale matter. To argue upon the possibility of culture before luxury to the bucolic world may be to argue truly, but it is an attempt to disturb a sequence to which humanity has been long accustomed. Yeobright preaching to the Egdon eremites that they might rise to a serene comprehensiveness without going through the process of enriching themselves was not unlike arguing to ancient Chaldeans that in ascending from earth to the pure empyrean it was not necessary to pass first into the intervening heaven of ether.

Was Yeobright's mind well-proportioned? No. A well-proportioned mind is one which shows no particular bias; one of which we may safely say that it will never cause its owner to be confined as a madman, tortured as a heretic, or crucified as a blasphemer. Also, on the other hand, that it will never cause him to be applauded as a prophet, revered as a priest, or exalted as a king. Its usual blessings are happiness and mediocrity. It produces the poetry of Rogers, the paintings of West, the statecraft of North, the spiritual guidance of Tomline; enabling its possessors to find their way to wealth, to wind up well, to step with dignity off the stage, to die comfortably in their beds, and to get the decent monument which, in many cases, they deserve. It never would have allowed Yeobright to do such a ridiculous thing as throw up his business to benefit his fellow-creatures.

He walked along towards home without attending to paths. If anyone knew the heath well it was Clym. He was permeated with its scenes, with its substance, and with its odours. He might be said to be its product. His eyes had first opened thereon; with its appearance all the first images of his memory were mingled, his estimate of life had been coloured by it: his toys had been the flint knives and arrow-heads which he found there, wondering why stones should "grow" to such odd shapes; his flowers, the purple bells and yellow furze: his animal kingdom, the snakes and croppers; his society, its human haunters. Take all the varying hates felt by Eustacia Vye towards the heath, and translate them into loves, and you have the heart of Clym. He gazed upon the wide prospect as he walked, and was glad.

To many persons this Egdon was a place which had slipped out of its century generations ago, to intrude as an uncouth object into this. It was an obsolete thing, and few cared to study it. How could this be otherwise in the days of square fields, plashed hedges, and meadows watered on a plan so rectangular that on a fine day they looked like silver gridirons? The farmer, in his ride, who could smile at artificial grasses, look with solicitude at the coming corn, and sigh with sadness at the fly-eaten turnips, bestowed upon the distant upland of heath nothing better than a frown. But as for Yeobright, when he looked from the heights on his way he could not help indulging in a barbarous satisfaction at observing that, in some of the attempts at reclamation from the waste, tillage, after holding on for a year or two, had receded again in despair, the ferns and furze-tufts stubbornly reasserting themselves.

He descended into the valley, and soon reached his home at Blooms-End. His mother was snipping dead leaves from the window-plants. She looked up at him as if she did not understand the meaning of his long stay with her; her face had worn that look for several days. He could perceive that the curiosity which had been shown by the hair-cutting group amounted in his mother to concern. But she had asked no question with her lips, even when the arrival of his trunk suggested that he was not going to leave her soon. Her silence besought an explanation of him more loudly than words.

"I am not going back to Paris again, Mother," he said. "At least, in my old capacity. I have given up the business."

Mrs. Yeobright turned in pained surprise. "I thought something was amiss, because of the boxes. I wonder you did not tell me sooner."

"I ought to have done it. But I have been in doubt whether you would be pleased with my plan. I was not quite clear on a few points myself. I am going to take an entirely new course."

"I am astonished, Clym. How can you want to do better than you've been doing?"

"Very easily. But I shall not do better in the way you mean; I suppose it will be called doing worse. But I hate that business of mine, and I want to do some worthy thing before I die. As a schoolmaster I think to do it — a school-master to the poor and ignorant, to teach them what nobody else will."

“After all the trouble that has been taken to give you a start, and when there is nothing to do but to keep straight on towards affluence, you say you will be a poor man’s schoolmaster. Your fancies will be your ruin, Clym.”

Mrs. Yeobright spoke calmly, but the force of feeling behind the words was but too apparent to one who knew her as well as her son did. He did not answer. There was in his face that hopelessness of being understood which comes when the objector is constitutionally beyond the reach of a logic that, even under favouring conditions, is almost too coarse a vehicle for the subtlety of the argument.

No more was said on the subject till the end of dinner. His mother then began, as if there had been no interval since the morning. “It disturbs me, Clym, to find that you have come home with such thoughts as those. I hadn’t the least idea that you meant to go backward in the world by your own free choice. Of course, I have always supposed you were going to push straight on, as other men do — all who deserve the name — when they have been put in a good way of doing well.”

“I cannot help it,” said Clym, in a troubled tone. “Mother, I hate the flashy business. Talk about men who deserve the name, can any man deserving the name waste his time in that effeminate way, when he sees half the world going to ruin for want of somebody to buckle to and teach them how to breast the misery they are born to? I get up every morning and see the whole creation groaning and travailing in pain, as St. Paul says, and yet there am I, trafficking in glittering splendours with wealthy women and titled libertines, and pandering to the meanest vanities — I, who have health and strength enough for anything. I have been troubled in my mind about it all the year, and the end is that I cannot do it any more.”

“Why can’t you do it as well as others?”

“I don’t know, except that there are many things other people care for which I don’t; and that’s partly why I think I ought to do this. For one thing, my body does not require much of me. I cannot enjoy delicacies; good things are wasted upon me. Well, I ought to turn that defect to advantage, and by being able to do without what other people require I can spend what such things cost upon anybody else.”

Now, Yeobright, having inherited some of these very instincts from the woman before him, could not fail to awaken a reciprocity in her through her feelings, if not by arguments, disguise it as she might for his good. She spoke with less assurance. “And yet you might have been a wealthy man if you had only persevered. Manager to that large diamond establishment — what better can a man wish for? What a post of trust and respect! I suppose you will be like your father; like him, you are getting weary of doing well.”

“No,” said her son, “I am not weary of that, though I am weary of what you mean by it. Mother, what is doing well?”

Mrs. Yeobright was far too thoughtful a woman to be content with ready definitions, and, like the “What is wisdom?” of Plato’s Socrates, and the “What is truth?” of Pontius Pilate, Yeobright’s burning question received no answer.

The silence was broken by the clash of the garden gate, a tap at the door, and its opening. Christian Cantle appeared in the room in his Sunday clothes.

It was the custom on Egdon to begin the preface to a story before absolutely entering the house, so as to be well in for the body of the narrative by the time visitor and visited stood face to face. Christian had been saying to them while the door was leaving its latch, "To think that I, who go from home but once in a while, and hardly then, should have been there this morning!"

"'Tis news you have brought us, then, Christian?" said Mrs. Yeobright.

"Ay, sure, about a witch, and ye must overlook my time o' day; for, says I, 'I must go and tell 'em, though they won't have half done dinner.' I assure ye it made me shake like a driven leaf. Do ye think any harm will come o't?"

"Well — what?"

"This morning at church we was all standing up, and the pa'son said, 'Let us pray.' 'Well,' thinks I, 'one may as well kneel as stand'; so down I went; and, more than that, all the rest were as willing to oblige the man as I. We hadn't been hard at it for more than a minute when a most terrible screech sounded through church, as if somebody had just gied up their heart's blood. All the folk jumped up and then we found that Susan Nunsuch had pricked Miss Vye with a long stocking-needle, as she had threatened to do as soon as ever she could get the young lady to church, where she don't come very often. She've waited for this chance for weeks, so as to draw her blood and put an end to the bewitching of Susan's children that has been carried on so long. Sue followed her into church, sat next to her, and as soon as she could find a chance in went the stocking-needle into my lady's arm."

"Good heaven, how horrid!" said Mrs. Yeobright.

"Sue pricked her that deep that the maid fainted away; and as I was afeard there might be some tumult among us, I got behind the bass viol and didn't see no more. But they carried her out into the air, 'tis said; but when they looked round for Sue she was gone. What a scream that girl gied, poor thing! There were the pa'son in his surplice holding up his hand and saying, 'Sit down, my good people, sit down!' But the deuce a bit would they sit down. O, and what d'ye think I found out, Mrs. Yeobright? The pa'son wears a suit of clothes under his surplice! — I could see his black sleeves when he held up his arm."

"'Tis a cruel thing," said Yeobright.

"Yes," said his mother.

"The nation ought to look into it," said Christian. "Here's Humphrey coming, I think."

In came Humphrey. "Well, have ye heard the news? But I see you have. 'Tis a very strange thing that whenever one of Egdon folk goes to church some rum job or other is sure to be doing. The last time one of us was there was when neighbour Fairway went in the fall; and that was the day you forbad the banns, Mrs. Yeobright."

"Has this cruelly treated girl been able to walk home?" said Clym.

“They say she got better, and went home very well. And now I’ve told it I must be moving homeward myself.”

“And I,” said Humphrey. “Truly now we shall see if there’s anything in what folks say about her.”

When they were gone into the heath again Yeobright said quietly to his mother, “Do you think I have turned teacher too soon?”

“It is right that there should be schoolmasters, and missionaries, and all such men,” she replied. “But it is right, too, that I should try to lift you out of this life into something richer, and that you should not come back again, and be as if I had not tried at all.”

Later in the day Sam, the turf-cutter, entered. “I’ve come a-borrowing, Mrs. Yeobright. I suppose you have heard what’s been happening to the beauty on the hill?”

“Yes, Sam: half a dozen have been telling us.”

“Beauty?” said Clym.

“Yes, tolerably well-favoured,” Sam replied. “Lord! all the country owns that ‘tis one of the strangest things in the world that such a woman should have come to live up there.”

“Dark or fair?”

“Now, though I’ve seen her twenty times, that’s a thing I cannot call to mind.”

“Darker than Tamsin,” murmured Mrs. Yeobright.

“A woman who seems to care for nothing at all, as you may say.”

“She is melancholy, then?” inquired Clym.

“She mopes about by herself, and don’t mix in with the people.”

“Is she a young lady inclined for adventures?”

“Not to my knowledge.”

“Doesn’t join in with the lads in their games, to get some sort of excitement in this lonely place?”

“No.”

“Mumming, for instance?”

“No. Her notions be different. I should rather say her thoughts were far away from here, with lords and ladies she’ll never know, and mansions she’ll never see again.”

Observing that Clym appeared singularly interested Mrs. Yeobright said rather uneasily to Sam, “You see more in her than most of us do. Miss Vye is to my mind too idle to be charming. I have never heard that she is of any use to herself or to other people. Good girls don’t get treated as witches even on Egdon.”

“Nonsense — that proves nothing either way,” said Yeobright.

“Well, of course I don’t understand such niceties,” said Sam, withdrawing from a possibly unpleasant argument; “and what she is we must wait for time to tell us. The business that I have really called about is this, to borrow the longest and strongest rope you have. The captain’s bucket has dropped into the well, and they are in want of water; and as all the chaps are at home today we think we can get it out for him. We have three cart-ropes already, but they won’t reach to the bottom.”

Mrs. Yeobright told him that he might have whatever ropes he could find in the outhouse, and Sam went out to search. When he passed by the door Clym joined him, and accompanied him to the gate.

“Is this young witch-lady going to stay long at Mistorver?” he asked.

“I should say so.”

“What a cruel shame to ill-use her, She must have suffered greatly — more in mind than in body.”

“‘Twas a graceless trick — such a handsome girl, too. You ought to see her, Mr. Yeobright, being a young man come from far, and with a little more to show for your years than most of us.”

“Do you think she would like to teach children?” said Clym.

Sam shook his head. “Quite a different sort of body from that, I reckon.”

“O, it was merely something which occurred to me. It would of course be necessary to see her and talk it over — not an easy thing, by the way, for my family and hers are not very friendly.”

“I’ll tell you how you mid see her, Mr. Yeobright,” said Sam. “We are going to grapple for the bucket at six o’clock tonight at her house, and you could lend a hand. There’s five or six coming, but the well is deep, and another might be useful, if you don’t mind appearing in that shape. She’s sure to be walking round.”

“I’ll think of it,” said Yeobright; and they parted.

He thought of it a good deal; but nothing more was said about Eustacia inside the house at that time. Whether this romantic martyr to superstition and the melancholy mummer he had conversed with under the full moon were one and the same person remained as yet a problem.

CHAPTER 3

The First Act in a Timeworn Drama

The afternoon was fine, and Yeobright walked on the heath for an hour with his mother. When they reached the lofty ridge which divided the valley of Blooms-End from the adjoining valley they stood still and looked round. The Quiet Woman Inn was visible on the low margin of the heath in one direction, and afar on the other hand rose Mistorver Knap.

“You mean to call on Thomasin?” he inquired.

“Yes. But you need not come this time,” said his mother.

“In that case I’ll branch off here, Mother. I am going to Mistorver.”

Mrs. Yeobright turned to him inquiringly.

“I am going to help them get the bucket out of the captain’s well,” he continued. “As it is so very deep I may be useful. And I should like to see this Miss Vye — not so much for her good looks as for another reason.”

“Must you go?” his mother asked.

“I thought to.”

And they parted. “There is no help for it,” murmured Clym’s mother gloomily as he withdrew. “They are sure to see each other. I wish Sam would carry his news to other houses than mine.”

Clym’s retreating figure got smaller and smaller as it rose and fell over the hillocks on his way. “He is tender-hearted,” said Mrs. Yeobright to herself while she watched him; “otherwise it would matter little. How he’s going on!”

He was, indeed, walking with a will over the furze, as straight as a line, as if his life depended upon it. His mother drew a long breath, and, abandoning the visit to Thomasin, turned back. The evening films began to make nebulous pictures of the valleys, but the high lands still were raked by the declining rays of the winter sun, which glanced on Clym as he walked forward, eyed by every rabbit and field-fare around, a long shadow advancing in front of him.

On drawing near to the furze-covered bank and ditch which fortified the captain’s dwelling he could hear voices within, signifying that operations had been already begun. At the side-entrance gate he stopped and looked over.

Half a dozen able-bodied men were standing in a line from the well-mouth, holding a rope which passed over the well-roller into the depths below. Fairway, with a piece of smaller rope round his body, made fast to one of the standards, to guard against accidents, was leaning over the opening, his right hand clasping the vertical rope that descended into the well.

“Now, silence, folks,” said Fairway.

The talking ceased, and Fairway gave a circular motion to the rope, as if he were stirring batter. At the end of a minute a dull splashing reverberated from the bottom of the well; the helical twist he had imparted to the rope had reached the grapnel below.

“Haul!” said Fairway; and the men who held the rope began to gather it over the wheel.

“I think we’ve got sommat,” said one of the haulers-in.

“Then pull steady,” said Fairway.

They gathered up more and more, till a regular dripping into the well could be heard below. It grew smarter with the increasing height of the bucket, and presently a hundred and fifty feet of rope had been pulled in.

Fairway then lit a lantern, tied it to another cord, and began lowering it into the well beside the first: Clym came forward and looked down. Strange humid leaves, which knew nothing of the seasons of the year, and quaint-natured mosses were revealed on the wellside as the lantern descended; till its rays fell upon a confused mass of rope and bucket dangling in the dank, dark air.

“We’ve only got en by the edge of the hoop — steady, for God’s sake!” said Fairway.

They pulled with the greatest gentleness, till the wet bucket appeared about two yards below them, like a dead friend come to earth again. Three or four hands were stretched out, then jerk went the rope, whizz went the wheel, the two foremost haulers

fell backward, the beating of a falling body was heard, receding down the sides of the well, and a thunderous uproar arose at the bottom. The bucket was gone again.

“Damn the bucket!” said Fairway.

“Lower again,” said Sam.

“I’m as stiff as a ram’s horn stooping so long,” said Fairway, standing up and stretching himself till his joints creaked.

“Rest a few minutes, Timothy,” said Yeobright. “I’ll take your place.”

The grapnel was again lowered. Its smart impact upon the distant water reached their ears like a kiss, whereupon Yeobright knelt down, and leaning over the well began dragging the grapnel round and round as Fairway had done.

“Tie a rope round him — it is dangerous!” cried a soft and anxious voice somewhere above them.

Everybody turned. The speaker was a woman, gazing down upon the group from an upper window, whose panes blazed in the ruddy glare from the west. Her lips were parted and she appeared for the moment to forget where she was.

The rope was accordingly tied round his waist, and the work proceeded. At the next haul the weight was not heavy, and it was discovered that they had only secured a coil of the rope detached from the bucket. The tangled mass was thrown into the background. Humphrey took Yeobright’s place, and the grapnel was lowered again.

Yeobright retired to the heap of recovered rope in a meditative mood. Of the identity between the lady’s voice and that of the melancholy mummer he had not a moment’s doubt. “How thoughtful of her!” he said to himself.

Eustacia, who had reddened when she perceived the effect of her exclamation upon the group below, was no longer to be seen at the window, though Yeobright scanned it wistfully. While he stood there the men at the well succeeded in getting up the bucket without a mishap. One of them went to inquire for the captain, to learn what orders he wished to give for mending the well-tackle. The captain proved to be away from home, and Eustacia appeared at the door and came out. She had lapsed into an easy and dignified calm, far removed from the intensity of life in her words of solicitude for Clym’s safety.

“Will it be possible to draw water here tonight?” she inquired.

“No, miss; the bottom of the bucket is clean knocked out. And as we can do no more now we’ll leave off, and come again tomorrow morning.”

“No water,” she murmured, turning away.

“I can send you up some from Blooms-End,” said Clym, coming forward and raising his hat as the men retired.

Yeobright and Eustacia looked at each other for one instant, as if each had in mind those few moments during which a certain moonlight scene was common to both. With the glance the calm fixity of her features sublimed itself to an expression of refinement and warmth; it was like garish noon rising to the dignity of sunset in a couple of seconds.

“Thank you; it will hardly be necessary,” she replied.

“But if you have no water?”

“Well, it is what I call no water,” she said, blushing, and lifting her long-lashed eyelids as if to lift them were a work requiring consideration. “But my grandfather calls it water enough. I’ll show you what I mean.”

She moved away a few yards, and Clym followed. When she reached the corner of the enclosure, where the steps were formed for mounting the boundary bank, she sprang up with a lightness which seemed strange after her listless movement towards the well. It incidentally showed that her apparent languor did not arise from lack of force.

Clym ascended behind her, and noticed a circular burnt patch at the top of the bank. “Ashes?” he said.

“Yes,” said Eustacia. “We had a little bonfire here last Fifth of November, and those are the marks of it.”

On that spot had stood the fire she had kindled to attract Wildeve.

“That’s the only kind of water we have,” she continued, tossing a stone into the pool, which lay on the outside of the bank like the white of an eye without its pupil. The stone fell with a flounce, but no Wildeve appeared on the other side, as on a previous occasion there. “My grandfather says he lived for more than twenty years at sea on water twice as bad as that,” she went on, “and considers it quite good enough for us here on an emergency.”

“Well, as a matter of fact there are no impurities in the water of these pools at this time of the year. It has only just rained into them.”

She shook her head. “I am managing to exist in a wilderness, but I cannot drink from a pond,” she said.

Clym looked towards the well, which was now deserted, the men having gone home. “It is a long way to send for spring-water,” he said, after a silence. “But since you don’t like this in the pond, I’ll try to get you some myself.” He went back to the well. “Yes, I think I could do it by tying on this pail.”

“But, since I would not trouble the men to get it, I cannot in conscience let you.”

“I don’t mind the trouble at all.”

He made fast the pail to the long coil of rope, put it over the wheel, and allowed it to descend by letting the rope slip through his hands. Before it had gone far, however, he checked it.

“I must make fast the end first, or we may lose the whole,” he said to Eustacia, who had drawn near. “Could you hold this a moment, while I do it — or shall I call your servant?”

“I can hold it,” said Eustacia; and he placed the rope in her hands, going then to search for the end.

“I suppose I may let it slip down?” she inquired.

“I would advise you not to let it go far,” said Clym. “It will get much heavier, you will find.”

However, Eustacia had begun to pay out. While he was tying she cried, "I cannot stop it!"

Clym ran to her side, and found he could only check the rope by twisting the loose part round the upright post, when it stopped with a jerk. "Has it hurt you?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Very much?"

"No; I think not." She opened her hands. One of them was bleeding; the rope had dragged off the skin. Eustacia wrapped it in her handkerchief.

"You should have let go," said Yeobright. "Why didn't you?"

"You said I was to hold on...This is the second time I have been wounded today."

"Ah, yes; I have heard of it. I blush for my native Egdon. Was it a serious injury you received in church, Miss Vye?"

There was such an abundance of sympathy in Clym's tone that Eustacia slowly drew up her sleeve and disclosed her round white arm. A bright red spot appeared on its smooth surface, like a ruby on Parian marble.

"There it is," she said, putting her finger against the spot.

"It was dastardly of the woman," said Clym. "Will not Captain Vye get her punished?"

"He is gone from home on that very business. I did not know that I had such a magic reputation."

"And you fainted?" said Clym, looking at the scarlet little puncture as if he would like to kiss it and make it well.

"Yes, it frightened me. I had not been to church for a long time. And now I shall not go again for ever so long — perhaps never. I cannot face their eyes after this. Don't you think it dreadfully humiliating? I wished I was dead for hours after, but I don't mind now."

"I have come to clean away these cobwebs," said Yeobright. "Would you like to help me — by high-class teaching? We might benefit them much."

"I don't quite feel anxious to. I have not much love for my fellow-creatures. Sometimes I quite hate them."

"Still I think that if you were to hear my scheme you might take an interest in it. There is no use in hating people — if you hate anything, you should hate what produced them."

"Do you mean Nature? I hate her already. But I shall be glad to hear your scheme at any time."

The situation had now worked itself out, and the next natural thing was for them to part. Clym knew this well enough, and Eustacia made a move of conclusion; yet he looked at her as if he had one word more to say. Perhaps if he had not lived in Paris it would never have been uttered.

"We have met before," he said, regarding her with rather more interest than was necessary.

"I do not own it," said Eustacia, with a repressed, still look.

“But I may think what I like.”

“Yes.”

“You are lonely here.”

“I cannot endure the heath, except in its purple season. The heath is a cruel taskmaster to me.”

“Can you say so?” he asked. “To my mind it is most exhilarating, and strengthening, and soothing. I would rather live on these hills than anywhere else in the world.”

“It is well enough for artists; but I never would learn to draw.”

“And there is a very curious druidical stone just out there.” He threw a pebble in the direction signified. “Do you often go to see it?”

“I was not even aware there existed any such curious druidical stone. I am aware that there are boulevards in Paris.”

Yeobright looked thoughtfully on the ground. “That means much,” he said.

“It does indeed,” said Eustacia.

“I remember when I had the same longing for town bustle. Five years of a great city would be a perfect cure for that.”

“Heaven send me such a cure! Now, Mr. Yeobright, I will go indoors and plaster my wounded hand.”

They separated, and Eustacia vanished in the increasing shade. She seemed full of many things. Her past was a blank, her life had begun. The effect upon Clym of this meeting he did not fully discover till some time after. During his walk home his most intelligible sensation was that his scheme had somehow become glorified. A beautiful woman had been intertwined with it.

On reaching the house he went up to the room which was to be made his study, and occupied himself during the evening in unpacking his books from the boxes and arranging them on shelves. From another box he drew a lamp and a can of oil. He trimmed the lamp, arranged his table, and said, “Now, I am ready to begin.”

He rose early the next morning, read two hours before breakfast by the light of his lamp — read all the morning, all the afternoon. Just when the sun was going down his eyes felt weary, and he leant back in his chair.

His room overlooked the front of the premises and the valley of the heath beyond. The lowest beams of the winter sun threw the shadow of the house over the palings, across the grass margin of the heath, and far up the vale, where the chimney outlines and those of the surrounding tree-tops stretched forth in long dark prongs. Having been seated at work all day, he decided to take a turn upon the hills before it got dark; and, going out forthwith, he struck across the heath towards Mistover.

It was an hour and a half later when he again appeared at the garden gate. The shutters of the house were closed, and Christian Cantle, who had been wheeling manure about the garden all day, had gone home. On entering he found that his mother, after waiting a long time for him, had finished her meal.

“Where have you been, Clym?” she immediately said. “Why didn’t you tell me that you were going away at this time?”

"I have been on the heath."

"You'll meet Eustacia Vye if you go up there."

Clym paused a minute. "Yes, I met her this evening," he said, as though it were spoken under the sheer necessity of preserving honesty.

"I wondered if you had."

"It was no appointment."

"No; such meetings never are."

"But you are not angry, Mother?"

"I can hardly say that I am not. Angry? No. But when I consider the usual nature of the drag which causes men of promise to disappoint the world I feel uneasy."

"You deserve credit for the feeling, Mother. But I can assure you that you need not be disturbed by it on my account."

"When I think of you and your new crotchets," said Mrs. Yeobright, with some emphasis, "I naturally don't feel so comfortable as I did a twelvemonth ago. It is incredible to me that a man accustomed to the attractive women of Paris and elsewhere should be so easily worked upon by a girl in a heath. You could just as well have walked another way."

"I had been studying all day."

"Well, yes," she added more hopefully, "I have been thinking that you might get on as a schoolmaster, and rise that way, since you really are determined to hate the course you were pursuing."

Yeobright was unwilling to disturb this idea, though his scheme was far enough removed from one wherein the education of youth should be made a mere channel of social ascent. He had no desires of that sort. He had reached the stage in a young man's life when the grimness of the general human situation first becomes clear; and the realisation of this causes ambition to halt awhile. In France it is not uncustomary to commit suicide at this stage; in England we do much better, or much worse, as the case may be.

The love between the young man and his mother was strangely invisible now. Of love it may be said, the less earthly the less demonstrative. In its absolutely indestructible form it reaches a profundity in which all exhibition of itself is painful. It was so with these. Had conversations between them been overheard, people would have said, "How cold they are to each other!"

His theory and his wishes about devoting his future to teaching had made an impression on Mrs. Yeobright. Indeed, how could it be otherwise when he was a part of her — when their discourses were as if carried on between the right and the left hands of the same body? He had despaired of reaching her by argument; and it was almost as a discovery to him that he could reach her by a magnetism which was as superior to words as words are to yells.

Strangely enough he began to feel now that it would not be so hard to persuade her who was his best friend that comparative poverty was essentially the higher course for him, as to reconcile to his feelings the act of persuading her. From every provident

point of view his mother was so undoubtedly right, that he was not without a sickness of heart in finding he could shake her.

She had a singular insight into life, considering that she had never mixed with it. There are instances of persons who, without clear ideas of the things they criticize have yet had clear ideas of the relations of those things. Blacklock, a poet blind from his birth, could describe visual objects with accuracy; Professor Sanderson, who was also blind, gave excellent lectures on colour, and taught others the theory of ideas which they had and he had not. In the social sphere these gifted ones are mostly women; they can watch a world which they never saw, and estimate forces of which they have only heard. We call it intuition.

What was the great world to Mrs. Yeobright? A multitude whose tendencies could be perceived, though not its essences. Communities were seen by her as from a distance; she saw them as we see the throngs which cover the canvases of Sallaert, Van Alsloot, and others of that school — vast masses of beings, jostling, zigzagging, and processioning in definite directions, but whose features are indistinguishable by the very comprehensiveness of the view.

One could see that, as far as it had gone, her life was very complete on its reflective side. The philosophy of her nature, and its limitation by circumstances, was almost written in her movements. They had a majestic foundation, though they were far from being majestic; and they had a ground-work of assurance, but they were not assured. As her once elastic walk had become deadened by time, so had her natural pride of life been hindered in its blooming by her necessities.

The next slight touch in the shaping of Clym's destiny occurred a few days after. A barrow was opened on the heath, and Yeobright attended the operation, remaining away from his study during several hours. In the afternoon Christian returned from a journey in the same direction, and Mrs. Yeobright questioned him.

"They have dug a hole, and they have found things like flowerpots upside down, Mis'ess Yeobright; and inside these be real charnel bones. They have carried 'em off to men's houses; but I shouldn't like to sleep where they will bide. Dead folks have been known to come and claim their own. Mr. Yeobright had got one pot of the bones, and was going to bring 'em home — real skellington bones — but 'twas ordered otherwise. You'll be relieved to hear that he gave away his pot and all, on second thoughts; and a blessed thing for ye, Mis'ess Yeobright, considering the wind o' nights."

"Gave it away?"

"Yes. To Miss Vye. She has a cannibal taste for such churchyard furniture seemingly."

"Miss Vye was there too?"

"Ay, 'a b'lieve she was."

When Clym came home, which was shortly after, his mother said, in a curious tone, "The urn you had meant for me you gave away."

Yeobright made no reply; the current of her feeling was too pronounced to admit it.

The early weeks of the year passed on. Yeobright certainly studied at home, but he also walked much abroad, and the direction of his walk was always towards some point of a line between Mistover and Rainbarrow.

The month of March arrived, and the heath showed its first signs of awakening from winter trance. The awakening was almost feline in its stealthiness. The pool outside the bank by Eustacia's dwelling, which seemed as dead and desolate as ever to an observer who moved and made noises in his observation, would gradually disclose a state of great animation when silently watched awhile. A timid animal world had come to life for the season. Little tadpoles and efts began to bubble up through the water, and to race along beneath it; toads made noises like very young ducks, and advanced to the margin in twos and threes; overhead, bumblebees flew hither and thither in the thickening light, their drone coming and going like the sound of a gong.

On an evening such as this Yeobright descended into the Blooms-End valley from beside that very pool, where he had been standing with another person quite silently and quite long enough to hear all this puny stir of resurrection in nature; yet he had not heard it. His walk was rapid as he came down, and he went with a springy trend. Before entering upon his mother's premises he stopped and breathed. The light which shone forth on him from the window revealed that his face was flushed and his eye bright. What it did not show was something which lingered upon his lips like a seal set there. The abiding presence of this impress was so real that he hardly dared to enter the house, for it seemed as if his mother might say, "What red spot is that glowing upon your mouth so vividly?"

But he entered soon after. The tea was ready, and he sat down opposite his mother. She did not speak many words; and as for him, something had been just done and some words had been just said on the hill which prevented him from beginning a desultory chat. His mother's taciturnity was not without ominousness, but he appeared not to care. He knew why she said so little, but he could not remove the cause of her bearing towards him. These half-silent sittings were far from uncommon with them now. At last Yeobright made a beginning of what was intended to strike at the whole root of the matter.

"Five days have we sat like this at meals with scarcely a word. What's the use of it, Mother?"

"None," said she, in a heart-swollen tone. "But there is only too good a reason."

"Not when you know all. I have been wanting to speak about this, and I am glad the subject is begun. The reason, of course, is Eustacia Vye. Well, I confess I have seen her lately, and have seen her a good many times."

"Yes, yes; and I know what that amounts to. It troubles me, Clym. You are wasting your life here; and it is solely on account of her. If it had not been for that woman you would never have entertained this teaching scheme at all."

Clym looked hard at his mother. "You know that is not it," he said.

"Well, I know you had decided to attempt it before you saw her; but that would have ended in intentions. It was very well to talk of, but ridiculous to put in practice.

I fully expected that in the course of a month or two you would have seen the folly of such self-sacrifice, and would have been by this time back again to Paris in some business or other. I can understand objections to the diamond trade — I really was thinking that it might be inadequate to the life of a man like you even though it might have made you a millionaire. But now I see how mistaken you are about this girl I doubt if you could be correct about other things.”

“How am I mistaken in her?”

“She is lazy and dissatisfied. But that is not all of it. Supposing her to be as good a woman as any you can find, which she certainly is not, why do you wish to connect yourself with anybody at present?”

“Well, there are practical reasons,” Clym began, and then almost broke off under an overpowering sense of the weight of argument which could be brought against his statement.

“If I take a school an educated woman would be invaluable as a help to me.”

“What! you really mean to marry her?”

“It would be premature to state that plainly. But consider what obvious advantages there would be in doing it. She — — ”

“Don’t suppose she has any money. She hasn’t a farthing.”

“She is excellently educated, and would make a good matron in a boarding-school. I candidly own that I have modified my views a little, in deference to you; and it should satisfy you. I no longer adhere to my intention of giving with my own mouth rudimentary education to the lowest class. I can do better. I can establish a good private school for farmers’ sons, and without stopping the school I can manage to pass examinations. By this means, and by the assistance of a wife like her — — ”

“Oh, Clym!”

“I shall ultimately, I hope, be at the head of one of the best schools in the county.”

Yeobright had enunciated the word “her” with a fervour which, in conversation with a mother, was absurdly indiscreet. Hardly a maternal heart within the four seas could in such circumstances, have helped being irritated at that ill-timed betrayal of feeling for a new woman.

“You are blinded, Clym,” she said warmly. “It was a bad day for you when you first set eyes on her. And your scheme is merely a castle in the air built on purpose to justify this folly which has seized you, and to salve your conscience on the irrational situation you are in.”

“Mother, that’s not true,” he firmly answered.

“Can you maintain that I sit and tell untruths, when all I wish to do is to save you from sorrow? For shame, Clym! But it is all through that woman — a hussy!”

Clym reddened like fire and rose. He placed his hand upon his mother’s shoulder and said, in a tone which hung strangely between entreaty and command, “I won’t hear it. I may be led to answer you in a way which we shall both regret.”

His mother parted her lips to begin some other vehement truth, but on looking at him she saw that in his face which led her to leave the words unsaid. Yeobright walked

once or twice across the room, and then suddenly went out of the house. It was eleven o'clock when he came in, though he had not been further than the precincts of the garden. His mother was gone to bed. A light was left burning on the table, and supper was spread. Without stopping for any food he secured the doors and went upstairs.

CHAPTER 4

An Hour of Bliss and Many Hours of Sadness

The next day was gloomy enough at Blooms-End. Yeobright remained in his study, sitting over the open books; but the work of those hours was miserably scant. Determined that there should be nothing in his conduct towards his mother resembling sullenness, he had occasionally spoken to her on passing matters, and would take no notice of the brevity of her replies. With the same resolve to keep up a show of conversation he said, about seven o'clock in the evening, "There's an eclipse of the moon tonight. I am going out to see it." And, putting on his overcoat, he left her.

The low moon was not as yet visible from the front of the house, and Yeobright climbed out of the valley until he stood in the full flood of her light. But even now he walked on, and his steps were in the direction of Rainbarrow.

In half an hour he stood at the top. The sky was clear from verge to verge, and the moon flung her rays over the whole heath, but without sensibly lighting it, except where paths and water-courses had laid bare the white flints and glistening quartz sand, which made streaks upon the general shade. After standing awhile he stooped and felt the heather. It was dry, and he flung himself down upon the barrow, his face towards the moon, which depicted a small image of herself in each of his eyes.

He had often come up here without stating his purpose to his mother; but this was the first time that he had been ostensibly frank as to his purpose while really concealing it. It was a moral situation which, three months earlier, he could hardly have credited of himself. In returning to labour in this sequestered spot he had anticipated an escape from the chafing of social necessities; yet behold they were here also. More than ever he longed to be in some world where personal ambition was not the only recognized form of progress — such, perhaps, as might have been the case at some time or other in the silvery globe then shining upon him. His eye travelled over the length and breadth of that distant country — over the Bay of Rainbows, the sombre Sea of Crises, the Ocean of Storms, the Lake of Dreams, the vast Walled Plains, and the wondrous Ring Mountains — till he almost felt himself to be voyaging bodily through its wild scenes, standing on its hollow hills, traversing its deserts, descending its vales and old sea bottoms, or mounting to the edges of its craters.

While he watched the far-removed landscape a tawny stain grew into being on the lower verge — the eclipse had begun. This marked a preconcerted moment — for the remote celestial phenomenon had been pressed into sublunary service as a lover's signal. Yeobright's mind flew back to earth at the sight; he arose, shook himself and

listened. Minute after minute passed by, perhaps ten minutes passed, and the shadow on the moon perceptibly widened. He heard a rustling on his left hand, a cloaked figure with an upturned face appeared at the base of the Barrow, and Clym descended. In a moment the figure was in his arms, and his lips upon hers.

“My Eustacia!”

“Clym, dearest!”

Such a situation had less than three months brought forth.

They remained long without a single utterance, for no language could reach the level of their condition — words were as the rusty implements of a by-gone barbarous epoch, and only to be occasionally tolerated.

“I began to wonder why you did not come,” said Yeobright, when she had withdrawn a little from his embrace.

“You said ten minutes after the first mark of shade on the edge of the moon, and that’s what it is now.”

“Well, let us only think that here we are.”

Then, holding each other’s hand, they were again silent, and the shadow on the moon’s disc grew a little larger.

“Has it seemed long since you last saw me?” she asked.

“It has seemed sad.”

“And not long? That’s because you occupy yourself, and so blind yourself to my absence. To me, who can do nothing, it has been like living under stagnant water.”

“I would rather bear tediousness, dear, than have time made short by such means as have shortened mine.”

“In what way is that? You have been thinking you wished you did not love me.”

“How can a man wish that, and yet love on? No, Eustacia.”

“Men can, women cannot.”

“Well, whatever I may have thought, one thing is certain — I do love you — past all compass and description. I love you to oppressiveness — I, who have never before felt more than a pleasant passing fancy for any woman I have ever seen. Let me look right into your moonlit face and dwell on every line and curve in it! Only a few hairbreadths make the difference between this face and faces I have seen many times before I knew you; yet what a difference — the difference between everything and nothing at all. One touch on that mouth again! there, and there, and there. Your eyes seem heavy, Eustacia.”

“No, it is my general way of looking. I think it arises from my feeling sometimes an agonizing pity for myself that I ever was born.”

“You don’t feel it now?”

“No. Yet I know that we shall not love like this always. Nothing can ensure the continuance of love. It will evaporate like a spirit, and so I feel full of fears.”

“You need not.”

“Ah, you don’t know. You have seen more than I, and have been into cities and among people that I have only heard of, and have lived more years than I; but yet I am older at this than you. I loved another man once, and now I love you.”

“In God’s mercy don’t talk so, Eustacia!”

“But I do not think I shall be the one who wearies first. It will, I fear, end in this way: your mother will find out that you meet me, and she will influence you against me!”

“That can never be. She knows of these meetings already.”

“And she speaks against me?”

“I will not say.”

“There, go away! Obey her. I shall ruin you. It is foolish of you to meet me like this. Kiss me, and go away forever. Forever — do you hear? — forever!”

“Not I.”

“It is your only chance. Many a man’s love has been a curse to him.”

“You are desperate, full of fancies, and wilful; and you misunderstand. I have an additional reason for seeing you tonight besides love of you. For though, unlike you, I feel our affection may be eternal. I feel with you in this, that our present mode of existence cannot last.”

“Oh! ‘tis your mother. Yes, that’s it! I knew it.”

“Never mind what it is. Believe this, I cannot let myself lose you. I must have you always with me. This very evening I do not like to let you go. There is only one cure for this anxiety, dearest — you must be my wife.”

She started — then endeavoured to say calmly, “Cynics say that cures the anxiety by curing the love.”

“But you must answer me. Shall I claim you some day — I don’t mean at once?”

“I must think,” Eustacia murmured. “At present speak of Paris to me. Is there any place like it on earth?”

“It is very beautiful. But will you be mine?”

“I will be nobody else’s in the world — does that satisfy you?”

“Yes, for the present.”

“Now tell me of the Tuileries, and the Louvre,” she continued evasively.

“I hate talking of Paris! Well, I remember one sunny room in the Louvre which would make a fitting place for you to live in — the Galerie d’Apollon. Its windows are mainly east; and in the early morning, when the sun is bright, the whole apartment is in a perfect blaze of splendour. The rays bristle and dart from the encrustations of gilding to the magnificent inlaid coffers, from the coffers to the gold and silver plate, from the plate to the jewels and precious stones, from these to the enamels, till there is a perfect network of light which quite dazzles the eye. But now, about our marriage — — ”

“And Versailles — the King’s Gallery is some such gorgeous room, is it not?”

“Yes. But what’s the use of talking of gorgeous rooms? By the way, the Little Trianon would suit us beautifully to live in, and you might walk in the gardens in the moonlight and think you were in some English shrubbery; It is laid out in English fashion.”

“I should hate to think that!”

“Then you could keep to the lawn in front of the Grand Palace. All about there you would doubtless feel in a world of historical romance.”

He went on, since it was all new to her, and described Fontainebleau, St. Cloud, the Bois, and many other familiar haunts of the Parisians; till she said —

“When used you to go to these places?”

“On Sundays.”

“Ah, yes. I dislike English Sundays. How I should chime in with their manners over there! Dear Clym, you’ll go back again?”

Clym shook his head, and looked at the eclipse.

“If you’ll go back again I’ll — be something,” she said tenderly, putting her head near his breast. “If you’ll agree I’ll give my promise, without making you wait a minute longer.”

“How extraordinary that you and my mother should be of one mind about this!” said Yeobright. “I have vowed not to go back, Eustacia. It is not the place I dislike; it is the occupation.”

“But you can go in some other capacity.”

“No. Besides, it would interfere with my scheme. Don’t press that, Eustacia. Will you marry me?”

“I cannot tell.”

“Now — never mind Paris; it is no better than other spots. Promise, sweet!”

“You will never adhere to your education plan, I am quite sure; and then it will be all right for me; and so I promise to be yours for ever and ever.”

Clym brought her face towards his by a gentle pressure of the hand, and kissed her.

“Ah! but you don’t know what you have got in me,” she said. “Sometimes I think there is not that in Eustacia Vye which will make a good homespun wife. Well, let it go — see how our time is slipping, slipping, slipping!” She pointed towards the half-eclipsed moon.

“You are too mournful.”

“No. Only I dread to think of anything beyond the present. What is, we know. We are together now, and it is unknown how long we shall be so; the unknown always fills my mind with terrible possibilities, even when I may reasonably expect it to be cheerful...Clym, the eclipsed moonlight shines upon your face with a strange foreign colour, and shows its shape as if it were cut out in gold. That means that you should be doing better things than this.”

“You are ambitious, Eustacia — no, not exactly ambitious, luxurious. I ought to be of the same vein, to make you happy, I suppose. And yet, far from that, I could live and die in a hermitage here, with proper work to do.”

There was that in his tone which implied distrust of his position as a solicitous lover, a doubt if he were acting fairly towards one whose tastes touched his own only at rare and infrequent points. She saw his meaning, and whispered, in a low, full accent of eager assurance "Don't mistake me, Clym — though I should like Paris, I love you for yourself alone. To be your wife and live in Paris would be heaven to me; but I would rather live with you in a hermitage here than not be yours at all. It is gain to me either way, and very great gain. There's my too candid confession."

"Spoken like a woman. And now I must soon leave you. I'll walk with you towards your house."

"But must you go home yet?" she asked. "Yes, the sand has nearly slipped away, I see, and the eclipse is creeping on more and more. Don't go yet! Stop till the hour has run itself out; then I will not press you any more. You will go home and sleep well; I keep sighing in my sleep! Do you ever dream of me?"

"I cannot recollect a clear dream of you."

"I see your face in every scene of my dreams, and hear your voice in every sound. I wish I did not. It is too much what I feel. They say such love never lasts. But it must! And yet once, I remember, I saw an officer of the Hussars ride down the street at Budmouth, and though he was a total stranger and never spoke to me, I loved him till I thought I should really die of love — but I didn't die, and at last I left off caring for him. How terrible it would be if a time should come when I could not love you, my Clym!"

"Please don't say such reckless things. When we see such a time at hand we will say, 'I have outlived my faith and purpose,' and die. There, the hour has expired — now let us walk on."

Hand in hand they went along the path towards Mistover. When they were near the house he said, "It is too late for me to see your grandfather tonight. Do you think he will object to it?"

"I will speak to him. I am so accustomed to be my own mistress that it did not occur to me that we should have to ask him."

Then they lingeringly separated, and Clym descended towards Blooms-End.

And as he walked further and further from the charmed atmosphere of his Olympian girl his face grew sad with a new sort of sadness. A perception of the dilemma in which his love had placed him came back in full force. In spite of Eustacia's apparent willingness to wait through the period of an unpromising engagement, till he should be established in his new pursuit, he could not but perceive at moments that she loved him rather as a visitant from a gay world to which she rightly belonged than as a man with a purpose opposed to that recent past of his which so interested her. It meant that, though she made no conditions as to his return to the French capital, this was what she secretly longed for in the event of marriage; and it robbed him of many an otherwise pleasant hour. Along with that came the widening breach between himself and his mother. Whenever any little occurrence had brought into more prominence than usual the disappointment that he was causing her it had sent him on lone and

moody walks; or he was kept awake a great part of the night by the turmoil of spirit which such a recognition created. If Mrs. Yeobright could only have been led to see what a sound and worthy purpose this purpose of his was and how little it was being affected by his devotions to Eustacia, how differently would she regard him!

Thus as his sight grew accustomed to the first blinding halo kindled about him by love and beauty, Yeobright began to perceive what a strait he was in. Sometimes he wished that he had never known Eustacia, immediately to retract the wish as brutal. Three antagonistic growths had to be kept alive: his mother's trust in him, his plan for becoming a teacher, and Eustacia's happiness. His fervid nature could not afford to relinquish one of these, though two of the three were as many as he could hope to preserve. Though his love was as chaste as that of Petrarch for his Laura, it had made fetters of what previously was only a difficulty. A position which was not too simple when he stood whole-hearted had become indescribably complicated by the addition of Eustacia. Just when his mother was beginning to tolerate one scheme he had introduced another still bitterer than the first, and the combination was more than she could bear.

CHAPTER 5

Sharp Words Are Spoken, and a Crisis Ensues

When Yeobright was not with Eustacia he was sitting slavishly over his books; when he was not reading he was meeting her. These meetings were carried on with the greatest secrecy.

One afternoon his mother came home from a morning visit to Thomasin. He could see from a disturbance in the lines of her face that something had happened.

"I have been told an incomprehensible thing," she said mournfully. "The captain has let out at the Woman that you and Eustacia Vye are engaged to be married."

"We are," said Yeobright. "But it may not be yet for a very long time."

"I should hardly think it **WOULD** be yet for a very long time! You will take her to Paris, I suppose?" She spoke with weary hopelessness.

"I am not going back to Paris."

"What will you do with a wife, then?"

"Keep a school in Budmouth, as I have told you."

"That's incredible! The place is overrun with schoolmasters. You have no special qualifications. What possible chance is there for such as you?"

"There is no chance of getting rich. But with my system of education, which is as new as it is true, I shall do a great deal of good to my fellow-creatures."

"Dreams, dreams! If there had been any system left to be invented they would have found it out at the universities long before this time."

"Never, Mother. They cannot find it out, because their teachers don't come in contact with the class which demands such a system — that is, those who have had no

preliminary training. My plan is one for instilling high knowledge into empty minds without first cramming them with what has to be uncrammed again before true study begins.”

“I might have believed you if you had kept yourself free from entanglements; but this woman — if she had been a good girl it would have been bad enough; but being — — ”

“She is a good girl.”

“So you think. A Corfu bandmaster’s daughter! What has her life been? Her surname even is not her true one.”

“She is Captain Vye’s granddaughter, and her father merely took her mother’s name. And she is a lady by instinct.”

“They call him ‘captain,’ but anybody is captain.”

“He was in the Royal Navy!”

“No doubt he has been to sea in some tub or other. Why doesn’t he look after her? No lady would rove about the heath at all hours of the day and night as she does. But that’s not all of it. There was something queer between her and Thomasin’s husband at one time — I am as sure of it as that I stand here.”

“Eustacia has told me. He did pay her a little attention a year ago; but there’s no harm in that. I like her all the better.”

“Clym,” said his mother with firmness, “I have no proofs against her, unfortunately. But if she makes you a good wife, there has never been a bad one.”

“Believe me, you are almost exasperating,” said Yeobright vehemently. “And this very day I had intended to arrange a meeting between you. But you give me no peace; you try to thwart my wishes in everything.”

“I hate the thought of any son of mine marrying badly! I wish I had never lived to see this; it is too much for me — it is more than I dreamt!” She turned to the window. Her breath was coming quickly, and her lips were pale, parted, and trembling.

“Mother,” said Clym, “whatever you do, you will always be dear to me — that you know. But one thing I have a right to say, which is, that at my age I am old enough to know what is best for me.”

Mrs. Yeobright remained for some time silent and shaken, as if she could say no more. Then she replied, “Best? Is it best for you to injure your prospects for such a voluptuous, idle woman as that? Don’t you see that by the very fact of your choosing her you prove that you do not know what is best for you? You give up your whole thought — you set your whole soul — to please a woman.”

“I do. And that woman is you.”

“How can you treat me so flippantly!” said his mother, turning again to him with a tearful look. “You are unnatural, Clym, and I did not expect it.”

“Very likely,” said he cheerlessly. “You did not know the measure you were going to mete me, and therefore did not know the measure that would be returned to you again.”

“You answer me; you think only of her. You stick to her in all things.”

“That proves her to be worthy. I have never yet supported what is bad. And I do not care only for her. I care for you and for myself, and for anything that is good. When a woman once dislikes another she is merciless!”

“O Clym! please don’t go setting down as my fault what is your obstinate wrong-headedness. If you wished to connect yourself with an unworthy person why did you come home here to do it? Why didn’t you do it in Paris? — it is more the fashion there. You have come only to distress me, a lonely woman, and shorten my days! I wish that you would bestow your presence where you bestow your love!”

Clym said huskily, “You are my mother. I will say no more — beyond this, that I beg your pardon for having thought this my home. I will no longer inflict myself upon you; I’ll go.” And he went out with tears in his eyes.

It was a sunny afternoon at the beginning of summer, and the moist hollows of the heath had passed from their brown to their green stage. Yeobright walked to the edge of the basin which extended down from Mistover and Rainbarrow.

By this time he was calm, and he looked over the landscape. In the minor valleys, between the hillocks which diversified the contour of the vale, the fresh young ferns were luxuriantly growing up, ultimately to reach a height of five or six feet. He descended a little way, flung himself down in a spot where a path emerged from one of the small hollows, and waited. Hither it was that he had promised Eustacia to bring his mother this afternoon, that they might meet and be friends. His attempt had utterly failed.

He was in a nest of vivid green. The ferny vegetation round him, though so abundant, was quite uniform — it was a grove of machine-made foliage, a world of green triangles with saw-edges, and not a single flower. The air was warm with a vaporous warmth, and the stillness was unbroken. Lizards, grasshoppers, and ants were the only living things to be beheld. The scene seemed to belong to the ancient world of the carboniferous period, when the forms of plants were few, and of the fern kind; when there was neither bud nor blossom, nothing but a monotonous extent of leafage, amid which no bird sang.

When he had reclined for some considerable time, gloomily pondering, he discerned above the ferns a drawn bonnet of white silk approaching from the left, and Yeobright knew directly that it covered the head of her he loved. His heart awoke from its apathy to a warm excitement, and, jumping to his feet, he said aloud, “I knew she was sure to come.”

She vanished in a hollow for a few moments, and then her whole form unfolded itself from the brake.

“Only you here?” she exclaimed, with a disappointed air, whose hollowness was proved by her rising redness and her half-guilty low laugh. “Where is Mrs. Yeobright?”

“She has not come,” he replied in a subdued tone.

“I wish I had known that you would be here alone,” she said seriously, “and that we were going to have such an idle, pleasant time as this. Pleasure not known beforehand is half wasted; to anticipate it is to double it. I have not thought once today of having you all to myself this afternoon, and the actual moment of a thing is so soon gone.”

“It is indeed.”

“Poor Clym!” she continued, looking tenderly into his face. “You are sad. Something has happened at your home. Never mind what is — let us only look at what seems.”

“But, darling, what shall we do?” said he.

“Still go on as we do now — just live on from meeting to meeting, never minding about another day. You, I know, are always thinking of that — I can see you are. But you must not — will you, dear Clym?”

“You are just like all women. They are ever content to build their lives on any incidental position that offers itself; whilst men would fain make a globe to suit them. Listen to this, Eustacia. There is a subject I have determined to put off no longer. Your sentiment on the wisdom of *Carpe diem* does not impress me today. Our present mode of life must shortly be brought to an end.”

“It is your mother!”

“It is. I love you none the less in telling you; it is only right you should know.”

“I have feared my bliss,” she said, with the merest motion of her lips. “It has been too intense and consuming.”

“There is hope yet. There are forty years of work in me yet, and why should you despair? I am only at an awkward turning. I wish people wouldn’t be so ready to think that there is no progress without uniformity.”

“Ah — your mind runs off to the philosophical side of it. Well, these sad and hopeless obstacles are welcome in one sense, for they enable us to look with indifference upon the cruel satires that Fate loves to indulge in. I have heard of people, who, upon coming suddenly into happiness, have died from anxiety lest they should not live to enjoy it. I felt myself in that whimsical state of uneasiness lately; but I shall be spared it now. Let us walk on.”

Clym took the hand which was already bared for him — it was a favourite way with them to walk bare hand in bare hand — and led her through the ferns. They formed a very comely picture of love at full flush, as they walked along the valley that late afternoon, the sun sloping down on their right, and throwing their thin spectral shadows, tall as poplar trees, far out across the furze and fern. Eustacia went with her head thrown back fancifully, a certain glad and voluptuous air of triumph pervading her eyes at having won by her own unaided self a man who was her perfect complement in attainment, appearance, and age. On the young man’s part, the paleness of face which he had brought with him from Paris, and the incipient marks of time and thought, were less perceptible than when he returned, the healthful and energetic sturdiness which was his by nature having partially recovered its original proportions. They wandered onward till they reached the nether margin of the heath, where it became marshy and merged in moorland.

“I must part from you here, Clym,” said Eustacia.

They stood still and prepared to bid each other farewell. Everything before them was on a perfect level. The sun, resting on the horizon line, streamed across the ground from between copper-coloured and lilac clouds, stretched out in flats beneath a sky of pale soft green. All dark objects on the earth that lay towards the sun were overspread

by a purple haze, against which groups of wailing gnats shone out, rising upwards and dancing about like sparks of fire.

“O! this leaving you is too hard to bear!” exclaimed Eustacia in a sudden whisper of anguish. “Your mother will influence you too much; I shall not be judged fairly, it will get afloat that I am not a good girl, and the witch story will be added to make me blacker!”

“They cannot. Nobody dares to speak disrespectfully of you or of me.”

“Oh how I wish I was sure of never losing you — that you could not be able to desert me anyhow!”

Clym stood silent a moment. His feelings were high, the moment was passionate, and he cut the knot.

“You shall be sure of me, darling,” he said, folding her in his arms. “We will be married at once.”

“O Clym!”

“Do you agree to it?”

“If — if we can.”

“We certainly can, both being of full age. And I have not followed my occupation all these years without having accumulated money; and if you will agree to live in a tiny cottage somewhere on the heath, until I take a house in Budmouth for the school, we can do it at a very little expense.”

“How long shall we have to live in the tiny cottage, Clym?”

“About six months. At the end of that time I shall have finished my reading — yes, we will do it, and this heart-aching will be over. We shall, of course, live in absolute seclusion, and our married life will only begin to outward view when we take the house in Budmouth, where I have already addressed a letter on the matter. Would your grandfather allow you?”

“I think he would — on the understanding that it should not last longer than six months.”

“I will guarantee that, if no misfortune happens.”

“If no misfortune happens,” she repeated slowly.

“Which is not likely. Dearest, fix the exact day.”

And then they consulted on the question, and the day was chosen. It was to be a fortnight from that time.

This was the end of their talk, and Eustacia left him. Clym watched her as she retired towards the sun. The luminous rays wrapped her up with her increasing distance, and the rustle of her dress over the sprouting sedge and grass died away. As he watched, the dead flat of the scenery overpowered him, though he was fully alive to the beauty of that untarnished early summer green which was worn for the nonce by the poorest blade. There was something in its oppressive horizontality which too much reminded him of the arena of life; it gave him a sense of bare equality with, and no superiority to, a single living thing under the sun.

Eustacia was now no longer the goddess but the woman to him, a being to fight for, support, help, be maligned for. Now that he had reached a cooler moment he would have preferred a less hasty marriage; but the card was laid, and he determined to abide by the game. Whether Eustacia was to add one other to the list of those who love too hotly to love long and well, the forthcoming event was certainly a ready way of proving.

CHAPTER 6

Yeobright Goes, and the Breach Is Complete

All that evening smart sounds denoting an active packing up came from Yeobright's room to the ears of his mother downstairs.

Next morning he departed from the house and again proceeded across the heath. A long day's march was before him, his object being to secure a dwelling to which he might take Eustacia when she became his wife. Such a house, small, secluded, and with its windows boarded up, he had casually observed a month earlier, about two miles beyond the village of East Egdon, and six miles distant altogether; and thither he directed his steps today.

The weather was far different from that of the evening before. The yellow and vapoury sunset which had wrapped up Eustacia from his parting gaze had presaged change. It was one of those not infrequent days of an English June which are as wet and boisterous as November. The cold clouds hastened on in a body, as if painted on a moving slide. Vapours from other continents arrived upon the wind, which curled and parted round him as he walked on.

At length Clym reached the margin of a fir and beech plantation that had been enclosed from heath land in the year of his birth. Here the trees, laden heavily with their new and humid leaves, were now suffering more damage than during the highest winds of winter, when the boughs are especially disencumbered to do battle with the storm. The wet young beeches were undergoing amputations, bruises, crippling, and harsh lacerations, from which the wasting sap would bleed for many a day to come, and which would leave scars visible till the day of their burning. Each stem was wrenched at the root, where it moved like a bone in its socket, and at every onset of the gale convulsive sounds came from the branches, as if pain were felt. In a neighbouring brake a finch was trying to sing; but the wind blew under his feathers till they stood on end, twisted round his little tail, and made him give up his song.

Yet a few yards to Yeobright's left, on the open heath, how ineffectively gnashed the storm! Those gusts which tore the trees merely waved the furze and heather in a light caress. Egdon was made for such times as these.

Yeobright reached the empty house about midday. It was almost as lonely as that of Eustacia's grandfather, but the fact that it stood near a heath was disguised by a belt of firs which almost enclosed the premises. He journeyed on about a mile further to the

village in which the owner lived, and, returning with him to the house, arrangements were completed, and the man undertook that one room at least should be ready for occupation the next day. Clym's intention was to live there alone until Eustacia should join him on their wedding-day.

Then he turned to pursue his way homeward through the drizzle that had so greatly transformed the scene. The ferns, among which he had lain in comfort yesterday, were dripping moisture from every frond, wetting his legs through as he brushed past; and the fur of the rabbits leaping before him was clotted into dark locks by the same watery surrounding.

He reached home damp and weary enough after his ten-mile walk. It had hardly been a propitious beginning, but he had chosen his course, and would show no swerving. The evening and the following morning were spent in concluding arrangements for his departure. To stay at home a minute longer than necessary after having once come to his determination would be, he felt, only to give new pain to his mother by some word, look, or deed.

He had hired a conveyance and sent off his goods by two o'clock that day. The next step was to get some furniture, which, after serving for temporary use in the cottage, would be available for the house at Budmouth when increased by goods of a better description. A mart extensive enough for the purpose existed at Anglebury, some miles beyond the spot chosen for his residence, and there he resolved to pass the coming night.

It now only remained to wish his mother good-bye. She was sitting by the window as usual when he came downstairs.

"Mother, I am going to leave you," he said, holding out his hand.

"I thought you were, by your packing," replied Mrs. Yeobright in a voice from which every particle of emotion was painfully excluded.

"And you will part friends with me?"

"Certainly, Clym."

"I am going to be married on the twenty-fifth."

"I thought you were going to be married."

"And then — and then you must come and see us. You will understand me better after that, and our situation will not be so wretched as it is now."

"I do not think it likely I shall come to see you."

"Then it will not be my fault or Eustacia's, Mother. Good-bye!"

He kissed her cheek, and departed in great misery, which was several hours in lessening itself to a controllable level. The position had been such that nothing more could be said without, in the first place, breaking down a barrier; and that was not to be done.

No sooner had Yeobright gone from his mother's house than her face changed its rigid aspect for one of blank despair. After a while she wept, and her tears brought some relief. During the rest of the day she did nothing but walk up and down the garden path in a state bordering on stupefaction. Night came, and with it but little

rest. The next day, with an instinct to do something which should reduce prostration to mournfulness, she went to her son's room, and with her own hands arranged it in order, for an imaginary time when he should return again. She gave some attention to her flowers, but it was perfunctorily bestowed, for they no longer charmed her.

It was a great relief when, early in the afternoon, Thomasin paid her an unexpected visit. This was not the first meeting between the relatives since Thomasin's marriage; and past blunders having been in a rough way rectified, they could always greet each other with pleasure and ease.

The oblique band of sunlight which followed her through the door became the young wife well. It illuminated her as her presence illuminated the heath. In her movements, in her gaze, she reminded the beholder of the feathered creatures who lived around her home. All similes and allegories concerning her began and ended with birds. There was as much variety in her motions as in their flight. When she was musing she was a kestrel, which hangs in the air by an invisible motion of its wings. When she was in a high wind her light body was blown against trees and banks like a heron's. When she was frightened she darted noiselessly like a kingfisher. When she was serene she skimmed like a swallow, and that is how she was moving now.

"You are looking very blithe, upon my word, Tamsie," said Mrs. Yeobright, with a sad smile. "How is Damon?"

"He is very well."

"Is he kind to you, Thomasin?" And Mrs. Yeobright observed her narrowly.

"Pretty fairly."

"Is that honestly said?"

"Yes, Aunt. I would tell you if he were unkind." She added, blushing, and with hesitation, "He — I don't know if I ought to complain to you about this, but I am not quite sure what to do. I want some money, you know, Aunt — some to buy little things for myself — and he doesn't give me any. I don't like to ask him; and yet, perhaps, he doesn't give it me because he doesn't know. Ought I to mention it to him, Aunt?"

"Of course you ought. Have you never said a word on the matter?"

"You see, I had some of my own," said Thomasin evasively, "and I have not wanted any of his until lately. I did just say something about it last week; but he seems — not to remember."

"He must be made to remember. You are aware that I have a little box full of spade-guineas, which your uncle put into my hands to divide between yourself and Clym whenever I chose. Perhaps the time has come when it should be done. They can be turned into sovereigns at any moment."

"I think I should like to have my share — that is, if you don't mind."

"You shall, if necessary. But it is only proper that you should first tell your husband distinctly that you are without any, and see what he will do."

"Very well, I will...Aunt, I have heard about Clym. I know you are in trouble about him, and that's why I have come."

Mrs. Yeobright turned away, and her features worked in her attempt to conceal her feelings. Then she ceased to make any attempt, and said, weeping, "O Thomasin, do you think he hates me? How can he bear to grieve me so, when I have lived only for him through all these years?"

"Hate you — no," said Thomasin soothingly. "It is only that he loves her too well. Look at it quietly — do. It is not so very bad of him. Do you know, I thought it not the worst match he could have made. Miss Vye's family is a good one on her mother's side; and her father was a romantic wanderer — a sort of Greek Ulysses."

"It is no use, Thomasin; it is no use. Your intention is good; but I will not trouble you to argue. I have gone through the whole that can be said on either side times, and many times. Clym and I have not parted in anger; we have parted in a worse way. It is not a passionate quarrel that would have broken my heart; it is the steady opposition and persistence in going wrong that he has shown. O Thomasin, he was so good as a little boy — so tender and kind!"

"He was, I know."

"I did not think one whom I called mine would grow up to treat me like this. He spoke to me as if I opposed him to injure him. As though I could wish him ill!"

"There are worse women in the world than Eustacia Vye."

"There are too many better that's the agony of it. It was she, Thomasin, and she only, who led your husband to act as he did — I would swear it!"

"No," said Thomasin eagerly. "It was before he knew me that he thought of her, and it was nothing but a mere flirtation."

"Very well; we will let it be so. There is little use in unravelling that now. Sons must be blind if they will. Why is it that a woman can see from a distance what a man cannot see close? Clym must do as he will — he is nothing more to me. And this is maternity — to give one's best years and best love to ensure the fate of being despised!"

"You are too unyielding. Think how many mothers there are whose sons have brought them to public shame by real crimes before you feel so deeply a case like this."

"Thomasin, don't lecture me — I can't have it. It is the excess above what we expect that makes the force of the blow, and that may not be greater in their case than in mine — they may have foreseen the worst...I am wrongly made, Thomasin," she added, with a mournful smile. "Some widows can guard against the wounds their children give them by turning their hearts to another husband and beginning life again. But I always was a poor, weak, one-idea'd creature — I had not the compass of heart nor the enterprise for that. Just as forlorn and stupefied as I was when my husband's spirit flew away I have sat ever since — never attempting to mend matters at all. I was comparatively a young woman then, and I might have had another family by this time, and have been comforted by them for the failure of this one son."

"It is more noble in you that you did not."

"The more noble, the less wise."

“Forget it, and be soothed, dear Aunt. And I shall not leave you alone for long. I shall come and see you every day.”

And for one week Thomasin literally fulfilled her word. She endeavoured to make light of the wedding; and brought news of the preparations, and that she was invited to be present. The next week she was rather unwell, and did not appear. Nothing had as yet been done about the guineas, for Thomasin feared to address her husband again on the subject, and Mrs. Yeobright had insisted upon this.

One day just before this time Wildeve was standing at the door of the Quiet Woman. In addition to the upward path through the heath to Rainbarrow and Mistover, there was a road which branched from the highway a short distance below the inn, and ascended to Mistover by a circuitous and easy incline. This was the only route on that side for vehicles to the captain’s retreat. A light cart from the nearest town descended the road, and the lad who was driving pulled up in front of the inn for something to drink.

“You come from Mistover?” said Wildeve.

“Yes. They are taking in good things up there. Going to be a wedding.” And the driver buried his face in his mug.

Wildeve had not received an inkling of the fact before, and a sudden expression of pain overspread his face. He turned for a moment into the passage to hide it. Then he came back again.

“Do you mean Miss Vye?” he said. “How is it — that she can be married so soon?”

“By the will of God and a ready young man, I suppose.”

“You don’t mean Mr. Yeobright?”

“Yes. He has been creeping about with her all the spring.”

“I suppose — she was immensely taken with him?”

“She is crazy about him, so their general servant of all work tells me. And that lad Charley that looks after the horse is all in a daze about it. The stun-poll has got fond-like of her.”

“Is she lively — is she glad? Going to be married so soon — well!”

“It isn’t so very soon.”

“No; not so very soon.”

Wildeve went indoors to the empty room, a curious heartache within him. He rested his elbow upon the mantelpiece and his face upon his hand. When Thomasin entered the room he did not tell her of what he had heard. The old longing for Eustacia had reappeared in his soul — and it was mainly because he had discovered that it was another man’s intention to possess her.

To be yearning for the difficult, to be weary of that offered; to care for the remote, to dislike the near; it was Wildeve’s nature always. This is the true mark of the man of sentiment. Though Wildeve’s fevered feeling had not been elaborated to real poetical compass, it was of the standard sort. His might have been called the Rousseau of Egdon.

CHAPTER 7

The Morning and the Evening of a Day

The wedding morning came. Nobody would have imagined from appearances that Blooms-End had any interest in Mistover that day. A solemn stillness prevailed around the house of Clym's mother, and there was no more animation indoors. Mrs. Yeobright, who had declined to attend the ceremony, sat by the breakfast table in the old room which communicated immediately with the porch, her eyes listlessly directed towards the open door. It was the room in which, six months earlier, the merry Christmas party had met, to which Eustacia came secretly and as a stranger. The only living thing that entered now was a sparrow; and seeing no movements to cause alarm, he hopped boldly round the room, endeavoured to go out by the window, and fluttered among the pot-flowers. This roused the lonely sitter, who got up, released the bird, and went to the door. She was expecting Thomasin, who had written the night before to state that the time had come when she would wish to have the money and that she would if possible call this day.

Yet Thomasin occupied Mrs. Yeobright's thoughts but slightly as she looked up the valley of the heath, alive with butterflies, and with grasshoppers whose husky noises on every side formed a whispered chorus. A domestic drama, for which the preparations were now being made a mile or two off, was but little less vividly present to her eyes than if enacted before her. She tried to dismiss the vision, and walked about the garden plot; but her eyes ever and anon sought out the direction of the parish church to which Mistover belonged, and her excited fancy clove the hills which divided the building from her eyes. The morning wore away. Eleven o'clock struck — could it be that the wedding was then in progress? It must be so. She went on imagining the scene at the church, which he had by this time approached with his bride. She pictured the little group of children by the gate as the pony carriage drove up in which, as Thomasin had learnt, they were going to perform the short journey. Then she saw them enter and proceed to the chancel and kneel; and the service seemed to go on.

She covered her face with her hands. "O, it is a mistake!" she groaned. "And he will rue it some day, and think of me!"

While she remained thus, overcome by her forebodings, the old clock indoors whizzed forth twelve strokes. Soon after, faint sounds floated to her ear from afar over the hills. The breeze came from that quarter, and it had brought with it the notes of distant bells, gaily starting off in a peal: one, two, three, four, five. The ringers at East Egdon were announcing the nuptials of Eustacia and her son.

"Then it is over," she murmured. "Well, well! and life too will be over soon. And why should I go on scalding my face like this? Cry about one thing in life, cry about all; one thread runs through the whole piece. And yet we say, 'a time to laugh!'"

Towards evening Wildeve came. Since Thomasin's marriage Mrs. Yeobright had shown him that grim friendliness which at last arises in all such cases of undesired affinity. The vision of what ought to have been is thrown aside in sheer weariness, and

browbeaten human endeavour listlessly makes the best of the fact that is. Wildeve, to do him justice, had behaved very courteously to his wife's aunt; and it was with no surprise that she saw him enter now.

"Thomasin has not been able to come, as she promised to do," he replied to her inquiry, which had been anxious, for she knew that her niece was badly in want of money.

"The captain came down last night and personally pressed her to join them today. So, not to be unpleasant, she determined to go. They fetched her in the pony-chaise, and are going to bring her back."

"Then it is done," said Mrs. Yeobright. "Have they gone to their new home?"

"I don't know. I have had no news from Mistover since Thomasin left to go."

"You did not go with her?" said she, as if there might be good reasons why.

"I could not," said Wildeve, reddening slightly. "We could not both leave the house; it was rather a busy morning, on account of Anglebury Great Market. I believe you have something to give to Thomasin? If you like, I will take it."

Mrs. Yeobright hesitated, and wondered if Wildeve knew what the something was. "Did she tell you of this?" she inquired.

"Not particularly. She casually dropped a remark about having arranged to fetch some article or other."

"It is hardly necessary to send it. She can have it whenever she chooses to come."

"That won't be yet. In the present state of her health she must not go on walking so much as she has done." He added, with a faint twang of sarcasm, "What wonderful thing is it that I cannot be trusted to take?"

"Nothing worth troubling you with."

"One would think you doubted my honesty," he said, with a laugh, though his colour rose in a quick resentfulness frequent with him.

"You need think no such thing," said she drily. "It is simply that I, in common with the rest of the world, feel that there are certain things which had better be done by certain people than by others."

"As you like, as you like," said Wildeve laconically. "It is not worth arguing about. Well, I think I must turn homeward again, as the inn must not be left long in charge of the lad and the maid only."

He went his way, his farewell being scarcely so courteous as his greeting. But Mrs. Yeobright knew him thoroughly by this time, and took little notice of his manner, good or bad.

When Wildeve was gone Mrs. Yeobright stood and considered what would be the best course to adopt with regard to the guineas, which she had not liked to entrust to Wildeve. It was hardly credible that Thomasin had told him to ask for them, when the necessity for them had arisen from the difficulty of obtaining money at his hands. At the same time Thomasin really wanted them, and might be unable to come to Blooms-End for another week at least. To take or send the money to her at the inn would be impolite, since Wildeve would pretty surely be present, or would discover the

transaction; and if, as her aunt suspected, he treated her less kindly than she deserved to be treated, he might then get the whole sum out of her gentle hands. But on this particular evening Thomasin was at Mistover, and anything might be conveyed to her there without the knowledge of her husband. Upon the whole the opportunity was worth taking advantage of.

Her son, too, was there, and was now married. There could be no more proper moment to render him his share of the money than the present. And the chance that would be afforded her, by sending him this gift, of showing how far she was from bearing him ill-will, cheered the sad mother's heart.

She went upstairs and took from a locked drawer a little box, out of which she poured a hoard of broad unworn guineas that had lain there many a year. There were a hundred in all, and she divided them into two heaps, fifty in each. Tying up these in small canvas bags, she went down to the garden and called to Christian Cattle, who was loitering about in hope of a supper which was not really owed him. Mrs. Yeobright gave him the moneybags, charged him to go to Mistover, and on no account to deliver them into any one's hands save her son's and Thomasin's. On further thought she deemed it advisable to tell Christian precisely what the two bags contained, that he might be fully impressed with their importance. Christian pocketed the moneybags, promised the greatest carefulness, and set out on his way.

"You need not hurry," said Mrs. Yeobright. "It will be better not to get there till after dusk, and then nobody will notice you. Come back here to supper, if it is not too late."

It was nearly nine o'clock when he began to ascend the vale towards Mistover; but the long days of summer being at their climax, the first obscurity of evening had only just begun to tan the landscape. At this point of his journey Christian heard voices, and found that they proceeded from a company of men and women who were traversing a hollow ahead of him, the tops only of their heads being visible.

He paused and thought of the money he carried. It was almost too early even for Christian seriously to fear robbery; nevertheless he took a precaution which ever since his boyhood he had adopted whenever he carried more than two or three shillings upon his person — a precaution somewhat like that of the owner of the Pitt Diamond when filled with similar misgivings. He took off his boots, untied the guineas, and emptied the contents of one little bag into the right boot, and of the other into the left, spreading them as flatly as possible over the bottom of each, which was really a spacious coffer by no means limited to the size of the foot. Pulling them on again and lacing them to the very top, he proceeded on his way, more easy in his head than under his soles.

His path converged towards that of the noisy company, and on coming nearer he found to his relief that they were several Egdon people whom he knew very well, while with them walked Fairway, of Blooms-End.

"What! Christian going too?" said Fairway as soon as he recognized the newcomer. "You've got no young woman nor wife to your name to gie a gown-piece to, I'm sure."

“What d’ye mean?” said Christian.

“Why, the raffle. The one we go to every year. Going to the raffle as well as ourselves?”

“Never knew a word o’t. Is it like cudgel playing or other sportful forms of bloodshed? I don’t want to go, thank you, Mister Fairway, and no offence.”

“Christian don’t know the fun o’t, and ‘twould be a fine sight for him,” said a buxom woman. “There’s no danger at all, Christian. Every man puts in a shilling apiece, and one wins a gown-piece for his wife or sweetheart if he’s got one.”

“Well, as that’s not my fortune there’s no meaning in it to me. But I should like to see the fun, if there’s nothing of the black art in it, and if a man may look on without cost or getting into any dangerous wrangle?”

“There will be no uproar at all,” said Timothy. “Sure, Christian, if you’d like to come we’ll see there’s no harm done.”

“And no ba’dy gaieties, I suppose? You see, neighbours, if so, it would be setting father a bad example, as he is so light moral’d. But a gown-piece for a shilling, and no black art — ’tis worth looking in to see, and it wouldn’t hinder me half an hour. Yes, I’ll come, if you’ll step a little way towards Mistover with me afterwards, supposing night should have closed in, and nobody else is going that way?”

One or two promised; and Christian, diverging from his direct path, turned round to the right with his companions towards the Quiet Woman.

When they entered the large common room of the inn they found assembled there about ten men from among the neighbouring population, and the group was increased by the new contingent to double that number. Most of them were sitting round the room in seats divided by wooden elbows like those of crude cathedral stalls, which were carved with the initials of many an illustrious drunkard of former times who had passed his days and his nights between them, and now lay as an alcoholic cinder in the nearest churchyard. Among the cups on the long table before the sitters lay an open parcel of light drapery — the gown-piece, as it was called — which was to be raffled for. Wildevé was standing with his back to the fireplace smoking a cigar; and the promoter of the raffle, a packman from a distant town, was expatiating upon the value of the fabric as material for a summer dress.

“Now, gentlemen,” he continued, as the newcomers drew up to the table, “there’s five have entered, and we want four more to make up the number. I think, by the faces of those gentlemen who have just come in, that they are shrewd enough to take advantage of this rare opportunity of beautifying their ladies at a very trifling expense.”

Fairway, Sam, and another placed their shillings on the table, and the man turned to Christian.

“No, sir,” said Christian, drawing back, with a quick gaze of misgiving. “I am only a poor chap come to look on, an it please ye, sir. I don’t so much as know how you do it. If so be I was sure of getting it I would put down the shilling; but I couldn’t otherwise.”

"I think you might almost be sure," said the pedlar. "In fact, now I look into your face, even if I can't say you are sure to win, I can say that I never saw anything look more like winning in my life."

"You'll anyhow have the same chance as the rest of us," said Sam.

"And the extra luck of being the last comer," said another.

"And I was born wi' a caul, and perhaps can be no more ruined than drowned?" Christian added, beginning to give way.

Ultimately Christian laid down his shilling, the raffle began, and the dice went round. When it came to Christian's turn he took the box with a trembling hand, shook it fearfully, and threw a pair-royal. Three of the others had thrown common low pairs, and all the rest mere points.

"The gentleman looked like winning, as I said," observed the chapman blandly. "Take it, sir; the article is yours."

"Haw-haw-haw!" said Fairway. "I'm damned if this isn't the quarest start that ever I knowed!"

"Mine?" asked Christian, with a vacant stare from his target eyes. "I — I haven't got neither maid, wife, nor widder belonging to me at all, and I'm afeard it will make me laughed at to ha'e it, Master Traveller. What with being curious to join in I never thought of that! What shall I do wi' a woman's clothes in MY bedroom, and not lose my decency!"

"Keep 'em, to be sure," said Fairway, "if it is only for luck. Perhaps 'twill tempt some woman that thy poor carcass had no power over when standing empty-handed."

"Keep it, certainly," said Wildeve, who had idly watched the scene from a distance.

The table was then cleared of the articles, and the men began to drink.

"Well, to be sure!" said Christian, half to himself. "To think I should have been born so lucky as this, and not have found it out until now! What curious creatures these dice be — powerful rulers of us all, and yet at my command! I am sure I never need be afeared of anything after this." He handled the dice fondly one by one. "Why, sir," he said in a confidential whisper to Wildeve, who was near his left hand, "if I could only use this power that's in me of multiplying money I might do some good to a near relation of yours, seeing what I've got about me of hers — eh?" He tapped one of his money-laden boots upon the floor.

"What do you mean?" said Wildeve.

"That's a secret. Well, I must be going now." He looked anxiously towards Fairway.

"Where are you going?" Wildeve asked.

"To Mistover Knap. I have to see Mrs. Thomasin there — that's all."

"I am going there, too, to fetch Mrs. Wildeve. We can walk together."

Wildeve became lost in thought, and a look of inward illumination came into his eyes. It was money for his wife that Mrs. Yeobright could not trust him with. "Yet she could trust this fellow," he said to himself. "Why doesn't that which belongs to the wife belong to the husband too?"

He called to the pot-boy to bring him his hat, and said, "Now, Christian, I am ready."

"Mr. Wildeve," said Christian timidly, as he turned to leave the room, "would you mind lending me them wonderful little things that carry my luck inside 'em, that I might practise a bit by myself, you know?" He looked wistfully at the dice and box lying on the mantelpiece.

"Certainly," said Wildeve carelessly. "They were only cut out by some lad with his knife, and are worth nothing." And Christian went back and privately pocketed them.

Wildeve opened the door and looked out. The night was warm and cloudy. "By Gad! 'tis dark," he continued. "But I suppose we shall find our way."

"If we should lose the path it might be awkward," said Christian. "A lantern is the only shield that will make it safe for us."

"Let's have a lantern by all means." The stable lantern was fetched and lighted. Christian took up his gownpiece, and the two set out to ascend the hill.

Within the room the men fell into chat till their attention was for a moment drawn to the chimney-corner. This was large, and, in addition to its proper recess, contained within its jambs, like many on Egdon, a receding seat, so that a person might sit there absolutely unobserved, provided there was no fire to light him up, as was the case now and throughout the summer. From the niche a single object protruded into the light from the candles on the table. It was a clay pipe, and its colour was reddish. The men had been attracted to this object by a voice behind the pipe asking for a light.

"Upon my life, it fairly startled me when the man spoke!" said Fairway, handing a candle. "Oh — 'tis the reddleman! You've kept a quiet tongue, young man."

"Yes, I had nothing to say," observed Venn. In a few minutes he arose and wished the company good night.

Meanwhile Wildeve and Christian had plunged into the heath.

It was a stagnant, warm, and misty night, full of all the heavy perfumes of new vegetation not yet dried by hot sun, and among these particularly the scent of the fern. The lantern, dangling from Christian's hand, brushed the feathery fronds in passing by, disturbing moths and other winged insects, which flew out and alighted upon its horny panes.

"So you have money to carry to Mrs. Wildeve?" said Christian's companion, after a silence. "Don't you think it very odd that it shouldn't be given to me?"

"As man and wife be one flesh, 'twould have been all the same, I should think," said Christian. "But my strict documents was, to give the money into Mrs. Wildeve's hand — and 'tis well to do things right."

"No doubt," said Wildeve. Any person who had known the circumstances might have perceived that Wildeve was mortified by the discovery that the matter in transit was money, and not, as he had supposed when at Blooms-End, some fancy nick-nack which only interested the two women themselves. Mrs. Yeobright's refusal implied that his honour was not considered to be of sufficiently good quality to make him a safer bearer of his wife's property.

"How very warm it is tonight, Christian!" he said, panting, when they were nearly under Rainbarrow. "Let us sit down for a few minutes, for Heaven's sake."

Wildeve flung himself down on the soft ferns; and Christian, placing the lantern and parcel on the ground, perched himself in a cramped position hard by, his knees almost touching his chin. He presently thrust one hand into his coat-pocket and began shaking it about.

"What are you rattling in there?" said Wildeve.

"Only the dice, sir," said Christian, quickly withdrawing his hand. "What magical machines these little things be, Mr. Wildeve! 'Tis a game I should never get tired of. Would you mind my taking 'em out and looking at 'em for a minute, to see how they are made? I didn't like to look close before the other men, for fear they should think it bad manners in me." Christian took them out and examined them in the hollow of his hand by the lantern light. "That these little things should carry such luck, and such charm, and such a spell, and such power in 'em, passes all I ever heard or zeed," he went on, with a fascinated gaze at the dice, which, as is frequently the case in country places, were made of wood, the points being burnt upon each face with the end of a wire.

"They are a great deal in a small compass, You think?"

"Yes. Do ye suppose they really be the devil's playthings, Mr. Wildeve? If so, 'tis no good sign that I be such a lucky man."

"You ought to win some money, now that you've got them. Any woman would marry you then. Now is your time, Christian, and I would recommend you not to let it slip. Some men are born to luck, some are not. I belong to the latter class."

"Did you ever know anybody who was born to it besides myself?"

"O yes. I once heard of an Italian, who sat down at a gaming table with only a louis, (that's a foreign sovereign), in his pocket. He played on for twenty-four hours, and won ten thousand pounds, stripping the bank he had played against. Then there was another man who had lost a thousand pounds, and went to the broker's next day to sell stock, that he might pay the debt. The man to whom he owed the money went with him in a hackney-coach; and to pass the time they tossed who should pay the fare. The ruined man won, and the other was tempted to continue the game, and they played all the way. When the coachman stopped he was told to drive home again: the whole thousand pounds had been won back by the man who was going to sell."

"Ha — ha — splendid!" exclaimed Christian. "Go on — go on!"

"Then there was a man of London, who was only a waiter at White's clubhouse. He began playing first half-crown stakes, and then higher and higher, till he became very rich, got an appointment in India, and rose to be Governor of Madras. His daughter married a member of Parliament, and the Bishop of Carlisle stood godfather to one of the children."

"Wonderfull wonderfull"

"And once there was a young man in America who gambled till he had lost his last dollar. He staked his watch and chain, and lost as before; staked his umbrella, lost

again; staked his hat, lost again; staked his coat and stood in his shirt-sleeves, lost again. Began taking off his breeches, and then a looker-on gave him a trifle for his pluck. With this he won. Won back his coat, won back his hat, won back his umbrella, his watch, his money, and went out of the door a rich man."

"Oh, 'tis too good — it takes away my breath! Mr. Wildeve, I think I will try another shilling with you, as I am one of that sort; no danger can come o't, and you can afford to lose."

"Very well," said Wildeve, rising. Searching about with the lantern, he found a large flat stone, which he placed between himself and Christian, and sat down again. The lantern was opened to give more light, and it's rays directed upon the stone. Christian put down a shilling, Wildeve another, and each threw. Christian won. They played for two, Christian won again.

"Let us try four," said Wildeve. They played for four. This time the stakes were won by Wildeve.

"Ah, those little accidents will, of course, sometimes happen, to the luckiest man," he observed.

"And now I have no more money!" explained Christian excitedly. "And yet, if I could go on, I should get it back again, and more. I wish this was mine." He struck his boot upon the ground, so that the guineas chinked within.

"What! you have not put Mrs. Wildeve's money there?"

"Yes. 'Tis for safety. Is it any harm to raffle with a married lady's money when, if I win, I shall only keep my winnings, and give her her own all the same; and if t'other man wins, her money will go to the lawful owner?"

"None at all."

Wildeve had been brooding ever since they started on the mean estimation in which he was held by his wife's friends; and it cut his heart severely. As the minutes passed he had gradually drifted into a revengeful intention without knowing the precise moment of forming it. This was to teach Mrs. Yeobright a lesson, as he considered it to be; in other words, to show her if he could that her niece's husband was the proper guardian of her niece's money.

"Well, here goes!" said Christian, beginning to unlace one boot. "I shall dream of it nights and nights, I suppose; but I shall always swear my flesh don't crawl when I think o't!"

He thrust his hand into the boot and withdrew one of poor Thomasin's precious guineas, piping hot. Wildeve had already placed a sovereign on the stone. The game was then resumed. Wildeve won first, and Christian ventured another, winning himself this time. The game fluctuated, but the average was in Wildeve's favour. Both men became so absorbed in the game that they took no heed of anything but the pigmy objects immediately beneath their eyes, the flat stone, the open lantern, the dice, and the few illuminated fern-leaves which lay under the light, were the whole world to them.

At length Christian lost rapidly; and presently, to his horror, the whole fifty guineas belonging to Thomasin had been handed over to his adversary.

“I don’t care — I don’t care!” he moaned, and desperately set about untying his left boot to get at the other fifty. “The devil will toss me into the flames on his three-pronged fork for this night’s work, I know! But perhaps I shall win yet, and then I’ll get a wife to sit up with me o’ nights and I won’t be afeard, I won’t! Here’s another for’ee, my man!” He slapped another guinea down upon the stone, and the dice-box was rattled again.

Time passed on. Wildeve began to be as excited as Christian himself. When commencing the game his intention had been nothing further than a bitter practical joke on Mrs. Yeobright. To win the money, fairly or otherwise, and to hand it contemptuously to Thomasin in her aunt’s presence, had been the dim outline of his purpose. But men are drawn from their intentions even in the course of carrying them out, and it was extremely doubtful, by the time the twentieth guinea had been reached, whether Wildeve was conscious of any other intention than that of winning for his own personal benefit. Moreover, he was now no longer gambling for his wife’s money, but for Yeobright’s; though of this fact Christian, in his apprehensiveness, did not inform him till afterwards.

It was nearly eleven o’clock, when, with almost a shriek, Christian placed Yeobright’s last gleaming guinea upon the stone. In thirty seconds it had gone the way of its companions.

Christian turned and flung himself on the ferns in a convulsion of remorse, “O, what shall I do with my wretched self?” he groaned. “What shall I do? Will any good Heaven hae mercy upon my wicked soul?”

“Do? Live on just the same.”

“I won’t live on just the same! I’ll die! I say you are a — a — — ”

“A man sharper than my neighbour.”

“Yes, a man sharper than my neighbour; a regular sharper!”

“Poor chips-in-porridge, you are very unmannerly.”

“I don’t know about that! And I say you be unmannerly! You’ve got money that isn’t your own. Half the guineas are poor Mr. Clym’s.”

“How’s that?”

“Because I had to gie fifty of ‘em to him. Mrs. Yeobright said so.”

“Oh?... Well, ‘twould have been more graceful of her to have given them to his wife Eustacia. But they are in my hands now.”

Christian pulled on his boots, and with heavy breathings, which could be heard to some distance, dragged his limbs together, arose, and tottered away out of sight. Wildeve set about shutting the lantern to return to the house, for he deemed it too late to go to Mistover to meet his wife, who was to be driven home in the captain’s four-wheel. While he was closing the little horn door a figure rose from behind a neighbouring bush and came forward into the lantern light. It was the reddleman approaching.

CHAPTER 8

A New Force Disturbs the Current

Wildeve stared. Venn looked coolly towards Wildeve, and, without a word being spoken, he deliberately sat himself down where Christian had been seated, thrust his hand into his pocket, drew out a sovereign, and laid it on the stone.

“You have been watching us from behind that bush?” said Wildeve.

The reddleman nodded. “Down with your stake,” he said. “Or haven’t you pluck enough to go on?”

Now, gambling is a species of amusement which is much more easily begun with full pockets than left off with the same; and though Wildeve in a cooler temper might have prudently declined this invitation, the excitement of his recent success carried him completely away. He placed one of the guineas on a slab beside the reddleman’s sovereign. “Mine is a guinea,” he said.

“A guinea that’s not your own,” said Venn sarcastically.

“It is my own,” answered Wildeve haughtily. “It is my wife’s, and what is hers is mine.”

“Very well; let’s make a beginning.” He shook the box, and threw eight, ten, and nine; the three casts amounted to twenty-seven.

This encouraged Wildeve. He took the box; and his three casts amounted to forty-five.

Down went another of the reddleman’s sovereigns against his first one which Wildeve laid. This time Wildeve threw fifty-one points, but no pair. The reddleman looked grim, threw a raffle of aces, and pocketed the stakes.

“Here you are again,” said Wildeve contemptuously. “Double the stakes.” He laid two of Thomasin’s guineas, and the reddleman his two pounds. Venn won again. New stakes were laid on the stone, and the gamblers proceeded as before.

Wildeve was a nervous and excitable man, and the game was beginning to tell upon his temper. He writhed, fumed, shifted his seat, and the beating of his heart was almost audible. Venn sat with lips impassively closed and eyes reduced to a pair of unimportant twinkles; he scarcely appeared to breathe. He might have been an Arab, or an automaton; he would have been like a red sandstone statue but for the motion of his arm with the dice-box.

The game fluctuated, now in favour of one, now in favour of the other, without any great advantage on the side of either. Nearly twenty minutes were passed thus. The light of the candle had by this time attracted heath-flies, moths, and other winged creatures of night, which floated round the lantern, flew into the flame, or beat about the faces of the two players.

But neither of the men paid much attention to these things, their eyes being concentrated upon the little flat stone, which to them was an arena vast and important as a battlefield. By this time a change had come over the game; the reddleman won

continually. At length sixty guineas — Thomasin's fifty, and ten of Clym's — had passed into his hands. Wildeve was reckless, frantic, exasperated.

“Won back his coat,” said Venn slyly.

Another throw, and the money went the same way.

“Won back his hat,” continued Venn.

“Oh, oh!” said Wildeve.

“Won back his watch, won back his money, and went out of the door a rich man,” added Venn sentence by sentence, as stake after stake passed over to him.

“Five more!” shouted Wildeve, dashing down the money. “And three casts be hanged — one shall decide.”

The red automaton opposite lapsed into silence, nodded, and followed his example. Wildeve rattled the box, and threw a pair of sixes and five points. He clapped his hands; “I have done it this time — hurrah!”

“There are two playing, and only one has thrown,” said the reddleman, quietly bringing down the box. The eyes of each were then so intently converged upon the stone that one could fancy their beams were visible, like rays in a fog.

Venn lifted the box, and behold a triplet of sixes was disclosed.

Wildeve was full of fury. While the reddleman was grasping the stakes Wildeve seized the dice and hurled them, box and all, into the darkness, uttering a fearful imprecation. Then he arose and began stamping up and down like a madman.

“It is all over, then?” said Venn.

“No, no!” cried Wildeve. “I mean to have another chance yet. I must!”

“But, my good man, what have you done with the dice?”

“I threw them away — it was a momentary irritation. What a fool I am! Here — come and help me to look for them — we must find them again.”

Wildeve snatched up the lantern and began anxiously prowling among the furze and fern.

“You are not likely to find them there,” said Venn, following. “What did you do such a crazy thing as that for? Here's the box. The dice can't be far off.”

Wildeve turned the light eagerly upon the spot where Venn had found the box, and mauled the herbage right and left. In the course of a few minutes one of the dice was found. They searched on for some time, but no other was to be seen.

“Never mind,” said Wildeve; “let's play with one.”

“Agreed,” said Venn.

Down they sat again, and recommenced with single guinea stakes; and the play went on smartly. But Fortune had unmistakably fallen in love with the reddleman tonight. He won steadily, till he was the owner of fourteen more of the gold pieces. Seventy-nine of the hundred guineas were his, Wildeve possessing only twenty-one. The aspect of the two opponents was now singular. Apart from motions, a complete diorama of the fluctuations of the game went on in their eyes. A diminutive candle-flame was mirrored in each pupil, and it would have been possible to distinguish therein between the moods of hope and the moods of abandonment, even as regards the reddleman, though his

facial muscles betrayed nothing at all. Wildeve played on with the recklessness of despair.

“What’s that?” he suddenly exclaimed, hearing a rustle; and they both looked up.

They were surrounded by dusky forms between four and five feet high, standing a few paces beyond the rays of the lantern. A moment’s inspection revealed that the encircling figures were heath-croppers, their heads being all towards the players, at whom they gazed intently.

“Hoosh!” said Wildeve, and the whole forty or fifty animals at once turned and galloped away. Play was again resumed.

Ten minutes passed away. Then a large death’s head moth advanced from the obscure outer air, wheeled twice round the lantern, flew straight at the candle, and extinguished it by the force of the blow. Wildeve had just thrown, but had not lifted the box to see what he had cast; and now it was impossible.

“What the infernal!” he shrieked. “Now, what shall we do? Perhaps I have thrown six — have you any matches?”

“None,” said Venn.

“Christian had some — I wonder where he is. Christian!”

But there was no reply to Wildeve’s shout, save a mournful whining from the herons which were nesting lower down the vale. Both men looked blankly round without rising. As their eyes grew accustomed to the darkness they perceived faint greenish points of light among the grass and fern. These lights dotted the hillside like stars of a low magnitude.

“Ah — glowworms,” said Wildeve. “Wait a minute. We can continue the game.”

Venn sat still, and his companion went hither and thither till he had gathered thirteen glowworms — as many as he could find in a space of four or five minutes — upon a fox-glove leaf which he pulled for the purpose. The reddleman vented a low humorous laugh when he saw his adversary return with these. “Determined to go on, then?” he said drily.

“I always am!” said Wildeve angrily. And shaking the glowworms from the leaf he ranged them with a trembling hand in a circle on the stone, leaving a space in the middle for the descent of the dice-box, over which the thirteen tiny lamps threw a pale phosphoric shine. The game was again renewed. It happened to be that season of the year at which glowworms put forth their greatest brilliancy, and the light they yielded was more than ample for the purpose, since it is possible on such nights to read the handwriting of a letter by the light of two or three.

The incongruity between the men’s deeds and their environment was great. Amid the soft juicy vegetation of the hollow in which they sat, the motionless and the uninhabited solitude, intruded the chink of guineas, the rattle of dice, the exclamations of the reckless players.

Wildeve had lifted the box as soon as the lights were obtained, and the solitary die proclaimed that the game was still against him.

“I won’t play any more — you’ve been tampering with the dice,” he shouted.

"How — when they were your own?" said the reddleman.

"We'll change the game: the lowest point shall win the stake — it may cut off my ill luck. Do you refuse?"

"No — go on," said Venn.

"O, there they are again — damn them!" cried Wildeve, looking up. The heath-croppers had returned noiselessly, and were looking on with erect heads just as before, their timid eyes fixed upon the scene, as if they were wondering what mankind and candlelight could have to do in these haunts at this untoward hour.

"What a plague those creatures are — staring at me so!" he said, and flung a stone, which scattered them; when the game was continued as before.

Wildeve had now ten guineas left; and each laid five. Wildeve threw three points; Venn two, and raked in the coins. The other seized the die, and clenched his teeth upon it in sheer rage, as if he would bite it in pieces. "Never give in — here are my last five!" he cried, throwing them down.

"Hang the glowworms — they are going out. Why don't you burn, you little fools? Stir them up with a thorn."

He probed the glowworms with a bit of stick, and rolled them over, till the bright side of their tails was upwards.

"There's light enough. Throw on," said Venn.

Wildeve brought down the box within the shining circle and looked eagerly. He had thrown ace. "Well done! — I said it would turn, and it has turned." Venn said nothing; but his hand shook slightly.

He threw ace also.

"O!" said Wildeve. "Curse me!"

The die smacked the stone a second time. It was ace again. Venn looked gloomy, threw — the die was seen to be lying in two pieces, the cleft sides uppermost.

"I've thrown nothing at all," he said.

"Serves me right — I split the die with my teeth. Here — take your money. Blank is less than one."

"I don't wish it."

"Take it, I say — you've won it!" And Wildeve threw the stakes against the reddleman's chest. Venn gathered them up, arose, and withdrew from the hollow, Wildeve sitting stupefied.

When he had come to himself he also arose, and, with the extinguished lantern in his hand, went towards the highroad. On reaching it he stood still. The silence of night pervaded the whole heath except in one direction; and that was towards Mistorver. There he could hear the noise of light wheels, and presently saw two carriagelamps descending the hill. Wildeve screened himself under a bush and waited.

The vehicle came on and passed before him. It was a hired carriage, and behind the coachman were two persons whom he knew well. There sat Eustacia and Yeobright, the arm of the latter being round her waist. They turned the sharp corner at the bottom

towards the temporary home which Clym had hired and furnished, about five miles to the eastward.

Wildeve forgot the loss of the money at the sight of his lost love, whose preciousness in his eyes was increasing in geometrical progression with each new incident that reminded him of their hopeless division. Brimming with the subtilized misery that he was capable of feeling, he followed the opposite way towards the inn.

About the same moment that Wildeve stepped into the highway Venn also had reached it at a point a hundred yards further on; and he, hearing the same wheels, likewise waited till the carriage should come up. When he saw who sat therein he seemed to be disappointed. Reflecting a minute or two, during which interval the carriage rolled on, he crossed the road, and took a short cut through the furze and heath to a point where the turnpike road bent round in ascending a hill. He was now again in front of the carriage, which presently came up at a walking pace. Venn stepped forward and showed himself.

Eustacia started when the lamp shone upon him, and Clym's arm was involuntarily withdrawn from her waist. He said, "What, Diggory? You are having a lonely walk."

"Yes — I beg your pardon for stopping you," said Venn. "But I am waiting about for Mrs. Wildeve: I have something to give her from Mrs. Yeobright. Can you tell me if she's gone home from the party yet?"

"No. But she will be leaving soon. You may possibly meet her at the corner."

Venn made a farewell obeisance, and walked back to his former position, where the byroad from Mistover joined the highway. Here he remained fixed for nearly half an hour, and then another pair of lights came down the hill. It was the old-fashioned wheeled nondescript belonging to the captain, and Thomasin sat in it alone, driven by Charley.

The reddleman came up as they slowly turned the corner. "I beg pardon for stopping you, Mrs. Wildeve," he said. "But I have something to give you privately from Mrs. Yeobright." He handed a small parcel; it consisted of the hundred guineas he had just won, roughly twisted up in a piece of paper.

Thomasin recovered from her surprise, and took the packet. "That's all, ma'am — I wish you good night," he said, and vanished from her view.

Thus Venn, in his anxiety to rectify matters, had placed in Thomasin's hands not only the fifty guineas which rightly belonged to her, but also the fifty intended for her cousin Clym. His mistake had been based upon Wildeve's words at the opening of the game, when he indignantly denied that the guinea was not his own. It had not been comprehended by the reddleman that at halfway through the performance the game was continued with the money of another person; and it was an error which afterwards helped to cause more misfortune than treble the loss in money value could have done.

The night was now somewhat advanced; and Venn plunged deeper into the heath, till he came to a ravine where his van was standing — a spot not more than two hundred yards from the site of the gambling bout. He entered this movable home of his, lit his lantern, and, before closing his door for the night, stood reflecting on the

circumstances of the preceding hours. While he stood the dawn grew visible in the northeast quarter of the heavens, which, the clouds having cleared off, was bright with a soft sheen at this midsummer time, though it was only between one and two o'clock. Venn, thoroughly weary, then shut his door and flung himself down to sleep.

BOOK FOUR

THE CLOSED DOOR

CHAPTER 1

The Rencontre by the Pool

The July sun shone over Egdon and fired its crimson heather to scarlet. It was the one season of the year, and the one weather of the season, in which the heath was gorgeous. This flowering period represented the second or noontide division in the cycle of those superficial changes which alone were possible here; it followed the green or young-fern period, representing the morn, and preceded the brown period, when the heathbells and ferns would wear the russet tinges of evening; to be in turn displaced by the dark hue of the winter period, representing night.

Clym and Eustacia, in their little house at Alderworth, beyond East Egdon, were living on with a monotony which was delightful to them. The heath and changes of weather were quite blotted out from their eyes for the present. They were enclosed in a sort of luminous mist, which hid from them surroundings of any inharmonious colour, and gave to all things the character of light. When it rained they were charmed, because they could remain indoors together all day with such a show of reason; when it was fine they were charmed, because they could sit together on the hills. They were like those double stars which revolve round and round each other, and from a distance appear to be one. The absolute solitude in which they lived intensified their reciprocal thoughts; yet some might have said that it had the disadvantage of consuming their mutual affections at a fearfully prodigal rate. Yeobright did not fear for his own part; but recollection of Eustacia's old speech about the evanescence of love, now apparently forgotten by her, sometimes caused him to ask himself a question; and he recoiled at the thought that the quality of finiteness was not foreign to Eden.

When three or four weeks had been passed thus, Yeobright resumed his reading in earnest. To make up for lost time he studied indefatigably, for he wished to enter his new profession with the least possible delay.

Now, Eustacia's dream had always been that, once married to Clym, she would have the power of inducing him to return to Paris. He had carefully withheld all promise to do so; but would he be proof against her coaxing and argument? She had calculated to such a degree on the probability of success that she had represented Paris, and

not Budmouth, to her grandfather as in all likelihood their future home. Her hopes were bound up in this dream. In the quiet days since their marriage, when Yeobright had been poring over her lips, her eyes, and the lines of her face, she had mused and mused on the subject, even while in the act of returning his gaze; and now the sight of the books, indicating a future which was antagonistic to her dream, struck her with a positively painful jar. She was hoping for the time when, as the mistress of some pretty establishment, however small, near a Parisian Boulevard, she would be passing her days on the skirts at least of the gay world, and catching stray wafts from those town pleasures she was so well fitted to enjoy. Yet Yeobright was as firm in the contrary intention as if the tendency of marriage were rather to develop the fantasies of young philanthropy than to sweep them away.

Her anxiety reached a high pitch; but there was something in Clym's undeviating manner which made her hesitate before sounding him on the subject. At this point in their experience, however, an incident helped her. It occurred one evening about six weeks after their union, and arose entirely out of the unconscious misapplication of Venn of the fifty guineas intended for Yeobright.

A day or two after the receipt of the money Thomasin had sent a note to her aunt to thank her. She had been surprised at the largeness of the amount; but as no sum had ever been mentioned she set that down to her late uncle's generosity. She had been strictly charged by her aunt to say nothing to her husband of this gift; and Wildeve, as was natural enough, had not brought himself to mention to his wife a single particular of the midnight scene in the heath. Christian's terror, in like manner, had tied his tongue on the share he took in that proceeding; and hoping that by some means or other the money had gone to its proper destination, he simply asserted as much, without giving details.

Therefore, when a week or two had passed away, Mrs. Yeobright began to wonder why she never heard from her son of the receipt of the present; and to add gloom to her perplexity came the possibility that resentment might be the cause of his silence. She could hardly believe as much, but why did he not write? She questioned Christian, and the confusion in his answers would at once have led her to believe that something was wrong, had not one-half of his story been corroborated by Thomasin's note.

Mrs. Yeobright was in this state of uncertainty when she was informed one morning that her son's wife was visiting her grandfather at Mistover. She determined to walk up the hill, see Eustacia, and ascertain from her daughter-in-law's lips whether the family guineas, which were to Mrs. Yeobright what family jewels are to wealthier dowagers, had miscarried or not.

When Christian learnt where she was going his concern reached its height. At the moment of her departure he could prevaricate no longer, and, confessing to the gambling, told her the truth as far as he knew it — that the guineas had been won by Wildeve.

“What, is he going to keep them?” Mrs. Yeobright cried.

“I hope and trust not!” moaned Christian. “He’s a good man, and perhaps will do right things. He said you ought to have gied Mr. Clym’s share to Eustacia, and that’s perhaps what he’ll do himself.”

To Mrs. Yeobright, as soon as she could calmly reflect, there was much likelihood in this, for she could hardly believe that Wildeve would really appropriate money belonging to her son. The intermediate course of giving it to Eustacia was the sort of thing to please Wildeve’s fancy. But it filled the mother with anger none the less. That Wildeve should have got command of the guineas after all, and should rearrange the disposal of them, placing Clym’s share in Clym’s wife’s hands, because she had been his own sweetheart, and might be so still, was as irritating a pain as any that Mrs. Yeobright had ever borne.

She instantly dismissed the wretched Christian from her employ for his conduct in the affair; but, feeling quite helpless and unable to do without him, told him afterwards that he might stay a little longer if he chose. Then she hastened off to Eustacia, moved by a much less promising emotion towards her daughter-in-law than she had felt half an hour earlier, when planning her journey. At that time it was to inquire in a friendly spirit if there had been any accidental loss; now it was to ask plainly if Wildeve had privately given her money which had been intended as a sacred gift to Clym.

She started at two o’clock, and her meeting with Eustacia was hastened by the appearance of the young lady beside the pool and bank which bordered her grandfather’s premises, where she stood surveying the scene, and perhaps thinking of the romantic enactments it had witnessed in past days. When Mrs. Yeobright approached, Eustacia surveyed her with the calm stare of a stranger.

The mother-in-law was the first to speak. “I was coming to see you,” she said.

“Indeed!” said Eustacia with surprise, for Mrs. Yeobright, much to the girl’s mortification, had refused to be present at the wedding. “I did not at all expect you.”

“I was coming on business only,” said the visitor, more coldly than at first. “Will you excuse my asking this — Have you received a gift from Thomasin’s husband?”

“A gift?”

“I mean money!”

“What — I myself?”

“Well, I meant yourself, privately — though I was not going to put it in that way.”

“Money from Mr. Wildeve? No — never! Madam, what do you mean by that?” Eustacia fired up all too quickly, for her own consciousness of the old attachment between herself and Wildeve led her to jump to the conclusion that Mrs. Yeobright also knew of it, and might have come to accuse her of receiving dishonourable presents from him now.

“I simply ask the question,” said Mrs. Yeobright. “I have been — — ”

“You ought to have better opinions of me — I feared you were against me from the first!” exclaimed Eustacia.

“No. I was simply for Clym,” replied Mrs. Yeobright, with too much emphasis in her earnestness. “It is the instinct of everyone to look after their own.”

“How can you imply that he required guarding against me?” cried Eustacia, passionate tears in her eyes. “I have not injured him by marrying him! What sin have I done that you should think so ill of me? You had no right to speak against me to him when I have never wronged you.”

“I only did what was fair under the circumstances,” said Mrs. Yeobright more softly. “I would rather not have gone into this question at present, but you compel me. I am not ashamed to tell you the honest truth. I was firmly convinced that he ought not to marry you — therefore I tried to dissuade him by all the means in my power. But it is done now, and I have no idea of complaining any more. I am ready to welcome you.”

“Ah, yes, it is very well to see things in that business point of view,” murmured Eustacia with a smothered fire of feeling. “But why should you think there is anything between me and Mr. Wildeve? I have a spirit as well as you. I am indignant; and so would any woman be. It was a condescension in me to be Clym’s wife, and not a manoeuvre, let me remind you; and therefore I will not be treated as a schemer whom it becomes necessary to bear with because she has crept into the family.”

“Oh!” said Mrs. Yeobright, vainly endeavouring to control her anger. “I have never heard anything to show that my son’s lineage is not as good as the Vyes’ — perhaps better. It is amusing to hear you talk of condescension.”

“It was condescension, nevertheless,” said Eustacia vehemently. “And if I had known then what I know now, that I should be living in this wild heath a month after my marriage, I — I should have thought twice before agreeing.”

“It would be better not to say that; it might not sound truthful. I am not aware that any deception was used on his part — I know there was not — whatever might have been the case on the other side.”

“This is too exasperating!” answered the younger woman huskily, her face crimsoning, and her eyes darting light. “How can you dare to speak to me like that? I insist upon repeating to you that had I known that my life would from my marriage up to this time have been as it is, I should have said NO. I don’t complain. I have never uttered a sound of such a thing to him; but it is true. I hope therefore that in the future you will be silent on my eagerness. If you injure me now you injure yourself.”

“Injure you? Do you think I am an evil-disposed person?”

“You injured me before my marriage, and you have now suspected me of secretly favouring another man for money!”

“I could not help what I thought. But I have never spoken of you outside my house.”

“You spoke of me within it, to Clym, and you could not do worse.”

“I did my duty.”

“And I’ll do mine.”

“A part of which will possibly be to set him against his mother. It is always so. But why should I not bear it as others have borne it before me!”

“I understand you,” said Eustacia, breathless with emotion. “You think me capable of every bad thing. Who can be worse than a wife who encourages a lover, and poisons

her husband's mind against his relative? Yet that is now the character given to me. Will you not come and drag him out of my hands?"

Mrs. Yeobright gave back heat for heat.

"Don't rage at me, madam! It ill becomes your beauty, and I am not worth the injury you may do it on my account, I assure you. I am only a poor old woman who has lost a son."

"If you had treated me honourably you would have had him still." Eustacia said, while scalding tears trickled from her eyes. "You have brought yourself to folly; you have caused a division which can never be healed!"

"I have done nothing. This audacity from a young woman is more than I can bear."

"It was asked for; you have suspected me, and you have made me speak of my husband in a way I would not have done. You will let him know that I have spoken thus, and it will cause misery between us. Will you go away from me? You are no friend!"

"I will go when I have spoken a word. If anyone says I have come here to question you without good grounds for it, that person speaks untruly. If anyone says that I attempted to stop your marriage by any but honest means, that person, too, does not speak the truth. I have fallen on an evil time; God has been unjust to me in letting you insult me! Probably my son's happiness does not lie on this side of the grave, for he is a foolish man who neglects the advice of his parent. You, Eustacia, stand on the edge of a precipice without knowing it. Only show my son one-half the temper you have shown me today — and you may before long — and you will find that though he is as gentle as a child with you now, he can be as hard as steel!"

The excited mother then withdrew, and Eustacia, panting, stood looking into the pool.

CHAPTER 2

He Is Set upon by Adversities but He Sings a Song

The result of that unpropitious interview was that Eustacia, instead of passing the afternoon with her grandfather, hastily returned home to Clym, where she arrived three hours earlier than she had been expected.

She came indoors with her face flushed, and her eyes still showing traces of her recent excitement. Yeobright looked up astonished; he had never seen her in any way approaching to that state before. She passed him by, and would have gone upstairs unnoticed, but Clym was so concerned that he immediately followed her.

"What is the matter, Eustacia?" he said. She was standing on the hearthrug in the bedroom, looking upon the floor, her hands clasped in front of her, her bonnet yet unremoved. For a moment she did not answer; and then she replied in a low voice —

"I have seen your mother; and I will never see her again!" A weight fell like a stone upon Clym. That same morning, when Eustacia had arranged to go and see her

grandfather, Clym had expressed a wish that she would drive down to Blooms-End and inquire for her mother-in-law, or adopt any other means she might think fit to bring about a reconciliation. She had set out gaily; and he had hoped for much.

“Why is this?” he asked.

“I cannot tell — I cannot remember. I met your mother. And I will never meet her again.”

“Why?”

“What do I know about Mr. Wildeve now? I won’t have wicked opinions passed on me by anybody. O! it was too humiliating to be asked if I had received any money from him, or encouraged him, or something of the sort — I don’t exactly know what!”

“How could she have asked you that?”

“She did.”

“Then there must have been some meaning in it. What did my mother say besides?”

“I don’t know what she said, except in so far as this, that we both said words which can never be forgiven!”

“Oh, there must be some misapprehension. Whose fault was it that her meaning was not made clear?”

“I would rather not say. It may have been the fault of the circumstances, which were awkward at the very least. O Clym — I cannot help expressing it — this is an unpleasant position that you have placed me in. But you must improve it — yes, say you will — for I hate it all now! Yes, take me to Paris, and go on with your old occupation, Clym! I don’t mind how humbly we live there at first, if it can only be Paris, and not Egdon Heath.”

“But I have quite given up that idea,” said Yeobright, with surprise. “Surely I never led you to expect such a thing?”

“I own it. Yet there are thoughts which cannot be kept out of mind, and that one was mine. Must I not have a voice in the matter, now I am your wife and the sharer of your doom?”

“Well, there are things which are placed beyond the pale of discussion; and I thought this was specially so, and by mutual agreement.”

“Clym, I am unhappy at what I hear,” she said in a low voice; and her eyes drooped, and she turned away.

This indication of an unexpected mine of hope in Eustacia’s bosom disconcerted her husband. It was the first time that he had confronted the fact of the indirectness of a woman’s movement towards her desire. But his intention was unshaken, though he loved Eustacia well. All the effect that her remark had upon him was a resolve to chain himself more closely than ever to his books, so as to be the sooner enabled to appeal to substantial results from another course in arguing against her whim.

Next day the mystery of the guineas was explained. Thomasin paid them a hurried visit, and Clym’s share was delivered up to him by her own hands. Eustacia was not present at the time.

“Then this is what my mother meant,” exclaimed Clym. “Thomasin, do you know that they have had a bitter quarrel?”

There was a little more reticence now than formerly in Thomasin’s manner towards her cousin. It is the effect of marriage to engender in several directions some of the reserve it annihilates in one. “Your mother told me,” she said quietly. “She came back to my house after seeing Eustacia.”

“The worst thing I dreaded has come to pass. Was Mother much disturbed when she came to you, Thomasin?”

“Yes.”

“Very much indeed?”

“Yes.”

Clym leant his elbow upon the post of the garden gate, and covered his eyes with his hand.

“Don’t trouble about it, Clym. They may get to be friends.”

He shook his head. “Not two people with inflammable natures like theirs. Well, what must be will be.”

“One thing is cheerful in it — the guineas are not lost.”

“I would rather have lost them twice over than have had this happen.”

Amid these jarring events Yeobright felt one thing to be indispensable — that he should speedily make some show of progress in his scholastic plans. With this view he read far into the small hours during many nights.

One morning, after a severer strain than usual, he awoke with a strange sensation in his eyes. The sun was shining directly upon the window-blind, and at his first glance thitherward a sharp pain obliged him to close his eyelids quickly. At every new attempt to look about him the same morbid sensibility to light was manifested, and excoriating tears ran down his cheeks. He was obliged to tie a bandage over his brow while dressing; and during the day it could not be abandoned. Eustacia was thoroughly alarmed. On finding that the case was no better the next morning they decided to send to Anglebury for a surgeon.

Towards evening he arrived, and pronounced the disease to be acute inflammation induced by Clym’s night studies, continued in spite of a cold previously caught, which had weakened his eyes for the time.

Fretting with impatience at this interruption to a task he was so anxious to hasten, Clym was transformed into an invalid. He was shut up in a room from which all light was excluded, and his condition would have been one of absolute misery had not Eustacia read to him by the glimmer of a shaded lamp. He hoped that the worst would soon be over; but at the surgeon’s third visit he learnt to his dismay that although he might venture out of doors with shaded eyes in the course of a month, all thought of pursuing his work, or of reading print of any description, would have to be given up for a long time to come.

One week and another week wore on, and nothing seemed to lighten the gloom of the young couple. Dreadful imaginings occurred to Eustacia, but she carefully refrained

from uttering them to her husband. Suppose he should become blind, or, at all events, never recover sufficient strength of sight to engage in an occupation which would be congenial to her feelings, and conduce to her removal from this lonely dwelling among the hills? That dream of beautiful Paris was not likely to cohere into substance in the presence of this misfortune. As day after day passed by, and he got no better, her mind ran more and more in this mournful groove, and she would go away from him into the garden and weep despairing tears.

Yeobright thought he would send for his mother; and then he thought he would not. Knowledge of his state could only make her the more unhappy; and the seclusion of their life was such that she would hardly be likely to learn the news except through a special messenger. Endeavouring to take the trouble as philosophically as possible, he waited on till the third week had arrived, when he went into the open air for the first time since the attack. The surgeon visited him again at this stage, and Clym urged him to express a distinct opinion. The young man learnt with added surprise that the date at which he might expect to resume his labours was as uncertain as ever, his eyes being in that peculiar state which, though affording him sight enough for walking about, would not admit of their being strained upon any definite object without incurring the risk of reproducing ophthalmia in its acute form.

Clym was very grave at the intelligence, but not despairing. A quiet firmness, and even cheerfulness, took possession of him. He was not to be blind; that was enough. To be doomed to behold the world through smoked glass for an indefinite period was bad enough, and fatal to any kind of advance; but Yeobright was an absolute stoic in the face of mishaps which only affected his social standing; and, apart from Eustacia, the humblest walk of life would satisfy him if it could be made to work in with some form of his culture scheme. To keep a cottage night-school was one such form; and his affliction did not master his spirit as it might otherwise have done.

He walked through the warm sun westward into those tracts of Egdon with which he was best acquainted, being those lying nearer to his old home. He saw before him in one of the valleys the gleaming of whetted iron, and advancing, dimly perceived that the shine came from the tool of a man who was cutting furze. The worker recognized Clym, and Yeobright learnt from the voice that the speaker was Humphrey.

Humphrey expressed his sorrow at Clym's condition, and added, "Now, if yours was low-class work like mine, you could go on with it just the same."

"Yes, I could," said Yeobright musingly. "How much do you get for cutting these faggots?"

"Half-a-crown a hundred, and in these long days I can live very well on the wages."

During the whole of Yeobright's walk home to Alderworth he was lost in reflections which were not of an unpleasant kind. On his coming up to the house Eustacia spoke to him from the open window, and he went across to her.

"Darling," he said, "I am much happier. And if my mother were reconciled to me and to you I should, I think, be happy quite."

"I fear that will never be," she said, looking afar with her beautiful stormy eyes. "How CAN you say 'I am happier,' and nothing changed?"

"It arises from my having at last discovered something I can do, and get a living at, in this time of misfortune."

"Yes?"

"I am going to be a furze- and turf-cutter."

"No, Clym!" she said, the slight hopefulness previously apparent in her face going off again, and leaving her worse than before.

"Surely I shall. Is it not very unwise in us to go on spending the little money we've got when I can keep down expenditures by an honest occupation? The outdoor exercise will do me good, and who knows but that in a few months I shall be able to go on with my reading again?"

"But my grandfather offers to assist us, if we require assistance."

"We don't require it. If I go furze-cutting we shall be fairly well off."

"In comparison with slaves, and the Israelites in Egypt, and such people!" A bitter tear rolled down Eustacia's face, which he did not see. There had been nonchalance in his tone, showing her that he felt no absolute grief at a consummation which to her was a positive horror.

The very next day Yeobright went to Humphrey's cottage, and borrowed of him leggings, gloves, a whetstone, and a hook, to use till he should be able to purchase some for himself. Then he sallied forth with his new fellow-labourer and old acquaintance, and selecting a spot where the furze grew thickest he struck the first blow in his adopted calling. His sight, like the wings in Rasselas, though useless to him for his grand purpose, sufficed for this strait, and he found that when a little practice should have hardened his palms against blistering he would be able to work with ease.

Day after day he rose with the sun, buckled on his leggings, and went off to the rendezvous with Humphrey. His custom was to work from four o'clock in the morning till noon; then, when the heat of the day was at its highest, to go home and sleep for an hour or two; afterwards coming out again and working till dusk at nine.

This man from Paris was now so disguised by his leather accoutrements, and by the goggles he was obliged to wear over his eyes, that his closest friend might have passed by without recognizing him. He was a brown spot in the midst of an expanse of olive-green gorse, and nothing more. Though frequently depressed in spirit when not actually at work, owing to thoughts of Eustacia's position and his mother's estrangement, when in the full swing of labour he was cheerfully disposed and calm.

His daily life was of a curious microscopic sort, his whole world being limited to a circuit of a few feet from his person. His familiars were creeping and winged things, and they seemed to enroll him in their band. Bees hummed around his ears with an intimate air, and tugged at the heath and furze-flowers at his side in such numbers as to weigh them down to the sod. The strange amber-coloured butterflies which Egdon produced, and which were never seen elsewhere, quivered in the breath of his lips, alighted upon his bowed back, and sported with the glittering point of his hook as

he flourished it up and down. Tribes of emerald-green grasshoppers leaped over his feet, falling awkwardly on their backs, heads, or hips, like unskilful acrobats, as chance might rule; or engaged themselves in noisy flirtations under the fern-fronds with silent ones of homely hue. Huge flies, ignorant of ladders and wire-netting, and quite in a savage state, buzzed about him without knowing that he was a man. In and out of the fern-dells snakes glided in their most brilliant blue and yellow guise, it being the season immediately following the shedding of their old skins, when their colours are brightest. Litters of young rabbits came out from their forms to sun themselves upon hillocks, the hot beams blazing through the delicate tissue of each thin-fleshed ear, and firing it to a blood-red transparency in which the veins could be seen. None of them feared him. The monotony of his occupation soothed him, and was in itself a pleasure. A forced limitation of effort offered a justification of homely courses to an unambitious man, whose conscience would hardly have allowed him to remain in such obscurity while his powers were unimpeded. Hence Yeobright sometimes sang to himself, and when obliged to accompany Humphrey in search of brambles for faggot-bonds he would amuse his companion with sketches of Parisian life and character, and so while away the time.

On one of these warm afternoons Eustacia walked out alone in the direction of Yeobright's place of work. He was busily chopping away at the furze, a long row of faggots which stretched downward from his position representing the labour of the day. He did not observe her approach, and she stood close to him, and heard his undercurrent of song.

It shocked her. To see him there, a poor afflicted man, earning money by the sweat of his brow, had at first moved her to tears; but to hear him sing and not at all rebel against an occupation which, however satisfactory to himself, was degrading to her, as an educated lady-wife, wounded her through. Unconscious of her presence, he still went on singing: —

“Le point du jour
A nos bosquets rend toute leur parure;
Flore est plus belle a son retour;
L’oiseau reprend doux chant d’amour;
Tout celebre dans la nature
Le point du jour.
“Le point du jour
Cause parfois, cause douleur extreme;
Que l’espace des nuits est court
Pour le berger brulant d’amour,
Force de quitter ce qu’il aime
Au point du jour!”

It was bitterly plain to Eustacia that he did not care much about social failure; and the proud fair woman bowed her head and wept in sick despair at thought of the

blasting effect upon her own life of that mood and condition in him. Then she came forward.

“I would starve rather than do it!” she exclaimed vehemently. “And you can sing! I will go and live with my grandfather again!”

“Eustacia! I did not see you, though I noticed something moving,” he said gently. He came forward, pulled off his huge leather glove, and took her hand. “Why do you speak in such a strange way? It is only a little old song which struck my fancy when I was in Paris, and now just applies to my life with you. Has your love for me all died, then, because my appearance is no longer that of a fine gentleman?”

“Dearest, you must not question me unpleasantly, or it may make me not love you.”

“Do you believe it possible that I would run the risk of doing that?”

“Well, you follow out your own ideas, and won’t give in to mine when I wish you to leave off this shameful labour. Is there anything you dislike in me that you act so contrarily to my wishes? I am your wife, and why will you not listen? Yes, I am your wife indeed!”

“I know what that tone means.”

“What tone?”

“The tone in which you said, ‘Your wife indeed.’ It meant, ‘Your wife, worse luck.’”

“It is hard in you to probe me with that remark. A woman may have reason, though she is not without heart, and if I felt ‘worse luck,’ it was no ignoble feeling — it was only too natural. There, you see that at any rate I do not attempt untruths. Do you remember how, before we were married, I warned you that I had not good wifely qualities?”

“You mock me to say that now. On that point at least the only noble course would be to hold your tongue, for you are still queen of me, Eustacia, though I may no longer be king of you.”

“You are my husband. Does not that content you?”

“Not unless you are my wife without regret.”

“I cannot answer you. I remember saying that I should be a serious matter on your hands.”

“Yes, I saw that.”

“Then you were too quick to see! No true lover would have seen any such thing; you are too severe upon me, Clym — I won’t like your speaking so at all.”

“Well, I married you in spite of it, and don’t regret doing so. How cold you seem this afternoon! and yet I used to think there never was a warmer heart than yours.”

“Yes, I fear we are cooling — I see it as well as you,” she sighed mournfully. “And how madly we loved two months ago! You were never tired of contemplating me, nor I of contemplating you. Who could have thought then that by this time my eyes would not seem so very bright to yours, nor your lips so very sweet to mine? Two months — is it possible? Yes, ‘tis too true!”

“You sigh, dear, as if you were sorry for it; and that’s a hopeful sign.”

“No. I don’t sigh for that. There are other things for me to sigh for, or any other woman in my place.”

“That your chances in life are ruined by marrying in haste an unfortunate man?”

“Why will you force me, Clym, to say bitter things? I deserve pity as much as you. As much? — I think I deserve it more. For you can sing! It would be a strange hour which should catch me singing under such a cloud as this! Believe me, sweet, I could weep to a degree that would astonish and confound such an elastic mind as yours. Even had you felt careless about your own affliction, you might have refrained from singing out of sheer pity for mine. God! if I were a man in such a position I would curse rather than sing.”

Yeobright placed his hand upon her arm. “Now, don’t you suppose, my inexperienced girl, that I cannot rebel, in high Promethean fashion, against the gods and fate as well as you. I have felt more steam and smoke of that sort than you have ever heard of. But the more I see of life the more do I perceive that there is nothing particularly great in its greatest walks, and therefore nothing particularly small in mine of furze-cutting. If I feel that the greatest blessings vouchsafed to us are not very valuable, how can I feel it to be any great hardship when they are taken away? So I sing to pass the time. Have you indeed lost all tenderness for me, that you begrudge me a few cheerful moments?”

“I have still some tenderness left for you.”

“Your words have no longer their old flavour. And so love dies with good fortune!”

“I cannot listen to this, Clym — it will end bitterly,” she said in a broken voice. “I will go home.”

CHAPTER 3

She Goes Out to Battle against Depression

A few days later, before the month of August has expired, Eustacia and Yeobright sat together at their early dinner.

Eustacia’s manner had become of late almost apathetic. There was a forlorn look about her beautiful eyes which, whether she deserved it or not, would have excited pity in the breast of anyone who had known her during the full flush of her love for Clym. The feelings of husband and wife varied, in some measure, inversely with their positions. Clym, the afflicted man, was cheerful; and he even tried to comfort her, who had never felt a moment of physical suffering in her whole life.

“Come, brighten up, dearest; we shall be all right again. Some day perhaps I shall see as well as ever. And I solemnly promise that I’ll leave off cutting furze as soon as I have the power to do anything better. You cannot seriously wish me to stay idling at home all day?”

“But it is so dreadful — a furze-cutter! and you a man who have lived about the world, and speak French, and German, and who are fit for what is so much better than this.”

"I suppose when you first saw me and heard about me I was wrapped in a sort of golden halo to your eyes — a man who knew glorious things, and had mixed in brilliant scenes — in short, an adorable, delightful, distracting hero?"

"Yes," she said, sobbing.

"And now I am a poor fellow in brown leather."

"Don't taunt me. But enough of this. I will not be depressed any more. I am going from home this afternoon, unless you greatly object. There is to be a village picnic — a gipsying, they call it — at East Egdon, and I shall go."

"To dance?"

"Why not? You can sing."

"Well, well, as you will. Must I come to fetch you?"

"If you return soon enough from your work. But do not inconvenience yourself about it. I know the way home, and the heath has no terror for me."

"And can you cling to gaiety so eagerly as to walk all the way to a village festival in search of it?"

"Now, you don't like my going alone! Clym, you are not jealous?"

"No. But I would come with you if it could give you any pleasure; though, as things stand, perhaps you have too much of me already. Still, I somehow wish that you did not want to go. Yes, perhaps I am jealous; and who could be jealous with more reason than I, a half-blind man, over such a woman as you?"

"Don't think like it. Let me go, and don't take all my spirits away!"

"I would rather lose all my own, my sweet wife. Go and do whatever you like. Who can forbid your indulgence in any whim? You have all my heart yet, I believe; and because you bear with me, who am in truth a drag upon you, I owe you thanks. Yes, go alone and shine. As for me, I will stick to my doom. At that kind of meeting people would shun me. My hook and gloves are like the St. Lazarus rattle of the leper, warning the world to get out of the way of a sight that would sadden them." He kissed her, put on his leggings, and went out.

When he was gone she rested her head upon her hands and said to herself, "Two wasted lives — his and mine. And I am come to this! Will it drive me out of my mind?"

She cast about for any possible course which offered the least improvement on the existing state of things, and could find none. She imagined how all those Budmouth ones who should learn what had become of her would say, "Look at the girl for whom nobody was good enough!" To Eustacia the situation seemed such a mockery of her hopes that death appeared the only door of relief if the satire of Heaven should go much further.

Suddenly she aroused herself and exclaimed, "But I'll shake it off. Yes, I WILL shake it off! No one shall know my suffering. I'll be bitterly merry, and ironically gay, and I'll laugh in derision. And I'll begin by going to this dance on the green."

She ascended to her bedroom and dressed herself with scrupulous care. To an on-looker her beauty would have made her feelings almost seem reasonable. The gloomy corner into which accident as much as indiscretion had brought this woman might have

led even a moderate partisan to feel that she had cogent reasons for asking the Supreme Power by what right a being of such exquisite finish had been placed in circumstances calculated to make of her charms a curse rather than a blessing.

It was five in the afternoon when she came out from the house ready for her walk. There was material enough in the picture for twenty new conquests. The rebellious sadness that was rather too apparent when she sat indoors without a bonnet was cloaked and softened by her outdoor attire, which always had a sort of nebulosity about it, devoid of harsh edges anywhere; so that her face looked from its environment as from a cloud, with no noticeable lines of demarcation between flesh and clothes. The heat of the day had scarcely declined as yet, and she went along the sunny hills at a leisurely pace, there being ample time for her idle expedition. Tall ferns buried her in their leafage whenever her path lay through them, which now formed miniature forests, though not one stem of them would remain to bud the next year.

The site chosen for the village festivity was one of the lawnlike oases which were occasionally, yet not often, met with on the plateaux of the heath district. The brakes of furze and fern terminated abruptly round the margin, and the grass was unbroken. A green cattletrack skirted the spot, without, however, emerging from the screen of fern, and this path Eustacia followed, in order to reconnoitre the group before joining it. The lusty notes of the East Egdon band had directed her unerringly, and she now beheld the musicians themselves, sitting in a blue wagon with red wheels scrubbed as bright as new, and arched with sticks, to which boughs and flowers were tied. In front of this was the grand central dance of fifteen or twenty couples, flanked by minor dances of inferior individuals whose gyrations were not always in strict keeping with the tune.

The young men wore blue and white rosettes, and with a flush on their faces footed it to the girls, who, with the excitement and the exercise, blushed deeper than the pink of their numerous ribbons. Fair ones with long curls, fair ones with short curls, fair ones with lovelocks, fair ones with braids, flew round and round; and a beholder might well have wondered how such a prepossessing set of young women of like size, age, and disposition, could have been collected together where there were only one or two villages to choose from. In the background was one happy man dancing by himself, with closed eyes, totally oblivious of all the rest. A fire was burning under a pollard thorn a few paces off, over which three kettles hung in a row. Hard by was a table where elderly dames prepared tea, but Eustacia looked among them in vain for the cattle-dealer's wife who had suggested that she should come, and had promised to obtain a courteous welcome for her.

This unexpected absence of the only local resident whom Eustacia knew considerably damaged her scheme for an afternoon of reckless gaiety. Joining in became a matter of difficulty, notwithstanding that, were she to advance, cheerful dames would come forward with cups of tea and make much of her as a stranger of superior grace and knowledge to themselves. Having watched the company through the figures of two

dances, she decided to walk a little further, to a cottage where she might get some refreshment, and then return homeward in the shady time of evening.

This she did, and by the time that she retraced her steps towards the scene of the gipsying, which it was necessary to repass on her way to Alderworth, the sun was going down. The air was now so still that she could hear the band afar off, and it seemed to be playing with more spirit, if that were possible, than when she had come away. On reaching the hill the sun had quite disappeared; but this made little difference either to Eustacia or to the revellers, for a round yellow moon was rising before her, though its rays had not yet outmastered those from the west. The dance was going on just the same, but strangers had arrived and formed a ring around the figure, so that Eustacia could stand among these without a chance of being recognized.

A whole village-full of sensuous emotion, scattered abroad all the year long, surged here in a focus for an hour. The forty hearts of those waving couples were beating as they had not done since, twelve months before, they had come together in similar jollity. For the time paganism was revived in their hearts, the pride of life was all in all, and they adored none other than themselves.

How many of those impassioned but temporary embraces were destined to become perpetual was possibly the wonder of some of those who indulged in them, as well as of Eustacia who looked on. She began to envy those pirouetters, to hunger for the hope and happiness which the fascination of the dance seemed to engender within them. Desperately fond of dancing herself, one of Eustacia's expectations of Paris had been the opportunity it might afford her of indulgence in this favourite pastime. Unhappily, that expectation was now extinct within her for ever.

Whilst she abstractedly watched them spinning and fluctuating in the increasing moonlight she suddenly heard her name whispered by a voice over her shoulder. Turning in surprise, she beheld at her elbow one whose presence instantly caused her to flush to the temples.

It was Wildeve. Till this moment he had not met her eye since the morning of his marriage, when she had been loitering in the church, and had startled him by lifting her veil and coming forward to sign the register as witness. Yet why the sight of him should have instigated that sudden rush of blood she could not tell.

Before she could speak he whispered, "Do you like dancing as much as ever?"

"I think I do," she replied in a low voice.

"Will you dance with me?"

"It would be a great change for me; but will it not seem strange?"

"What strangeness can there be in relations dancing together?"

"Ah — yes, relations. Perhaps none."

"Still, if you don't like to be seen, pull down your veil; though there is not much risk of being known by this light. Lots of strangers are here."

She did as he suggested; and the act was a tacit acknowledgment that she accepted his offer.

Wildeve gave her his arm and took her down on the outside of the ring to the bottom of the dance, which they entered. In two minutes more they were involved in the figure and began working their way upwards to the top. Till they had advanced halfway thither Eustacia wished more than once that she had not yielded to his request; from the middle to the top she felt that, since she had come out to seek pleasure, she was only doing a natural thing to obtain it. Fairly launched into the ceaseless glides and whirls which their new position as top couple opened up to them, Eustacia's pulses began to move too quickly for long rumination of any kind.

Through the length of five-and-twenty couples they threaded their giddy way, and a new vitality entered her form. The pale ray of evening lent a fascination to the experience. There is a certain degree and tone of light which tends to disturb the equilibrium of the senses, and to promote dangerously the tenderer moods; added to movement, it drives the emotions to rankness, the reason becoming sleepy and unperceiving in inverse proportion; and this light fell now upon these two from the disc of the moon. All the dancing girls felt the symptoms, but Eustacia most of all. The grass under their feet became trodden away, and the hard, beaten surface of the sod, when viewed aslant towards the moonlight, shone like a polished table. The air became quite still, the flag above the wagon which held the musicians clung to the pole, and the players appeared only in outline against the sky; except when the circular mouths of the trombone, ophicleide, and French horn gleamed out like huge eyes from the shade of their figures. The pretty dresses of the maids lost their subtler day colours and showed more or less of a misty white. Eustacia floated round and round on Wildeve's arm, her face rapt and statuesque; her soul had passed away from and forgotten her features, which were left empty and quiescent, as they always are when feeling goes beyond their register.

How near she was to Wildeve! it was terrible to think of. She could feel his breathing, and he, of course, could feel hers. How badly she had treated him! yet, here they were treading one measure. The enchantment of the dance surprised her. A clear line of difference divided like a tangible fence her experience within this maze of motion from her experience without it. Her beginning to dance had been like a change of atmosphere; outside, she had been steeped in arctic frigidity by comparison with the tropical sensations here. She had entered the dance from the troubled hours of her late life as one might enter a brilliant chamber after a night walk in a wood. Wildeve by himself would have been merely an agitation; Wildeve added to the dance, and the moonlight, and the secrecy, began to be a delight. Whether his personality supplied the greater part of this sweetly compounded feeling, or whether the dance and the scene weighed the more therein, was a nice point upon which Eustacia herself was entirely in a cloud.

People began to say "Who are they?" but no invidious inquiries were made. Had Eustacia mingled with the other girls in their ordinary daily walks the case would have been different: here she was not inconvenienced by excessive inspection, for all were wrought to their brightest grace by the occasion. Like the planet Mercury surrounded

by the lustre of sunset, her permanent brilliancy passed without much notice in the temporary glory of the situation.

As for Wildeve, his feelings are easy to guess. Obstacles were a ripening sun to his love, and he was at this moment in a delirium of exquisite misery. To clasp as his for five minutes what was another man's through all the rest of the year was a kind of thing he of all men could appreciate. He had long since begun to sigh again for Eustacia; indeed, it may be asserted that signing the marriage register with Thomasin was the natural signal to his heart to return to its first quarters, and that the extra complication of Eustacia's marriage was the one addition required to make that return compulsory.

Thus, for different reasons, what was to the rest an exhilarating movement was to these two a riding upon the whirlwind. The dance had come like an irresistible attack upon whatever sense of social order there was in their minds, to drive them back into old paths which were now doubly irregular. Through three dances in succession they spun their way; and then, fatigued with the incessant motion, Eustacia turned to quit the circle in which she had already remained too long. Wildeve led her to a grassy mound a few yards distant, where she sat down, her partner standing beside her. From the time that he addressed her at the beginning of the dance till now they had not exchanged a word.

"The dance and the walking have tired you?" he said tenderly.

"No; not greatly."

"It is strange that we should have met here of all places, after missing each other so long."

"We have missed because we tried to miss, I suppose."

"Yes. But you began that proceeding — by breaking a promise."

"It is scarcely worth while to talk of that now. We have formed other ties since then — you no less than I."

"I am sorry to hear that your husband is ill."

"He is not ill — only incapacitated."

"Yes — that is what I mean. I sincerely sympathize with you in your trouble. Fate has treated you cruelly."

She was silent awhile. "Have you heard that he has chosen to work as a furze-cutter?" she said in a low, mournful voice.

"It has been mentioned to me," answered Wildeve hesitatingly. "But I hardly believed it."

"It is true. What do you think of me as a furze-cutter's wife?"

"I think the same as ever of you, Eustacia. Nothing of that sort can degrade you — you ennoble the occupation of your husband."

"I wish I could feel it."

"Is there any chance of Mr. Yeobright getting better?"

"He thinks so. I doubt it."

“I was quite surprised to hear that he had taken a cottage. I thought, in common with other people, that he would have taken you off to a home in Paris immediately after you had married him. ‘What a gay, bright future she has before her!’ I thought. He will, I suppose, return there with you, if his sight gets strong again?”

Observing that she did not reply he regarded her more closely. She was almost weeping. Images of a future never to be enjoyed, the revived sense of her bitter disappointment, the picture of the neighbour’s suspended ridicule which was raised by Wildeve’s words, had been too much for proud Eustacia’s equanimity.

Wildeve could hardly control his own too forward feelings when he saw her silent perturbation. But he affected not to notice this, and she soon recovered her calmness.

“You do not intend to walk home by yourself?” he asked.

“O yes,” said Eustacia. “What could hurt me on this heath, who have nothing?”

“By diverging a little I can make my way home the same as yours. I shall be glad to keep you company as far as Throope Corner.” Seeing that Eustacia sat on in hesitation he added, “Perhaps you think it unwise to be seen in the same road with me after the events of last summer?”

“Indeed I think no such thing,” she said haughtily. “I shall accept whose company I choose, for all that may be said by the miserable inhabitants of Egdon.”

“Then let us walk on — if you are ready. Our nearest way is towards that holly bush with the dark shadow that you see down there.”

Eustacia arose, and walked beside him in the direction signified, brushing her way over the damping heath and fern, and followed by the strains of the merrymakers, who still kept up the dance. The moon had now waxed bright and silvery, but the heath was proof against such illumination, and there was to be observed the striking scene of a dark, rayless tract of country under an atmosphere charged from its zenith to its extremities with whitest light. To an eye above them their two faces would have appeared amid the expanse like two pearls on a table of ebony.

On this account the irregularities of the path were not visible, and Wildeve occasionally stumbled; whilst Eustacia found it necessary to perform some graceful feats of balancing whenever a small tuft of heather or root of furze protruded itself through the grass of the narrow track and entangled her feet. At these junctures in her progress a hand was invariably stretched forward to steady her, holding her firmly until smooth ground was again reached, when the hand was again withdrawn to a respectful distance.

They performed the journey for the most part in silence, and drew near to Throope Corner, a few hundred yards from which a short path branched away to Eustacia’s house. By degrees they discerned coming towards them a pair of human figures, apparently of the male sex.

When they came a little nearer Eustacia broke the silence by saying, “One of those men is my husband. He promised to come to meet me.”

“And the other is my greatest enemy,” said Wildeve.

“It looks like Diggory Venn.”

“That is the man.”

“It is an awkward meeting,” said she; “but such is my fortune. He knows too much about me, unless he could know more, and so prove to himself that what he now knows counts for nothing. Well, let it be — you must deliver me up to them.”

“You will think twice before you direct me to do that. Here is a man who has not forgotten an item in our meetings at Rainbarrow — he is in company with your husband. Which of them, seeing us together here, will believe that our meeting and dancing at the gipsy party was by chance?”

“Very well,” she whispered gloomily. “Leave me before they come up.”

Wildevé bade her a tender farewell, and plunged across the fern and furze, Eustacia slowly walking on. In two or three minutes she met her husband and his companion.

“My journey ends here for tonight, reddleman,” said Yeobright as soon as he perceived her. “I turn back with this lady. Good night.”

“Good night, Mr. Yeobright,” said Venn. “I hope to see you better soon.”

The moonlight shone directly upon Venn’s face as he spoke, and revealed all its lines to Eustacia. He was looking suspiciously at her. That Venn’s keen eye had discerned what Yeobright’s feeble vision had not — a man in the act of withdrawing from Eustacia’s side — was within the limits of the probable.

If Eustacia had been able to follow the reddleman she would soon have found striking confirmation of her thought. No sooner had Clym given her his arm and led her off the scene than the reddleman turned back from the beaten track towards East Egdon, whither he had been strolling merely to accompany Clym in his walk, Diggory’s van being again in the neighbourhood. Stretching out his long legs, he crossed the pathless portion of the heath somewhat in the direction which Wildevé had taken. Only a man accustomed to nocturnal rambles could at this hour have descended those shaggy slopes with Venn’s velocity without falling headlong into a pit, or snapping off his leg by jamming his foot into some rabbit burrow. But Venn went on without much inconvenience to himself, and the course of his scamper was towards the Quiet Woman Inn. This place he reached in about half an hour, and he was well aware that no person who had been near Throope Corner when he started could have got down here before him.

The lonely inn was not yet closed, though scarcely an individual was there, the business done being chiefly with travellers who passed the inn on long journeys, and these had now gone on their way. Venn went to the public room, called for a mug of ale, and inquired of the maid in an indifferent tone if Mr. Wildevé was at home.

Thomasin sat in an inner room and heard Venn’s voice. When customers were present she seldom showed herself, owing to her inherent dislike for the business; but perceiving that no one else was there tonight she came out.

“He is not at home yet, Diggory,” she said pleasantly. “But I expected him sooner. He has been to East Egdon to buy a horse.”

“Did he wear a light wideawake?”

“Yes.”

“Then I saw him at Throope Corner, leading one home,” said Venn drily. “A beauty, with a white face and a mane as black as night. He will soon be here, no doubt.” Rising and looking for a moment at the pure, sweet face of Thomasin, over which a shadow of sadness had passed since the time when he had last seen her, he ventured to add, “Mr. Wildeve seems to be often away at this time.”

“O yes,” cried Thomasin in what was intended to be a tone of gaiety. “Husbands will play the truant, you know. I wish you could tell me of some secret plan that would help me to keep him home at my will in the evenings.”

“I will consider if I know of one,” replied Venn in that same light tone which meant no lightness. And then he bowed in a manner of his own invention and moved to go. Thomasin offered him her hand; and without a sigh, though with food for many, the reddleman went out.

When Wildeve returned, a quarter of an hour later Thomasin said simply, and in the abashed manner usual with her now, “Where is the horse, Damon?”

“O, I have not bought it, after all. The man asks too much.”

“But somebody saw you at Throope Corner leading it home — a beauty, with a white face and a mane as black as night.”

“Ah!” said Wildeve, fixing his eyes upon her; “who told you that?”

“Venn the reddleman.”

The expression of Wildeve’s face became curiously condensed. “That is a mistake — it must have been someone else,” he said slowly and testily, for he perceived that Venn’s countermoves had begun again.

CHAPTER 4

Rough Coercion Is Employed

Those words of Thomasin, which seemed so little, but meant so much, remained in the ears of Diggory Venn: “Help me to keep him home in the evenings.”

On this occasion Venn had arrived on Egdon Heath only to cross to the other side — he had no further connection with the interests of the Yeobright family, and he had a business of his own to attend to. Yet he suddenly began to feel himself drifting into the old track of manoeuvring on Thomasin’s account.

He sat in his van and considered. From Thomasin’s words and manner he had plainly gathered that Wildeve neglected her. For whom could he neglect her if not for Eustacia? Yet it was scarcely credible that things had come to such a head as to indicate that Eustacia systematically encouraged him. Venn resolved to reconnoitre somewhat carefully the lonely road which led along the vale from Wildeve’s dwelling to Clym’s house at Alderworth.

At this time, as has been seen, Wildeve was quite innocent of any predetermined act of intrigue, and except at the dance on the green he had not once met Eustacia since her marriage. But that the spirit of intrigue was in him had been shown by a

recent romantic habit of his — a habit of going out after dark and strolling towards Alderworth, there looking at the moon and stars, looking at Eustacia's house, and walking back at leisure.

Accordingly, when watching on the night after the festival, the reddleman saw him ascend by the little path, lean over the front gate of Clym's garden, sigh, and turn to go back again. It was plain that Wildeve's intrigue was rather ideal than real. Venn retreated before him down the hill to a place where the path was merely a deep groove between the heather; here he mysteriously bent over the ground for a few minutes, and retired. When Wildeve came on to that spot his ankle was caught by something, and he fell headlong.

As soon as he had recovered the power of respiration he sat up and listened. There was not a sound in the gloom beyond the spiritless stir of the summer wind. Feeling about for the obstacle which had flung him down, he discovered that two tufts of heath had been tied together across the path, forming a loop, which to a traveller was certain overthrow. Wildeve pulled off the string that bound them, and went on with tolerable quickness. On reaching home he found the cord to be of a reddish colour. It was just what he had expected.

Although his weaknesses were not specially those akin to physical fear, this species of coup-de-Jarnac from one he knew too well troubled the mind of Wildeve. But his movements were unaltered thereby. A night or two later he again went along the vale to Alderworth, taking the precaution of keeping out of any path. The sense that he was watched, that craft was employed to circumvent his errant tastes, added piquancy to a journey so entirely sentimental, so long as the danger was of no fearful sort. He imagined that Venn and Mrs. Yeobright were in league, and felt that there was a certain legitimacy in combating such a coalition.

The heath tonight appeared to be totally deserted; and Wildeve, after looking over Eustacia's garden gate for some little time, with a cigar in his mouth, was tempted by the fascination that emotional smuggling had for his nature to advance towards the window, which was not quite closed, the blind being only partly drawn down. He could see into the room, and Eustacia was sitting there alone. Wildeve contemplated her for a minute, and then retreating into the heath beat the ferns lightly, whereupon moths flew out alarmed. Securing one, he returned to the window, and holding the moth to the chink, opened his hand. The moth made towards the candle upon Eustacia's table, hovered round it two or three times, and flew into the flame.

Eustacia started up. This had been a well-known signal in old times when Wildeve had used to come secretly wooing to Mistover. She at once knew that Wildeve was outside, but before she could consider what to do her husband came in from upstairs. Eustacia's face burnt crimson at the unexpected collision of incidents, and filled it with an animation that it too frequently lacked.

"You have a very high colour, dearest," said Yeobright, when he came close enough to see it. "Your appearance would be no worse if it were always so."

"I am warm," said Eustacia. "I think I will go into the air for a few minutes."

“Shall I go with you?”

“O no. I am only going to the gate.”

She arose, but before she had time to get out of the room a loud rapping began upon the front door.

“I’ll go — I’ll go,” said Eustacia in an unusually quick tone for her; and she glanced eagerly towards the window whence the moth had flown; but nothing appeared there.

“You had better not at this time of the evening,” he said. Clym stepped before her into the passage, and Eustacia waited, her somnolent manner covering her inner heat and agitation.

She listened, and Clym opened the door. No words were uttered outside, and presently he closed it and came back, saying, “Nobody was there. I wonder what that could have meant?”

He was left to wonder during the rest of the evening, for no explanation offered itself, and Eustacia said nothing, the additional fact that she knew of only adding more mystery to the performance.

Meanwhile a little drama had been acted outside which saved Eustacia from all possibility of compromising herself that evening at least. Whilst Wildeve had been preparing his moth-signal another person had come behind him up to the gate. This man, who carried a gun in his hand, looked on for a moment at the other’s operation by the window, walked up to the house, knocked at the door, and then vanished round the corner and over the hedge.

“Damn him!” said Wildeve. “He has been watching me again.”

As his signal had been rendered futile by this uproarious rapping Wildeve withdrew, passed out at the gate, and walked quickly down the path without thinking of anything except getting away unnoticed. Halfway down the hill the path ran near a knot of stunted hollies, which in the general darkness of the scene stood as the pupil in a black eye. When Wildeve reached this point a report startled his ear, and a few spent gunshots fell among the leaves around him.

There was no doubt that he himself was the cause of that gun’s discharge; and he rushed into the clump of hollies, beating the bushes furiously with his stick; but nobody was there. This attack was a more serious matter than the last, and it was some time before Wildeve recovered his equanimity. A new and most unpleasant system of menace had begun, and the intent appeared to be to do him grievous bodily harm. Wildeve had looked upon Venn’s first attempt as a species of horseplay, which the reddleman had indulged in for want of knowing better; but now the boundary line was passed which divides the annoying from the perilous.

Had Wildeve known how thoroughly in earnest Venn had become he might have been still more alarmed. The reddleman had been almost exasperated by the sight of Wildeve outside Clym’s house, and he was prepared to go to any lengths short of absolutely shooting him, to terrify the young innkeeper out of his recalcitrant impulses. The doubtful legitimacy of such rough coercion did not disturb the mind of Venn. It troubles few such minds in such cases, and sometimes this is not to be regretted. From

the impeachment of Strafford to Farmer Lynch's short way with the scamps of Virginia there have been many triumphs of justice which are mockeries of law.

About half a mile below Clym's secluded dwelling lay a hamlet where lived one of the two constables who preserved the peace in the parish of Alderworth, and Wildeve went straight to the constable's cottage. Almost the first thing that he saw on opening the door was the constable's truncheon hanging to a nail, as if to assure him that here were the means to his purpose. On inquiry, however, of the constable's wife he learnt that the constable was not at home. Wildeve said he would wait.

The minutes ticked on, and the constable did not arrive. Wildeve cooled down from his state of high indignation to a restless dissatisfaction with himself, the scene, the constable's wife, and the whole set of circumstances. He arose and left the house. Altogether, the experience of that evening had had a cooling, not to say a chilling, effect on misdirected tenderness, and Wildeve was in no mood to ramble again to Alderworth after nightfall in hope of a stray glance from Eustacia.

Thus far the reddleman had been tolerably successful in his rude contrivances for keeping down Wildeve's inclination to rove in the evening. He had nipped in the bud the possible meeting between Eustacia and her old lover this very night. But he had not anticipated that the tendency of his action would be to divert Wildeve's movement rather than to stop it. The gambling with the guineas had not conduced to make him a welcome guest to Clym; but to call upon his wife's relative was natural, and he was determined to see Eustacia. It was necessary to choose some less untoward hour than ten o'clock at night. "Since it is unsafe to go in the evening," he said, "I'll go by day."

Meanwhile Venn had left the heath and gone to call upon Mrs. Yeobright, with whom he had been on friendly terms since she had learnt what a providential countermove he had made towards the restitution of the family guineas. She wondered at the lateness of his call, but had no objection to see him.

He gave her a full account of Clym's affliction, and of the state in which he was living; then, referring to Thomasin, touched gently upon the apparent sadness of her days. "Now, ma'am, depend upon it," he said, "you couldn't do a better thing for either of 'em than to make yourself at home in their houses, even if there should be a little rebuff at first."

"Both she and my son disobeyed me in marrying; therefore I have no interest in their households. Their troubles are of their own making." Mrs. Yeobright tried to speak severely; but the account of her son's state had moved her more than she cared to show.

"Your visits would make Wildeve walk straighter than he is inclined to do, and might prevent unhappiness down the heath."

"What do you mean?"

"I saw something tonight out there which I didn't like at all. I wish your son's house and Mr. Wildeve's were a hundred miles apart instead of four or five."

"Then there WAS an understanding between him and Clym's wife when he made a fool of Thomasin!"

“We’ll hope there’s no understanding now.”

“And our hope will probably be very vain. O Clym! O Thomasin!”

“There’s no harm done yet. In fact, I’ve persuaded Wildeve to mind his own business.”

“How?”

“O, not by talking — by a plan of mine called the silent system.”

“I hope you’ll succeed.”

“I shall if you help me by calling and making friends with your son. You’ll have a chance then of using your eyes.”

“Well, since it has come to this,” said Mrs. Yeobright sadly, “I will own to you, reddleman, that I thought of going. I should be much happier if we were reconciled. The marriage is unalterable, my life may be cut short, and I should wish to die in peace. He is my only son; and since sons are made of such stuff I am not sorry I have no other. As for Thomasin, I never expected much from her; and she has not disappointed me. But I forgave her long ago; and I forgive him now. I’ll go.”

At this very time of the reddleman’s conversation with Mrs. Yeobright at Blooms-End another conversation on the same subject was languidly proceeding at Alderworth.

All the day Clym had borne himself as if his mind were too full of its own matter to allow him to care about outward things, and his words now showed what had occupied his thoughts. It was just after the mysterious knocking that he began the theme. “Since I have been away today, Eustacia, I have considered that something must be done to heal up this ghastly breach between my dear mother and myself. It troubles me.”

“What do you propose to do?” said Eustacia abstractedly, for she could not clear away from her the excitement caused by Wildeve’s recent manoeuvre for an interview.

“You seem to take a very mild interest in what I propose, little or much,” said Clym, with tolerable warmth.

“You mistake me,” she answered, reviving at his reproach. “I am only thinking.”

“What of?”

“Partly of that moth whose skeleton is getting burnt up in the wick of the candle,” she said slowly. “But you know I always take an interest in what you say.”

“Very well, dear. Then I think I must go and call upon her.”...He went on with tender feeling: “It is a thing I am not at all too proud to do, and only a fear that I might irritate her has kept me away so long. But I must do something. It is wrong in me to allow this sort of thing to go on.”

“What have you to blame yourself about?”

“She is getting old, and her life is lonely, and I am her only son.”

“She has Thomasin.”

“Thomasin is not her daughter; and if she were that would not excuse me. But this is beside the point. I have made up my mind to go to her, and all I wish to ask you is whether you will do your best to help me — that is, forget the past; and if she shows her willingness to be reconciled, meet her halfway by welcoming her to our house, or by accepting a welcome to hers?”

At first Eustacia closed her lips as if she would rather do anything on the whole globe than what he suggested. But the lines of her mouth softened with thought, though not so far as they might have softened, and she said, "I will put nothing in your way; but after what has passed it, is asking too much that I go and make advances."

"You never distinctly told me what did pass between you."

"I could not do it then, nor can I now. Sometimes more bitterness is sown in five minutes than can be got rid of in a whole life; and that may be the case here." She paused a few moments, and added, "If you had never returned to your native place, Clym, what a blessing it would have been for you!... It has altered the destinies of —

—

"Three people."

"Five," Eustacia thought; but she kept that in.

CHAPTER 5

The Journey across the Heath

Thursday, the thirty-first of August, was one of a series of days during which snug houses were stifling, and when cool draughts were treats; when cracks appeared in clayey gardens, and were called "earthquakes" by apprehensive children; when loose spokes were discovered in the wheels of carts and carriages; and when stinging insects haunted the air, the earth, and every drop of water that was to be found.

In Mrs. Yeobright's garden large-leaved plants of a tender kind flagged by ten o'clock in the morning; rhubarb bent downward at eleven; and even stiff cabbages were limp by noon.

It was about eleven o'clock on this day that Mrs. Yeobright started across the heath towards her son's house, to do her best in getting reconciled with him and Eustacia, in conformity with her words to the reddleman. She had hoped to be well advanced in her walk before the heat of the day was at its highest, but after setting out she found that this was not to be done. The sun had branded the whole heath with its mark, even the purple heath-flowers having put on a brownness under the dry blazes of the few preceding days. Every valley was filled with air like that of a kiln, and the clean quartz sand of the winter water-courses, which formed summer paths, had undergone a species of incineration since the drought had set in.

In cool, fresh weather Mrs. Yeobright would have found no inconvenience in walking to Alderworth, but the present torrid attack made the journey a heavy undertaking for a woman past middle age; and at the end of the third mile she wished that she had hired Fairway to drive her a portion at least of the distance. But from the point at which she had arrived it was as easy to reach Clym's house as to get home again. So she went on, the air around her pulsating silently, and oppressing the earth with lassitude. She looked at the sky overhead, and saw that the sapphire hue of the zenith in spring and early summer had been replaced by a metallic violet.

Occasionally she came to a spot where independent worlds of ephemerals were passing their time in mad carousal, some in the air, some on the hot ground and vegetation, some in the tepid and stringy water of a nearly dried pool. All the shallower ponds had decreased to a vaporous mud amid which the maggoty shapes of innumerable obscure creatures could be indistinctly seen, heaving and wallowing with enjoyment. Being a woman not disinclined to philosophize she sometimes sat down under her umbrella to rest and to watch their happiness, for a certain hopefulness as to the result of her visit gave ease to her mind, and between important thoughts left it free to dwell on any infinitesimal matter which caught her eyes.

Mrs. Yeobright had never before been to her son's house, and its exact position was unknown to her. She tried one ascending path and another, and found that they led her astray. Retracing her steps, she came again to an open level, where she perceived at a distance a man at work. She went towards him and inquired the way.

The labourer pointed out the direction, and added, "Do you see that furze-cutter, ma'am, going up that footpath yond?"

Mrs. Yeobright strained her eyes, and at last said that she did perceive him.

"Well, if you follow him you can make no mistake. He's going to the same place, ma'am."

She followed the figure indicated. He appeared of a russet hue, not more distinguishable from the scene around him than the green caterpillar from the leaf it feeds on. His progress when actually walking was more rapid than Mrs. Yeobright's; but she was enabled to keep at an equable distance from him by his habit of stopping whenever he came to a brake of brambles, where he paused awhile. On coming in her turn to each of these spots she found half a dozen long limp brambles which he had cut from the bush during his halt and laid out straight beside the path. They were evidently intended for furze-faggot bonds which he meant to collect on his return.

The silent being who thus occupied himself seemed to be of no more account in life than an insect. He appeared as a mere parasite of the heath, fretting its surface in his daily labour as a moth frets a garment, entirely engrossed with its products, having no knowledge of anything in the world but fern, furze, heath, lichens, and moss.

The furze-cutter was so absorbed in the business of his journey that he never turned his head; and his leather-legged and gauntleted form at length became to her as nothing more than a moving handpost to show her the way. Suddenly she was attracted to his individuality by observing peculiarities in his walk. It was a gait she had seen somewhere before; and the gait revealed the man to her, as the gait of Ahimaaz in the distant plain made him known to the watchman of the king. "His walk is exactly as my husband's used to be," she said; and then the thought burst upon her that the furze-cutter was her son.

She was scarcely able to familiarize herself with this strange reality. She had been told that Clym was in the habit of cutting furze, but she had supposed that he occupied himself with the labour only at odd times, by way of useful pastime; yet she now beheld him as a furze-cutter and nothing more — wearing the regulation dress of the craft,

and thinking the regulation thoughts, to judge by his motions. Planning a dozen hasty schemes for at once preserving him and Eustacia from this mode of life, she throbbingly followed the way, and saw him enter his own door.

At one side of Clym's house was a knoll, and on the top of the knoll a clump of fir trees so highly thrust up into the sky that their foliage from a distance appeared as a black spot in the air above the crown of the hill. On reaching this place Mrs. Yeobright felt distressingly agitated, weary, and unwell. She ascended, and sat down under their shade to recover herself, and to consider how best to break the ground with Eustacia, so as not to irritate a woman underneath whose apparent indolence lurked passions even stronger and more active than her own.

The trees beneath which she sat were singularly battered, rude, and wild, and for a few minutes Mrs. Yeobright dismissed thoughts of her own storm-broken and exhausted state to contemplate theirs. Not a bough in the nine trees which composed the group but was splintered, lopped, and distorted by the fierce weather that there held them at its mercy whenever it prevailed. Some were blasted and split as if by lightning, black stains as from fire marking their sides, while the ground at their feet was strewn with dead fir-needles and heaps of cones blown down in the gales of past years. The place was called the Devil's Bellows, and it was only necessary to come there on a March or November night to discover the forcible reasons for that name. On the present heated afternoon, when no perceptible wind was blowing, the trees kept up a perpetual moan which one could hardly believe to be caused by the air.

Here she sat for twenty minutes or more ere she could summon resolution to go down to the door, her courage being lowered to zero by her physical lassitude. To any other person than a mother it might have seemed a little humiliating that she, the elder of the two women, should be the first to make advances. But Mrs. Yeobright had well considered all that, and she only thought how best to make her visit appear to Eustacia not abject but wise.

From her elevated position the exhausted woman could perceive the roof of the house below, and the garden and the whole enclosure of the little domicile. And now, at the moment of rising, she saw a second man approaching the gate. His manner was peculiar, hesitating, and not that of a person come on business or by invitation. He surveyed the house with interest, and then walked round and scanned the outer boundary of the garden, as one might have done had it been the birthplace of Shakespeare, the prison of Mary Stuart, or the Chateau of Hougomont. After passing round and again reaching the gate he went in. Mrs. Yeobright was vexed at this, having reckoned on finding her son and his wife by themselves; but a moment's thought showed her that the presence of an acquaintance would take off the awkwardness of her first appearance in the house, by confining the talk to general matters until she had begun to feel comfortable with them. She came down the hill to the gate, and looked into the hot garden.

There lay the cat asleep on the bare gravel of the path, as if beds, rugs, and carpets were unendurable. The leaves of the hollyhocks hung like half-closed umbrellas, the sap almost simmered in the stems, and foliage with a smooth surface glared like metallic

mirrors. A small apple tree, of the sort called Ratheripe, grew just inside the gate, the only one which throve in the garden, by reason of the lightness of the soil; and among the fallen apples on the ground beneath were wasps rolling drunk with the juice, or creeping about the little caves in each fruit which they had eaten out before stupefied by its sweetness. By the door lay Clym's furze-hook and the last handful of faggot-bonds she had seen him gather; they had plainly been thrown down there as he entered the house.

CHAPTER 6

A Conjuncture, and Its Result upon the Pedestrian

Wildeve, as has been stated, was determined to visit Eustacia boldly, by day, and on the easy terms of a relation, since the reddleman had spied out and spoilt his walks to her by night. The spell that she had thrown over him in the moonlight dance made it impossible for a man having no strong puritanic force within him to keep away altogether. He merely calculated on meeting her and her husband in an ordinary manner, chatting a little while, and leaving again. Every outward sign was to be conventional; but the one great fact would be there to satisfy him — he would see her. He did not even desire Clym's absence, since it was just possible that Eustacia might resent any situation which could compromise her dignity as a wife, whatever the state of her heart towards him. Women were often so.

He went accordingly; and it happened that the time of his arrival coincided with that of Mrs. Yeobright's pause on the hill near the house. When he had looked round the premises in the manner she had noticed he went and knocked at the door. There was a few minutes' interval, and then the key turned in the lock, the door opened, and Eustacia herself confronted him.

Nobody could have imagined from her bearing now that here stood the woman who had joined with him in the impassioned dance of the week before, unless indeed he could have penetrated below the surface and gauged the real depth of that still stream.

"I hope you reached home safely?" said Wildeve.

"O yes," she carelessly returned.

"And were you not tired the next day? I feared you might be."

"I was rather. You need not speak low — nobody will over-hear us. My small servant is gone on an errand to the village."

"Then Clym is not at home?"

"Yes, he is."

"O! I thought that perhaps you had locked the door because you were alone and were afraid of tramps."

"No — here is my husband."

They had been standing in the entry. Closing the front door and turning the key, as before, she threw open the door of the adjoining room and asked him to walk in.

Wildeve entered, the room appearing to be empty; but as soon as he had advanced a few steps he started. On the hearthrug lay Clym asleep. Beside him were the leggings, thick boots, leather gloves, and sleeve-waistcoat in which he worked.

“You may go in; you will not disturb him,” she said, following behind. “My reason for fastening the door is that he may not be intruded upon by any chance comer while lying here, if I should be in the garden or upstairs.”

“Why is he sleeping there?” said Wildeve in low tones.

“He is very weary. He went out at half-past four this morning, and has been working ever since. He cuts furze because it is the only thing he can do that does not put any strain upon his poor eyes.” The contrast between the sleeper’s appearance and Wildeve’s at this moment was painfully apparent to Eustacia, Wildeve being elegantly dressed in a new summer suit and light hat; and she continued: “Ah! you don’t know how differently he appeared when I first met him, though it is such a little while ago. His hands were as white and soft as mine; and look at them now, how rough and brown they are! His complexion is by nature fair, and that rusty look he has now, all of a colour with his leather clothes, is caused by the burning of the sun.”

“Why does he go out at all!” Wildeve whispered.

“Because he hates to be idle; though what he earns doesn’t add much to our exchequer. However, he says that when people are living upon their capital they must keep down current expenses by turning a penny where they can.”

“The fates have not been kind to you, Eustacia Yeobright.”

“I have nothing to thank them for.”

“Nor has he — except for their one great gift to him.”

“What’s that?”

Wildeve looked her in the eyes.

Eustacia blushed for the first time that day. “Well, I am a questionable gift,” she said quietly. “I thought you meant the gift of content — which he has, and I have not.”

“I can understand content in such a case — though how the outward situation can attract him puzzles me.”

“That’s because you don’t know him. He’s an enthusiast about ideas, and careless about outward things. He often reminds me of the Apostle Paul.”

“I am glad to hear that he’s so grand in character as that.”

“Yes; but the worst of it is that though Paul was excellent as a man in the Bible he would hardly have done in real life.”

Their voices had instinctively dropped lower, though at first they had taken no particular care to avoid awakening Clym. “Well, if that means that your marriage is a misfortune to you, you know who is to blame,” said Wildeve.

“The marriage is no misfortune in itself,” she retorted with some little petulance. “It is simply the accident which has happened since that has been the cause of my ruin. I have certainly got thistles for figs in a worldly sense, but how could I tell what time would bring forth?”

“Sometimes, Eustacia, I think it is a judgment upon you. You rightly belonged to me, you know; and I had no idea of losing you.”

“No, it was not my fault! Two could not belong to you; and remember that, before I was aware, you turned aside to another woman. It was cruel levity in you to do that. I never dreamt of playing such a game on my side till you began it on yours.”

“I meant nothing by it,” replied Wildeve. “It was a mere interlude. Men are given to the trick of having a passing fancy for somebody else in the midst of a permanent love, which reasserts itself afterwards just as before. On account of your rebellious manner to me I was tempted to go further than I should have done; and when you still would keep playing the same tantalising part I went further still, and married her.” Turning and looking again at the unconscious form of Clym, he murmured, “I am afraid that you don’t value your prize, Clym...He ought to be happier than I in one thing at least. He may know what it is to come down in the world, and to be afflicted with a great personal calamity; but he probably doesn’t know what it is to lose the woman he loved.”

“He is not ungrateful for winning her,” whispered Eustacia, “and in that respect he is a good man. Many women would go far for such a husband. But do I desire unreasonably much in wanting what is called life — music, poetry, passion, war, and all the beating and pulsing that are going on in the great arteries of the world? That was the shape of my youthful dream; but I did not get it. Yet I thought I saw the way to it in my Clym.”

“And you only married him on that account?”

“There you mistake me. I married him because I loved him, but I won’t say that I didn’t love him partly because I thought I saw a promise of that life in him.”

“You have dropped into your old mournful key.”

“But I am not going to be depressed,” she cried perversely. “I began a new system by going to that dance, and I mean to stick to it. Clym can sing merrily; why should not I?”

Wildeve looked thoughtfully at her. “It is easier to say you will sing than to do it; though if I could I would encourage you in your attempt. But as life means nothing to me, without one thing which is now impossible, you will forgive me for not being able to encourage you.”

“Damon, what is the matter with you, that you speak like that?” she asked, raising her deep shady eyes to his.

“That’s a thing I shall never tell plainly; and perhaps if I try to tell you in riddles you will not care to guess them.”

Eustacia remained silent for a minute, and she said, “We are in a strange relationship today. You mince matters to an uncommon nicety. You mean, Damon, that you still love me. Well, that gives me sorrow, for I am not made so entirely happy by my marriage that I am willing to spurn you for the information, as I ought to do. But we have said too much about this. Do you mean to wait until my husband is awake?”

"I thought to speak to him; but it is unnecessary, Eustacia, if I offend you by not forgetting you, you are right to mention it; but do not talk of spurning."

She did not reply, and they stood looking musingly at Clym as he slept on in that profound sleep which is the result of physical labour carried on in circumstances that wake no nervous fear.

"God, how I envy him that sweet sleep!" said Wildeve. "I have not slept like that since I was a boy — years and years ago."

While they thus watched him a click at the gate was audible, and a knock came to the door. Eustacia went to a window and looked out.

Her countenance changed. First she became crimson, and then the red subsided till it even partially left her lips.

"Shall I go away?" said Wildeve, standing up.

"I hardly know."

"Who is it?"

"Mrs. Yeobright. O, what she said to me that day! I cannot understand this visit — what does she mean? And she suspects that past time of ours."

"I am in your hands. If you think she had better not see me here I'll go into the next room."

"Well, yes — go."

Wildeve at once withdrew; but before he had been half a minute in the adjoining apartment Eustacia came after him.

"No," she said, "we won't have any of this. If she comes in she must see you — and think if she likes there's something wrong! But how can I open the door to her, when she dislikes me — wishes to see not me, but her son? I won't open the door!"

Mrs. Yeobright knocked again more loudly.

"Her knocking will, in all likelihood, awaken him," continued Eustacia, "and then he will let her in himself. Ah — listen."

They could hear Clym moving in the other room, as if disturbed by the knocking, and he uttered the word "Mother."

"Yes — he is awake — he will go to the door," she said, with a breath of relief. "Come this way. I have a bad name with her, and you must not be seen. Thus I am obliged to act by stealth, not because I do ill, but because others are pleased to say so."

By this time she had taken him to the back door, which was open, disclosing a path leading down the garden. "Now, one word, Damon," she remarked as he stepped forth. "This is your first visit here; let it be your last. We have been hot lovers in our time, but it won't do now. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Wildeve. "I have had all I came for, and I am satisfied."

"What was it?"

"A sight of you. Upon my eternal honour I came for no more."

Wildeve kissed his hand to the beautiful girl he addressed, and passed into the garden, where she watched him down the path, over the stile at the end, and into

the ferns outside, which brushed his hips as he went along till he became lost in their thickets. When he had quite gone she slowly turned, and directed her attention to the interior of the house.

But it was possible that her presence might not be desired by Clym and his mother at this moment of their first meeting, or that it would be superfluous. At all events, she was in no hurry to meet Mrs. Yeobright. She resolved to wait till Clym came to look for her, and glided back into the garden. Here she idly occupied herself for a few minutes, till finding no notice was taken of her she retraced her steps through the house to the front, where she listened for voices in the parlour. But hearing none she opened the door and went in. To her astonishment Clym lay precisely as Wildeve and herself had left him, his sleep apparently unbroken. He had been disturbed and made to dream and murmur by the knocking, but he had not awakened. Eustacia hastened to the door, and in spite of her reluctance to open it to a woman who had spoken of her so bitterly, she unfastened it and looked out. Nobody was to be seen. There, by the scraper, lay Clym's hook and the handful of faggot-bonds he had brought home; in front of her were the empty path, the garden gate standing slightly ajar; and, beyond, the great valley of purple heath thrilling silently in the sun. Mrs. Yeobright was gone.

Clym's mother was at this time following a path which lay hidden from Eustacia by a shoulder of the hill. Her walk thither from the garden gate had been hasty and determined, as of a woman who was now no less anxious to escape from the scene than she had previously been to enter it. Her eyes were fixed on the ground; within her two sights were graven — that of Clym's hook and brambles at the door, and that of a woman's face at a window. Her lips trembled, becoming unnaturally thin as she murmured, "'Tis too much — Clym, how can he bear to do it! He is at home; and yet he lets her shut the door against me!"

In her anxiety to get out of the direct view of the house she had diverged from the straightest path homeward, and while looking about to regain it she came upon a little boy gathering whortleberries in a hollow. The boy was Johnny Nunsuch, who had been Eustacia's stoker at the bonfire, and, with the tendency of a minute body to gravitate towards a greater, he began hovering round Mrs. Yeobright as soon as she appeared, and trotted on beside her without perceptible consciousness of his act.

Mrs. Yeobright spoke to him as one in a mesmeric sleep. "'Tis a long way home, my child, and we shall not get there till evening."

"I shall," said her small companion. "I am going to play marnels afore supper, and we go to supper at six o'clock, because Father comes home. Does your father come home at six too?"

"No, he never comes; nor my son either, nor anybody."

"What have made you so down? Have you seen a ooser?"

"I have seen what's worse — a woman's face looking at me through a windowpane."

"Is that a bad sight?"

"Yes. It is always a bad sight to see a woman looking out at a weary wayfarer and not letting her in."

“Once when I went to Throope Great Pond to catch effets I seed myself looking up at myself, and I was frightened and jumped back like anything.”

...”If they had only shown signs of meeting my advances halfway how well it might have been done! But there is no chance. Shut out! She must have set him against me. Can there be beautiful bodies without hearts inside? I think so. I would not have done it against a neighbour’s cat on such a fiery day as this!”

“What is it you say?”

“Never again — never! Not even if they send for me!”

“You must be a very curious woman to talk like that.”

“O no, not at all,” she said, returning to the boy’s prattle. “Most people who grow up and have children talk as I do. When you grow up your mother will talk as I do too.”

“I hope she won’t; because ‘tis very bad to talk nonsense.”

“Yes, child; it is nonsense, I suppose. Are you not nearly spent with the heat?”

“Yes. But not so much as you be.”

“How do you know?”

“Your face is white and wet, and your head is hanging-down-like.”

“Ah, I am exhausted from inside.”

“Why do you, every time you take a step, go like this?” The child in speaking gave to his motion the jerk and limp of an invalid.

“Because I have a burden which is more than I can bear.”

The little boy remained silently pondering, and they tottered on side by side until more than a quarter of an hour had elapsed, when Mrs. Yeobright, whose weakness plainly increased, said to him, “I must sit down here to rest.”

When she had seated herself he looked long in her face and said, “How funny you draw your breath — like a lamb when you drive him till he’s nearly done for. Do you always draw your breath like that?”

“Not always.” Her voice was now so low as to be scarcely above a whisper.

“You will go to sleep there, I suppose, won’t you? You have shut your eyes already.”

“No. I shall not sleep much till — another day, and then I hope to have a long, long one — very long. Now can you tell me if Rimsmoor Pond is dry this summer?”

“Rimsmoor Pond is, but Oker’s Pool isn’t, because he is deep, and is never dry — ’tis just over there.”

“Is the water clear?”

“Yes, middling — except where the heath-croppers walk into it.”

“Then, take this, and go as fast as you can, and dip me up the clearest you can find. I am very faint.”

She drew from the small willow reticule that she carried in her hand an old-fashioned china teacup without a handle; it was one of half a dozen of the same sort lying in the reticule, which she had preserved ever since her childhood, and had brought with her today as a small present for Clym and Eustacia.

The boy started on his errand, and soon came back with the water, such as it was. Mrs. Yeobright attempted to drink, but it was so warm as to give her nausea, and she threw it away. Afterwards she still remained sitting, with her eyes closed.

The boy waited, played near her, caught several of the little brown butterflies which abounded, and then said as he waited again, "I like going on better than biding still. Will you soon start again?"

"I don't know."

"I wish I might go on by myself," he resumed, fearing, apparently, that he was to be pressed into some unpleasant service. "Do you want me any more, please?"

Mrs. Yeobright made no reply.

"What shall I tell Mother?" the boy continued.

"Tell her you have seen a broken-hearted woman cast off by her son."

Before quite leaving her he threw upon her face a wistful glance, as if he had misgivings on the generosity of forsaking her thus. He gazed into her face in a vague, wondering manner, like that of one examining some strange old manuscript the key to whose characters is undiscoverable. He was not so young as to be absolutely without a sense that sympathy was demanded, he was not old enough to be free from the terror felt in childhood at beholding misery in adult quarters hither-to deemed impregnable; and whether she were in a position to cause trouble or to suffer from it, whether she and her affliction were something to pity or something to fear, it was beyond him to decide. He lowered his eyes and went on without another word. Before he had gone half a mile he had forgotten all about her, except that she was a woman who had sat down to rest.

Mrs. Yeobright's exertions, physical and emotional, had well-nigh prostrated her; but she continued to creep along in short stages with long breaks between. The sun had now got far to the west of south and stood directly in her face, like some merciless incendiary, brand in hand, waiting to consume her. With the departure of the boy all visible animation disappeared from the landscape, though the intermittent husky notes of the male grasshoppers from every tuft of furze were enough to show that amid the prostration of the larger animal species an unseen insect world was busy in all the fullness of life.

In two hours she reached a slope about three-fourths the whole distance from Alderworth to her own home, where a little patch of shepherd's-thyme intruded upon the path; and she sat down upon the perfumed mat it formed there. In front of her a colony of ants had established a thoroughfare across the way, where they toiled a never-ending and heavy-laden throng. To look down upon them was like observing a city street from the top of a tower. She remembered that this bustle of ants had been in progress for years at the same spot — doubtless those of the old times were the ancestors of these which walked there now. She leant back to obtain more thorough rest, and the soft eastern portion of the sky was as great a relief to her eyes as the thyme was to her head. While she looked a heron arose on that side of the sky and flew on with his face towards the sun. He had come dripping wet from some pool in the valleys, and as he

flew the edges and lining of his wings, his thighs and his breast were so caught by the bright sunbeams that he appeared as if formed of burnished silver. Up in the zenith where he was seemed a free and happy place, away from all contact with the earthly ball to which she was pinioned; and she wished that she could arise uncrushed from its surface and fly as he flew then.

But, being a mother, it was inevitable that she should soon cease to ruminate upon her own condition. Had the track of her next thought been marked by a streak in the air, like the path of a meteor, it would have shown a direction contrary to the heron's, and have descended to the eastward upon the roof of Clym's house.

CHAPTER 7

The Tragic Meeting of Two Old Friends

He in the meantime had aroused himself from sleep, sat up, and looked around. Eustacia was sitting in a chair hard by him, and though she held a book in her hand she had not looked into it for some time.

"Well, indeed!" said Clym, brushing his eyes with his hands. "How soundly I have slept! I have had such a tremendous dream, too — one I shall never forget."

"I thought you had been dreaming," said she.

"Yes. It was about my mother. I dreamt that I took you to her house to make up differences, and when we got there we couldn't get in, though she kept on crying to us for help. However, dreams are dreams. What o'clock is it, Eustacia?"

"Half-past two."

"So late, is it? I didn't mean to stay so long. By the time I have had something to eat it will be after three."

"Ann is not come back from the village, and I thought I would let you sleep on till she returned."

Clym went to the window and looked out. Presently he said, musingly, "Week after week passes, and yet Mother does not come. I thought I should have heard something from her long before this."

Misgiving, regret, fear, resolution, ran their swift course of expression in Eustacia's dark eyes. She was face to face with a monstrous difficulty, and she resolved to get free of it by postponement.

"I must certainly go to Blooms-End soon," he continued, "and I think I had better go alone." He picked up his leggings and gloves, threw them down again, and added, "As dinner will be so late today I will not go back to the heath, but work in the garden till the evening, and then, when it will be cooler, I will walk to Blooms-End. I am quite sure that if I make a little advance Mother will be willing to forget all. It will be rather late before I can get home, as I shall not be able to do the distance either way in less than an hour and a half. But you will not mind for one evening, dear? What are you thinking of to make you look so abstracted?"

"I cannot tell you," she said heavily. "I wish we didn't live here, Clym. The world seems all wrong in this place."

"Well — if we make it so. I wonder if Thomasin has been to Blooms-End lately. I hope so. But probably not, as she is, I believe, expecting to be confined in a month or so. I wish I had thought of that before. Poor Mother must indeed be very lonely."

"I don't like you going tonight."

"Why not tonight?"

"Something may be said which will terribly injure me."

"My mother is not vindictive," said Clym, his colour faintly rising.

"But I wish you would not go," Eustacia repeated in a low tone. "If you agree not to go tonight I promise to go by myself to her house tomorrow, and make it up with her, and wait till you fetch me."

"Why do you want to do that at this particular time, when at every previous time that I have proposed it you have refused?"

"I cannot explain further than that I should like to see her alone before you go," she answered, with an impatient move of her head, and looking at him with an anxiety more frequently seen upon those of a sanguine temperament than upon such as herself.

"Well, it is very odd that just when I had decided to go myself you should want to do what I proposed long ago. If I wait for you to go tomorrow another day will be lost; and I know I shall be unable to rest another night without having been. I want to get this settled, and will. You must visit her afterwards — it will be all the same."

"I could even go with you now?"

"You could scarcely walk there and back without a longer rest than I shall take. No, not tonight, Eustacia."

"Let it be as you say, then," she replied in the quiet way of one who, though willing to ward off evil consequences by a mild effort, would let events fall out as they might sooner than wrestle hard to direct them.

Clym then went into the garden; and a thoughtful languor stole over Eustacia for the remainder of the afternoon, which her husband attributed to the heat of the weather.

In the evening he set out on the journey. Although the heat of summer was yet intense the days had considerably shortened, and before he had advanced a mile on his way all the heath purples, browns, and greens had merged in a uniform dress without airiness or graduation, and broken only by touches of white where the little heaps of clean quartz sand showed the entrance to a rabbit burrow, or where the white flints of a footpath lay like a thread over the slopes. In almost every one of the isolated and stunted thorns which grew here and there a nighthawk revealed his presence by whirring like the clack of a mill as long as he could hold his breath, then stopping, flapping his wings, wheeling round the bush, alighting, and after a silent interval of listening beginning to whirr again. At each brushing of Clym's feet white millermoths flew into the air just high enough to catch upon their dusty wings the mellowed light from the west, which now shone across the depressions and levels of the ground without falling thereon to light them up.

Yeobright walked on amid this quiet scene with a hope that all would soon be well. Three miles on he came to a spot where a soft perfume was wafted across his path, and he stood still for a moment to inhale the familiar scent. It was the place at which, four hours earlier, his mother had sat down exhausted on the knoll covered with shepherd's-thyme. While he stood a sound between a breathing and a moan suddenly reached his ears.

He looked to where the sound came from; but nothing appeared there save the verge of the hillock stretching against the sky in an unbroken line. He moved a few steps in that direction, and now he perceived a recumbent figure almost close to his feet.

Among the different possibilities as to the person's individuality there did not for a moment occur to Yeobright that it might be one of his own family. Sometimes furze-cutters had been known to sleep out of doors at these times, to save a long journey homeward and back again; but Clym remembered the moan and looked closer, and saw that the form was feminine; and a distress came over him like cold air from a cave. But he was not absolutely certain that the woman was his mother till he stooped and beheld her face, pallid, and with closed eyes.

His breath went, as it were, out of his body and the cry of anguish which would have escaped him died upon his lips. During the momentary interval that elapsed before he became conscious that something must be done all sense of time and place left him, and it seemed as if he and his mother were as when he was a child with her many years ago on this heath at hours similar to the present. Then he awoke to activity; and bending yet lower he found that she still breathed, and that her breath though feeble was regular, except when disturbed by an occasional gasp.

"O, what is it! Mother, are you very ill — you are not dying?" he cried, pressing his lips to her face. "I am your Clym. How did you come here? What does it all mean?"

At that moment the chasm in their lives which his love for Eustacia had caused was not remembered by Yeobright, and to him the present joined continuously with that friendly past that had been their experience before the division.

She moved her lips, appeared to know him, but could not speak; and then Clym strove to consider how best to move her, as it would be necessary to get her away from the spot before the dews were intense. He was able-bodied, and his mother was thin. He clasped his arms round her, lifted her a little, and said, "Does that hurt you?"

She shook her head, and he lifted her up; then, at a slow pace, went onward with his load. The air was now completely cool; but whenever he passed over a sandy patch of ground uncarpeted with vegetation there was reflected from its surface into his face the heat which it had imbibed during the day. At the beginning of his undertaking he had thought but little of the distance which yet would have to be traversed before Blooms-End could be reached; but though he had slept that afternoon he soon began to feel the weight of his burden. Thus he proceeded, like Aeneas with his father; the bats circling round his head, nightjars flapping their wings within a yard of his face, and not a human being within call.

While he was yet nearly a mile from the house his mother exhibited signs of restlessness under the constraint of being borne along, as if his arms were irksome to her. He lowered her upon his knees and looked around. The point they had now reached, though far from any road, was not more than a mile from the Blooms-End cottages occupied by Fairway, Sam, Humphrey, and the Cantles. Moreover, fifty yards off stood a hut, built of clods and covered with thin turves, but now entirely disused. The simple outline of the lonely shed was visible, and thither he determined to direct his steps. As soon as he arrived he laid her down carefully by the entrance, and then ran and cut with his pocketknife an armful of the driest fern. Spreading this within the shed, which was entirely open on one side, he placed his mother thereon; then he ran with all his might towards the dwelling of Fairway.

Nearly a quarter of an hour had passed, disturbed only by the broken breathing of the sufferer, when moving figures began to animate the line between heath and sky. In a few moments Clym arrived with Fairway, Humphrey, and Susan Nunsuch; Olly Dowden, who had chanced to be at Fairway's, Christian and Grandfer Cattle following helter-skelter behind. They had brought a lantern and matches, water, a pillow, and a few other articles which had occurred to their minds in the hurry of the moment. Sam had been despatched back again for brandy, and a boy brought Fairway's pony, upon which he rode off to the nearest medical man, with directions to call at Wildeve's on his way, and inform Thomasin that her aunt was unwell.

Sam and the brandy soon arrived, and it was administered by the light of the lantern; after which she became sufficiently conscious to signify by signs that something was wrong with her foot. Olly Dowden at length understood her meaning, and examined the foot indicated. It was swollen and red. Even as they watched the red began to assume a more livid colour, in the midst of which appeared a scarlet speck, smaller than a pea, and it was found to consist of a drop of blood, which rose above the smooth flesh of her ankle in a hemisphere.

"I know what it is," cried Sam. "She has been stung by an adder!"

"Yes," said Clym instantly. "I remember when I was a child seeing just such a bite. O, my poor mother!"

"It was my father who was bit," said Sam. "And there's only one way to cure it. You must rub the place with the fat of other adders, and the only way to get that is by frying them. That's what they did for him."

"'Tis an old remedy," said Clym distrustfully, "and I have doubts about it. But we can do nothing else till the doctor comes."

"'Tis a sure cure," said Olly Dowden, with emphasis. "I've used it when I used to go out nursing."

"Then we must pray for daylight, to catch them," said Clym gloomily.

"I will see what I can do," said Sam.

He took a green hazel which he had used as a walking stick, split it at the end, inserted a small pebble, and with the lantern in his hand went out into the heath.

Clym had by this time lit a small fire, and despatched Susan Nunsuch for a frying pan. Before she had returned Sam came in with three adders, one briskly coiling and uncoiling in the cleft of the stick, and the other two hanging dead across it.

“I have only been able to get one alive and fresh as he ought to be,” said Sam. “These limp ones are two I killed today at work; but as they don’t die till the sun goes down they can’t be very stale meat.”

The live adder regarded the assembled group with a sinister look in its small black eye, and the beautiful brown and jet pattern on its back seemed to intensify with indignation. Mrs. Yeobright saw the creature, and the creature saw her — she quivered throughout, and averted her eyes.

“Look at that,” murmured Christian Cante. “Neighbours, how do we know but that something of the old serpent in God’s garden, that gied the apple to the young woman with no clothes, lives on in adders and snakes still? Look at his eye — for all the world like a villainous sort of black currant. ‘Tis to be hoped he can’t ill-wish us! There’s folks in heath who’ve been overlooked already. I will never kill another adder as long as I live.”

“Well, ‘tis right to be afeard of things, if folks can’t help it,” said Grandfer Cante. “‘Twould have saved me many a brave danger in my time.”

“I fancy I heard something outside the shed,” said Christian. “I wish troubles would come in the daytime, for then a man could show his courage, and hardly beg for mercy of the most broomstick old woman he should see, if he was a brave man, and able to run out of her sight!”

“Even such an ignorant fellow as I should know better than do that,” said Sam.

“Well, there’s calamities where we least expect it, whether or no. Neighbours, if Mrs. Yeobright were to die, d’ye think we should be took up and tried for the manslaughter of a woman?”

“No, they couldn’t bring it in as that,” said Sam, “unless they could prove we had been poachers at some time of our lives. But she’ll fetch round.”

“Now, if I had been stung by ten adders I should hardly have lost a day’s work for’t,” said Grandfer Cante. “Such is my spirit when I am on my mettle. But perhaps ‘tis natural in a man trained for war. Yes, I’ve gone through a good deal; but nothing ever came amiss to me after I joined the Locals in four.” He shook his head and smiled at a mental picture of himself in uniform. “I was always first in the most galliantest scrapes in my younger days!”

“I suppose that was because they always used to put the biggest fool afore,” said Fairway from the fire, beside which he knelt, blowing it with his breath.

“D’ye think so, Timothy?” said Grandfer Cante, coming forward to Fairway’s side with sudden depression in his face. “Then a man may feel for years that he is good solid company, and be wrong about himself after all?”

“Never mind that question, Grandfer. Stir your stumps and get some more sticks. ‘Tis very nonsense of an old man to prattle so when life and death’s in mangling.”

“Yes, yes,” said Grandfer Cante, with melancholy conviction. “Well, this is a bad night altogether for them that have done well in their time; and if I were ever such a dab at the hautboy or tenor viol, I shouldn’t have the heart to play tunes upon ‘em now.”

Susan now arrived with the frying pan, when the live adder was killed and the heads of the three taken off. The remainders, being cut into lengths and split open, were tossed into the pan, which began hissing and crackling over the fire. Soon a rill of clear oil trickled from the carcasses, whereupon Clym dipped the corner of his handkerchief into the liquid and anointed the wound.

CHAPTER 8

Eustacia Hears of Good Fortune, and Beholds Evil

In the meantime Eustacia, left alone in her cottage at Alderworth, had become considerably depressed by the posture of affairs. The consequences which might result from Clym’s discovery that his mother had been turned from his door that day were likely to be disagreeable, and this was a quality in events which she hated as much as the dreadful.

To be left to pass the evening by herself was irksome to her at any time, and this evening it was more irksome than usual by reason of the excitements of the past hours. The two visits had stirred her into restlessness. She was not wrought to any great pitch of uneasiness by the probability of appearing in an ill light in the discussion between Clym and his mother, but she was wrought to vexation, and her slumbering activities were quickened to the extent of wishing that she had opened the door. She had certainly believed that Clym was awake, and the excuse would be an honest one as far as it went; but nothing could save her from censure in refusing to answer at the first knock. Yet, instead of blaming herself for the issue she laid the fault upon the shoulders of some indistinct, colossal Prince of the World, who had framed her situation and ruled her lot.

At this time of the year it was pleasanter to walk by night than by day, and when Clym had been absent about an hour she suddenly resolved to go out in the direction of Blooms-End, on the chance of meeting him on his return. When she reached the garden gate she heard wheels approaching, and looking round beheld her grandfather coming up in his car.

“I can’t stay a minute, thank ye,” he answered to her greeting. “I am driving to East Egdon; but I came round here just to tell you the news. Perhaps you have heard — about Mr. Wildeve’s fortune?”

“No,” said Eustacia blankly.

“Well, he has come into a fortune of eleven thousand pounds — uncle died in Canada, just after hearing that all his family, whom he was sending home, had gone to the

bottom in the Cassiopeia; so Wildeve has come into everything, without in the least expecting it."

Eustacia stood motionless awhile. "How long has he known of this?" she asked.

"Well, it was known to him this morning early, for I knew it at ten o'clock, when Charley came back. Now, he is what I call a lucky man. What a fool you were, Eustacia!"

"In what way?" she said, lifting her eyes in apparent calmness.

"Why, in not sticking to him when you had him."

"Had him, indeed!"

"I did not know there had ever been anything between you till lately; and, faith, I should have been hot and strong against it if I had known; but since it seems that there was some sniffing between ye, why the deuce didn't you stick to him?"

Eustacia made no reply, but she looked as if she could say as much upon that subject as he if she chose.

"And how is your poor purblind husband?" continued the old man. "Not a bad fellow either, as far as he goes."

"He is quite well."

"It is a good thing for his cousin what-d'ye-call-her? By George, you ought to have been in that galley, my girl! Now I must drive on. Do you want any assistance? What's mine is yours, you know."

"Thank you, Grandfather, we are not in want at present," she said coldly. "Clym cuts furze, but he does it mostly as a useful pastime, because he can do nothing else."

"He is paid for his pastime, isn't he? Three shillings a hundred, I heard."

"Clym has money," she said, colouring, "but he likes to earn a little."

"Very well; good night." And the captain drove on.

When her grandfather was gone Eustacia went on her way mechanically; but her thoughts were no longer concerning her mother-in-law and Clym. Wildeve, notwithstanding his complaints against his fate, had been seized upon by destiny and placed in the sunshine once more. Eleven thousand pounds! From every Egdon point of view he was a rich man. In Eustacia's eyes, too, it was an ample sum — one sufficient to supply those wants of hers which had been stigmatized by Clym in his more austere moods as vain and luxurious. Though she was no lover of money she loved what money could bring; and the new accessories she imagined around him clothed Wildeve with a great deal of interest. She recollected now how quietly well-dressed he had been that morning — he had probably put on his newest suit, regardless of damage by briars and thorns. And then she thought of his manner towards herself.

"O I see it, I see it," she said. "How much he wishes he had me now, that he might give me all I desire!"

In recalling the details of his glances and words — at the time scarcely regarded — it became plain to her how greatly they had been dictated by his knowledge of this new event. "Had he been a man to bear a jilt ill-will he would have told me of his good fortune in crowing tones; instead of doing that he mentioned not a word, in deference to my misfortunes, and merely implied that he loved me still, as one superior to him."

Wildeve's silence that day on what had happened to him was just the kind of behaviour calculated to make an impression on such a woman. Those delicate touches of good taste were, in fact, one of the strong points in his demeanour towards the other sex. The peculiarity of Wildeve was that, while at one time passionate, upbraiding, and resentful towards a woman, at another he would treat her with such unparalleled grace as to make previous neglect appear as no discourtesy, injury as no insult, interference as a delicate attention, and the ruin of her honour as excess of chivalry. This man, whose admiration today Eustacia had disregarded, whose good wishes she had scarcely taken the trouble to accept, whom she had shown out of the house by the back door, was the possessor of eleven thousand pounds — a man of fair professional education, and one who had served his articles with a civil engineer.

So intent was Eustacia upon Wildeve's fortunes that she forgot how much closer to her own course were those of Clym; and instead of walking on to meet him at once she sat down upon a stone. She was disturbed in her reverie by a voice behind, and turning her head beheld the old lover and fortunate inheritor of wealth immediately beside her.

She remained sitting, though the fluctuation in her look might have told any man who knew her so well as Wildeve that she was thinking of him.

"How did you come here?" she said in her clear low tone. "I thought you were at home."

"I went on to the village after leaving your garden; and now I have come back again — that's all. Which way are you walking, may I ask?"

She waved her hand in the direction of Blooms-End. "I am going to meet my husband. I think I may possibly have got into trouble whilst you were with me today."

"How could that be?"

"By not letting in Mrs. Yeobright."

"I hope that visit of mine did you no harm."

"None. It was not your fault," she said quietly.

By this time she had risen; and they involuntarily sauntered on together, without speaking, for two or three minutes; when Eustacia broke silence by saying, "I assume I must congratulate you."

"On what? O yes; on my eleven thousand pounds, you mean. Well, since I didn't get something else, I must be content with getting that."

"You seem very indifferent about it. Why didn't you tell me today when you came?" she said in the tone of a neglected person. "I heard of it quite by accident."

"I did mean to tell you," said Wildeve. "But I — well, I will speak frankly — I did not like to mention it when I saw, Eustacia, that your star was not high. The sight of a man lying wearied out with hard work, as your husband lay, made me feel that to brag of my own fortune to you would be greatly out of place. Yet, as you stood there beside him, I could not help feeling too that in many respects he was a richer man than I."

At this Eustacia said, with slumbering mischievousness, "What, would you exchange with him — your fortune for me?"

"I certainly would," said Wildeve.

"As we are imagining what is impossible and absurd, suppose we change the subject?"

"Very well; and I will tell you of my plans for the future, if you care to hear them. I shall permanently invest nine thousand pounds, keep one thousand as ready money, and with the remaining thousand travel for a year or so."

"Travel? What a bright idea! Where will you go to?"

"From here to Paris, where I shall pass the winter and spring. Then I shall go to Italy, Greece, Egypt, and Palestine, before the hot weather comes on. In the summer I shall go to America; and then, by a plan not yet settled, I shall go to Australia and round to India. By that time I shall have begun to have had enough of it. Then I shall probably come back to Paris again, and there I shall stay as long as I can afford to."

"Back to Paris again," she murmured in a voice that was nearly a sigh. She had never once told Wildeve of the Parisian desires which Clym's description had sown in her; yet here was he involuntarily in a position to gratify them. "You think a good deal of Paris?" she added.

"Yes. In my opinion it is the central beauty-spot of the world."

"And in mine! And Thomasin will go with you?"

"Yes, if she cares to. She may prefer to stay at home."

"So you will be going about, and I shall be staying here!"

"I suppose you will. But we know whose fault that is."

"I am not blaming you," she said quickly.

"Oh, I thought you were. If ever you SHOULD be inclined to blame me, think of a certain evening by Rainbarrow, when you promised to meet me and did not. You sent me a letter; and my heart ached to read that as I hope yours never will. That was one point of divergence. I then did something in haste...But she is a good woman, and I will say no more."

"I know that the blame was on my side that time," said Eustacia. "But it had not always been so. However, it is my misfortune to be too sudden in feeling. O, Damon, don't reproach me any more — I can't bear that."

They went on silently for a distance of two or three miles, when Eustacia said suddenly, "Haven't you come out of your way, Mr. Wildeve?"

"My way is anywhere tonight. I will go with you as far as the hill on which we can see Blooms-End, as it is getting late for you to be alone."

"Don't trouble. I am not obliged to be out at all. I think I would rather you did not accompany me further. This sort of thing would have an odd look if known."

"Very well, I will leave you." He took her hand unexpectedly, and kissed it — for the first time since her marriage. "What light is that on the hill?" he added, as it were to hide the caress.

She looked, and saw a flickering firelight proceeding from the open side of a hovel a little way before them. The hovel, which she had hitherto always found empty, seemed to be inhabited now.

“Since you have come so far,” said Eustacia, “will you see me safely past that hut? I thought I should have met Clym somewhere about here, but as he doesn’t appear I will hasten on and get to Blooms-End before he leaves.”

They advanced to the turf-shed, and when they got near it the firelight and the lantern inside showed distinctly enough the form of a woman reclining on a bed of fern, a group of heath men and women standing around her. Eustacia did not recognize Mrs. Yeobright in the reclining figure, nor Clym as one of the standers-by till she came close. Then she quickly pressed her hand up on Wildeve’s arm and signified to him to come back from the open side of the shed into the shadow.

“It is my husband and his mother,” she whispered in an agitated voice. “What can it mean? Will you step forward and tell me?”

Wildeve left her side and went to the back wall of the hut. Presently Eustacia perceived that he was beckoning to her, and she advanced and joined him.

“It is a serious case,” said Wildeve.

From their position they could hear what was proceeding inside.

“I cannot think where she could have been going,” said Clym to someone. “She had evidently walked a long way, but even when she was able to speak just now she would not tell me where. What do you really think of her?”

“There is a great deal to fear,” was gravely answered, in a voice which Eustacia recognized as that of the only surgeon in the district. “She has suffered somewhat from the bite of the adder; but it is exhaustion which has overpowered her. My impression is that her walk must have been exceptionally long.”

“I used to tell her not to overwalk herself this weather,” said Clym, with distress. “Do you think we did well in using the adder’s fat?”

“Well, it is a very ancient remedy — the old remedy of the viper-catchers, I believe,” replied the doctor. “It is mentioned as an infallible ointment by Hoffman, Mead, and I think the Abbe Fontana. Undoubtedly it was as good a thing as you could do; though I question if some other oils would not have been equally efficacious.”

“Come here, come here!” was then rapidly said in anxious female tones, and Clym and the doctor could be heard rushing forward from the back part of the shed to where Mrs. Yeobright lay.

“Oh, what is it?” whispered Eustacia.

“‘Twas Thomasin who spoke,” said Wildeve. “Then they have fetched her. I wonder if I had better go in — yet it might do harm.”

For a long time there was utter silence among the group within; and it was broken at last by Clym saying, in an agonized voice, “O Doctor, what does it mean?”

The doctor did not reply at once; ultimately he said, “She is sinking fast. Her heart was previously affected, and physical exhaustion has dealt the finishing blow.”

Then there was a weeping of women, then waiting, then hushed exclamations, then a strange gasping sound, then a painful stillness.

"It is all over," said the doctor.

Further back in the hut the cotters whispered, "Mrs. Yeobright is dead."

Almost at the same moment the two watchers observed the form of a small old-fashioned child entering at the open side of the shed. Susan Nunsuch, whose boy it was, went forward to the opening and silently beckoned to him to go back.

"I've got something to tell 'ee, Mother," he cried in a shrill tone. "That woman asleep there walked along with me today; and she said I was to say that I had seed her, and she was a broken-hearted woman and cast off by her son, and then I came on home."

A confused sob as from a man was heard within, upon which Eustacia gasped faintly, "That's Clym — I must go to him — yet dare I do it? No — come away!"

When they had withdrawn from the neighbourhood of the shed she said huskily, "I am to blame for this. There is evil in store for me."

"Was she not admitted to your house after all?" Wildeve inquired.

"No, and that's where it all lies! Oh, what shall I do! I shall not intrude upon them — I shall go straight home. Damon, good-bye! I cannot speak to you any more now."

They parted company; and when Eustacia had reached the next hill she looked back. A melancholy procession was wending its way by the light of the lantern from the hut towards Blooms-End. Wildeve was nowhere to be seen.

BOOK FIVE

THE DISCOVERY

CHAPTER 1

"Wherefore Is Light Given to Him That Is in Misery"

One evening, about three weeks after the funeral of Mrs. Yeobright, when the silver face of the moon sent a bundle of beams directly upon the floor of Clym's house at Alderworth, a woman came forth from within. She reclined over the garden gate as if to refresh herself awhile. The pale lunar touches which make beauties of hags lent divinity to this face, already beautiful.

She had not long been there when a man came up the road and with some hesitation said to her, "How is he tonight, ma'am, if you please?"

"He is better, though still very unwell, Humphrey," replied Eustacia.

"Is he light-headed, ma'am?"

"No. He is quite sensible now."

"Do he rave about his mother just the same, poor fellow?" continued Humphrey.

"Just as much, though not quite so wildly," she said in a low voice.

“It was very unfortunate, ma’am, that the boy Johnny should ever ha’ told him his mother’s dying words, about her being broken-hearted and cast off by her son. ‘Twas enough to upset any man alive.”

Eustacia made no reply beyond that of a slight catch in her breath, as of one who fain would speak but could not; and Humphrey, declining her invitation to come in, went away.

Eustacia turned, entered the house, and ascended to the front bedroom, where a shaded light was burning. In the bed lay Clym, pale, haggard, wide awake, tossing to one side and to the other, his eyes lit by a hot light, as if the fire in their pupils were burning up their substance.

“Is it you, Eustacia?” he said as she sat down.

“Yes, Clym. I have been down to the gate. The moon is shining beautifully, and there is not a leaf stirring.”

“Shining, is it? What’s the moon to a man like me? Let it shine — let anything be, so that I never see another day!... Eustacia, I don’t know where to look — my thoughts go through me like swords. O, if any man wants to make himself immortal by painting a picture of wretchedness, let him come here!”

“Why do you say so?”

“I cannot help feeling that I did my best to kill her.”

“No, Clym.”

“Yes, it was so; it is useless to excuse me! My conduct to her was too hideous — I made no advances; and she could not bring herself to forgive me. Now she is dead! If I had only shown myself willing to make it up with her sooner, and we had been friends, and then she had died, it wouldn’t be so hard to bear. But I never went near her house, so she never came near mine, and didn’t know how welcome she would have been — that’s what troubles me. She did not know I was going to her house that very night, for she was too insensible to understand me. If she had only come to see me! I longed that she would. But it was not to be.”

There escaped from Eustacia one of those shivering sighs which used to shake her like a pestilent blast. She had not yet told.

But Yeobright was too deeply absorbed in the ramblings incidental to his remorseful state to notice her. During his illness he had been continually talking thus. Despair had been added to his original grief by the unfortunate disclosure of the boy who had received the last words of Mrs. Yeobright — words too bitterly uttered in an hour of misapprehension. Then his distress had overwhelmed him, and he longed for death as a field labourer longs for the shade. It was the pitiful sight of a man standing in the very focus of sorrow. He continually bewailed his tardy journey to his mother’s house, because it was an error which could never be rectified, and insisted that he must have been horribly perverted by some fiend not to have thought before that it was his duty to go to her, since she did not come to him. He would ask Eustacia to agree with him in his self-condemnation; and when she, seared inwardly by a secret she dared not tell, declared that she could not give an opinion, he would say, “That’s because you

didn't know my mother's nature. She was always ready to forgive if asked to do so; but I seemed to her to be as an obstinate child, and that made her unyielding. Yet not unyielding — she was proud and reserved, no more...Yes, I can understand why she held out against me so long. She was waiting for me. I dare say she said a hundred times in her sorrow, 'What a return he makes for all the sacrifices I have made for him!' I never went to her! When I set out to visit her it was too late. To think of that is nearly intolerable!"

Sometimes his condition had been one of utter remorse, unsoftened by a single tear of pure sorrow: and then he writhed as he lay, fevered far more by thought than by physical ills. "If I could only get one assurance that she did not die in a belief that I was resentful," he said one day when in this mood, "it would be better to think of than a hope of heaven. But that I cannot do."

"You give yourself up too much to this wearying despair," said Eustacia. "Other men's mothers have died."

"That doesn't make the loss of mine less. Yet it is less the loss than the circumstances of the loss. I sinned against her, and on that account there is no light for me."

"She sinned against you, I think."

"No, she did not. I committed the guilt; and may the whole burden be upon my head!"

"I think you might consider twice before you say that," Eustacia replied. "Single men have, no doubt, a right to curse themselves as much as they please; but men with wives involve two in the doom they pray down."

"I am in too sorry a state to understand what you are refining on," said the wretched man. "Day and night shout at me, 'You have helped to kill her.' But in loathing myself I may, I own, be unjust to you, my poor wife. Forgive me for it, Eustacia, for I scarcely know what I do."

Eustacia was always anxious to avoid the sight of her husband in such a state as this, which had become as dreadful to her as the trial scene was to Judas Iscariot. It brought before her eyes the spectre of a worn-out woman knocking at a door which she would not open; and she shrank from contemplating it. Yet it was better for Yeobright himself when he spoke openly of his sharp regret, for in silence he endured infinitely more, and would sometimes remain so long in a tense, brooding mood, consuming himself by the gnawing of his thought, that it was imperatively necessary to make him talk aloud, that his grief might in some degree expend itself in the effort.

Eustacia had not been long indoors after her look at the moonlight when a soft foot-step came up to the house, and Thomasin was announced by the woman downstairs.

"Ah, Thomasin! Thank you for coming tonight," said Clym when she entered the room. "Here am I, you see. Such a wretched spectacle am I, that I shrink from being seen by a single friend, and almost from you."

"You must not shrink from me, dear Clym," said Thomasin earnestly, in that sweet voice of hers which came to a sufferer like fresh air into a Black Hole. "Nothing in you

can ever shock me or drive me away. I have been here before, but you don't remember it."

"Yes, I do; I am not delirious, Thomasin, nor have I been so at all. Don't you believe that if they say so. I am only in great misery at what I have done, and that, with the weakness, makes me seem mad. But it has not upset my reason. Do you think I should remember all about my mother's death if I were out of my mind? No such good luck. Two months and a half, Thomasin, the last of her life, did my poor mother live alone, distracted and mourning because of me; yet she was unvisited by me, though I was living only six miles off. Two months and a half — seventy-five days did the sun rise and set upon her in that deserted state which a dog didn't deserve! Poor people who had nothing in common with her would have cared for her, and visited her had they known her sickness and loneliness; but I, who should have been all to her, stayed away like a cur. If there is any justice in God let Him kill me now. He has nearly blinded me, but that is not enough. If He would only strike me with more pain I would believe in Him forever!"

"Hush, hush! O, pray, Clym, don't, don't say it!" implored Thomasin, affrighted into sobs and tears; while Eustacia, at the other side of the room, though her pale face remained calm, writhed in her chair. Clym went on without heeding his cousin.

"But I am not worth receiving further proof even of Heaven's reprobation. Do you think, Thomasin, that she knew me — that she did not die in that horrid mistaken notion about my not forgiving her, which I can't tell you how she acquired? If you could only assure me of that! Do you think so, Eustacia? Do speak to me."

"I think I can assure you that she knew better at last," said Thomasin. The pallid Eustacia said nothing.

"Why didn't she come to my house? I would have taken her in and showed her how I loved her in spite of all. But she never came; and I didn't go to her, and she died on the heath like an animal kicked out, nobody to help her till it was too late. If you could have seen her, Thomasin, as I saw her — a poor dying woman, lying in the dark upon the bare ground, moaning, nobody near, believing she was utterly deserted by all the world, it would have moved you to anguish, it would have moved a brute. And this poor woman my mother! No wonder she said to the child, 'You have seen a broken-hearted woman.' What a state she must have been brought to, to say that! and who can have done it but I? It is too dreadful to think of, and I wish I could be punished more heavily than I am. How long was I what they called out of my senses?"

"A week, I think."

"And then I became calm."

"Yes, for four days."

"And now I have left off being calm."

"But try to be quiet — please do, and you will soon be strong. If you could remove that impression from your mind — "

“Yes, yes,” he said impatiently. “But I don’t want to get strong. What’s the use of my getting well? It would be better for me if I die, and it would certainly be better for Eustacia. Is Eustacia there?”

“Yes.”

“It would be better for you, Eustacia, if I were to die?”

“Don’t press such a question, dear Clym.”

“Well, it really is but a shadowy supposition; for unfortunately I am going to live. I feel myself getting better. Thomasin, how long are you going to stay at the inn, now that all this money has come to your husband?”

“Another month or two, probably; until my illness is over. We cannot get off till then. I think it will be a month or more.”

“Yes, yes. Of course. Ah, Cousin Tamsie, you will get over your trouble — one little month will take you through it, and bring something to console you; but I shall never get over mine, and no consolation will come!”

“Clym, you are unjust to yourself. Depend upon it, Aunt thought kindly of you. I know that, if she had lived, you would have been reconciled with her.”

“But she didn’t come to see me, though I asked her, before I married, if she would come. Had she come, or had I gone there, she would never have died saying, ‘I am a broken-hearted woman, cast off by my son.’ My door has always been open to her — a welcome here has always awaited her. But that she never came to see.”

“You had better not talk any more now, Clym,” said Eustacia faintly from the other part of the room, for the scene was growing intolerable to her.

“Let me talk to you instead for the little time I shall be here,” Thomasin said soothingly. “Consider what a one-sided way you have of looking at the matter, Clym. When she said that to the little boy you had not found her and taken her into your arms; and it might have been uttered in a moment of bitterness. It was rather like Aunt to say things in haste. She sometimes used to speak so to me. Though she did not come I am convinced that she thought of coming to see you. Do you suppose a man’s mother could live two or three months without one forgiving thought? She forgave me; and why should she not have forgiven you?”

“You laboured to win her round; I did nothing. I, who was going to teach people the higher secrets of happiness, did not know how to keep out of that gross misery which the most untaught are wise enough to avoid.”

“How did you get here tonight, Thomasin?” said Eustacia.

“Damon set me down at the end of the lane. He has driven into East Egdon on business, and he will come and pick me up by-and-by.”

Accordingly they soon after heard the noise of wheels. Wildeve had come, and was waiting outside with his horse and gig.

“Send out and tell him I will be down in two minutes,” said Thomasin.

“I will run down myself,” said Eustacia.

She went down. Wildeve had alighted, and was standing before the horse's head when Eustacia opened the door. He did not turn for a moment, thinking the comer Thomasin. Then he looked, startled ever so little, and said one word: "Well?"

"I have not yet told him," she replied in a whisper.

"Then don't do so till he is well — it will be fatal. You are ill yourself."

"I am wretched...O Damon," she said, bursting into tears, "I — I can't tell you how unhappy I am! I can hardly bear this. I can tell nobody of my trouble — nobody knows of it but you."

"Poor girl!" said Wildeve, visibly affected at her distress, and at last led on so far as to take her hand. "It is hard, when you have done nothing to deserve it, that you should have got involved in such a web as this. You were not made for these sad scenes. I am to blame most. If I could only have saved you from it all!"

"But, Damon, please pray tell me what I must do? To sit by him hour after hour, and hear him reproach himself as being the cause of her death, and to know that I am the sinner, if any human being is at all, drives me into cold despair. I don't know what to do. Should I tell him or should I not tell him? I always am asking myself that. O, I want to tell him; and yet I am afraid. If he find it out he must surely kill me, for nothing else will be in proportion to his feelings now. 'Beware the fury of a patient man' sounds day by day in my ears as I watch him."

"Well, wait till he is better, and trust to chance. And when you tell, you must only tell part — for his own sake."

"Which part should I keep back?"

Wildeve paused. "That I was in the house at the time," he said in a low tone.

"Yes; it must be concealed, seeing what has been whispered. How much easier are hasty actions than speeches that will excuse them!"

"If he were only to die — " Wildeve murmured.

"Do not think of it! I would not buy hope of immunity by so cowardly a desire even if I hated him. Now I am going up to him again. Thomasin bade me tell you she would be down in a few minutes. Good-bye."

She returned, and Thomasin soon appeared. When she was seated in the gig with her husband, and the horse was turning to go off, Wildeve lifted his eyes to the bedroom windows. Looking from one of them he could discern a pale, tragic face watching him drive away. It was Eustacia's.

CHAPTER 2

A Lurid Light Breaks in upon a Darkened Understanding

Clym's grief became mitigated by wearing itself out. His strength returned, and a month after the visit of Thomasin he might have been seen walking about the garden. Endurance and despair, equanimity and gloom, the tints of health and the pallor of death, mingled weirdly in his face. He was now unnaturally silent upon all of the past

that related to his mother; and though Eustacia knew that he was thinking of it none the less, she was only too glad to escape the topic ever to bring it up anew. When his mind had been weaker his heart had led him to speak out; but reason having now somewhat recovered itself he sank into taciturnity.

One evening when he was thus standing in the garden, abstractedly spudding up a weed with his stick, a bony figure turned the corner of the house and came up to him.

“Christian, isn’t it?” said Clym. “I am glad you have found me out. I shall soon want you to go to Blooms-End and assist me in putting the house in order. I suppose it is all locked up as I left it?”

“Yes, Mister Clym.”

“Have you dug up the potatoes and other roots?”

“Yes, without a drop o’ rain, thank God. But I was coming to tell ‘ee of something else which is quite different from what we have lately had in the family. I am sent by the rich gentleman at the Woman, that we used to call the landlord, to tell ‘ee that Mrs. Wildeve is doing well of a girl, which was born punctually at one o’clock at noon, or a few minutes more or less; and ‘tis said that expecting of this increase is what have kept ‘em there since they came into their money.”

“And she is getting on well, you say?”

“Yes, sir. Only Mr. Wildeve is twanky because ‘t isn’t a boy — that’s what they say in the kitchen, but I was not supposed to notice that.”

“Christian, now listen to me.”

“Yes, sure, Mr. Yeobright.”

“Did you see my mother the day before she died?”

“No, I did not.”

Yeobright’s face expressed disappointment.

“But I zeed her the morning of the same day she died.”

Clym’s look lighted up. “That’s nearer still to my meaning,” he said.

“Yes, I know ‘twas the same day; for she said, ‘I be going to see him, Christian; so I shall not want any vegetables brought in for dinner.’”

“See whom?”

“See you. She was going to your house, you understand.”

Yeobright regarded Christian with intense surprise. “Why did you never mention this?” he said. “Are you sure it was my house she was coming to?”

“O yes. I didn’t mention it because I’ve never zeed you lately. And as she didn’t get there it was all nought, and nothing to tell.”

“And I have been wondering why she should have walked in the heath on that hot day! Well, did she say what she was coming for? It is a thing, Christian, I am very anxious to know.”

“Yes, Mister Clym. She didn’t say it to me, though I think she did to one here and there.”

“Do you know one person to whom she spoke of it?”

"There is one man, please, sir, but I hope you won't mention my name to him, as I have seen him in strange places, particular in dreams. One night last summer he glared at me like Famine and Sword, and it made me feel so low that I didn't comb out my few hairs for two days. He was standing, as it might be, Mister Yeobright, in the middle of the path to Mistorver, and your mother came up, looking as pale — "

"Yes, when was that?"

"Last summer, in my dream."

"Pooh! Who's the man?"

"Diggory, the reddleman. He called upon her and sat with her the evening before she set out to see you. I hadn't gone home from work when he came up to the gate."

"I must see Venn — I wish I had known it before," said Clym anxiously. "I wonder why he has not come to tell me?"

"He went out of Egdon Heath the next day, so would not be likely to know you wanted him."

"Christian," said Clym, "you must go and find Venn. I am otherwise engaged, or I would go myself. Find him at once, and tell him I want to speak to him."

"I am a good hand at hunting up folk by day," said Christian, looking dubiously round at the declining light; "but as to night-time, never is such a bad hand as I, Mister Yeobright."

"Search the heath when you will, so that you bring him soon. Bring him tomorrow, if you can."

Christian then departed. The morrow came, but no Venn. In the evening Christian arrived, looking very weary. He had been searching all day, and had heard nothing of the reddleman.

"Inquire as much as you can tomorrow without neglecting your work," said Yeobright. "Don't come again till you have found him."

The next day Yeobright set out for the old house at Blooms-End, which, with the garden, was now his own. His severe illness had hindered all preparations for his removal thither; but it had become necessary that he should go and overlook its contents, as administrator to his mother's little property; for which purpose he decided to pass the next night on the premises.

He journeyed onward, not quickly or decisively, but in the slow walk of one who has been awakened from a stupefying sleep. It was early afternoon when he reached the valley. The expression of the place, the tone of the hour, were precisely those of many such occasions in days gone by; and these antecedent similarities fostered the illusion that she, who was there no longer, would come out to welcome him. The garden gate was locked and the shutters were closed, just as he himself had left them on the evening after the funeral. He unlocked the gate, and found that a spider had already constructed a large web, tying the door to the lintel, on the supposition that it was never to be opened again. When he had entered the house and flung back the shutters he set about his task of overhauling the cupboards and closets, burning papers, and considering how best to arrange the place for Eustacia's reception, until such time as

he might be in a position to carry out his long-delayed scheme, should that time ever arrive.

As he surveyed the rooms he felt strongly disinclined for the alterations which would have to be made in the time-honoured furnishing of his parents and grandparents, to suit Eustacia's modern ideas. The gaunt oak-cased clock, with the picture of the Ascension on the door panel and the Miraculous Draught of Fishes on the base; his grandmother's corner cupboard with the glass door, through which the spotted china was visible; the dumb-waiter; the wooden tea trays; the hanging fountain with the brass tap — whither would these venerable articles have to be banished?

He noticed that the flowers in the window had died for want of water, and he placed them out upon the ledge, that they might be taken away. While thus engaged he heard footsteps on the gravel without, and somebody knocked at the door.

Yeobright opened it, and Venn was standing before him.

"Good morning," said the reddleman. "Is Mrs. Yeobright at home?"

Yeobright looked upon the ground. "Then you have not seen Christian or any of the Egdon folks?" he said.

"No. I have only just returned after a long stay away. I called here the day before I left."

"And you have heard nothing?"

"Nothing."

"My mother is — dead."

"Dead!" said Venn mechanically.

"Her home now is where I shouldn't mind having mine."

Venn regarded him, and then said, "If I didn't see your face I could never believe your words. Have you been ill?"

"I had an illness."

"Well, the change! When I parted from her a month ago everything seemed to say that she was going to begin a new life."

"And what seemed came true?"

"You say right, no doubt. Trouble has taught you a deeper vein of talk than mine. All I meant was regarding her life here. She has died too soon."

"Perhaps through my living too long. I have had a bitter experience on that score this last month, Diggory. But come in; I have been wanting to see you."

He conducted the reddleman into the large room where the dancing had taken place the previous Christmas, and they sat down in the settle together. "There's the cold fireplace, you see," said Clym. "When that half-burnt log and those cinders were alight she was alive! Little has been changed here yet. I can do nothing. My life creeps like a snail."

"How came she to die?" said Venn.

Yeobright gave him some particulars of her illness and death, and continued: "After this no kind of pain will ever seem more than an indisposition to me. I began saying that I wanted to ask you something, but I stray from subjects like a drunken man. I

am anxious to know what my mother said to you when she last saw you. You talked with her a long time, I think?"

"I talked with her more than half an hour."

"About me?"

"Yes. And it must have been on account of what we said that she was on the heath. Without question she was coming to see you."

"But why should she come to see me if she felt so bitterly against me? There's the mystery."

"Yet I know she quite forgave 'ee."

"But, Diggory — would a woman, who had quite forgiven her son, say, when she felt herself ill on the way to his house, that she was broken-hearted because of his ill-usage? Never!"

"What I know is that she didn't blame you at all. She blamed herself for what had happened, and only herself. I had it from her own lips."

"You had it from her lips that I had NOT ill-treated her; and at the same time another had it from her lips that I HAD ill-treated her? My mother was no impulsive woman who changed her opinion every hour without reason. How can it be, Venn, that she should have told such different stories in close succession?"

"I cannot say. It is certainly odd, when she had forgiven you, and had forgiven your wife, and was going to see ye on purpose to make friends."

"If there was one thing wanting to bewilder me it was this incomprehensible thing!... Diggory, if we, who remain alive, were only allowed to hold conversation with the dead — just once, a bare minute, even through a screen of iron bars, as with persons in prison — what we might learn! How many who now ride smiling would hide their heads! And this mystery — I should then be at the bottom of it at once. But the grave has forever shut her in; and how shall it be found out now?"

No reply was returned by his companion, since none could be given; and when Venn left, a few minutes later, Clym had passed from the dullness of sorrow to the fluctuation of carking incertitude.

He continued in the same state all the afternoon. A bed was made up for him in the same house by a neighbour, that he might not have to return again the next day; and when he retired to rest in the deserted place it was only to remain awake hour after hour thinking the same thoughts. How to discover a solution to this riddle of death seemed a query of more importance than highest problems of the living. There was housed in his memory a vivid picture of the face of a little boy as he entered the hovel where Clym's mother lay. The round eyes, eager gaze, the piping voice which enunciated the words, had operated like stiletts on his brain.

A visit to the boy suggested itself as a means of gleaning new particulars; though it might be quite unproductive. To probe a child's mind after the lapse of six weeks, not for facts which the child had seen and understood, but to get at those which were in their nature beyond him, did not promise much; yet when every obvious channel

is blocked we grope towards the small and obscure. There was nothing else left to do; after that he would allow the enigma to drop into the abyss of undiscoverable things.

It was about daybreak when he had reached this decision, and he at once arose. He locked up the house and went out into the green patch which merged in heather further on. In front of the white garden-palings the path branched into three like a broad arrow. The road to the right led to the Quiet Woman and its neighbourhood; the middle track led to Mistover Knap; the left-hand track led over the hill to another part of Mistover, where the child lived. On inclining into the latter path Yeobright felt a creeping chilliness, familiar enough to most people, and probably caused by the unsunned morning air. In after days he thought of it as a thing of singular significance.

When Yeobright reached the cottage of Susan Nunsuch, the mother of the boy he sought, he found that the inmates were not yet astir. But in upland hamlets the transition from a-bed to abroad is surprisingly swift and easy. There no dense partition of yawns and toilets divides humanity by night from humanity by day. Yeobright tapped at the upper windowsill, which he could reach with his walking stick; and in three or four minutes the woman came down.

It was not till this moment that Clym recollected her to be the person who had behaved so barbarously to Eustacia. It partly explained the insuavity with which the woman greeted him. Moreover, the boy had been ailing again; and Susan now, as ever since the night when he had been pressed into Eustacia's service at the bonfire, attributed his indispositions to Eustacia's influence as a witch. It was one of those sentiments which lurk like moles underneath the visible surface of manners, and may have been kept alive by Eustacia's entreaty to the captain, at the time that he had intended to prosecute Susan for the pricking in church, to let the matter drop; which he accordingly had done.

Yeobright overcame his repugnance, for Susan had at least borne his mother no ill-will. He asked kindly for the boy; but her manner did not improve.

"I wish to see him," continued Yeobright, with some hesitation, "to ask him if he remembers anything more of his walk with my mother than what he has previously told."

She regarded him in a peculiar and criticizing manner. To anybody but a half-blind man it would have said, "You want another of the knocks which have already laid you so low."

She called the boy downstairs, asked Clym to sit down on a stool, and continued, "Now, Johnny, tell Mr. Yeobright anything you can call to mind."

"You have not forgotten how you walked with the poor lady on that hot day?" said Clym.

"No," said the boy.

"And what she said to you?"

The boy repeated the exact words he had used on entering the hut. Yeobright rested his elbow on the table and shaded his face with his hand; and the mother looked as if she wondered how a man could want more of what had stung him so deeply.

"She was going to Alderworth when you first met her?"

"No; she was coming away."

"That can't be."

"Yes; she walked along with me. I was coming away, too."

"Then where did you first see her?"

"At your house."

"Attend, and speak the truth!" said Clym sternly.

"Yes, sir; at your house was where I seed her first."

Clym started up, and Susan smiled in an expectant way which did not embellish her face; it seemed to mean, "Something sinister is coming!"

"What did she do at my house?"

"She went and sat under the trees at the Devil's Bellows."

"Good God! this is all news to me!"

"You never told me this before?" said Susan.

"No, Mother; because I didn't like to tell 'ee I had been so far. I was picking black-hearts, and went further than I meant."

"What did she do then?" said Yeobright.

"Looked at a man who came up and went into your house."

"That was myself — a furze-cutter, with brambles in his hand."

"No; 'twas not you. 'Twas a gentleman. You had gone in afore."

"Who was he?"

"I don't know."

"Now tell me what happened next."

"The poor lady went and knocked at your door, and the lady with black hair looked out of the side window at her."

The boy's mother turned to Clym and said, "This is something you didn't expect?"

Yeobright took no more notice of her than if he had been of stone. "Go on, go on," he said hoarsely to the boy.

"And when she saw the young lady look out of the window the old lady knocked again; and when nobody came she took up the furze-hook and looked at it, and put it down again, and then she looked at the faggot-bonds; and then she went away, and walked across to me, and blowed her breath very hard, like this. We walked on together, she and I, and I talked to her and she talked to me a bit, but not much, because she couldn't blow her breath."

"O!" murmured Clym, in a low tone, and bowed his head. "Let's have more," he said.

"She couldn't talk much, and she couldn't walk; and her face was, O so queer!"

"How was her face?"

"Like yours is now."

The woman looked at Yeobright, and beheld him colourless, in a cold sweat. "Isn't there meaning in it?" she said stealthily. "What do you think of her now?"

"Silence!" said Clym fiercely. And, turning to the boy, "And then you left her to die?"

“No,” said the woman, quickly and angrily. “He did not leave her to die! She sent him away. Whoever says he forsook her says what’s not true.”

“Trouble no more about that,” answered Clym, with a quivering mouth. “What he did is a trifle in comparison with what he saw. Door kept shut, did you say? Kept shut, she looking out of window? Good heart of God! — what does it mean?”

The child shrank away from the gaze of his questioner.

“He said so,” answered the mother, “and Johnny’s a God-fearing boy and tells no lies.”

“‘Cast off by my son!’ No, by my best life, dear mother, it is not so! But by your son’s, your son’s — May all murderesses get the torment they deserve!”

With these words Yeobright went forth from the little dwelling. The pupils of his eyes, fixed steadfastly on blankness, were vaguely lit with an icy shine; his mouth had passed into the phase more or less imaginatively rendered in studies of Oedipus. The strangest deeds were possible to his mood. But they were not possible to his situation. Instead of there being before him the pale face of Eustacia, and a masculine shape unknown, there was only the imperturbable countenance of the heath, which, having defied the cataclysmal onsets of centuries, reduced to insignificance by its seamed and antique features the wildest turmoil of a single man.

CHAPTER 3

Eustacia Dresses Herself on a Black Morning

A consciousness of a vast impassivity in all which lay around him took possession even of Yeobright in his wild walk towards Alderworth. He had once before felt in his own person this overpowering of the fervid by the inanimate; but then it had tended to enervate a passion far sweeter than that which at present pervaded him. It was once when he stood parting from Eustacia in the moist still levels beyond the hills.

But dismissing all this he went onward home, and came to the front of his house. The blinds of Eustacia’s bedroom were still closely drawn, for she was no early riser. All the life visible was in the shape of a solitary thrush cracking a small snail upon the door-stone for his breakfast, and his tapping seemed a loud noise in the general silence which prevailed; but on going to the door Clym found it unfastened, the young girl who attended upon Eustacia being astir in the back part of the premises. Yeobright entered and went straight to his wife’s room.

The noise of his arrival must have aroused her, for when he opened the door she was standing before the looking glass in her nightdress, the ends of her hair gathered into one hand, with which she was coiling the whole mass round her head, previous to beginning toilette operations. She was not a woman given to speaking first at a meeting, and she allowed Clym to walk across in silence, without turning her head. He came behind her, and she saw his face in the glass. It was ashy, haggard, and terrible. Instead of starting towards him in sorrowful surprise, as even Eustacia, undemonstrative wife

as she was, would have done in days before she burdened herself with a secret, she remained motionless, looking at him in the glass. And while she looked the carmine flush with which warmth and sound sleep had suffused her cheeks and neck dissolved from view, and the deathlike pallor in his face flew across into hers. He was close enough to see this, and the sight instigated his tongue.

“You know what is the matter,” he said huskily. “I see it in your face.”

Her hand relinquished the rope of hair and dropped to her side, and the pile of tresses, no longer supported, fell from the crown of her head about her shoulders and over the white nightgown. She made no reply.

“Speak to me,” said Yeobright peremptorily.

The blanching process did not cease in her, and her lips now became as white as her face. She turned to him and said, “Yes, Clym, I’ll speak to you. Why do you return so early? Can I do anything for you?”

“Yes, you can listen to me. It seems that my wife is not very well?”

“Why?”

“Your face, my dear; your face. Or perhaps it is the pale morning light which takes your colour away? Now I am going to reveal a secret to you. Ha-ha!”

“O, that is ghastly!”

“What?”

“Your laugh.”

“There’s reason for ghastliness. Eustacia, you have held my happiness in the hollow of your hand, and like a devil you have dashed it down!”

She started back from the dressing-table, retreated a few steps from him, and looked him in the face. “Ah! you think to frighten me,” she said, with a slight laugh. “Is it worth while? I am undefended, and alone.”

“How extraordinary!”

“What do you mean?”

“As there is ample time I will tell you, though you know well enough. I mean that it is extraordinary that you should be alone in my absence. Tell me, now, where is he who was with you on the afternoon of the thirty-first of August? Under the bed? Up the chimney?”

A shudder overcame her and shook the light fabric of her nightdress throughout. “I do not remember dates so exactly,” she said. “I cannot recollect that anybody was with me besides yourself.”

“The day I mean,” said Yeobright, his voice growing louder and harsher, “was the day you shut the door against my mother and killed her. O, it is too much — too bad!” He leant over the footpiece of the bedstead for a few moments, with his back towards her; then rising again — “Tell me, tell me! tell me — do you hear?” he cried, rushing up to her and seizing her by the loose folds of her sleeve.

The superstratum of timidity which often overlies those who are daring and defiant at heart had been passed through, and the mettlesome substance of the woman was reached. The red blood inundated her face, previously so pale.

“What are you going to do?” she said in a low voice, regarding him with a proud smile. “You will not alarm me by holding on so; but it would be a pity to tear my sleeve.”

Instead of letting go he drew her closer to him. “Tell me the particulars of — my mother’s death,” he said in a hard, panting whisper; “or — I’ll — I’ll — ”

“Clym,” she answered slowly, “do you think you dare do anything to me that I dare not bear? But before you strike me listen. You will get nothing from me by a blow, even though it should kill me, as it probably will. But perhaps you do not wish me to speak — killing may be all you mean?”

“Kill you! Do you expect it?”

“I do.”

“Why?”

“No less degree of rage against me will match your previous grief for her.”

“Phew — I shall not kill you,” he said contemptuously, as if under a sudden change of purpose. “I did think of it; but — I shall not. That would be making a martyr of you, and sending you to where she is; and I would keep you away from her till the universe come to an end, if I could.”

“I almost wish you would kill me,” said she with gloomy bitterness. “It is with no strong desire, I assure you, that I play the part I have lately played on earth. You are no blessing, my husband.”

“You shut the door — you looked out of the window upon her — you had a man in the house with you — you sent her away to die. The inhumanity — the treachery — I will not touch you — stand away from me — and confess every word!”

“Never! I’ll hold my tongue like the very death that I don’t mind meeting, even though I can clear myself of half you believe by speaking. Yes. I will! Who of any dignity would take the trouble to clear cobwebs from a wild man’s mind after such language as this? No; let him go on, and think his narrow thoughts, and run his head into the mire. I have other cares.”

“‘Tis too much — but I must spare you.”

“Poor charity.”

“By my wretched soul you sting me, Eustacia! I can keep it up, and hotly too. Now, then, madam, tell me his name!”

“Never, I am resolved.”

“How often does he write to you? Where does he put his letters — when does he meet you? Ah, his letters! Do you tell me his name?”

“I do not.”

“Then I’ll find it myself.” His eyes had fallen upon a small desk that stood near, on which she was accustomed to write her letters. He went to it. It was locked.

“Unlock this!”

“You have no right to say it. That’s mine.”

Without another word he seized the desk and dashed it to the floor. The hinge burst open, and a number of letters tumbled out.

“Stay!” said Eustacia, stepping before him with more excitement than she had hitherto shown.

“Come, come! stand away! I must see them.”

She looked at the letters as they lay, checked her feeling and moved indifferently aside; when he gathered them up, and examined them.

By no stretch of meaning could any but a harmless construction be placed upon a single one of the letters themselves. The solitary exception was an empty envelope directed to her, and the handwriting was Wildeve’s. Yeobright held it up. Eustacia was doggedly silent.

“Can you read, madam? Look at this envelope. Doubtless we shall find more soon, and what was inside them. I shall no doubt be gratified by learning in good time what a well-finished and full-blown adept in a certain trade my lady is.”

“Do you say it to me — do you?” she gasped.

He searched further, but found nothing more. “What was in this letter?” he said.

“Ask the writer. Am I your hound that you should talk to me in this way?”

“Do you brave me? do you stand me out, mistress? Answer. Don’t look at me with those eyes if you would bewitch me again! Sooner than that I die. You refuse to answer?”

“I wouldn’t tell you after this, if I were as innocent as the sweetest babe in heaven!”

“Which you are not.”

“Certainly I am not absolutely,” she replied. “I have not done what you suppose; but if to have done no harm at all is the only innocence recognized, I am beyond forgiveness. But I require no help from your conscience.”

“You can resist, and resist again! Instead of hating you I could, I think, mourn for and pity you, if you were contrite, and would confess all. Forgive you I never can. I don’t speak of your lover — I will give you the benefit of the doubt in that matter, for it only affects me personally. But the other — had you half-killed me, had it been that you wilfully took the sight away from these feeble eyes of mine, I could have forgiven you. But THAT’S too much for nature!”

“Say no more. I will do without your pity. But I would have saved you from uttering what you will regret.”

“I am going away now. I shall leave you.”

“You need not go, as I am going myself. You will keep just as far away from me by staying here.”

“Call her to mind — think of her — what goodness there was in her — it showed in every line of her face! Most women, even when but slightly annoyed, show a flicker of evil in some curl of the mouth or some corner of the cheek; but as for her, never in her angriest moments was there anything malicious in her look. She was angered quickly, but she forgave just as readily, and underneath her pride there was the meekness of a child. What came of it? — what cared you? You hated her just as she was learning to love you. O! couldn’t you see what was best for you, but must bring a curse upon me, and agony and death upon her, by doing that cruel deed! What was the fellow’s name who was keeping you company and causing you to add cruelty to her to your wrong to

me? Was it Wildeve? Was it poor Thomasin's husband? Heaven, what wickedness! Lost your voice, have you? It is natural after detection of that most noble trick...Eustacia, didn't any tender thought of your own mother lead you to think of being gentle to mine at such a time of weariness? Did not one grain of pity enter your heart as she turned away? Think what a vast opportunity was then lost of beginning a forgiving and honest course. Why did not you kick him out, and let her in, and say I'll be an honest wife and a noble woman from this hour? Had I told you to go and quench eternally our last flickering chance of happiness here you could have done no worse. Well, she's asleep now; and have you a hundred gallants, neither they nor you can insult her any more."

"You exaggerate fearfully," she said in a faint, weary voice; "but I cannot enter into my defence — it is not worth doing. You are nothing to me in future, and the past side of the story may as well remain untold. I have lost all through you, but I have not complained. Your blunders and misfortunes may have been a sorrow to you, but they have been a wrong to me. All persons of refinement have been scared away from me since I sank into the mire of marriage. Is this your cherishing — to put me into a hut like this, and keep me like the wife of a hind? You deceived me — not by words, but by appearances, which are less seen through than words. But the place will serve as well as any other — as somewhere to pass from — into my grave." Her words were smothered in her throat, and her head drooped down.

"I don't know what you mean by that. Am I the cause of your sin?" (Eustacia made a trembling motion towards him.) "What, you can begin to shed tears and offer me your hand? Good God! can you? No, not I. I'll not commit the fault of taking that." (The hand she had offered dropped nervelessly, but the tears continued flowing.) "Well, yes, I'll take it, if only for the sake of my own foolish kisses that were wasted there before I knew what I cherished. How bewitched I was! How could there be any good in a woman that everybody spoke ill of?"

"O, O, O!" she cried, breaking down at last; and, shaking with sobs which choked her, she sank upon her knees. "O, will you have done! O, you are too relentless — there's a limit to the cruelty of savages! I have held out long — but you crush me down. I beg for mercy — I cannot bear this any longer — it is inhuman to go further with this! If I had — killed your — mother with my own hand — I should not deserve such a scourging to the bone as this. O, O! God have mercy upon a miserable woman!... You have beaten me in this game — I beg you to stay your hand in pity!... I confess that I — wilfully did not undo the door the first time she knocked — but — I should have unfastened it the second — if I had not thought you had gone to do it yourself. When I found you had not I opened it, but she was gone. That's the extent of my crime — towards HER. Best natures commit bad faults sometimes, don't they? — I think they do. Now I will leave you — for ever and ever!"

"Tell all, and I WILL pity you. Was the man in the house with you Wildeve?"

"I cannot tell," she said desperately through her sobbing. "Don't insist further — I cannot tell. I am going from this house. We cannot both stay here."

“You need not go — I will go. You can stay here.”

“No, I will dress, and then I will go.”

“Where?”

“Where I came from, or ELSEWHERE.”

She hastily dressed herself, Yeobright moodily walking up and down the room the whole of the time. At last all her things were on. Her little hands quivered so violently as she held them to her chin to fasten her bonnet that she could not tie the strings, and after a few moments she relinquished the attempt. Seeing this he moved forward and said, “Let me tie them.”

She assented in silence, and lifted her chin. For once at least in her life she was totally oblivious of the charm of her attitude. But he was not, and he turned his eyes aside, that he might not be tempted to softness.

The strings were tied; she turned from him. “Do you still prefer going away yourself to my leaving you?” he inquired again.

“I do.”

“Very well — let it be. And when you will confess to the man I may pity you.”

She flung her shawl about her and went downstairs, leaving him standing in the room.

Eustacia had not long been gone when there came a knock at the door of the bedroom; and Yeobright said, “Well?”

It was the servant; and she replied, “Somebody from Mrs. Wildevé’s have called to tell ‘ee that the mis’ess and the baby are getting on wonderful well, and the baby’s name is to be Eustacia Clementine.” And the girl retired.

“What a mockery!” said Clym. “This unhappy marriage of mine to be perpetuated in that child’s name!”

CHAPTER 4

The Ministrations of a Half-forgotten One

Eustacia’s journey was at first as vague in direction as that of thistledown on the wind. She did not know what to do. She wished it had been night instead of morning, that she might at least have borne her misery without the possibility of being seen. Tracing mile after mile along between the dying ferns and the wet white spiders’ webs, she at length turned her steps towards her grandfather’s house. She found the front door closed and locked. Mechanically she went round to the end where the stable was, and on looking in at the stable door she saw Charley standing within.

“Captain Vye is not at home?” she said.

“No, ma’am,” said the lad in a flutter of feeling; “he’s gone to Weatherbury, and won’t be home till night. And the servant is gone home for a holiday. So the house is locked up.”

Eustacia's face was not visible to Charley as she stood at the doorway, her back being to the sky, and the stable but indifferently lighted; but the wildness of her manner arrested his attention. She turned and walked away across the enclosure to the gate, and was hidden by the bank.

When she had disappeared Charley, with misgiving in his eyes, slowly came from the stable door, and going to another point in the bank he looked over. Eustacia was leaning against it on the outside, her face covered with her hands, and her head pressing the dewy heather which bearded the bank's outer side. She appeared to be utterly indifferent to the circumstance that her bonnet, hair, and garments were becoming wet and disarranged by the moisture of her cold, harsh pillow. Clearly something was wrong.

Charley had always regarded Eustacia as Eustacia had regarded Clym when she first beheld him — as a romantic and sweet vision, scarcely incarnate. He had been so shut off from her by the dignity of her look and the pride of her speech, except at that one blissful interval when he was allowed to hold her hand, that he had hardly deemed her a woman, wingless and earthly, subject to household conditions and domestic jars. The inner details of her life he had only conjectured. She had been a lovely wonder, predestined to an orbit in which the whole of his own was but a point; and this sight of her leaning like a helpless, despairing creature against a wild wet bank filled him with an amazed horror. He could no longer remain where he was. Leaping over, he came up, touched her with his finger, and said tenderly, "You are poorly, ma'am. What can I do?"

Eustacia started up, and said, "Ah, Charley — you have followed me. You did not think when I left home in the summer that I should come back like this!"

"I did not, dear ma'am. Can I help you now?"

"I am afraid not. I wish I could get into the house. I feel giddy — that's all."

"Lean on my arm, ma'am, till we get to the porch, and I will try to open the door."

He supported her to the porch, and there depositing her on a seat hastened to the back, climbed to a window by the help of a ladder, and descending inside opened the door. Next he assisted her into the room, where there was an old-fashioned horsehair settee as large as a donkey wagon. She lay down here, and Charley covered her with a cloak he found in the hall.

"Shall I get you something to eat and drink?" he said.

"If you please, Charley. But I suppose there is no fire?"

"I can light it, ma'am."

He vanished, and she heard a splitting of wood and a blowing of bellows; and presently he returned, saying, "I have lighted a fire in the kitchen, and now I'll light one here."

He lit the fire, Eustacia dreamily observing him from her couch. When it was blazing up he said, "Shall I wheel you round in front of it, ma'am, as the morning is chilly?"

"Yes, if you like."

"Shall I go and bring the victuals now?"

"Yes, do," she murmured languidly.

When he had gone, and the dull sounds occasionally reached her ears of his movements in the kitchen, she forgot where she was, and had for a moment to consider by an effort what the sounds meant. After an interval which seemed short to her whose thoughts were elsewhere, he came in with a tray on which steamed tea and toast, though it was nearly lunch-time.

"Place it on the table," she said. "I shall be ready soon."

He did so, and retired to the door; when, however, he perceived that she did not move he came back a few steps.

"Let me hold it to you, if you don't wish to get up," said Charley. He brought the tray to the front of the couch, where he knelt down, adding, "I will hold it for you."

Eustacia sat up and poured out a cup of tea. "You are very kind to me, Charley," she murmured as she sipped.

"Well, I ought to be," said he diffidently, taking great trouble not to rest his eyes upon her, though this was their only natural position, Eustacia being immediately before him. "You have been kind to me."

"How have I?" said Eustacia.

"You let me hold your hand when you were a maiden at home."

"Ah, so I did. Why did I do that? My mind is lost — it had to do with the mumming, had it not?"

"Yes, you wanted to go in my place."

"I remember. I do indeed remember — too well!"

She again became utterly downcast; and Charley, seeing that she was not going to eat or drink any more, took away the tray.

Afterwards he occasionally came in to see if the fire was burning, to ask her if she wanted anything, to tell her that the wind had shifted from south to west, to ask her if she would like him to gather her some blackberries; to all which inquiries she replied in the negative or with indifference.

She remained on the settee some time longer, when she aroused herself and went upstairs. The room in which she had formerly slept still remained much as she had left it, and the recollection that this forced upon her of her own greatly changed and infinitely worsened situation again set on her face the undetermined and formless misery which it had worn on her first arrival. She peeped into her grandfather's room, through which the fresh autumn air was blowing from the open window. Her eye was arrested by what was a familiar sight enough, though it broke upon her now with a new significance.

It was a brace of pistols, hanging near the head of her grandfather's bed, which he always kept there loaded, as a precaution against possible burglars, the house being very lonely. Eustacia regarded them long, as if they were the page of a book in which she read a new and a strange matter. Quickly, like one afraid of herself, she returned downstairs and stood in deep thought.

"If I could only do it!" she said. "It would be doing much good to myself and all connected with me, and no harm to a single one."

The idea seemed to gather force within her, and she remained in a fixed attitude nearly ten minutes, when a certain finality was expressed in her gaze, and no longer the blankness of indecision.

She turned and went up the second time — softly and stealthily now — and entered her grandfather's room, her eyes at once seeking the head of the bed. The pistols were gone.

The instant quashing of her purpose by their absence affected her brain as a sudden vacuum affects the body — she nearly fainted. Who had done this? There was only one person on the premises besides herself. Eustacia involuntarily turned to the open window which overlooked the garden as far as the bank that bounded it. On the summit of the latter stood Charley, sufficiently elevated by its height to see into the room. His gaze was directed eagerly and solicitously upon her.

She went downstairs to the door and beckoned to him.

"You have taken them away?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Why did you do it?"

"I saw you looking at them too long."

"What has that to do with it?"

"You have been heart-broken all the morning, as if you did not want to live."

"Well?"

"And I could not bear to leave them in your way. There was meaning in your look at them."

"Where are they now?"

"Locked up."

"Where?"

"In the stable."

"Give them to me."

"No, ma'am."

"You refuse?"

"I do. I care too much for you to give 'em up."

She turned aside, her face for the first time softening from the stony immobility of the earlier day, and the corners of her mouth resuming something of that delicacy of cut which was always lost in her moments of despair. At last she confronted him again.

"Why should I not die if I wish?" she said tremulously. "I have made a bad bargain with life, and I am weary of it — weary. And now you have hindered my escape. O, why did you, Charley! What makes death painful except the thought of others' grief? — and that is absent in my case, for not a sigh would follow me!"

"Ah, it is trouble that has done this! I wish in my very soul that he who brought it about might die and rot, even if 'tis transportation to say it!"

"Charley, no more of that. What do you mean to do about this you have seen?"

“Keep it close as night, if you promise not to think of it again.”

“You need not fear. The moment has passed. I promise.” She then went away, entered the house, and lay down.

Later in the afternoon her grandfather returned. He was about to question her categorically, but on looking at her he withheld his words.

“Yes, it is too bad to talk of,” she slowly returned in answer to his glance. “Can my old room be got ready for me tonight, Grandfather? I shall want to occupy it again.”

He did not ask what it all meant, or why she had left her husband, but ordered the room to be prepared.

CHAPTER 5

An Old Move Inadvertently Repeated

Charley’s attentions to his former mistress were unbounded. The only solace to his own trouble lay in his attempts to relieve hers. Hour after hour he considered her wants; he thought of her presence there with a sort of gratitude, and, while uttering imprecations on the cause of her unhappiness, in some measure blessed the result. Perhaps she would always remain there, he thought, and then he would be as happy as he had been before. His dread was lest she should think fit to return to Alderworth, and in that dread his eyes, with all the inquisitiveness of affection, frequently sought her face when she was not observing him, as he would have watched the head of a stockdove to learn if it contemplated flight. Having once really succoured her, and possibly preserved her from the rashness of acts, he mentally assumed in addition a guardian’s responsibility for her welfare.

For this reason he busily endeavoured to provide her with pleasant distractions, bringing home curious objects which he found in the heath, such as white trumpet-shaped mosses, redheaded lichens, stone arrowheads used by the old tribes on Egdon, and faceted crystals from the hollows of flints. These he deposited on the premises in such positions that she should see them as if by accident.

A week passed, Eustacia never going out of the house. Then she walked into the enclosed plot and looked through her grandfather’s spyglass, as she had been in the habit of doing before her marriage. One day she saw, at a place where the highroad crossed the distant valley, a heavily laden wagon passing along. It was piled with household furniture. She looked again and again, and recognized it to be her own. In the evening her grandfather came indoors with a rumour that Yeobright had removed that day from Alderworth to the old house at Blooms-End.

On another occasion when reconnoitring thus she beheld two female figures walking in the vale. The day was fine and clear; and the persons not being more than half a mile off she could see their every detail with the telescope. The woman walking in front carried a white bundle in her arms, from one end of which hung a long appendage of drapery; and when the walkers turned, so that the sun fell more directly upon them,

Eustacia could see that the object was a baby. She called Charley, and asked him if he knew who they were, though she well guessed.

“Mrs. Wildeve and the nurse-girl,” said Charley.

“The nurse is carrying the baby?” said Eustacia.

“No, ‘tis Mrs. Wildeve carrying that,” he answered, “and the nurse walks behind carrying nothing.”

The lad was in good spirits that day, for the Fifth of November had again come round, and he was planning yet another scheme to divert her from her too absorbing thoughts. For two successive years his mistress had seemed to take pleasure in lighting a bonfire on the bank overlooking the valley; but this year she had apparently quite forgotten the day and the customary deed. He was careful not to remind her, and went on with his secret preparations for a cheerful surprise, the more zealously that he had been absent last time and unable to assist. At every vacant minute he hastened to gather furze-stumps, thorn-tree roots, and other solid materials from the adjacent slopes, hiding them from cursory view.

The evening came, and Eustacia was still seemingly unconscious of the anniversary. She had gone indoors after her survey through the glass, and had not been visible since. As soon as it was quite dark Charley began to build the bonfire, choosing precisely that spot on the bank which Eustacia had chosen at previous times.

When all the surrounding bonfires had burst into existence Charley kindled his, and arranged its fuel so that it should not require tending for some time. He then went back to the house, and lingered round the door and windows till she should by some means or other learn of his achievement and come out to witness it. But the shutters were closed, the door remained shut, and no heed whatever seemed to be taken of his performance. Not liking to call her he went back and replenished the fire, continuing to do this for more than half an hour. It was not till his stock of fuel had greatly diminished that he went to the back door and sent in to beg that Mrs. Yeobright would open the window-shutters and see the sight outside.

Eustacia, who had been sitting listlessly in the parlour, started up at the intelligence and flung open the shutters. Facing her on the bank blazed the fire, which at once sent a ruddy glare into the room where she was, and overpowered the candles.

“Well done, Charley!” said Captain Vye from the chimney-corner. “But I hope it is not my wood that he’s burning...Ah, it was this time last year that I met with that man Venn, bringing home Thomasin Yeobright — to be sure it was! Well, who would have thought that girl’s troubles would have ended so well? What a snipe you were in that matter, Eustacia! Has your husband written to you yet?”

“No,” said Eustacia, looking vaguely through the window at the fire, which just then so much engaged her mind that she did not resent her grandfather’s blunt opinion. She could see Charley’s form on the bank, shovelling and stirring the fire; and there flashed upon her imagination some other form which that fire might call up.

She left the room, put on her garden bonnet and cloak, and went out. Reaching the bank, she looked over with a wild curiosity and misgiving, when Charley said to her, with a pleased sense of himself, "I made it o' purpose for you, ma'am."

"Thank you," she said hastily. "But I wish you to put it out now."

"It will soon burn down," said Charley, rather disappointed. "Is it not a pity to knock it out?"

"I don't know," she musingly answered.

They stood in silence, broken only by the crackling of the flames, till Charley, perceiving that she did not want to talk to him, moved reluctantly away.

Eustacia remained within the bank looking at the fire, intending to go indoors, yet lingering still. Had she not by her situation been inclined to hold in indifference all things honoured of the gods and of men she would probably have come away. But her state was so hopeless that she could play with it. To have lost is less disturbing than to wonder if we may possibly have won; and Eustacia could now, like other people at such a stage, take a standing-point outside herself, observe herself as a disinterested spectator, and think what a sport for Heaven this woman Eustacia was.

While she stood she heard a sound. It was the splash of a stone in the pond.

Had Eustacia received the stone full in the bosom her heart could not have given a more decided thump. She had thought of the possibility of such a signal in answer to that which had been unwittingly given by Charley; but she had not expected it yet. How prompt Wildeve was! Yet how could he think her capable of deliberately wishing to renew their assignations now? An impulse to leave the spot, a desire to stay, struggled within her; and the desire held its own. More than that it did not do, for she refrained even from ascending the bank and looking over. She remained motionless, not disturbing a muscle of her face or raising her eyes; for were she to turn up her face the fire on the bank would shine upon it, and Wildeve might be looking down.

There was a second splash into the pond.

Why did he stay so long without advancing and looking over? Curiosity had its way — she ascended one or two of the earth-steps in the bank and glanced out.

Wildeve was before her. He had come forward after throwing the last pebble, and the fire now shone into each of their faces from the bank stretching breast-high between them.

"I did not light it!" cried Eustacia quickly. "It was lit without my knowledge. Don't, don't come over to me!"

"Why have you been living here all these days without telling me? You have left your home. I fear I am something to blame in this?"

"I did not let in his mother; that's how it is!"

"You do not deserve what you have got, Eustacia; you are in great misery; I see it in your eyes, your mouth, and all over you. My poor, poor girl!" He stepped over the bank. "You are beyond everything unhappy!"

"No, no; not exactly — "

"It has been pushed too far — it is killing you — I do think it!"

Her usually quiet breathing had grown quicker with his words. "I — I —" she began, and then burst into quivering sobs, shaken to the very heart by the unexpected voice of pity — a sentiment whose existence in relation to herself she had almost forgotten.

This outbreak of weeping took Eustacia herself so much by surprise that she could not leave off, and she turned aside from him in some shame, though turning hid nothing from him. She sobbed on desperately; then the outpour lessened, and she became quieter. Wildeva had resisted the impulse to clasp her, and stood without speaking.

"Are you not ashamed of me, who used never to be a crying animal?" she asked in a weak whisper as she wiped her eyes. "Why didn't you go away? I wish you had not seen quite all that; it reveals too much by half."

"You might have wished it, because it makes me as sad as you," he said with emotion and deference. "As for revealing — the word is impossible between us two."

"I did not send for you — don't forget it, Damon; I am in pain, but I did not send for you! As a wife, at least, I've been straight."

"Never mind — I came. O, Eustacia, forgive me for the harm I have done you in these two past years! I see more and more that I have been your ruin."

"Not you. This place I live in."

"Ah, your generosity may naturally make you say that. But I am the culprit. I should either have done more or nothing at all."

"In what way?"

"I ought never to have hunted you out, or, having done it, I ought to have persisted in retaining you. But of course I have no right to talk of that now. I will only ask this — can I do anything for you? Is there anything on the face of the earth that a man can do to make you happier than you are at present? If there is, I will do it. You may command me, Eustacia, to the limit of my influence; and don't forget that I am richer now. Surely something can be done to save you from this! Such a rare plant in such a wild place it grieves me to see. Do you want anything bought? Do you want to go anywhere? Do you want to escape the place altogether? Only say it, and I'll do anything to put an end to those tears, which but for me would never have been at all."

"We are each married to another person," she said faintly; "and assistance from you would have an evil sound — after — after —"

"Well, there's no preventing slanderers from having their fill at any time; but you need not be afraid. Whatever I may feel I promise you on my word of honour never to speak to you about — or act upon — until you say I may. I know my duty to Thomasin quite as well as I know my duty to you as a woman unfairly treated. What shall I assist you in?"

"In getting away from here."

"Where do you wish to go to?"

"I have a place in my mind. If you could help me as far as Budmouth I can do all the rest. Steamers sail from there across the Channel, and so I can get to Paris, where I

want to be. Yes," she pleaded earnestly, "help me to get to Budmouth harbour without my grandfather's or my husband's knowledge, and I can do all the rest."

"Will it be safe to leave you there alone?"

"Yes, yes. I know Budmouth well."

"Shall I go with you? I am rich now."

She was silent.

"Say yes, sweet!"

She was silent still.

"Well, let me know when you wish to go. We shall be at our present house till December; after that we remove to Casterbridge. Command me in anything till that time."

"I will think of this," she said hurriedly. "Whether I can honestly make use of you as a friend, or must close with you as a lover — that is what I must ask myself. If I wish to go and decide to accept your company I will signal to you some evening at eight o'clock punctually, and this will mean that you are to be ready with a horse and trap at twelve o'clock the same night to drive me to Budmouth harbour in time for the morning boat."

"I will look out every night at eight, and no signal shall escape me."

"Now please go away. If I decide on this escape I can only meet you once more unless — I cannot go without you. Go — I cannot bear it longer. Go — go!"

Wildevé slowly went up the steps and descended into the darkness on the other side; and as he walked he glanced back, till the bank blotted out her form from his further view.

CHAPTER 6

Thomasin Argues with Her Cousin, and He Writes a Letter

Yeobright was at this time at Blooms-End, hoping that Eustacia would return to him. The removal of furniture had been accomplished only that day, though Clym had lived in the old house for more than a week. He had spent the time in working about the premises, sweeping leaves from the garden paths, cutting dead stalks from the flower beds, and nailing up creepers which had been displaced by the autumn winds. He took no particular pleasure in these deeds, but they formed a screen between himself and despair. Moreover, it had become a religion with him to preserve in good condition all that had lapsed from his mother's hands to his own.

During these operations he was constantly on the watch for Eustacia. That there should be no mistake about her knowing where to find him he had ordered a notice board to be affixed to the garden gate at Alderworth, signifying in white letters whither he had removed. When a leaf floated to the earth he turned his head, thinking it might be her foot-fall. A bird searching for worms in the mould of the flower-beds sounded like her hand on the latch of the gate; and at dusk, when soft, strange ventriloquisms

came from holes in the ground, hollow stalks, curled dead leaves, and other crannies wherein breezes, worms, and insects can work their will, he fancied that they were Eustacia, standing without and breathing wishes of reconciliation.

Up to this hour he had persevered in his resolve not to invite her back. At the same time the severity with which he had treated her lulled the sharpness of his regret for his mother, and awoke some of his old solicitude for his mother's supplanter. Harsh feelings produce harsh usage, and this by reaction quenches the sentiments that gave it birth. The more he reflected the more he softened. But to look upon his wife as innocence in distress was impossible, though he could ask himself whether he had given her quite time enough — if he had not come a little too suddenly upon her on that sombre morning.

Now that the first flush of his anger had paled he was disinclined to ascribe to her more than an indiscreet friendship with Wildeve, for there had not appeared in her manner the signs of dishonour. And this once admitted, an absolutely dark interpretation of her act towards his mother was no longer forced upon him.

On the evening of the fifth November his thoughts of Eustacia were intense. Echoes from those past times when they had exchanged tender words all the day long came like the diffused murmur of a seashore left miles behind. "Surely," he said, "she might have brought herself to communicate with me before now, and confess honestly what Wildeve was to her."

Instead of remaining at home that night he determined to go and see Thomasin and her husband. If he found opportunity he would allude to the cause of the separation between Eustacia and himself, keeping silence, however, on the fact that there was a third person in his house when his mother was turned away. If it proved that Wildeve was innocently there he would doubtless openly mention it. If he were there with unjust intentions Wildeve, being a man of quick feeling, might possibly say something to reveal the extent to which Eustacia was compromised.

But on reaching his cousin's house he found that only Thomasin was at home, Wildeve being at that time on his way towards the bonfire innocently lit by Charley at Mistover. Thomasin then, as always, was glad to see Clym, and took him to inspect the sleeping baby, carefully screening the candlelight from the infant's eyes with her hand.

"Tamsin, have you heard that Eustacia is not with me now?" he said when they had sat down again.

"No," said Thomasin, alarmed.

"And not that I have left Alderworth?"

"No. I never hear tidings from Alderworth unless you bring them. What is the matter?"

Clym in a disturbed voice related to her his visit to Susan Nunsuch's boy, the revelation he had made, and what had resulted from his charging Eustacia with having wilfully and heartlessly done the deed. He suppressed all mention of Wildeve's presence with her.

"All this, and I not knowing it!" murmured Thomasin in an awestruck tone, "Terrible! What could have made her — O, Eustacia! And when you found it out you went in hot haste to her? Were you too cruel? — or is she really so wicked as she seems?"

"Can a man be too cruel to his mother's enemy?"

"I can fancy so."

"Very well, then — I'll admit that he can. But now what is to be done?"

"Make it up again — if a quarrel so deadly can ever be made up. I almost wish you had not told me. But do try to be reconciled. There are ways, after all, if you both wish to."

"I don't know that we do both wish to make it up," said Clym. "If she had wished it, would she not have sent to me by this time?"

"You seem to wish to, and yet you have not sent to her."

"True; but I have been tossed to and fro in doubt if I ought, after such strong provocation. To see me now, Thomasin, gives you no idea of what I have been; of what depths I have descended to in these few last days. O, it was a bitter shame to shut out my mother like that! Can I ever forget it, or even agree to see her again?"

"She might not have known that anything serious would come of it, and perhaps she did not mean to keep Aunt out altogether."

"She says herself that she did not. But the fact remains that keep her out she did."

"Believe her sorry, and send for her."

"How if she will not come?"

"It will prove her guilty, by showing that it is her habit to nourish enmity. But I do not think that for a moment."

"I will do this. I will wait for a day or two longer — not longer than two days certainly; and if she does not send to me in that time I will indeed send to her. I thought to have seen Wildeve here tonight. Is he from home?"

Thomasin blushed a little. "No," she said. "He is merely gone out for a walk."

"Why didn't he take you with him? The evening is fine. You want fresh air as well as he."

"Oh, I don't care for going anywhere; besides, there is baby."

"Yes, yes. Well, I have been thinking whether I should not consult your husband about this as well as you," said Clym steadily.

"I fancy I would not," she quickly answered. "It can do no good."

Her cousin looked her in the face. No doubt Thomasin was ignorant that her husband had any share in the events of that tragic afternoon; but her countenance seemed to signify that she concealed some suspicion or thought of the reputed tender relations between Wildeve and Eustacia in days gone by.

Clym, however, could make nothing of it, and he rose to depart, more in doubt than when he came.

"You will write to her in a day or two?" said the young woman earnestly. "I do so hope the wretched separation may come to an end."

"I will," said Clym; "I don't rejoice in my present state at all."

And he left her and climbed over the hill to Blooms-End. Before going to bed he sat down and wrote the following letter: —

MY DEAR EUSTACIA, — I must obey my heart without consulting my reason too closely. Will you come back to me? Do so, and the past shall never be mentioned. I was too severe; but O, Eustacia, the provocation! You don't know, you never will know, what those words of anger cost me which you drew down upon yourself. All that an honest man can promise you I promise now, which is that from me you shall never suffer anything on this score again. After all the vows we have made, Eustacia, I think we had better pass the remainder of our lives in trying to keep them. Come to me, then, even if you reproach me. I have thought of your sufferings that morning on which I parted from you; I know they were genuine, and they are as much as you ought to bear. Our love must still continue. Such hearts as ours would never have been given us but to be concerned with each other. I could not ask you back at first, Eustacia, for I was unable to persuade myself that he who was with you was not there as a lover. But if you will come and explain distracting appearances I do not question that you can show your honesty to me. Why have you not come before? Do you think I will not listen to you? Surely not, when you remember the kisses and vows we exchanged under the summer moon. Return then, and you shall be warmly welcomed. I can no longer think of you to your prejudice — I am but too much absorbed in justifying you. — Your husband as ever,

CLYM.

“There,” he said, as he laid it in his desk, “that's a good thing done. If she does not come before tomorrow night I will send it to her.”

Meanwhile, at the house he had just left Thomasin sat sighing uneasily. Fidelity to her husband had that evening induced her to conceal all suspicion that Wildeve's interest in Eustacia had not ended with his marriage. But she knew nothing positive; and though Clym was her well-beloved cousin there was one nearer to her still.

When, a little later, Wildeve returned from his walk to Mistover, Thomasin said, “Damon, where have you been? I was getting quite frightened, and thought you had fallen into the river. I dislike being in the house by myself.”

“Frightened?” he said, touching her cheek as if she were some domestic animal. “Why, I thought nothing could frighten you. It is that you are getting proud, I am sure, and don't like living here since we have risen above our business. Well, it is a tedious matter, this getting a new house; but I couldn't have set about it sooner, unless our ten thousand pounds had been a hundred thousand, when we could have afforded to despise caution.”

“No — I don't mind waiting — I would rather stay here twelve months longer than run any risk with baby. But I don't like your vanishing so in the evenings. There's something on your mind — I know there is, Damon. You go about so gloomily, and look at the heath as if it were somebody's gaol instead of a nice wild place to walk in.”

He looked towards her with pitying surprise. “What, do you like Egdon Heath?” he said.

"I like what I was born near to; I admire its grim old face."

"Pooh, my dear. You don't know what you like."

"I am sure I do. There's only one thing unpleasant about Egdon."

"What's that?"

"You never take me with you when you walk there. Why do you wander so much in it yourself if you so dislike it?"

The inquiry, though a simple one, was plainly disconcerting, and he sat down before replying. "I don't think you often see me there. Give an instance."

"I will," she answered triumphantly. "When you went out this evening I thought that as baby was asleep I would see where you were going to so mysteriously without telling me. So I ran out and followed behind you. You stopped at the place where the road forks, looked round at the bonfires, and then said, 'Damn it, I'll go!' And you went quickly up the left-hand road. Then I stood and watched you."

Wildevé frowned, afterwards saying, with a forced smile, "Well, what wonderful discovery did you make?"

"There — now you are angry, and we won't talk of this any more." She went across to him, sat on a footstool, and looked up in his face.

"Nonsense!" he said, "that's how you always back out. We will go on with it now we have begun. What did you next see? I particularly want to know."

"Don't be like that, Damon!" she murmured. "I didn't see anything. You vanished out of sight, and then I looked round at the bonfires and came in."

"Perhaps this is not the only time you have dogged my steps. Are you trying to find out something bad about me?"

"Not at all! I have never done such a thing before, and I shouldn't have done it now if words had not sometimes been dropped about you."

"What DO you mean?" he impatiently asked.

"They say — they say you used to go to Alderworth in the evenings, and it puts into my mind what I have heard about —"

Wildevé turned angrily and stood up in front of her. "Now," he said, flourishing his hand in the air, "just out with it, madam! I demand to know what remarks you have heard."

"Well, I heard that you used to be very fond of Eustacia — nothing more than that, though dropped in a bit-by-bit way. You ought not to be angry!"

He observed that her eyes were brimming with tears. "Well," he said, "there is nothing new in that, and of course I don't mean to be rough towards you, so you need not cry. Now, don't let us speak of the subject any more."

And no more was said, Thomasin being glad enough of a reason for not mentioning Clym's visit to her that evening, and his story.

CHAPTER 7

The Night of the Sixth of November

Having resolved on flight Eustacia at times seemed anxious that something should happen to thwart her own intention. The only event that could really change her position was the appearance of Clym. The glory which had encircled him as her lover was departed now; yet some good simple quality of his would occasionally return to her memory and stir a momentary throb of hope that he would again present himself before her. But calmly considered it was not likely that such a severance as now existed would ever close up — she would have to live on as a painful object, isolated, and out of place. She had used to think of the heath alone as an uncongenial spot to be in; she felt it now of the whole world.

Towards evening on the sixth her determination to go away again revived. About four o'clock she packed up anew the few small articles she had brought in her flight from Alderworth, and also some belonging to her which had been left here; the whole formed a bundle not too large to be carried in her hand for a distance of a mile or two. The scene without grew darker; mud-coloured clouds bellied downwards from the sky like vast hammocks slung across it, and with the increase of night a stormy wind arose; but as yet there was no rain.

Eustacia could not rest indoors, having nothing more to do, and she wandered to and fro on the hill, not far from the house she was soon to leave. In these desultory ramblings she passed the cottage of Susan Nunsuch, a little lower down than her grandfather's. The door was ajar, and a riband of bright firelight fell over the ground without. As Eustacia crossed the firebeams she appeared for an instant as distinct as a figure in a phantasmagoria — a creature of light surrounded by an area of darkness; the moment passed, and she was absorbed in night again.

A woman who was sitting inside the cottage had seen and recognized her in that momentary irradiation. This was Susan herself, occupied in preparing a posset for her little boy, who, often ailing, was now seriously unwell. Susan dropped the spoon, shook her fist at the vanished figure, and then proceeded with her work in a musing, absent way.

At eight o'clock, the hour at which Eustacia had promised to signal Wildeve if ever she signalled at all, she looked around the premises to learn if the coast was clear, went to the furze-rick, and pulled thence a long-stemmed bough of that fuel. This she carried to the corner of the bank, and, glancing behind to see if the shutters were all closed, she struck a light, and kindled the furze. When it was thoroughly ablaze Eustacia took it by the stem and waved it in the air above her head till it had burned itself out.

She was gratified, if gratification were possible to such a mood, by seeing a similar light in the vicinity of Wildeve's residence a minute or two later. Having agreed to keep watch at this hour every night, in case she should require assistance, this promptness

proved how strictly he had held to his word. Four hours after the present time, that is, at midnight, he was to be ready to drive her to Budmouth, as prearranged.

Eustacia returned to the house. Supper having been got over she retired early, and sat in her bedroom waiting for the time to go by. The night being dark and threatening, Captain Vye had not strolled out to gossip in any cottage or to call at the inn, as was sometimes his custom on these long autumn nights; and he sat sipping grog alone downstairs. About ten o'clock there was a knock at the door. When the servant opened it the rays of the candle fell upon the form of Fairway.

"I was a-forced to go to Lower Mistover tonight," he said, "and Mr. Yeobright asked me to leave this here on my way; but, faith, I put it in the lining of my hat, and thought no more about it till I got back and was hasping my gate before going to bed. So I have run back with it at once."

He handed in a letter and went his way. The girl brought it to the captain, who found that it was directed to Eustacia. He turned it over and over, and fancied that the writing was her husband's, though he could not be sure. However, he decided to let her have it at once if possible, and took it upstairs for that purpose; but on reaching the door of her room and looking in at the keyhole he found there was no light within, the fact being that Eustacia, without undressing, had flung herself upon the bed, to rest and gather a little strength for her coming journey. Her grandfather concluded from what he saw that he ought not to disturb her; and descending again to the parlour he placed the letter on the mantelpiece to give it to her in the morning.

At eleven o'clock he went to bed himself, smoked for some time in his bedroom, put out his light at half-past eleven, and then, as was his invariable custom, pulled up the blind before getting into bed, that he might see which way the wind blew on opening his eyes in the morning, his bedroom window commanding a view of the flagstaff and vane. Just as he had lain down he was surprised to observe the white pole of the staff flash into existence like a streak of phosphorus drawn downwards across the shade of night without. Only one explanation met this — a light had been suddenly thrown upon the pole from the direction of the house. As everybody had retired to rest the old man felt it necessary to get out of bed, open the window softly, and look to the right and left. Eustacia's bedroom was lighted up, and it was the shine from her window which had lighted the pole. Wondering what had aroused her, he remained undecided at the window, and was thinking of fetching the letter to slip it under her door, when he heard a slight brushing of garments on the partition dividing his room from the passage.

The captain concluded that Eustacia, feeling wakeful, had gone for a book, and would have dismissed the matter as unimportant if he had not also heard her distinctly weeping as she passed.

"She is thinking of that husband of hers," he said to himself. "Ah, the silly goose! she had no business to marry him. I wonder if that letter is really his?"

He arose, threw his boat-cloak round him, opened the door, and said, "Eustacia!" There was no answer. "Eustacia!" he repeated louder, "there is a letter on the mantel-piece for you."

But no response was made to this statement save an imaginary one from the wind, which seemed to gnaw at the corners of the house, and the stroke of a few drops of rain upon the windows.

He went on to the landing, and stood waiting nearly five minutes. Still she did not return. He went back for a light, and prepared to follow her; but first he looked into her bedroom. There, on the outside of the quilt, was the impression of her form, showing that the bed had not been opened; and, what was more significant, she had not taken her candlestick downstairs. He was now thoroughly alarmed; and hastily putting on his clothes he descended to the front door, which he himself had bolted and locked. It was now unfastened. There was no longer any doubt that Eustacia had left the house at this midnight hour; and whither could she have gone? To follow her was almost impossible. Had the dwelling stood in an ordinary road, two persons setting out, one in each direction, might have made sure of overtaking her; but it was a hopeless task to seek for anybody on a heath in the dark, the practicable directions for flight across it from any point being as numerous as the meridians radiating from the pole. Perplexed what to do, he looked into the parlour, and was vexed to find that the letter still lay there untouched.

At half-past eleven, finding that the house was silent, Eustacia had lighted her candle, put on some warm outer wrappings, taken her bag in her hand, and, extinguishing the light again, descended the staircase. When she got into the outer air she found that it had begun to rain, and as she stood pausing at the door it increased, threatening to come on heavily. But having committed herself to this line of action there was no retreating for bad weather. Even the receipt of Clym's letter would not have stopped her now. The gloom of the night was funereal; all nature seemed clothed in crape. The spiky points of the fir trees behind the house rose into the sky like the turrets and pinnacles of an abbey. Nothing below the horizon was visible save a light which was still burning in the cottage of Susan Nunsuch.

Eustacia opened her umbrella and went out from the enclosure by the steps over the bank, after which she was beyond all danger of being perceived. Skirting the pool, she followed the path towards Rainbarrow, occasionally stumbling over twisted furze roots, tufts of rushes, or oozing lumps of fleshy fungi, which at this season lay scattered about the heath like the rotten liver and lungs of some colossal animal. The moon and stars were closed up by cloud and rain to the degree of extinction. It was a night which led the traveller's thoughts instinctively to dwell on nocturnal scenes of disaster in the chronicles of the world, on all that is terrible and dark in history and legend — the last plague of Egypt, the destruction of Sennacherib's host, the agony in Gethsemane.

Eustacia at length reached Rainbarrow, and stood still there to think. Never was harmony more perfect than that between the chaos of her mind and the chaos of the world without. A sudden recollection had flashed on her this moment — she had not

money enough for undertaking a long journey. Amid the fluctuating sentiments of the day her unpractical mind had not dwelt on the necessity of being well-provided, and now that she thoroughly realised the conditions she sighed bitterly and ceased to stand erect, gradually crouching down under the umbrella as if she were drawn into the Barrow by a hand from beneath. Could it be that she was to remain a captive still? Money — she had never felt its value before. Even to efface herself from the country means were required. To ask Wildevé for pecuniary aid without allowing him to accompany her was impossible to a woman with a shadow of pride left in her; to fly as his mistress — and she knew that he loved her — was of the nature of humiliation.

Anyone who had stood by now would have pitied her, not so much on account of her exposure to weather, and isolation from all of humanity except the mouldered remains inside the tumulus; but for that other form of misery which was denoted by the slightly rocking movement that her feelings imparted to her person. Extreme unhappiness weighed visibly upon her. Between the drippings of the rain from her umbrella to her mantle, from her mantle to the heather, from the heather to the earth, very similar sounds could be heard coming from her lips; and the tearfulness of the outer scene was repeated upon her face. The wings of her soul were broken by the cruel obstructiveness of all about her; and even had she seen herself in a promising way of getting to Budmouth, entering a steamer, and sailing to some opposite port, she would have been but little more buoyant, so fearfully malignant were other things. She uttered words aloud. When a woman in such a situation, neither old, deaf, crazed, nor whimsical, takes upon herself to sob and soliloquize aloud there is something grievous the matter.

“Can I go, can I go?” she moaned. “He’s not GREAT enough for me to give myself to — he does not suffice for my desire!... If he had been a Saul or a Bonaparte — ah! But to break my marriage vow for him — it is too poor a luxury!... And I have no money to go alone! And if I could, what comfort to me? I must drag on next year, as I have dragged on this year, and the year after that as before. How I have tried and tried to be a splendid woman, and how destiny has been against me!... I do not deserve my lot!” she cried in a frenzy of bitter revolt. “O, the cruelty of putting me into this ill-conceived world! I was capable of much; but I have been injured and blighted and crushed by things beyond my control! O, how hard it is of Heaven to devise such tortures for me, who have done no harm to Heaven at all!”

The distant light which Eustacia had cursorily observed in leaving the house came, as she had divined, from the cottage window of Susan Nunsuch. What Eustacia did not divine was the occupation of the woman within at that moment. Susan’s sight of her passing figure earlier in the evening, not five minutes after the sick boy’s exclamation, “Mother, I do feel so bad!” persuaded the matron that an evil influence was certainly exercised by Eustacia’s propinquity.

On this account Susan did not go to bed as soon as the evening’s work was over, as she would have done at ordinary times. To counteract the malign spell which she imagined poor Eustacia to be working, the boy’s mother busied herself with a ghastly

invention of superstition, calculated to bring powerlessness, atrophy, and annihilation on any human being against whom it was directed. It was a practice well known on Egdon at that date, and one that is not quite extinct at the present day.

She passed with her candle into an inner room, where, among other utensils, were two large brown pans, containing together perhaps a hundredweight of liquid honey, the produce of the bees during the foregoing summer. On a shelf over the pans was a smooth and solid yellow mass of a hemispherical form, consisting of beeswax from the same take of honey. Susan took down the lump, and cutting off several thin slices, heaped them in an iron ladle, with which she returned to the living-room, and placed the vessel in the hot ashes of the fireplace. As soon as the wax had softened to the plasticity of dough she kneaded the pieces together. And now her face became more intent. She began moulding the wax; and it was evident from her manner of manipulation that she was endeavouring to give it some preconceived form. The form was human.

By warming and kneading, cutting and twisting, dismembering and re-joining the incipient image she had in about a quarter of an hour produced a shape which tolerably well resembled a woman, and was about six inches high. She laid it on the table to get cold and hard. Meanwhile she took the candle and went upstairs to where the little boy was lying.

“Did you notice, my dear, what Mrs. Eustacia wore this afternoon besides the dark dress?”

“A red ribbon round her neck.”

“Anything else?”

“No — except sandal-shoes.”

“A red ribbon and sandal-shoes,” she said to herself.

Mrs. Nunsuch went and searched till she found a fragment of the narrowest red ribbon, which she took downstairs and tied round the neck of the image. Then fetching ink and a quilt from the rickety bureau by the window, she blackened the feet of the image to the extent presumably covered by shoes; and on the instep of each foot marked cross-lines in the shape taken by the sandalstrings of those days. Finally she tied a bit of black thread round the upper part of the head, in faint resemblance to a snood worn for confining the hair.

Susan held the object at arm’s length and contemplated it with a satisfaction in which there was no smile. To anybody acquainted with the inhabitants of Egdon Heath the image would have suggested Eustacia Yeobright.

From her workbasket in the window-seat the woman took a paper of pins, of the old long and yellow sort, whose heads were disposed to come off at their first usage. These she began to thrust into the image in all directions, with apparently excruciating energy. Probably as many as fifty were thus inserted, some into the head of the wax model, some into the shoulders, some into the trunk, some upwards through the soles of the feet, till the figure was completely permeated with pins.

She turned to the fire. It had been of turf; and though the high heap of ashes which turf fires produce was somewhat dark and dead on the outside, upon raking it abroad

with the shovel the inside of the mass showed a glow of red heat. She took a few pieces of fresh turf from the chimney-corner and built them together over the glow, upon which the fire brightened. Seizing with the tongs the image that she had made of Eustacia, she held it in the heat, and watched it as it began to waste slowly away. And while she stood thus engaged there came from between her lips a murmur of words.

It was a strange jargon — the Lord's Prayer repeated backwards — the incantation usual in proceedings for obtaining unhallowed assistance against an enemy. Susan uttered the lugubrious discourse three times slowly, and when it was completed the image had considerably diminished. As the wax dropped into the fire a long flame arose from the spot, and curling its tongue round the figure ate still further into its substance. A pin occasionally dropped with the wax, and the embers heated it red as it lay.

CHAPTER 8

Rain, Darkness, and Anxious Wanderers

While the effigy of Eustacia was melting to nothing, and the fair woman herself was standing on Rainbarrow, her soul in an abyss of desolation seldom plumbed by one so young, Yeobright sat lonely at Blooms-End. He had fulfilled his word to Thomasin by sending off Fairway with the letter to his wife, and now waited with increased impatience for some sound or signal of her return. Were Eustacia still at Mistover the very least he expected was that she would send him back a reply tonight by the same hand; though, to leave all to her inclination, he had cautioned Fairway not to ask for an answer. If one were handed to him he was to bring it immediately; if not, he was to go straight home without troubling to come round to Blooms-End again that night.

But secretly Clym had a more pleasing hope. Eustacia might possibly decline to use her pen — it was rather her way to work silently — and surprise him by appearing at his door. How fully her mind was made up to do otherwise he did not know.

To Clym's regret it began to rain and blow hard as the evening advanced. The wind rasped and scraped at the corners of the house, and filliped the eavesdroppings like peas against the panes. He walked restlessly about the untenanted rooms, stopping strange noises in windows and doors by jamming splinters of wood into the casements and crevices, and pressing together the leadwork of the quarries where it had become loosened from the glass. It was one of those nights when cracks in the walls of old churches widen, when ancient stains on the ceilings of decayed manor houses are renewed and enlarged from the size of a man's hand to an area of many feet. The little gate in the palings before his dwelling continually opened and clicked together again, but when he looked out eagerly nobody was there; it was as if invisible shapes of the dead were passing in on their way to visit him.

Between ten and eleven o'clock, finding that neither Fairway nor anybody else came to him, he retired to rest, and despite his anxieties soon fell asleep. His sleep, however,

was not very sound, by reason of the expectancy he had given way to, and he was easily awakened by a knocking which began at the door about an hour after. Clym arose and looked out of the window. Rain was still falling heavily, the whole expanse of heath before him emitting a subdued hiss under the downpour. It was too dark to see anything at all.

“Who’s there?” he cried.

Light footsteps shifted their position in the porch, and he could just distinguish in a plaintive female voice the words, “O Clym, come down and let me in!”

He flushed hot with agitation. “Surely it is Eustacia!” he murmured. If so, she had indeed come to him unawares.

He hastily got a light, dressed himself, and went down. On his flinging open the door the rays of the candle fell upon a woman closely wrapped up, who at once came forward.

“Thomasin!” he exclaimed in an indescribable tone of disappointment. “It is Thomasin, and on such a night as this! O, where is Eustacia?”

Thomasin it was, wet, frightened, and panting.

“Eustacia? I don’t know, Clym; but I can think,” she said with much perturbation. “Let me come in and rest — I will explain this. There is a great trouble brewing — my husband and Eustacia!”

“What, what?”

“I think my husband is going to leave me or do something dreadful — I don’t know what — Clym, will you go and see? I have nobody to help me but you; Eustacia has not yet come home?”

“No.”

She went on breathlessly: “Then they are going to run off together! He came indoors tonight about eight o’clock and said in an off-hand way, ‘Tamsie, I have just found that I must go a journey.’ ‘When?’ I said. ‘Tonight,’ he said. ‘Where?’ I asked him. ‘I cannot tell you at present,’ he said; ‘I shall be back again tomorrow.’ He then went and busied himself in looking up his things, and took no notice of me at all. I expected to see him start, but he did not, and then it came to be ten o’clock, when he said, ‘You had better go to bed.’ I didn’t know what to do, and I went to bed. I believe he thought I fell asleep, for half an hour after that he came up and unlocked the oak chest we keep money in when we have much in the house and took out a roll of something which I believe was banknotes, though I was not aware that he had ‘em there. These he must have got from the bank when he went there the other day. What does he want banknotes for, if he is only going off for a day? When he had gone down I thought of Eustacia, and how he had met her the night before — I know he did meet her, Clym, for I followed him part of the way; but I did not like to tell you when you called, and so make you think ill of him, as I did not think it was so serious. Then I could not stay in bed; I got up and dressed myself, and when I heard him out in the stable I thought I would come and tell you. So I came downstairs without any noise and slipped out.”

“Then he was not absolutely gone when you left?”

“No. Will you, dear Cousin Clym, go and try to persuade him not to go? He takes no notice of what I say, and puts me off with the story of his going on a journey, and will be home tomorrow, and all that; but I don’t believe it. I think you could influence him.”

“I’ll go,” said Clym. “O, Eustacia!”

Thomasin carried in her arms a large bundle; and having by this time seated herself she began to unroll it, when a baby appeared as the kernel to the husks — dry, warm, and unconscious of travel or rough weather. Thomasin briefly kissed the baby, and then found time to begin crying as she said, “I brought baby, for I was afraid what might happen to her. I suppose it will be her death, but I couldn’t leave her with Rachel!”

Clym hastily put together the logs on the hearth, raked abroad the embers, which were scarcely yet extinct, and blew up a flame with the bellows.

“Dry yourself,” he said. “I’ll go and get some more wood.”

“No, no — don’t stay for that. I’ll make up the fire. Will you go at once — please will you?”

Yeobright ran upstairs to finish dressing himself. While he was gone another rapping came to the door. This time there was no delusion that it might be Eustacia’s — the footsteps just preceding it had been heavy and slow. Yeobright thinking it might possibly be Fairway with a note in answer, descended again and opened the door.

“Captain Vye?” he said to a dripping figure.

“Is my granddaughter here?” said the captain.

“No.”

“Then where is she?”

“I don’t know.”

“But you ought to know — you are her husband.”

“Only in name apparently,” said Clym with rising excitement. “I believe she means to elope tonight with Wildeve. I am just going to look to it.”

“Well, she has left my house; she left about half an hour ago. Who’s sitting there?”

“My cousin Thomasin.”

The captain bowed in a preoccupied way to her. “I only hope it is no worse than an elopement,” he said.

“Worse? What’s worse than the worst a wife can do?”

“Well, I have been told a strange tale. Before starting in search of her I called up Charley, my stable lad. I missed my pistols the other day.”

“Pistols?”

“He said at the time that he took them down to clean. He has now owned that he took them because he saw Eustacia looking curiously at them; and she afterwards owned to him that she was thinking of taking her life, but bound him to secrecy, and promised never to think of such a thing again. I hardly suppose she will ever have bravado enough to use one of them; but it shows what has been lurking in her mind; and people who think of that sort of thing once think of it again.”

“Where are the pistols?”

“Safely locked up. O no, she won’t touch them again. But there are more ways of letting out life than through a bullet-hole. What did you quarrel about so bitterly with her to drive her to all this? You must have treated her badly indeed. Well, I was always against the marriage, and I was right.”

“Are you going with me?” said Yeobright, paying no attention to the captain’s latter remark. “If so I can tell you what we quarrelled about as we walk along.”

“Where to?”

“To Wildeve’s — that was her destination, depend upon it.”

Thomasin here broke in, still weeping: “He said he was only going on a sudden short journey; but if so why did he want so much money? O, Clym, what do you think will happen? I am afraid that you, my poor baby, will soon have no father left to you!”

“I am off now,” said Yeobright, stepping into the porch.

“I would fain go with ‘ee,” said the old man doubtfully. “But I begin to be afraid that my legs will hardly carry me there such a night as this. I am not so young as I was. If they are interrupted in their flight she will be sure to come back to me, and I ought to be at the house to receive her. But be it as ‘twill I can’t walk to the Quiet Woman, and that’s an end on’t. I’ll go straight home.”

“It will perhaps be best,” said Clym. “Thomasin, dry yourself, and be as comfortable as you can.”

With this he closed the door upon her, and left the house in company with Captain Vye, who parted from him outside the gate, taking the middle path, which led to Mistover. Clym crossed by the right-hand track towards the inn.

Thomasin, being left alone, took off some of her wet garments, carried the baby upstairs to Clym’s bed, and then came down to the sitting-room again, where she made a larger fire, and began drying herself. The fire soon flared up the chimney, giving the room an appearance of comfort that was doubled by contrast with the drumming of the storm without, which snapped at the windowpanes and breathed into the chimney strange low utterances that seemed to be the prologue to some tragedy.

But the least part of Thomasin was in the house, for her heart being at ease about the little girl upstairs she was mentally following Clym on his journey. Having indulged in this imaginary peregrination for some considerable interval, she became impressed with a sense of the intolerable slowness of time. But she sat on. The moment then came when she could scarcely sit longer, and it was like a satire on her patience to remember that Clym could hardly have reached the inn as yet. At last she went to the baby’s bedside. The child was sleeping soundly; but her imagination of possibly disastrous events at her home, the predominance within her of the unseen over the seen, agitated her beyond endurance. She could not refrain from going down and opening the door. The rain still continued, the candlelight falling upon the nearest drops and making glistening darts of them as they descended across the throng of invisible ones behind. To plunge into that medium was to plunge into water slightly diluted with air. But the difficulty of returning to her house at this moment made her all the more desirous

of doing so — anything was better than suspense. “I have come here well enough,” she said, “and why shouldn’t I go back again? It is a mistake for me to be away.”

She hastily fetched the infant, wrapped it up, cloaked herself as before, and shoveling the ashes over the fire, to prevent accidents, went into the open air. Pausing first to put the door key in its old place behind the shutter, she resolutely turned her face to the confronting pile of firmamental darkness beyond the palings, and stepped into its midst. But Thomasin’s imagination being so actively engaged elsewhere, the night and the weather had for her no terror beyond that of their actual discomfort and difficulty.

She was soon ascending Blooms-End valley and traversing the undulations on the side of the hill. The noise of the wind over the heath was shrill, and as if it whistled for joy at finding a night so congenial as this. Sometimes the path led her to hollows between thickets of tall and dripping bracken, dead, though not yet prostrate, which enclosed her like a pool. When they were more than usually tall she lifted the baby to the top of her head, that it might be out of the reach of their drenching fronds. On higher ground, where the wind was brisk and sustained, the rain flew in a level flight without sensible descent, so that it was beyond all power to imagine the remoteness of the point at which it left the bosoms of the clouds. Here self-defence was impossible, and individual drops stuck into her like the arrows into Saint Sebastian. She was enabled to avoid puddles by the nebulous paleness which signified their presence, though beside anything less dark than the heath they themselves would have appeared as blackness.

Yet in spite of all this Thomasin was not sorry that she had started. To her there were not, as to Eustacia, demons in the air, and malice in every bush and bough. The drops which lashed her face were not scorpions, but prosy rain; Egdon in the mass was no monster whatever, but impersonal open ground. Her fears of the place were rational, her dislikes of its worst moods reasonable. At this time it was in her view a windy, wet place, in which a person might experience much discomfort, lose the path without care, and possibly catch cold.

If the path is well known the difficulty at such times of keeping therein is not altogether great, from its familiar feel to the feet; but once lost it is irrecoverable. Owing to her baby, who somewhat impeded Thomasin’s view forward and distracted her mind, she did at last lose the track. This mishap occurred when she was descending an open slope about two-thirds home. Instead of attempting, by wandering hither and thither, the hopeless task of finding such a mere thread, she went straight on, trusting for guidance to her general knowledge of the contours, which was scarcely surpassed by Clym’s or by that of the heath-croppers themselves.

At length Thomasin reached a hollow and began to discern through the rain a faint blotted radiance, which presently assumed the oblong form of an open door. She knew that no house stood hereabouts, and was soon aware of the nature of the door by its height above the ground.

“Why, it is Diggory Venn’s van, surely!” she said.

A certain secluded spot near Rainbarrow was, she knew, often Venn’s chosen centre when staying in this neighbourhood; and she guessed at once that she had stumbled

upon this mysterious retreat. The question arose in her mind whether or not she should ask him to guide her into the path. In her anxiety to reach home she decided that she would appeal to him, notwithstanding the strangeness of appearing before his eyes at this place and season. But when, in pursuance of this resolve, Thomasin reached the van and looked in she found it to be untenanted; though there was no doubt that it was the reddleman's. The fire was burning in the stove, the lantern hung from the nail. Round the doorway the floor was merely sprinkled with rain, and not saturated, which told her that the door had not long been opened.

While she stood uncertainly looking in Thomasin heard a footstep advancing from the darkness behind her, and turning, beheld the well-known form in corduroy, lurid from head to foot, the lantern beams falling upon him through an intervening gauze of raindrops.

"I thought you went down the slope," he said, without noticing her face. "How do you come back here again?"

"Diggory?" said Thomasin faintly.

"Who are you?" said Venn, still unperceiving. "And why were you crying so just now?"

"O, Diggory! don't you know me?" said she. "But of course you don't, wrapped up like this. What do you mean? I have not been crying here, and I have not been here before."

Venn then came nearer till he could see the illuminated side of her form.

"Mrs. Wildeve!" he exclaimed, starting. "What a time for us to meet! And the baby too! What dreadful thing can have brought you out on such a night as this?"

She could not immediately answer; and without asking her permission he hopped into his van, took her by the arm, and drew her up after him.

"What is it?" he continued when they stood within.

"I have lost my way coming from Blooms-End, and I am in a great hurry to get home. Please show me as quickly as you can! It is so silly of me not to know Egdon better, and I cannot think how I came to lose the path. Show me quickly, Diggory, please."

"Yes, of course. I will go with 'ee. But you came to me before this, Mrs. Wildeve?"

"I only came this minute."

"That's strange. I was lying down here asleep about five minutes ago, with the door shut to keep out the weather, when the brushing of a woman's clothes over the heath-bushes just outside woke me up, for I don't sleep heavy, and at the same time I heard a sobbing or crying from the same woman. I opened my door and held out my lantern, and just as far as the light would reach I saw a woman; she turned her head when the light sheened on her, and then hurried on downhill. I hung up the lantern, and was curious enough to pull on my things and dog her a few steps, but I could see nothing of her any more. That was where I had been when you came up; and when I saw you I thought you were the same one."

"Perhaps it was one of the heathfolk going home?"

"No, it couldn't be. 'Tis too late. The noise of her gown over the he'th was of a whistling sort that nothing but silk will make."

"It wasn't I, then. My dress is not silk, you see...Are we anywhere in a line between Mistorver and the inn?"

"Well, yes; not far out."

"Ah, I wonder if it was she! Diggory, I must go at once!"

She jumped down from the van before he was aware, when Venn unhooked the lantern and leaped down after her. "I'll take the baby, ma'am," he said. "You must be tired out by the weight."

Thomasin hesitated a moment, and then delivered the baby into Venn's hands. "Don't squeeze her, Diggory," she said, "or hurt her little arm; and keep the cloak close over her like this, so that the rain may not drop in her face."

"I will," said Venn earnestly. "As if I could hurt anything belonging to you!"

"I only meant accidentally," said Thomasin.

"The baby is dry enough, but you are pretty wet," said the reddleman when, in closing the door of his cart to padlock it, he noticed on the floor a ring of water drops where her cloak had hung from her.

Thomasin followed him as he wound right and left to avoid the larger bushes, stopping occasionally and covering the lantern, while he looked over his shoulder to gain some idea of the position of Rainbarrow above them, which it was necessary to keep directly behind their backs to preserve a proper course.

"You are sure the rain does not fall upon baby?"

"Quite sure. May I ask how old he is, ma'am?"

"He!" said Thomasin reproachfully. "Anybody can see better than that in a moment. She is nearly two months old. How far is it now to the inn?"

"A little over a quarter of a mile."

"Will you walk a little faster?"

"I was afraid you could not keep up."

"I am very anxious to get there. Ah, there is a light from the window!"

"'Tis not from the window. That's a gig-lamp, to the best of my belief."

"O!" said Thomasin in despair. "I wish I had been there sooner — give me the baby, Diggory — you can go back now."

"I must go all the way," said Venn. "There is a quag between us and that light, and you will walk into it up to your neck unless I take you round."

"But the light is at the inn, and there is no quag in front of that."

"No, the light is below the inn some two or three hundred yards."

"Never mind," said Thomasin hurriedly. "Go towards the light, and not towards the inn."

"Yes," answered Venn, swerving round in obedience; and, after a pause, "I wish you would tell me what this great trouble is. I think you have proved that I can be trusted."

“There are some things that cannot be — cannot be told to — ” And then her heart rose into her throat, and she could say no more.

CHAPTER 9

Sights and Sounds Draw the Wanderers Together

Having seen Eustacia’s signal from the hill at eight o’clock, Wildeve immediately prepared to assist her in her flight, and, as he hoped, accompany her. He was somewhat perturbed, and his manner of informing Thomasin that he was going on a journey was in itself sufficient to rouse her suspicions. When she had gone to bed he collected the few articles he would require, and went upstairs to the money-chest, whence he took a tolerably bountiful sum in notes, which had been advanced to him on the property he was so soon to have in possession, to defray expenses incidental to the removal.

He then went to the stable and coach-house to assure himself that the horse, gig, and harness were in a fit condition for a long drive. Nearly half an hour was spent thus, and on returning to the house Wildeve had no thought of Thomasin being anywhere but in bed. He had told the stable lad not to stay up, leading the boy to understand that his departure would be at three or four in the morning; for this, though an exceptional hour, was less strange than midnight, the time actually agreed on, the packet from Budmouth sailing between one and two.

At last all was quiet, and he had nothing to do but to wait. By no effort could he shake off the oppression of spirits which he had experienced ever since his last meeting with Eustacia, but he hoped there was that in his situation which money could cure. He had persuaded himself that to act not ungenerously towards his gentle wife by settling on her the half of his property, and with chivalrous devotion towards another and greater woman by sharing her fate, was possible. And though he meant to adhere to Eustacia’s instructions to the letter, to deposit her where she wished and to leave her, should that be her will, the spell that she had cast over him intensified, and his heart was beating fast in the anticipated futility of such commands in the face of a mutual wish that they should throw in their lot together.

He would not allow himself to dwell long upon these conjectures, maxims, and hopes, and at twenty minutes to twelve he again went softly to the stable, harnessed the horse, and lit the lamps; whence, taking the horse by the head, he led him with the covered car out of the yard to a spot by the roadside some quarter of a mile below the inn.

Here Wildeve waited, slightly sheltered from the driving rain by a high bank that had been cast up at this place. Along the surface of the road where lit by the lamps the loosened gravel and small stones scudded and clicked together before the wind, which, leaving them in heaps, plunged into the heath and boomed across the bushes into darkness. Only one sound rose above this din of weather, and that was the roaring of a ten-hatch weir to the southward, from a river in the meads which formed the boundary of the heath in this direction.

He lingered on in perfect stillness till he began to fancy that the midnight hour must have struck. A very strong doubt had arisen in his mind if Eustacia would venture down the hill in such weather; yet knowing her nature he felt that she might. "Poor thing! 'tis like her ill-luck," he murmured.

At length he turned to the lamp and looked at his watch. To his surprise it was nearly a quarter past midnight. He now wished that he had driven up the circuitous road to Mistover, a plan not adopted because of the enormous length of the route in proportion to that of the pedestrian's path down the open hillside, and the consequent increase of labour for the horse.

At this moment a footstep approached; but the light of the lamps being in a different direction the comer was not visible. The step paused, then came on again.

"Eustacia?" said Wildeve.

The person came forward, and the light fell upon the form of Clym, glistening with wet, whom Wildeve immediately recognized; but Wildeve, who stood behind the lamp, was not at once recognized by Yeobright.

He stopped as if in doubt whether this waiting vehicle could have anything to do with the flight of his wife or not. The sight of Yeobright at once banished Wildeve's sober feelings, who saw him again as the deadly rival from whom Eustacia was to be kept at all hazards. Hence Wildeve did not speak, in the hope that Clym would pass by without particular inquiry.

While they both hung thus in hesitation a dull sound became audible above the storm and wind. Its origin was unmistakable — it was the fall of a body into the stream in the adjoining mead, apparently at a point near the weir.

Both started. "Good God! can it be she?" said Clym.

"Why should it be she?" said Wildeve, in his alarm forgetting that he had hitherto screened himself.

"Ah! — that's you, you traitor, is it?" cried Yeobright. "Why should it be she? Because last week she would have put an end to her life if she had been able. She ought to have been watched! Take one of the lamps and come with me."

Yeobright seized the one on his side and hastened on; Wildeve did not wait to unfasten the other, but followed at once along the meadow track to the weir, a little in the rear of Clym.

Shadwater Weir had at its foot a large circular pool, fifty feet in diameter, into which the water flowed through ten huge hatches, raised and lowered by a winch and cogs in the ordinary manner. The sides of the pool were of masonry, to prevent the water from washing away the bank; but the force of the stream in winter was sometimes such as to undermine the retaining wall and precipitate it into the hole. Clym reached the hatches, the framework of which was shaken to its foundations by the velocity of the current. Nothing but the froth of the waves could be discerned in the pool below. He got upon the plank bridge over the race, and holding to the rail, that the wind might not blow him off, crossed to the other side of the river. There he leant over the wall

and lowered the lamp, only to behold the vortex formed at the curl of the returning current.

Wildeve meanwhile had arrived on the former side, and the light from Yeobright's lamp shed a flecked and agitated radiance across the weir pool, revealing to the engineer the tumbling courses of the currents from the hatches above. Across this gashed and puckered mirror a dark body was slowly borne by one of the backward currents.

"O, my darling!" exclaimed Wildeve in an agonized voice; and, without showing sufficient presence of mind even to throw off his greatcoat, he leaped into the boiling caldron.

Yeobright could now also discern the floating body, though but indistinctly; and imagining from Wildeve's plunge that there was life to be saved he was about to leap after. Bethinking himself of a wiser plan, he placed the lamp against a post to make it stand upright, and running round to the lower part of the pool, where there was no wall, he sprang in and boldly waded upwards towards the deeper portion. Here he was taken off his legs, and in swimming was carried round into the centre of the basin, where he perceived Wildeve struggling.

While these hasty actions were in progress here, Venn and Thomasin had been toiling through the lower corner of the heath in the direction of the light. They had not been near enough to the river to hear the plunge, but they saw the removal of the carriage lamp, and watched its motion into the mead. As soon as they reached the car and horse Venn guessed that something new was amiss, and hastened to follow in the course of the moving light. Venn walked faster than Thomasin, and came to the weir alone.

The lamp placed against the post by Clym still shone across the water, and the reddleman observed something floating motionless. Being encumbered with the infant, he ran back to meet Thomasin.

"Take the baby, please, Mrs. Wildeve," he said hastily. "Run home with her, call the stable lad, and make him send down to me any men who may be living near. Somebody has fallen into the weir."

Thomasin took the child and ran. When she came to the covered car the horse, though fresh from the stable, was standing perfectly still, as if conscious of misfortune. She saw for the first time whose it was. She nearly fainted, and would have been unable to proceed another step but that the necessity of preserving the little girl from harm nerved her to an amazing self-control. In this agony of suspense she entered the house, put the baby in a place of safety, woke the lad and the female domestic, and ran out to give the alarm at the nearest cottage.

Diggory, having returned to the brink of the pool, observed that the small upper hatches or floats were withdrawn. He found one of these lying upon the grass, and taking it under one arm, and with his lantern in his hand, entered at the bottom of the pool as Clym had done. As soon as he began to be in deep water he flung himself across the hatch; thus supported he was able to keep afloat as long as he chose, holding

the lantern aloft with his disengaged hand. Propelled by his feet, he steered round and round the pool, ascending each time by one of the back streams and descending in the middle of the current.

At first he could see nothing. Then amidst the glistening of the whirlpools and the white clots of foam he distinguished a woman's bonnet floating alone. His search was now under the left wall, when something came to the surface almost close beside him. It was not, as he had expected, a woman, but a man. The reddleman put the ring of the lantern between his teeth, seized the floating man by the collar, and, holding on to the hatch with his remaining arm, struck out into the strongest race, by which the unconscious man, the hatch, and himself were carried down the stream. As soon as Venn found his feet dragging over the pebbles of the shallower part below he secured his footing and waded towards the brink. There, where the water stood at about the height of his waist, he flung away the hatch, and attempted to drag forth the man. This was a matter of great difficulty, and he found as the reason that the legs of the unfortunate stranger were tightly embraced by the arms of another man, who had hitherto been entirely beneath the surface.

At this moment his heart bounded to hear footsteps running towards him, and two men, roused by Thomasin, appeared at the brink above. They ran to where Venn was, and helped him in lifting out the apparently drowned persons, separating them, and laying them out upon the grass. Venn turned the light upon their faces. The one who had been uppermost was Yeobright; he who had been completely submerged was Wildeve.

"Now we must search the hole again," said Venn. "A woman is in there somewhere. Get a pole."

One of the men went to the footbridge and tore off the handrail. The reddleman and the two others then entered the water together from below as before, and with their united force probed the pool forwards to where it sloped down to its central depth. Venn was not mistaken in supposing that any person who had sunk for the last time would be washed down to this point, for when they had examined to about halfway across something impeded their thrust.

"Pull it forward," said Venn, and they raked it in with the pole till it was close to their feet.

Venn vanished under the stream, and came up with an armful of wet drapery enclosing a woman's cold form, which was all that remained of the desperate Eustacia.

When they reached the bank there stood Thomasin, in a stress of grief, bending over the two unconscious ones who already lay there. The horse and cart were brought to the nearest point in the road, and it was the work of a few minutes only to place the three in the vehicle. Venn led on the horse, supporting Thomasin upon his arm, and the two men followed, till they reached the inn.

The woman who had been shaken out of her sleep by Thomasin had hastily dressed herself and lighted a fire, the other servant being left to snore on in peace at the back

of the house. The insensible forms of Eustacia, Clym, and Wildeve were then brought in and laid on the carpet, with their feet to the fire, when such restorative processes as could be thought of were adopted at once, the stableman being in the meantime sent for a doctor. But there seemed to be not a whiff of life in either of the bodies. Then Thomasin, whose stupor of grief had been thrust off awhile by frantic action, applied a bottle of hartshorn to Clym's nostrils, having tried it in vain upon the other two. He sighed.

"Clym's alive!" she exclaimed.

He soon breathed distinctly, and again and again did she attempt to revive her husband by the same means; but Wildeve gave no sign. There was too much reason to think that he and Eustacia both were for ever beyond the reach of stimulating perfumes. Their exertions did not relax till the doctor arrived, when one by one, the senseless three were taken upstairs and put into warm beds.

Venn soon felt himself relieved from further attendance, and went to the door, scarcely able yet to realise the strange catastrophe that had befallen the family in which he took so great an interest. Thomasin surely would be broken down by the sudden and overwhelming nature of this event. No firm and sensible Mrs. Yeobright lived now to support the gentle girl through the ordeal; and, whatever an unimpassioned spectator might think of her loss of such a husband as Wildeve, there could be no doubt that for the moment she was distracted and horrified by the blow. As for himself, not being privileged to go to her and comfort her, he saw no reason for waiting longer in a house where he remained only as a stranger.

He returned across the heath to his van. The fire was not yet out, and everything remained as he had left it. Venn now bethought himself of his clothes, which were saturated with water to the weight of lead. He changed them, spread them before the fire, and lay down to sleep. But it was more than he could do to rest here while excited by a vivid imagination of the turmoil they were in at the house he had quitted, and, blaming himself for coming away, he dressed in another suit, locked up the door, and again hastened across to the inn. Rain was still falling heavily when he entered the kitchen. A bright fire was shining from the hearth, and two women were bustling about, one of whom was Olly Dowden.

"Well, how is it going on now?" said Venn in a whisper.

"Mr. Yeobright is better; but Mrs. Yeobright and Mr. Wildeve are dead and cold. The doctor says they were quite gone before they were out of the water."

"Ah! I thought as much when I hauled 'em up. And Mrs. Wildeve?"

"She is as well as can be expected. The doctor had her put between blankets, for she was almost as wet as they that had been in the river, poor young thing. You don't seem very dry, reddleman."

"Oh, 'tis not much. I have changed my things. This is only a little dampness I've got coming through the rain again."

"Stand by the fire. Mis'ess says you be to have whatever you want, and she was sorry when she was told that you'd gone away."

Venn drew near to the fireplace, and looked into the flames in an absent mood. The steam came from his leggings and ascended the chimney with the smoke, while he thought of those who were upstairs. Two were corpses, one had barely escaped the jaws of death, another was sick and a widow. The last occasion on which he had lingered by that fireplace was when the raffle was in progress; when Wildeve was alive and well; Thomasin active and smiling in the next room; Yeobright and Eustacia just made husband and wife, and Mrs. Yeobright living at Blooms-End. It had seemed at that time that the then position of affairs was good for at least twenty years to come. Yet, of all the circle, he himself was the only one whose situation had not materially changed.

While he ruminated a footstep descended the stairs. It was the nurse, who brought in her hand a rolled mass of wet paper. The woman was so engrossed with her occupation that she hardly saw Venn. She took from a cupboard some pieces of twine, which she strained across the fireplace, tying the end of each piece to the fire-dog, previously pulled forward for the purpose, and, unrolling the wet papers, she began pinning them one by one to the strings in a manner of clothes on a line.

“What be they?” said Venn.

“Poor master’s banknotes,” she answered. “They were found in his pocket when they undressed him.”

“Then he was not coming back again for some time?” said Venn.

“That we shall never know,” said she.

Venn was loth to depart, for all on earth that interested him lay under this roof. As nobody in the house had any more sleep that night, except the two who slept for ever, there was no reason why he should not remain. So he retired into the niche of the fireplace where he had used to sit, and there he continued, watching the steam from the double row of banknotes as they waved backwards and forwards in the draught of the chimney till their flaccidity was changed to dry crispness throughout. Then the woman came and unpinned them, and, folding them together, carried the handful upstairs. Presently the doctor appeared from above with the look of a man who could do no more, and, pulling on his gloves, went out of the house, the trotting of his horse soon dying away upon the road.

At four o’clock there was a gentle knock at the door. It was from Charley, who had been sent by Captain Vye to inquire if anything had been heard of Eustacia. The girl who admitted him looked in his face as if she did not know what answer to return, and showed him in to where Venn was seated, saying to the reddleman, “Will you tell him, please?”

Venn told. Charley’s only utterance was a feeble, indistinct sound. He stood quite still; then he burst out spasmodically, “I shall see her once more?”

“I dare say you may see her,” said Diggory gravely. “But hadn’t you better run and tell Captain Vye?”

“Yes, yes. Only I do hope I shall see her just once again.”

“You shall,” said a low voice behind; and starting round they beheld by the dim light, a thin, pallid, almost spectral form, wrapped in a blanket, and looking like Lazarus coming from the tomb.

It was Yeobright. Neither Venn nor Charley spoke, and Clym continued, “You shall see her. There will be time enough to tell the captain when it gets daylight. You would like to see her too — would you not, Diggory? She looks very beautiful now.”

Venn assented by rising to his feet, and with Charley he followed Clym to the foot of the staircase, where he took off his boots; Charley did the same. They followed Yeobright upstairs to the landing, where there was a candle burning, which Yeobright took in his hand, and with it led the way into an adjoining room. Here he went to the bedside and folded back the sheet.

They stood silently looking upon Eustacia, who, as she lay there still in death, eclipsed all her living phases. Pallor did not include all the quality of her complexion, which seemed more than whiteness; it was almost light. The expression of her finely carved mouth was pleasant, as if a sense of dignity had just compelled her to leave off speaking. Eternal rigidity had seized upon it in a momentary transition between fervour and resignation. Her black hair was looser now than either of them had ever seen it before, and surrounded her brow like a forest. The stateliness of look which had been almost too marked for a dweller in a country domicile had at last found an artistically happy background.

Nobody spoke, till at length Clym covered her and turned aside. “Now come here,” he said.

They went to a recess in the same room, and there, on a smaller bed, lay another figure — Wildeve. Less repose was visible in his face than in Eustacia’s, but the same luminous youthfulness overspread it, and the least sympathetic observer would have felt at sight of him now that he was born for a higher destiny than this. The only sign upon him of his recent struggle for life was in his fingertips, which were worn and sacrificed in his dying endeavours to obtain a hold on the face of the weir-wall.

Yeobright’s manner had been so quiet, he had uttered so few syllables since his reappearance, that Venn imagined him resigned. It was only when they had left the room and stood upon the landing that the true state of his mind was apparent. Here he said, with a wild smile, inclining his head towards the chamber in which Eustacia lay, “She is the second woman I have killed this year. I was a great cause of my mother’s death, and I am the chief cause of hers.”

“How?” said Venn.

“I spoke cruel words to her, and she left my house. I did not invite her back till it was too late. It is I who ought to have drowned myself. It would have been a charity to the living had the river overwhelmed me and borne her up. But I cannot die. Those who ought to have lived lie dead; and here am I alive!”

“But you can’t charge yourself with crimes in that way,” said Venn. “You may as well say that the parents be the cause of a murder by the child, for without the parents the child would never have been begot.”

“Yes, Venn, that is very true; but you don’t know all the circumstances. If it had pleased God to put an end to me it would have been a good thing for all. But I am getting used to the horror of my existence. They say that a time comes when men laugh at misery through long acquaintance with it. Surely that time will soon come to me!”

“Your aim has always been good,” said Venn. “Why should you say such desperate things?”

“No, they are not desperate. They are only hopeless; and my great regret is that for what I have done no man or law can punish me!”

BOOK SIX

AFTERCOURSES

CHAPTER 1

The Inevitable Movement Onward

The story of the deaths of Eustacia and Wildeve was told throughout Egdon, and far beyond, for many weeks and months. All the known incidents of their love were enlarged, distorted, touched up, and modified, till the original reality bore but a slight resemblance to the counterfeit presentation by surrounding tongues. Yet, upon the whole, neither the man nor the woman lost dignity by sudden death. Misfortune had struck them gracefully, cutting off their erratic histories with a catastrophic dash, instead of, as with many, attenuating each life to an uninteresting meagreness, through long years of wrinkles, neglect, and decay.

On those most nearly concerned the effect was somewhat different. Strangers who had heard of many such cases now merely heard of one more; but immediately where a blow falls no previous imaginings amount to appreciable preparation for it. The very suddenness of her bereavement dulled, to some extent, Thomasin’s feelings; yet irrationally enough, a consciousness that the husband she had lost ought to have been a better man did not lessen her mourning at all. On the contrary, this fact seemed at first to set off the dead husband in his young wife’s eyes, and to be the necessary cloud to the rainbow.

But the horrors of the unknown had passed. Vague misgivings about her future as a deserted wife were at an end. The worst had once been matter of trembling conjecture; it was now matter of reason only, a limited badness. Her chief interest, the little Eustacia, still remained. There was humility in her grief, no defiance in her attitude; and when this is the case a shaken spirit is apt to be stilled.

Could Thomasin’s mournfulness now and Eustacia’s serenity during life have been reduced to common measure, they would have touched the same mark nearly. But

Thomasin's former brightness made shadow of that which in a sombre atmosphere was light itself.

The spring came and calmed her; the summer came and soothed her; the autumn arrived, and she began to be comforted, for her little girl was strong and happy, growing in size and knowledge every day. Outward events flattered Thomasin not a little. Wildeve had died intestate, and she and the child were his only relatives. When administration had been granted, all the debts paid, and the residue of her husband's uncle's property had come into her hands, it was found that the sum waiting to be invested for her own and the child's benefit was little less than ten thousand pounds.

Where should she live? The obvious place was Blooms-End. The old rooms, it is true, were not much higher than the between-decks of a frigate, necessitating a sinking in the floor under the new clock-case she brought from the inn, and the removal of the handsome brass knobs on its head, before there was height for it to stand; but, such as the rooms were, there were plenty of them, and the place was endeared to her by every early recollection. Clym very gladly admitted her as a tenant, confining his own existence to two rooms at the top of the back staircase, where he lived on quietly, shut off from Thomasin and the three servants she had thought fit to indulge in now that she was a mistress of money, going his own ways, and thinking his own thoughts.

His sorrows had made some change in his outward appearance; and yet the alteration was chiefly within. It might have been said that he had a wrinkled mind. He had no enemies, and he could get nobody to reproach him, which was why he so bitterly reproached himself.

He did sometimes think he had been ill-used by fortune, so far as to say that to be born is a palpable dilemma, and that instead of men aiming to advance in life with glory they should calculate how to retreat out of it without shame. But that he and his had been sarcastically and pitilessly handled in having such irons thrust into their souls he did not maintain long. It is usually so, except with the sternest of men. Human beings, in their generous endeavour to construct a hypothesis that shall not degrade a First Cause, have always hesitated to conceive a dominant power of lower moral quality than their own; and, even while they sit down and weep by the waters of Babylon, invent excuses for the oppression which prompts their tears.

Thus, though words of solace were vainly uttered in his presence, he found relief in a direction of his own choosing when left to himself. For a man of his habits the house and the hundred and twenty pounds a year which he had inherited from his mother were enough to supply all worldly needs. Resources do not depend upon gross amounts, but upon the proportion of spendings to takings.

He frequently walked the heath alone, when the past seized upon him with its shadowy hand, and held him there to listen to its tale. His imagination would then people the spot with its ancient inhabitants — forgotten Celtic tribes trod their tracks about him, and he could almost live among them, look in their faces, and see them standing beside the barrows which swelled around, untouched and perfect as at the time of their erection. Those of the dyed barbarians who had chosen the cultivable

tracts were, in comparison with those who had left their marks here, as writers on paper beside writers on parchment. Their records had perished long ago by the plough, while the works of these remained. Yet they all had lived and died unconscious of the different fates awaiting their relics. It reminded him that unforeseen factors operate in the evolution of immortality.

Winter again came round, with its winds, frosts, tame robins, and sparkling starlight. The year previous Thomasin had hardly been conscious of the season's advance; this year she laid her heart open to external influences of every kind. The life of this sweet cousin, her baby, and her servants, came to Clym's senses only in the form of sounds through a wood partition as he sat over books of exceptionally large type; but his ear became at last so accustomed to these slight noises from the other part of the house that he almost could witness the scenes they signified. A faint beat of half-seconds conjured up Thomasin rocking the cradle, a wavering hum meant that she was singing the baby to sleep, a crunching of sand as between millstones raised the picture of Humphrey's, Fairway's, or Sam's heavy feet crossing the stone floor of the kitchen; a light boyish step, and a gay tune in a high key, betokened a visit from Grandfer Cattle; a sudden break-off in the Grandfer's utterances implied the application to his lips of a mug of small beer, a bustling and slamming of doors meant starting to go to market; for Thomasin, in spite of her added scope of gentility, led a ludicrously narrow life, to the end that she might save every possible pound for her little daughter.

One summer day Clym was in the garden, immediately outside the parlour window, which was as usual open. He was looking at the pot-flowers on the sill; they had been revived and restored by Thomasin to the state in which his mother had left them. He heard a slight scream from Thomasin, who was sitting inside the room.

"O, how you frightened me!" she said to someone who had entered. "I thought you were the ghost of yourself."

Clym was curious enough to advance a little further and look in at the window. To his astonishment there stood within the room Diggory Venn, no longer a reddleman, but exhibiting the strangely altered hues of an ordinary Christian countenance, white shirt-front, light flowered waistcoat, blue-spotted neckerchief, and bottle-green coat. Nothing in this appearance was at all singular but the fact of its great difference from what he had formerly been. Red, and all approach to red, was carefully excluded from every article of clothes upon him; for what is there that persons just out of harness dread so much as reminders of the trade which has enriched them?

Yeobright went round to the door and entered.

"I was so alarmed!" said Thomasin, smiling from one to the other. "I couldn't believe that he had got white of his own accord! It seemed supernatural."

"I gave up dealing in redden last Christmas," said Venn. "It was a profitable trade, and I found that by that time I had made enough to take the dairy of fifty cows that my father had in his lifetime. I always thought of getting to that place again if I changed at all, and now I am there."

"How did you manage to become white, Diggory?" Thomasin asked.

"I turned so by degrees, ma'am."

"You look much better than ever you did before."

Venn appeared confused; and Thomasin, seeing how inadvertently she had spoken to a man who might possibly have tender feelings for her still, blushed a little. Clym saw nothing of this, and added good-humouredly —

"What shall we have to frighten Thomasin's baby with, now you have become a human being again?"

"Sit down, Diggory," said Thomasin, "and stay to tea."

Venn moved as if he would retire to the kitchen, when Thomasin said with pleasant pertness as she went on with some sewing, "Of course you must sit down here. And where does your fifty-cow dairy lie, Mr. Venn?"

"At Stickleford — about two miles to the right of Alderworth, ma'am, where the meads begin. I have thought that if Mr. Yeobright would like to pay me a visit sometimes he shouldn't stay away for want of asking. I'll not bide to tea this afternoon, thank'ee, for I've got something on hand that must be settled. 'Tis Maypole-day tomorrow, and the Shadwater folk have clubbed with a few of your neighbours here to have a pole just outside your palings in the heath, as it is a nice green place." Venn waved his elbow towards the patch in front of the house. "I have been talking to Fairway about it," he continued, "and I said to him that before we put up the pole it would be as well to ask Mrs. Wildeve."

"I can say nothing against it," she answered. "Our property does not reach an inch further than the white palings."

"But you might not like to see a lot of folk going crazy round a stick, under your very nose?"

"I shall have no objection at all."

Venn soon after went away, and in the evening Yeobright strolled as far as Fairway's cottage. It was a lovely May sunset, and the birch trees which grew on this margin of the vast Egdon wilderness had put on their new leaves, delicate as butterflies' wings, and diaphanous as amber. Beside Fairway's dwelling was an open space recessed from the road, and here were now collected all the young people from within a radius of a couple of miles. The pole lay with one end supported on a trestle, and women were engaged in wreathing it from the top downwards with wild-flowers. The instincts of merry England lingered on here with exceptional vitality, and the symbolic customs which tradition has attached to each season of the year were yet a reality on Egdon. Indeed, the impulses of all such outlandish hamlets are pagan still — in these spots homage to nature, self-adoration, frantic gaieties, fragments of Teutonic rites to divinities whose names are forgotten, seem in some way or other to have survived mediaeval doctrine.

Yeobright did not interrupt the preparations, and went home again. The next morning, when Thomasin withdrew the curtains of her bedroom window, there stood the Maypole in the middle of the green, its top cutting into the sky. It had sprung up in the night, or rather early morning, like Jack's bean-stalk. She opened the casement to get a better view of the garlands and posies that adorned it. The sweet perfume of

the flowers had already spread into the surrounding air, which, being free from every taint, conducted to her lips a full measure of the fragrance received from the spire of blossom in its midst. At the top of the pole were crossed hoops decked with small flowers; beneath these came a milk-white zone of Maybloom; then a zone of bluebells, then of cowslips, then of lilacs, then of ragged-robins, daffodils, and so on, till the lowest stage was reached. Thomasin noticed all these, and was delighted that the May revel was to be so near.

When afternoon came people began to gather on the green, and Yeobright was interested enough to look out upon them from the open window of his room. Soon after this Thomasin walked out from the door immediately below and turned her eyes up to her cousin's face. She was dressed more gaily than Yeobright had ever seen her dressed since the time of Wildevé's death, eighteen months before; since the day of her marriage even she had not exhibited herself to such advantage.

"How pretty you look today, Thomasin!" he said. "Is it because of the Maypole?"

"Not altogether." And then she blushed and dropped her eyes, which he did not specially observe, though her manner seemed to him to be rather peculiar, considering that she was only addressing himself. Could it be possible that she had put on her summer clothes to please him?

He recalled her conduct towards him throughout the last few weeks, when they had often been working together in the garden, just as they had formerly done when they were boy and girl under his mother's eye. What if her interest in him were not so entirely that of a relative as it had formerly been? To Yeobright any possibility of this sort was a serious matter; and he almost felt troubled at the thought of it. Every pulse of loverlike feeling which had not been stilled during Eustacia's lifetime had gone into the grave with her. His passion for her had occurred too far on in his manhood to leave fuel enough on hand for another fire of that sort, as may happen with more boyish loves. Even supposing him capable of loving again, that love would be a plant of slow and laboured growth, and in the end only small and sickly, like an autumn-hatched bird.

He was so distressed by this new complexity that when the enthusiastic brass band arrived and struck up, which it did about five o'clock, with apparently wind enough among its members to blow down his house, he withdrew from his rooms by the back door, went down the garden, through the gate in the hedge, and away out of sight. He could not bear to remain in the presence of enjoyment today, though he had tried hard.

Nothing was seen of him for four hours. When he came back by the same path it was dusk, and the dews were coating every green thing. The boisterous music had ceased; but, entering the premises as he did from behind, he could not see if the May party had all gone till he had passed through Thomasin's division of the house to the front door. Thomasin was standing within the porch alone.

She looked at him reproachfully. "You went away just when it began, Clym," she said.

“Yes. I felt I could not join in. You went out with them, of course?”

“No, I did not.”

“You appeared to be dressed on purpose.”

“Yes, but I could not go out alone; so many people were there. One is there now.”

Yeobright strained his eyes across the dark-green patch beyond the paling, and near the black form of the Maypole he discerned a shadowy figure, sauntering idly up and down. “Who is it?” he said.

“Mr. Venn,” said Thomasin.

“You might have asked him to come in, I think, Tamsie. He has been very kind to you first and last.”

“I will now,” she said; and, acting on the impulse, went through the wicket to where Venn stood under the Maypole.

“It is Mr. Venn, I think?” she inquired.

Venn started as if he had not seen her — artful man that he was — and said, “Yes.”

“Will you come in?”

“I am afraid that I — ”

“I have seen you dancing this evening, and you had the very best of the girls for your partners. Is it that you won’t come in because you wish to stand here, and think over the past hours of enjoyment?”

“Well, that’s partly it,” said Mr. Venn, with ostentatious sentiment. “But the main reason why I am biding here like this is that I want to wait till the moon rises.”

“To see how pretty the Maypole looks in the moonlight?”

“No. To look for a glove that was dropped by one of the maidens.”

Thomasin was speechless with surprise. That a man who had to walk some four or five miles to his home should wait here for such a reason pointed to only one conclusion — the man must be amazingly interested in that glove’s owner.

“Were you dancing with her, Diggory?” she asked, in a voice which revealed that he had made himself considerably more interesting to her by this disclosure.

“No,” he sighed.

“And you will not come in, then?”

“Not tonight, thank you, ma’am.”

“Shall I lend you a lantern to look for the young person’s glove, Mr. Venn?”

“O no; it is not necessary, Mrs. Wildeve, thank you. The moon will rise in a few minutes.”

Thomasin went back to the porch. “Is he coming in?” said Clym, who had been waiting where she had left him.

“He would rather not tonight,” she said, and then passed by him into the house; whereupon Clym too retired to his own rooms.

When Clym was gone Thomasin crept upstairs in the dark, and, just listening by the cot, to assure herself that the child was asleep, she went to the window, gently lifted the corner of the white curtain, and looked out. Venn was still there. She watched the growth of the faint radiance appearing in the sky by the eastern hill, till presently

the edge of the moon burst upwards and flooded the valley with light. Diggory's form was now distinct on the green; he was moving about in a bowed attitude, evidently scanning the grass for the precious missing article, walking in zigzags right and left till he should have passed over every foot of the ground.

"How very ridiculous!" Thomasin murmured to herself, in a tone which was intended to be satirical. "To think that a man should be so silly as to go mooning about like that for a girl's glove! A respectable dairyman, too, and a man of money as he is now. What a pity!"

At last Venn appeared to find it; whereupon he stood up and raised it to his lips. Then placing it in his breastpocket — the nearest receptacle to a man's heart permitted by modern raiment — he ascended the valley in a mathematically direct line towards his distant home in the meadows.

CHAPTER 2

Thomasin Walks in a Green Place by the Roman Road

Clym saw little of Thomasin for several days after this; and when they met she was more silent than usual. At length he asked her what she was thinking of so intently.

"I am thoroughly perplexed," she said candidly. "I cannot for my life think who it is that Diggory Venn is so much in love with. None of the girls at the Maypole were good enough for him, and yet she must have been there."

Clym tried to imagine Venn's choice for a moment; but ceasing to be interested in the question he went on again with his gardening.

No clearing up of the mystery was granted her for some time. But one afternoon Thomasin was upstairs getting ready for a walk, when she had occasion to come to the landing and call "Rachel." Rachel was a girl about thirteen, who carried the baby out for airings; and she came upstairs at the call.

"Have you seen one of my last new gloves about the house, Rachel?" inquired Thomasin. "It is the fellow to this one."

Rachel did not reply.

"Why don't you answer?" said her mistress.

"I think it is lost, ma'am."

"Lost? Who lost it? I have never worn them but once."

Rachel appeared as one dreadfully troubled, and at last began to cry. "Please, ma'am, on the day of the Maypole I had none to wear, and I seed yours on the table, and I thought I would borrow 'em. I did not mean to hurt 'em at all, but one of them got lost. Somebody gave me some money to buy another pair for you, but I have not been able to go anywhere to get 'em."

"Who's somebody?"

"Mr. Venn."

"Did he know it was my glove?"

“Yes. I told him.”

Thomasin was so surprised by the explanation that she quite forgot to lecture the girl, who glided silently away. Thomasin did not move further than to turn her eyes upon the grass-plat where the Maypole had stood. She remained thinking, then said to herself that she would not go out that afternoon, but would work hard at the baby’s unfinished lovely plaid frock, cut on the cross in the newest fashion. How she managed to work hard, and yet do no more than she had done at the end of two hours, would have been a mystery to anyone not aware that the recent incident was of a kind likely to divert her industry from a manual to a mental channel.

Next day she went her ways as usual, and continued her custom of walking in the heath with no other companion than little Eustacia, now of the age when it is a matter of doubt with such characters whether they are intended to walk through the world on their hands or on their feet; so that they get into painful complications by trying both. It was very pleasant to Thomasin, when she had carried the child to some lonely place, to give her a little private practice on the green turf and shepherd’s-thyme, which formed a soft mat to fall headlong upon them when equilibrium was lost.

Once, when engaged in this system of training, and stooping to remove bits of stick, fern-stalks, and other such fragments from the child’s path, that the journey might not be brought to an untimely end by some insuperable barrier a quarter of an inch high, she was alarmed by discovering that a man on horseback was almost close beside her, the soft natural carpet having muffled the horse’s tread. The rider, who was Venn, waved his hat in the air and bowed gallantly.

“Diggory, give me my glove,” said Thomasin, whose manner it was under any circumstances to plunge into the midst of a subject which engrossed her.

Venn immediately dismounted, put his hand in his breastpocket, and handed the glove.

“Thank you. It was very good of you to take care of it.”

“It is very good of you to say so.”

“O no. I was quite glad to find you had it. Everybody gets so indifferent that I was surprised to know you thought of me.”

“If you had remembered what I was once you wouldn’t have been surprised.”

“Ah, no,” she said quickly. “But men of your character are mostly so independent.”

“What is my character?” he asked.

“I don’t exactly know,” said Thomasin simply, “except it is to cover up your feelings under a practical manner, and only to show them when you are alone.”

“Ah, how do you know that?” said Venn strategically.

“Because,” said she, stopping to put the little girl, who had managed to get herself upside down, right end up again, “because I do.”

“You mustn’t judge by folks in general,” said Venn. “Still I don’t know much what feelings are nowadays. I have got so mixed up with business of one sort and t’other that my soft sentiments are gone off in vapour like. Yes, I am given up body and soul to the making of money. Money is all my dream.”

“O Diggory, how wicked!” said Thomasin reproachfully, and looking at him in exact balance between taking his words seriously and judging them as said to tease her.

“Yes, ‘tis rather a rum course,” said Venn, in the bland tone of one comfortably resigned to sins he could no longer overcome.

“You, who used to be so nice!”

“Well, that’s an argument I rather like, because what a man has once been he may be again.” Thomasin blushed. “Except that it is rather harder now,” Venn continued.

“Why?” she asked.

“Because you be richer than you were at that time.”

“O no — not much. I have made it nearly all over to the baby, as it was my duty to do, except just enough to live on.”

“I am rather glad of that,” said Venn softly, and regarding her from the corner of his eye, “for it makes it easier for us to be friendly.”

Thomasin blushed again, and, when a few more words had been said of a not unpleasing kind, Venn mounted his horse and rode on.

This conversation had passed in a hollow of the heath near the old Roman road, a place much frequented by Thomasin. And it might have been observed that she did not in future walk that way less often from having met Venn there now. Whether or not Venn abstained from riding thither because he had met Thomasin in the same place might easily have been guessed from her proceedings about two months later in the same year.

CHAPTER 3

The Serious Discourse of Clym with His Cousin

Throughout this period Yeobright had more or less pondered on his duty to his cousin Thomasin. He could not help feeling that it would be a pitiful waste of sweet material if the tender-natured thing should be doomed from this early stage of her life onwards to dribble away her winsome qualities on lonely gorse and fern. But he felt this as an economist merely, and not as a lover. His passion for Eustacia had been a sort of conserve of his whole life, and he had nothing more of that supreme quality left to bestow. So far the obvious thing was not to entertain any idea of marriage with Thomasin, even to oblige her.

But this was not all. Years ago there had been in his mother’s mind a great fancy about Thomasin and himself. It had not positively amounted to a desire, but it had always been a favourite dream. That they should be man and wife in good time, if the happiness of neither were endangered thereby, was the fancy in question. So that what course save one was there now left for any son who revered his mother’s memory as Yeobright did? It is an unfortunate fact that any particular whim of parents, which might have been dispersed by half an hour’s conversation during their lives, becomes sublimated by their deaths into a fiat the most absolute, with such results to

conscientious children as those parents, had they lived, would have been the first to decry.

Had only Yeobright's own future been involved he would have proposed to Thomasin with a ready heart. He had nothing to lose by carrying out a dead mother's hope. But he dreaded to contemplate Thomasin wedded to the mere corpse of a lover that he now felt himself to be. He had but three activities alive in him. One was his almost daily walk to the little graveyard wherein his mother lay, another, his just as frequent visits by night to the more distant enclosure which numbered his Eustacia among its dead; the third was self-preparation for a vocation which alone seemed likely to satisfy his cravings — that of an itinerant preacher of the eleventh commandment. It was difficult to believe that Thomasin would be cheered by a husband with such tendencies as these.

Yet he resolved to ask her, and let her decide for herself. It was even with a pleasant sense of doing his duty that he went downstairs to her one evening for this purpose, when the sun was printing on the valley the same long shadow of the housetop that he had seen lying there times out of number while his mother lived.

Thomasin was not in her room, and he found her in the front garden. "I have long been wanting, Thomasin," he began, "to say something about a matter that concerns both our futures."

"And you are going to say it now?" she remarked quickly, colouring as she met his gaze. "Do stop a minute, Clym, and let me speak first, for oddly enough, I have been wanting to say something to you."

"By all means say on, Tamsie."

"I suppose nobody can overhear us?" she went on, casting her eyes around and lowering her voice. "Well, first you will promise me this — that you won't be angry and call me anything harsh if you disagree with what I propose?"

Yeobright promised, and she continued: "What I want is your advice, for you are my relation — I mean, a sort of guardian to me — aren't you, Clym?"

"Well, yes, I suppose I am; a sort of guardian. In fact, I am, of course," he said, altogether perplexed as to her drift.

"I am thinking of marrying," she then observed blandly. "But I shall not marry unless you assure me that you approve of such a step. Why don't you speak?"

"I was taken rather by surprise. But, nevertheless, I am very glad to hear such news. I shall approve, of course, dear Tamsie. Who can it be? I am quite at a loss to guess. No I am not — 'tis the old doctor! — not that I mean to call him old, for he is not very old after all. Ah — I noticed when he attended you last time!"

"No, no," she said hastily. "'Tis Mr. Venn."

Clym's face suddenly became grave.

"There, now, you don't like him, and I wish I hadn't mentioned him!" she exclaimed almost petulantly. "And I shouldn't have done it, either, only he keeps on bothering me so till I don't know what to do!"

Clym looked at the heath. "I like Venn well enough," he answered at last. "He is a very honest and at the same time astute man. He is clever too, as is proved by his having got you to favour him. But really, Thomasin, he is not quite —"

"Gentleman enough for me? That is just what I feel. I am sorry now that I asked you, and I won't think any more of him. At the same time I must marry him if I marry anybody — that I WILL say!"

"I don't see that," said Clym, carefully concealing every clue to his own interrupted intention, which she plainly had not guessed. "You might marry a professional man, or somebody of that sort, by going into the town to live and forming acquaintances there."

"I am not fit for town life — so very rural and silly as I always have been. Do not you yourself notice my countrified ways?"

"Well, when I came home from Paris I did, a little; but I don't now."

"That's because you have got countrified too. O, I couldn't live in a street for the world! Egdon is a ridiculous old place; but I have got used to it, and I couldn't be happy anywhere else at all."

"Neither could I," said Clym.

"Then how could you say that I should marry some town man? I am sure, say what you will, that I must marry Diggory, if I marry at all. He has been kinder to me than anybody else, and has helped me in many ways that I don't know of!" Thomasin almost pouted now.

"Yes, he has," said Clym in a neutral tone. "Well, I wish with all my heart that I could say, marry him. But I cannot forget what my mother thought on that matter, and it goes rather against me not to respect her opinion. There is too much reason why we should do the little we can to respect it now."

"Very well, then," sighed Thomasin. "I will say no more."

"But you are not bound to obey my wishes. I merely say what I think."

"O no — I don't want to be rebellious in that way," she said sadly. "I had no business to think of him — I ought to have thought of my family. What dreadfully bad impulses there are in me!" Her lips trembled, and she turned away to hide a tear.

Clym, though vexed at what seemed her unaccountable taste, was in a measure relieved to find that at any rate the marriage question in relation to himself was shelved. Through several succeeding days he saw her at different times from the window of his room moping disconsolately about the garden. He was half angry with her for choosing Venn; then he was grieved at having put himself in the way of Venn's happiness, who was, after all, as honest and persevering a young fellow as any on Egdon, since he had turned over a new leaf. In short, Clym did not know what to do.

When next they met she said abruptly, "He is much more respectable now than he was then!"

"Who? O yes — Diggory Venn."

"Aunt only objected because he was a reddleman."

“Well, Thomasin, perhaps I don’t know all the particulars of my mother’s wish. So you had better use your own discretion.”

“You will always feel that I slighted your mother’s memory.”

“No, I will not. I shall think you are convinced that, had she seen Diggory in his present position, she would have considered him a fitting husband for you. Now, that’s my real feeling. Don’t consult me any more, but do as you like, Thomasin. I shall be content.”

It is to be supposed that Thomasin was convinced; for a few days after this, when Clym strayed into a part of the heath that he had not lately visited, Humphrey, who was at work there, said to him, “I am glad to see that Mrs. Wildeve and Venn have made it up again, seemingly.”

“Have they?” said Clym abstractedly.

“Yes; and he do contrive to stumble upon her whenever she walks out on fine days with the chiel. But, Mr. Yeobright, I can’t help feeling that your cousin ought to have married you. ‘Tis a pity to make two chimleycorners where there need be only one. You could get her away from him now, ‘tis my belief, if you were only to set about it.”

“How can I have the conscience to marry after having driven two women to their deaths? Don’t think such a thing, Humphrey. After my experience I should consider it too much of a burlesque to go to church and take a wife. In the words of Job, ‘I have made a covenant with mine eyes; when then should I think upon a maid?’”

“No, Mr. Clym, don’t fancy that about driving two women to their deaths. You shouldn’t say it.”

“Well, we’ll leave that out,” said Yeobright. “But anyhow God has set a mark upon me which wouldn’t look well in a love-making scene. I have two ideas in my head, and no others. I am going to keep a night-school; and I am going to turn preacher. What have you got to say to that, Humphrey?”

“I’ll come and hear ‘ee with all my heart.”

“Thanks. ‘Tis all I wish.”

As Clym descended into the valley Thomasin came down by the other path, and met him at the gate. “What do you think I have to tell you, Clym?” she said, looking archly over her shoulder at him.

“I can guess,” he replied.

She scrutinized his face. “Yes, you guess right. It is going to be after all. He thinks I may as well make up my mind, and I have got to think so too. It is to be on the twenty-fifth of next month, if you don’t object.”

“Do what you think right, dear. I am only too glad that you see your way clear to happiness again. My sex owes you every amends for the treatment you received in days gone by.”*

* The writer may state here that the original conception of the story did not design a marriage between Thomasin and Venn. He was to have retained his isolated and weird character to the last, and to have disappeared mysteriously

from the heath, nobody knowing whither — Thomasin remaining a widow. But certain circumstances of serial publication led to a change of intent.

Readers can therefore choose between the endings, and those with an austere artistic code can assume the more consistent conclusion to be the true one.

CHAPTER 4

Cheerfulness Again Asserts Itself at Blooms-End, and Clym Finds His Vocation

Anybody who had passed through Blooms-End about eleven o'clock on the morning fixed for the wedding would have found that, while Yeobright's house was comparatively quiet, sounds denoting great activity came from the dwelling of his nearest neighbour, Timothy Fairway. It was chiefly a noise of feet, briskly crunching hither and thither over the sanded floor within. One man only was visible outside, and he seemed to be later at an appointment than he had intended to be, for he hastened up to the door, lifted the latch, and walked in without ceremony.

The scene within was not quite the customary one. Standing about the room was the little knot of men who formed the chief part of the Egdon coterie, there being present Fairway himself, Grandfer Cante, Humphrey, Christian, and one or two turf-cutters. It was a warm day, and the men were as a matter of course in their shirtsleeves, except Christian, who had always a nervous fear of parting with a scrap of his clothing when in anybody's house but his own. Across the stout oak table in the middle of the room was thrown a mass of striped linen, which Grandfer Cante held down on one side, and Humphrey on the other, while Fairway rubbed its surface with a yellow lump, his face being damp and creased with the effort of the labour.

"Waxing a bed-tick, souls?" said the newcomer.

"Yes, Sam," said Grandfer Cante, as a man too busy to waste words. "Shall I stretch this corner a shade tighter, Timothy?"

Fairway replied, and the waxing went on with unabated vigour. "'Tis going to be a good bed, by the look o't," continued Sam, after an interval of silence. "Who may it be for?"

"'Tis a present for the new folks that's going to set up housekeeping," said Christian, who stood helpless and overcome by the majesty of the proceedings.

"Ah, to be sure; and a valuable one, 'a b'lieve."

"Beds be dear to fokes that don't keep geese, bain't they, Mister Fairway?" said Christian, as to an omniscient being.

"Yes," said the furze-dealer, standing up, giving his forehead a thorough mopping, and handing the beeswax to Humphrey, who succeeded at the rubbing forthwith. "Not that this couple be in want of one, but 'twas well to show 'em a bit of friendliness at this great racketing vagary of their lives. I set up both my own daughters in one when they was married, and there have been feathers enough for another in the house

the last twelve months. Now then, neighbours, I think we have laid on enough wax. Grandfer Cantle, you turn the tick the right way outwards, and then I'll begin to shake in the feathers."

When the bed was in proper trim Fairway and Christian brought forward vast paper bags, stuffed to the full, but light as balloons, and began to turn the contents of each into the receptacle just prepared. As bag after bag was emptied, airy tufts of down and feathers floated about the room in increasing quantity till, through a mishap of Christian's, who shook the contents of one bag outside the tick, the atmosphere of the room became dense with gigantic flakes, which descended upon the workers like a windless snowstorm.

"I never saw such a clumsy chap as you, Christian," said Grandfer Cantle severely. "You might have been the son of a man that's never been outside Blooms-End in his life for all the wit you have. Really all the soldiering and smartness in the world in the father seems to count for nothing in forming the nater of the son. As far as that chief Christian is concerned I might as well have stayed at home and seed nothing, like all the rest of ye here. Though, as far as myself is concerned, a dashing spirit has counted for sommat, to be sure!"

"Don't ye let me down so, Father; I feel no bigger than a ninepin after it. I've made but a bruckle hit, I'm afeard."

"Come, come. Never pitch yerself in such a low key as that, Christian; you should try more," said Fairway.

"Yes, you should try more," echoed the Grandfer with insistence, as if he had been the first to make the suggestion. "In common conscience every man ought either to marry or go for a soldier. 'Tis a scandal to the nation to do neither one nor t'other. I did both, thank God! Neither to raise men nor to lay 'em low — that shows a poor do-nothing spirit indeed."

"I never had the nerve to stand fire," faltered Christian. "But as to marrying, I own I've asked here and there, though without much fruit from it. Yes, there's some house or other that might have had a man for a master — such as he is — that's now ruled by a woman alone. Still it might have been awkward if I had found her; for, d'ye see, neighbours, there'd have been nobody left at home to keep down Father's spirits to the decent pitch that becomes a old man."

"And you've your work cut out to do that, my son," said Grandfer Cantle smartly. "I wish that the dread of infirmities was not so strong in me! — I'd start the very first thing tomorrow to see the world over again! But seventy-one, though nothing at home, is a high figure for a rover...Ay, seventy-one, last Candlemasday. Gad, I'd sooner have it in guineas than in years!" And the old man sighed.

"Don't you be mournful, Grandfer," said Fairway. "Empt some more feathers into the bed-tick, and keep up yer heart. Though rather lean in the stalks you be a green-leaved old man still. There's time enough left to ye yet to fill whole chronicles."

"Begad, I'll go to 'em, Timothy — to the married pair!" said Granfer Cantle in an encouraged voice, and starting round briskly. "I'll go to 'em tonight and sing a wedding

song, hey? 'Tis like me to do so, you know; and they'd see it as such. My 'Down in Cupid's Gardens' was well liked in four; still, I've got others as good, and even better. What do you say to my

She cal'-led to' her love'

From the lat'-tice a-bove,

'O come in' from the fog-gy fog'-gy dew'.'

'Twould please 'em well at such a time! Really, now I come to think of it, I haven't turned my tongue in my head to the shape of a real good song since Old Midsummer night, when we had the 'Barley Mow' at the Woman; and 'tis a pity to neglect your strong point where there's few that have the compass for such things!"

"So 'tis, so 'tis," said Fairway. "Now gie the bed a shake down. We've put in seventy pounds of best feathers, and I think that's as many as the tick will fairly hold. A bit and a drap wouldn't be amiss now, I reckon. Christian, maul down the victuals from corner-cupboard if canst reach, man, and I'll draw a drap o' sommat to wet it with."

They sat down to a lunch in the midst of their work, feathers around, above, and below them; the original owners of which occasionally came to the open door and cackled begrudgingly at sight of such a quantity of their old clothes.

"Upon my soul I shall be chokt," said Fairway when, having extracted a feather from his mouth, he found several others floating on the mug as it was handed round.

"I've swallered several; and one had a tolerable quill," said Sam placidly from the corner.

"Hullo — what's that — wheels I hear coming?" Grandfer Cantle exclaimed, jumping up and hastening to the door. "Why, 'tis they back again — I didn't expect 'em yet this half-hour. To be sure, how quick marrying can be done when you are in the mind for't!"

"O yes, it can soon be DONE," said Fairway, as if something should be added to make the statement complete.

He arose and followed the Grandfer, and the rest also went to the door. In a moment an open fly was driven past, in which sat Venn and Mrs. Venn, Yeobright, and a grand relative of Venn's who had come from Budmouth for the occasion. The fly had been hired at the nearest town, regardless of distance and cost, there being nothing on Egdon Heath, in Venn's opinion, dignified enough for such an event when such a woman as Thomasin was the bride; and the church was too remote for a walking bridal-party.

As the fly passed the group which had run out from the homestead they shouted "Hurrah!" and waved their hands; feathers and down floating from their hair, their sleeves, and the folds of their garments at every motion, and Grandfer Cantle's seals dancing merrily in the sunlight as he twirled himself about. The driver of the fly turned a supercilious gaze upon them; he even treated the wedded pair themselves with something like condescension; for in what other state than heathen could people, rich or poor, exist who were doomed to abide in such a world's end as Egdon? Thomasin showed no such superiority to the group at the door, fluttering her hand as quickly as a bird's wing towards them, and asking Diggory, with tears in her eyes, if they ought

not to alight and speak to these kind neighbours. Venn, however, suggested that, as they were all coming to the house in the evening, this was hardly necessary.

After this excitement the saluting party returned to their occupation, and the stuffing and sewing were soon afterwards finished, when Fairway harnessed a horse, wrapped up the cumbrous present, and drove off with it in the cart to Venn's house at Stickleford.

Yeobright, having filled the office at the wedding service which naturally fell to his hands, and afterwards returned to the house with the husband and wife, was indisposed to take part in the feasting and dancing that wound up the evening. Thomasin was disappointed.

"I wish I could be there without dashing your spirits," he said. "But I might be too much like the skull at the banquet."

"No, no."

"Well, dear, apart from that, if you would excuse me, I should be glad. I know it seems unkind; but, dear Thomasin, I fear I should not be happy in the company — there, that's the truth of it. I shall always be coming to see you at your new home, you know, so that my absence now will not matter."

"Then I give in. Do whatever will be most comfortable to yourself."

Clym retired to his lodging at the housetop much relieved, and occupied himself during the afternoon in noting down the heads of a sermon, with which he intended to initiate all that really seemed practicable of the scheme that had originally brought him hither, and that he had so long kept in view under various modifications, and through evil and good report. He had tested and weighed his convictions again and again, and saw no reason to alter them, though he had considerably lessened his plan. His eyesight, by long humouring in his native air, had grown stronger, but not sufficiently strong to warrant his attempting his extensive educational project. Yet he did not repine — there was still more than enough of an unambitious sort to tax all his energies and occupy all his hours.

Evening drew on, and sounds of life and movement in the lower part of the domicile became more pronounced, the gate in the palings clicking incessantly. The party was to be an early one, and all the guests were assembled long before it was dark. Yeobright went down the back staircase and into the heath by another path than that in front, intending to walk in the open air till the party was over, when he would return to wish Thomasin and her husband good-bye as they departed. His steps were insensibly bent towards Mistover by the path that he had followed on that terrible morning when he learnt the strange news from Susan's boy.

He did not turn aside to the cottage, but pushed on to an eminence, whence he could see over the whole quarter that had once been Eustacia's home. While he stood observing the darkening scene somebody came up. Clym, seeing him but dimly, would have let him pass silently, had not the pedestrian, who was Charley, recognized the young man and spoken to him.

“Charley, I have not seen you for a length of time,” said Yeobright. “Do you often walk this way?”

“No,” the lad replied. “I don’t often come outside the bank.”

“You were not at the Maypole.”

“No,” said Charley, in the same listless tone. “I don’t care for that sort of thing now.”

“You rather liked Miss Eustacia, didn’t you?” Yeobright gently asked. Eustacia had frequently told him of Charley’s romantic attachment.

“Yes, very much. Ah, I wish — ”

“Yes?”

“I wish, Mr. Yeobright, you could give me something to keep that once belonged to her — if you don’t mind.”

“I shall be very happy to. It will give me very great pleasure, Charley. Let me think what I have of hers that you would like. But come with me to the house, and I’ll see.”

They walked towards Blooms-End together. When they reached the front it was dark, and the shutters were closed, so that nothing of the interior could be seen.

“Come round this way,” said Clym. “My entrance is at the back for the present.”

The two went round and ascended the crooked stair in darkness till Clym’s sitting-room on the upper floor was reached, where he lit a candle, Charley entering gently behind. Yeobright searched his desk, and taking out a sheet of tissue-paper unfolded from it two or three undulating locks of raven hair, which fell over the paper like black streams. From these he selected one, wrapped it up, and gave it to the lad, whose eyes had filled with tears. He kissed the packet, put it in his pocket, and said in a voice of emotion, “O, Mr. Clym, how good you are to me!”

“I will go a little way with you,” said Clym. And amid the noise of merriment from below they descended. Their path to the front led them close to a little side window, whence the rays of candles streamed across the shrubs. The window, being screened from general observation by the bushes, had been left unblinded, so that a person in this private nook could see all that was going on within the room which contained the wedding guests, except in so far as vision was hindered by the green antiquity of the panes.

“Charley, what are they doing?” said Clym. “My sight is weaker again tonight, and the glass of this window is not good.”

Charley wiped his own eyes, which were rather blurred with moisture, and stepped closer to the casement. “Mr. Venn is asking Christian Cantle to sing,” he replied, “and Christian is moving about in his chair as if he were much frightened at the question, and his father has struck up a stave instead of him.”

“Yes, I can hear the old man’s voice,” said Clym. “So there’s to be no dancing, I suppose. And is Thomasin in the room? I see something moving in front of the candles that resembles her shape, I think.”

“Yes. She do seem happy. She is red in the face, and laughing at something Fairway has said to her. O my!”

“What noise was that?” said Clym.

“Mr. Venn is so tall that he knocked his head against the beam in gieing a skip as he passed under. Mrs. Venn has run up quite frightened and now she’s put her hand to his head to feel if there’s a lump. And now they be all laughing again as if nothing had happened.”

“Do any of them seem to care about my not being there?” Clym asked.

“No, not a bit in the world. Now they are all holding up their glasses and drinking somebody’s health.”

“I wonder if it is mine?”

“No, ‘tis Mr. and Mrs. Venn’s, because he is making a hearty sort of speech. There — now Mrs. Venn has got up, and is going away to put on her things, I think.”

“Well, they haven’t concerned themselves about me, and it is quite right they should not. It is all as it should be, and Thomasin at least is happy. We will not stay any longer now, as they will soon be coming out to go home.”

He accompanied the lad into the heath on his way home, and, returning alone to the house a quarter of an hour later, found Venn and Thomasin ready to start, all the guests having departed in his absence. The wedded pair took their seats in the four-wheeled dogcart which Venn’s head milker and handy man had driven from Stickleford to fetch them in; little Eustacia and the nurse were packed securely upon the open flap behind; and the milker, on an ancient overstepping pony, whose shoes clashed like cymbals at every tread, rode in the rear, in the manner of a body-servant of the last century.

“Now we leave you in absolute possession of your own house again,” said Thomasin as she bent down to wish her cousin good night. “It will be rather lonely for you, Clym, after the hubbub we have been making.”

“O, that’s no inconvenience,” said Clym, smiling rather sadly. And then the party drove off and vanished in the night shades, and Yeobright entered the house. The ticking of the clock was the only sound that greeted him, for not a soul remained; Christian, who acted as cook, valet, and gardener to Clym, sleeping at his father’s house. Yeobright sat down in one of the vacant chairs, and remained in thought a long time. His mother’s old chair was opposite; it had been sat in that evening by those who had scarcely remembered that it ever was hers. But to Clym she was almost a presence there, now as always. Whatever she was in other people’s memories, in his she was the sublime saint whose radiance even his tenderness for Eustacia could not obscure. But his heart was heavy, that Mother had NOT crowned him in the day of his espousals and in the day of the gladness of his heart. And events had borne out the accuracy of her judgment, and proved the devotedness of her care. He should have heeded her for Eustacia’s sake even more than for his own. “It was all my fault,” he whispered. “O, my mother, my mother! would to God that I could live my life again, and endure for you what you endured for me!”

On the Sunday after this wedding an unusual sight was to be seen on Rainbarrow. From a distance there simply appeared to be a motionless figure standing on the top of the tumulus, just as Eustacia had stood on that lonely summit some two years and

a half before. But now it was fine warm weather, with only a summer breeze blowing, and early afternoon instead of dull twilight. Those who ascended to the immediate neighbourhood of the Barrow perceived that the erect form in the centre, piercing the sky, was not really alone. Round him upon the slopes of the Barrow a number of heathmen and women were reclining or sitting at their ease. They listened to the words of the man in their midst, who was preaching, while they abstractedly pulled heather, stripped ferns, or tossed pebbles down the slope. This was the first of a series of moral lectures or Sermons on the Mount, which were to be delivered from the same place every Sunday afternoon as long as the fine weather lasted.

The commanding elevation of Rainbarrow had been chosen for two reasons: first, that it occupied a central position among the remote cottages around; secondly, that the preacher thereon could be seen from all adjacent points as soon as he arrived at his post, the view of him being thus a convenient signal to those stragglers who wished to draw near. The speaker was bareheaded, and the breeze at each waft gently lifted and lowered his hair, somewhat too thin for a man of his years, these still numbering less than thirty-three. He wore a shade over his eyes, and his face was pensive and lined; but, though these bodily features were marked with decay there was no defect in the tones of his voice, which were rich, musical, and stirring. He stated that his discourses to people were to be sometimes secular, and sometimes religious, but never dogmatic; and that his texts would be taken from all kinds of books. This afternoon the words were as follows: —

““And the king rose up to meet her, and bowed himself unto her, and sat down on his throne, and caused a seat to be set for the king’s mother; and she sat on his right hand. Then she said, I desire one small petition of thee; I pray thee say me not nay. And the king said unto her, Ask, on, my mother: for I will not say thee nay.”“

Yeobright had, in fact, found his vocation in the career of an itinerant open-air preacher and lecturer on morally unimpeachable subjects; and from this day he laboured incessantly in that office, speaking not only in simple language on Rainbarrow and in the hamlets round, but in a more cultivated strain elsewhere — from the steps and porticoes of town halls, from market-crosses, from conduits, on esplanades and on wharves, from the parapets of bridges, in barns and outhouses, and all other such places in the neighbouring Wessex towns and villages. He left alone creeds and systems of philosophy, finding enough and more than enough to occupy his tongue in the opinions and actions common to all good men. Some believed him, and some believed not; some said that his words were commonplace, others complained of his want of theological doctrine; while others again remarked that it was well enough for a man to take to preaching who could not see to do anything else. But everywhere he was kindly received, for the story of his life had become generally known.

THE TRUMPET-MAJOR

The Trumpet-Major was published in 1880 and tells the story of Anne Garland, who is pursued by three suitors: John Loveday, the trumpet major in a British regiment, who honest and loyal; his brother Bob, an unreliable sailor; and Festus Derriman, the cowardly son of the local squire. The novel's setting, during the Napoleonic wars, is uncharacteristic in Hardy's work, which is usually more contemporary to the time of publication.

Emma Hardy, the great writer's first wife

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THE TRUMPET-MAJOR

JOHN LOVEDAY
 A SOLDIER IN THE WAR WITH BUONAPARTE
 AND
 ROBERT HIS BROTHER
 FIRST MATE IN THE MERCHANT SERVICE

PREFACE

The present tale is founded more largely on testimony — oral and written — than any other in this series. The external incidents which direct its course are mostly an unexaggerated reproduction of the recollections of old persons well known to the author in childhood, but now long dead, who were eye-witnesses of those scenes. If wholly transcribed their recollections would have filled a volume thrice the length of ‘The Trumpet-Major.’

Down to the middle of this century, and later, there were not wanting, in the neighbourhood of the places more or less clearly indicated herein, casual relics of the circumstances amid which the action moves — our preparations for defence against the threatened invasion of England by Buonaparte. An outhouse door riddled with bullet-holes, which had been extemporized by a solitary man as a target for firelock practice when the landing was hourly expected, a heap of bricks and clods on a beacon-hill, which had formed the chimney and walls of the hut occupied by the beacon-keeper, worm-eaten shafts and iron heads of pikes for the use of those who had no better weapons, ridges on the down thrown up during the encampment, fragments of volunteer uniform, and other such lingering remains, brought to my imagination in early childhood the state of affairs at the date of the war more vividly than volumes of history could have done.

Those who have attempted to construct a coherent narrative of past times from the fragmentary information furnished by survivors, are aware of the difficulty of ascertaining the true sequence of events indiscriminately recalled. For this purpose the newspapers of the date were indispensable. Of other documents consulted I may mention, for the satisfaction of those who love a true story, that the ‘Address to all Ranks and Descriptions of Englishmen’ was transcribed from an original copy in a local museum; that the hieroglyphic portrait of Napoleon existed as a print down to the present

day in an old woman's cottage near 'Overcombe;' that the particulars of the King's doings at his favourite watering-place were augmented by details from records of the time. The drilling scene of the local militia received some additions from an account given in so grave a work as Gifford's 'History of the Wars of the French Revolution' (London, 1817). But on reference to the History I find I was mistaken in supposing the account to be advanced as authentic, or to refer to rural England. However, it does in a large degree accord with the local traditions of such scenes that I have heard recounted, times without number, and the system of drill was tested by reference to the Army Regulations of 1801, and other military handbooks. Almost the whole narrative of the supposed landing of the French in the Bay is from oral relation as aforesaid. Other proofs of the veracity of this chronicle have escaped my recollection.

T. H.

October 1895.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT WAS SEEN FROM THE WINDOW OVERLOOKING THE DOWN

In the days of high-waisted and muslin-gowned women, when the vast amount of soldiering going on in the country was a cause of much trembling to the sex, there lived in a village near the Wessex coast two ladies of good report, though unfortunately of limited means. The elder was a Mrs. Martha Garland, a landscape-painter's widow, and the other was her only daughter Anne.

Anne was fair, very fair, in a poetical sense; but in complexion she was of that particular tint between blonde and brunette which is inconveniently left without a name. Her eyes were honest and inquiring, her mouth cleanly cut and yet not classical, the middle point of her upper lip scarcely descending so far as it should have done by rights, so that at the merest pleasant thought, not to mention a smile, portions of two or three white teeth were uncovered whether she would or not. Some people said that this was very attractive. She was graceful and slender, and, though but little above five feet in height, could draw herself up to look tall. In her manner, in her comings and goings, in her 'I'll do this,' or 'I'll do that,' she combined dignity with sweetness as no other girl could do; and any impressionable stranger youths who passed by were led to yearn for a windfall of speech from her, and to see at the same time that they would not get it. In short, beneath all that was charming and simple in this young woman there lurked a real firmness, unperceived at first, as the speck of colour lurks unperceived in the heart of the palest parsley flower.

She wore a white handkerchief to cover her white neck, and a cap on her head with a pink ribbon round it, tied in a bow at the front. She had a great variety of these cap-ribbons, the young men being fond of sending them to her as presents until they fell definitely in love with a special sweetheart elsewhere, when they left off doing so.

Between the border of her cap and her forehead were ranged a row of round brown curls, like swallows' nests under eaves.

She lived with her widowed mother in a portion of an ancient building formerly a manor-house, but now a mill, which, being too large for his own requirements, the miller had found it convenient to divide and appropriate in part to these highly respectable tenants. In this dwelling Mrs. Garland's and Anne's ears were soothed morning, noon, and night by the music of the mill, the wheels and cogs of which, being of wood, produced notes that might have borne in their minds a remote resemblance to the wooden tones of the stopped diapason in an organ. Occasionally, when the miller was bolting, there was added to these continuous sounds the cheerful clicking of the hopper, which did not deprive them of rest except when it was kept going all night; and over and above all this they had the pleasure of knowing that there crept in through every crevice, door, and window of their dwelling, however tightly closed, a subtle mist of superfine flour from the grinding room, quite invisible, but making its presence known in the course of time by giving a pallid and ghostly look to the best furniture. The miller frequently apologized to his tenants for the intrusion of this insidious dry fog; but the widow was of a friendly and thankful nature, and she said that she did not mind it at all, being as it was, not nasty dirt, but the blessed staff of life.

By good-humour of this sort, and in other ways, Mrs. Garland acknowledged her friendship for her neighbour, with whom Anne and herself associated to an extent which she never could have anticipated when, tempted by the lowness of the rent, they first removed thither after her husband's death from a larger house at the other end of the village. Those who have lived in remote places where there is what is called no society will comprehend the gradual levelling of distinctions that went on in this case at some sacrifice of gentility on the part of one household. The widow was sometimes sorry to find with what readiness Anne caught up some dialect-word or accent from the miller and his friends; but he was so good and true-hearted a man, and she so easy-minded, unambitious a woman, that she would not make life a solitude for fastidious reasons. More than all, she had good ground for thinking that the miller secretly admired her, and this added a piquancy to the situation.

* * * * *

On a fine summer morning, when the leaves were warm under the sun, and the more industrious bees abroad, diving into every blue and red cup that could possibly be considered a flower, Anne was sitting at the back window of her mother's portion of the house, measuring out lengths of worsted for a fringed rug that she was making, which lay, about three-quarters finished, beside her. The work, though chromatically brilliant, was tedious: a hearth-rug was a thing which nobody worked at from morning to night; it was taken up and put down; it was in the chair, on the floor, across the hand-rail, under the bed, kicked here, kicked there, rolled away in the closet, brought out again, and so on more capriciously perhaps than any other home-made article. Nobody was expected to finish a rug within a calculable period, and the wools of

the beginning became faded and historical before the end was reached. A sense of this inherent nature of worsted-work rather than idleness led Anne to look rather frequently from the open casement.

Immediately before her was the large, smooth millpond, over-full, and intruding into the hedge and into the road. The water, with its flowing leaves and spots of froth, was stealing away, like Time, under the dark arch, to tumble over the great slimy wheel within. On the other side of the mill-pond was an open place called the Cross, because it was three-quarters of one, two lanes and a cattle-drive meeting there. It was the general rendezvous and arena of the surrounding village. Behind this a steep slope rose high into the sky, merging in a wide and open down, now littered with sheep newly shorn. The upland by its height completely sheltered the mill and village from north winds, making summers of springs, reducing winters to autumn temperatures, and permitting myrtle to flourish in the open air.

The heaviness of noon pervaded the scene, and under its influence the sheep had ceased to feed. Nobody was standing at the Cross, the few inhabitants being indoors at their dinner. No human being was on the down, and no human eye or interest but Anne's seemed to be concerned with it. The bees still worked on, and the butterflies did not rest from roving, their smallness seeming to shield them from the stagnating effect that this turning moment of day had on larger creatures. Otherwise all was still.

The girl glanced at the down and the sheep for no particular reason; the steep margin of turf and daisies rising above the roofs, chimneys, apple-trees, and church tower of the hamlet around her, bounded the view from her position, and it was necessary to look somewhere when she raised her head. While thus engaged in working and stopping her attention was attracted by the sudden rising and running away of the sheep squatted on the down; and there succeeded sounds of a heavy tramping over the hard sod which the sheep had quitted, the tramp being accompanied by a metallic jingle. Turning her eyes further she beheld two cavalry soldiers on bulky grey chargers, armed and accoutred throughout, ascending the down at a point to the left where the incline was comparatively easy. The burnished chains, buckles, and plates of their trappings shone like little looking-glasses, and the blue, red, and white about them was unsubdued by weather or wear.

The two troopers rode proudly on, as if nothing less than crowns and empires ever concerned their magnificent minds. They reached that part of the down which lay just in front of her, where they came to a halt. In another minute there appeared behind them a group containing some half-dozen more of the same sort. These came on, halted, and dismounted likewise.

Two of the soldiers then walked some distance onward together, when one stood still, the other advancing further, and stretching a white line of tape between them. Two more of the men marched to another outlying point, where they made marks in the ground. Thus they walked about and took distances, obviously according to some preconcerted scheme.

At the end of this systematic proceeding one solitary horseman — a commissioned officer, if his uniform could be judged rightly at that distance — rode up the down, went over the ground, looked at what the others had done, and seemed to think that it was good. And then the girl heard yet louder tramps and clankings, and she beheld rising from where the others had risen a whole column of cavalry in marching order. At a distance behind these came a cloud of dust enveloping more and more troops, their arms and accoutrements reflecting the sun through the haze in faint flashes, stars, and streaks of light. The whole body approached slowly towards the plateau at the top of the down.

Anne threw down her work, and letting her eyes remain on the nearing masses of cavalry, the worsteds getting entangled as they would, said, ‘Mother, mother; come here! Here’s such a fine sight! What does it mean? What can they be going to do up there?’

The mother thus invoked ran upstairs and came forward to the window. She was a woman of sanguine mouth and eye, unheroic manner, and pleasant general appearance; a little more tarnished as to surface, but not much worse in contour than the girl herself.

Widow Garland’s thoughts were those of the period. ‘Can it be the French,’ she said, arranging herself for the extremest form of consternation. ‘Can that arch-enemy of mankind have landed at last?’ It should be stated that at this time there were two arch-enemies of mankind — Satan as usual, and Buonaparte, who had sprung up and eclipsed his elder rival altogether. Mrs. Garland alluded, of course, to the junior gentleman.

‘It cannot be he,’ said Anne. ‘Ah! there’s Simon Burden, the man who watches at the beacon. He’ll know!’

She waved her hand to an aged form of the same colour as the road, who had just appeared beyond the mill-pond, and who, though active, was bowed to that degree which almost reproaches a feeling observer for standing upright. The arrival of the soldiery had drawn him out from his drop of drink at the ‘Duke of York’ as it had attracted Anne. At her call he crossed the mill-bridge, and came towards the window.

Anne inquired of him what it all meant; but Simon Burden, without answering, continued to move on with parted gums, staring at the cavalry on his own private account with a concern that people often show about temporal phenomena when such matters can affect them but a short time longer. ‘You’ll walk into the millpond!’ said Anne. ‘What are they doing? You were a soldier many years ago, and ought to know.’

‘Don’t ask me, Mis’ess Anne,’ said the military relic, depositing his body against the wall one limb at a time. ‘I were only in the foot, ye know, and never had a clear understanding of horses. Ay, I be a old man, and of no judgment now.’ Some additional pressure, however, caused him to search further in his worm-eaten magazine of ideas, and he found that he did know in a dim irresponsible way. The soldiers must have come there to camp: those men they had seen first were the markers: they had come on before the rest to measure out the ground. He who had accompanied them was the quartermaster. ‘And so you see they have got all the lines marked out by the time

the regiment have come up,' he added. 'And then they will — well-a-deary! who'd ha' supposed that Overcombe would see such a day as this!'

'And then they will — '

'Then — Ah, it's gone from me again!' said Simon. 'O, and then they will raise their tents, you know, and picket their horses. That was it; so it was.'

By this time the column of horse had ascended into full view, and they formed a lively spectacle as they rode along the high ground in marching order, backed by the pale blue sky, and lit by the southerly sun. Their uniform was bright and attractive; white buckskin pantaloons, three-quarter boots, scarlet shakos set off with lace, mustachios waxed to a needle point; and above all, those richly ornamented blue jackets mantled with the historic pelisse — that fascination to women, and encumbrance to the wearers themselves.

'Tis the York Hussars!' said Simon Burden, brightening like a dying ember fanned. 'Foreigners to a man, and enrolled long since my time. But as good hearty comrades, they say, as you'll find in the King's service.'

'Here are more and different ones,' said Mrs. Garland.

Other troops had, during the last few minutes, been ascending the down at a remoter point, and now drew near. These were of different weight and build from the others; lighter men, in helmet hats, with white plumes.

'I don't know which I like best,' said Anne. 'These, I think, after all.'

Simon, who had been looking hard at the latter, now said that they were the — the Dragoons.

'All Englishmen they,' said the old man. 'They lay at Budmouth barracks a few years ago.'

'They did. I remember it,' said Mrs. Garland.

'And lots of the chaps about here 'listed at the time,' said Simon. 'I can call to mind that there was — ah, 'tis gone from me again! However, all that's of little account now.'

The dragoons passed in front of the lookers-on as the others had done, and their gay plumes, which had hung lazily during the ascent, swung to northward as they reached the top, showing that on the summit a fresh breeze blew. 'But look across there,' said Anne. There had entered upon the down from another direction several battalions of foot, in white kerseymere breeches and cloth gaiters. They seemed to be weary from a long march, the original black of their gaiters and boots being whity-brown with dust. Presently came regimental waggons, and the private canteen carts which followed at the end of a convoy.

The space in front of the mill-pond was now occupied by nearly all the inhabitants of the village, who had turned out in alarm, and remained for pleasure, their eyes lighted up with interest in what they saw; for trappings and regimentals, war horses and men, in towns an attraction, were here almost a sublimity.

The troops filed to their lines, dismounted, and in quick time took off their accoutrements, rolled up their sheep-skins, picketed and unbitted their horses, and made ready to erect the tents as soon as they could be taken from the waggons and brought

forward. When this was done, at a given signal the canvases flew up from the sod; and thenceforth every man had a place in which to lay his head.

Though nobody seemed to be looking on but the few at the window and in the village street, there were, as a matter of fact, many eyes converging upon that military arrival in its high and conspicuous position, not to mention the glances of birds and other wild creatures. Men in distant gardens, women in orchards and at cottage-doors, shepherds on remote hills, turnip-hoers in blue-green enclosures miles away, captains with spy-glasses out at sea, were regarding the picture keenly. Those three or four thousand men of one machine-like movement, some of them swashbucklers by nature; others, doubtless, of a quiet shop-keeping disposition who had inadvertently got into uniform — all of them had arrived from nobody knew where, and hence were matter of great curiosity. They seemed to the mere eye to belong to a different order of beings from those who inhabited the valleys below. Apparently unconscious and careless of what all the world was doing elsewhere, they remained picturesquely engrossed in the business of making themselves a habitation on the isolated spot which they had chosen.

Mrs. Garland was of a festive and sanguine turn of mind, a woman soon set up and soon set down, and the coming of the regiments quite excited her. She thought there was reason for putting on her best cap, thought that perhaps there was not; that she would hurry on the dinner and go out in the afternoon; then that she would, after all, do nothing unusual, nor show any silly excitements whatever, since they were unbecoming in a mother and a widow. Thus circumscribing her intentions till she was toned down to an ordinary person of forty, Mrs. Garland accompanied her daughter downstairs to dine, saying, 'Presently we will call on Miller Loveday, and hear what he thinks of it all.'

CHAPTER II.

SOMEBODY KNOCKS AND COMES IN

Miller Loveday was the representative of an ancient family of corn-grinders whose history is lost in the mists of antiquity. His ancestral line was contemporaneous with that of De Ros, Howard, and De La Zouche; but, owing to some trifling deficiency in the possessions of the house of Loveday, the individual names and intermarriages of its members were not recorded during the Middle Ages, and thus their private lives in any given century were uncertain. But it was known that the family had formed matrimonial alliances with farmers not so very small, and once with a gentleman-tanner, who had for many years purchased after their death the horses of the most aristocratic persons in the county — fiery steeds that earlier in their career had been valued at many hundred guineas.

It was also ascertained that Mr. Loveday's great-grandparents had been eight in number, and his great-great-grandparents sixteen, every one of whom reached to years of discretion: at every stage backwards his sires and gammers thus doubled and doubled

till they became a vast body of Gothic ladies and gentlemen of the rank known as ceorls or villeins, full of importance to the country at large, and ramifying throughout the unwritten history of England. His immediate father had greatly improved the value of their residence by building a new chimney, and setting up an additional pair of millstones.

Overcombe Mill presented at one end the appearance of a hard-worked house slipping into the river, and at the other of an idle, genteel place, half-cloaked with creepers at this time of the year, and having no visible connection with flour. It had hips instead of gables, giving it a round-shouldered look, four chimneys with no smoke coming out of them, two zigzag cracks in the wall, several open windows, with a looking-glass here and there inside, showing its warped back to the passer-by; snowy dimity curtains waving in the draught; two mill doors, one above the other, the upper enabling a person to step out upon nothing at a height of ten feet from the ground; a gaping arch vomiting the river, and a lean, long-nosed fellow looking out from the mill doorway, who was the hired grinder, except when a bulging fifteen stone man occupied the same place, namely, the miller himself.

Behind the mill door, and invisible to the mere wayfarer who did not visit the family, were chalked addition and subtraction sums, many of them originally done wrong, and the figures half rubbed out and corrected, noughts being turned into nines, and ones into twos. These were the miller's private calculations. There were also chalked in the same place rows and rows of strokes like open palings, representing the calculations of the grinder, who in his youthful ciphering studies had not gone so far as Arabic figures.

In the court in front were two worn-out millstones, made useful again by being let in level with the ground. Here people stood to smoke and consider things in muddy weather; and cats slept on the clean surfaces when it was hot. In the large stubbard-tree at the corner of the garden was erected a pole of larch fir, which the miller had bought with others at a sale of small timber in Damer's Wood one Christmas week. It rose from the upper boughs of the tree to about the height of a fisherman's mast, and on the top was a vane in the form of a sailor with his arm stretched out. When the sun shone upon this figure it could be seen that the greater part of his countenance was gone, and the paint washed from his body so far as to reveal that he had been a soldier in red before he became a sailor in blue. The image had, in fact, been John, one of our coming characters, and was then turned into Robert, another of them. This revolving piece of statuary could not, however, be relied on as a vane, owing to the neighbouring hill, which formed variable currents in the wind.

The leafy and quieter wing of the mill-house was the part occupied by Mrs. Garland and her daughter, who made up in summer-time for the narrowness of their quarters by overflowing into the garden on stools and chairs. The parlour or dining-room had a stone floor — a fact which the widow sought to disguise by double carpeting, lest the standing of Anne and herself should be lowered in the public eye. Here now the mid-day meal went lightly and mincingly on, as it does where there is no greedy carnivorous man to keep the dishes about, and was hanging on the close when somebody entered

the passage as far as the chink of the parlour door, and tapped. This proceeding was probably adopted to kindly avoid giving trouble to Susan, the neighbour's pink daughter, who helped at Mrs. Garland's in the mornings, but was at that moment particularly occupied in standing on the water-butt and gazing at the soldiers, with an inhaling position of the mouth and circular eyes.

There was a flutter in the little dining-room — the sensitiveness of habitual solitude makes hearts beat for preternaturally small reasons — and a guessing as to who the visitor might be. It was some military gentleman from the camp perhaps? No; that was impossible. It was the parson? No; he would not come at dinner-time. It was the well-informed man who travelled with drapery and the best Birmingham earrings? Not at all; his time was not till Thursday at three. Before they could think further the visitor moved forward another step, and the diners got a glimpse of him through the same friendly chink that had afforded him a view of the Garland dinner-table.

'O! It is only Loveday.'

This approximation to nobody was the miller above mentioned, a hale man of fifty-five or sixty — hale all through, as many were in those days, and not merely veneered with purple by exhilarating victuals and drinks, though the latter were not at all despised by him. His face was indeed rather pale than otherwise, for he had just come from the mill. It was capable of immense changes of expression: mobility was its essence, a roll of flesh forming a buttress to his nose on each side, and a deep ravine lying between his lower lip and the tumulus represented by his chin. These fleshy lumps moved stealthily, as if of their own accord, whenever his fancy was tickled.

His eyes having lighted on the table-cloth, plates, and viands, he found himself in a position which had a sensible awkwardness for a modest man who always liked to enter only at seasonable times the presence of a girl of such pleasantly soft ways as Anne Garland, she who could make apples seem like peaches, and throw over her shillings the glamour of guineas when she paid him for flour.

'Dinner is over, neighbour Loveday; please come in,' said the widow, seeing his case. The miller said something about coming in presently; but Anne pressed him to stay, with a tender motion of her lip as it played on the verge of a solicitous smile without quite lapsing into one — her habitual manner when speaking.

Loveday took off his low-crowned hat and advanced. He had not come about pigs or fowls this time. 'You have been looking out, like the rest o' us, no doubt, Mrs. Garland, at the mampus of soldiers that have come upon the down? Well, one of the horse regiments is the — th Dragoons, my son John's regiment, you know.'

The announcement, though it interested them, did not create such an effect as the father of John had seemed to anticipate; but Anne, who liked to say pleasant things, replied, 'The dragoons looked nicer than the foot, or the German cavalry either.'

'They are a handsome body of men,' said the miller in a disinterested voice. 'Faith! I didn't know they were coming, though it may be in the newspaper all the time. But old Derriman keeps it so long that we never know things till they be in everybody's mouth.'

This Derriman was a squireen living near, who was chiefly distinguished in the present warlike time by having a nephew in the yeomanry.

‘We were told that the yeomanry went along the turnpike road yesterday,’ said Anne; ‘and they say that they were a pretty sight, and quite soldierly.’

‘Ah! well — they be not regulars,’ said Miller Loveday, keeping back harsher criticism as uncalled for. But inflamed by the arrival of the dragoons, which had been the exciting cause of his call, his mind would not go to yeomanry. ‘John has not been home these five years,’ he said.

‘And what rank does he hold now?’ said the widow.

‘He’s trumpet-major, ma’am; and a good musician.’ The miller, who was a good father, went on to explain that John had seen some service, too. He had enlisted when the regiment was lying in this neighbourhood, more than eleven years before, which put his father out of temper with him, as he had wished him to follow on at the mill. But as the lad had enlisted seriously, and as he had often said that he would be a soldier, the miller had thought that he would let Jack take his chance in the profession of his choice.

Loveday had two sons, and the second was now brought into the conversation by a remark of Anne’s that neither of them seemed to care for the miller’s business.

‘No,’ said Loveday in a less buoyant tone. ‘Robert, you see, must needs go to sea.’

‘He is much younger than his brother?’ said Mrs. Garland.

About four years, the miller told her. His soldier son was two-and-thirty, and Bob was twenty-eight. When Bob returned from his present voyage, he was to be persuaded to stay and assist as grinder in the mill, and go to sea no more.

‘A sailor-miller!’ said Anne.

‘O, he knows as much about mill business as I do,’ said Loveday; ‘he was intended for it, you know, like John. But, bless me!’ he continued, ‘I am before my story. I’m come more particularly to ask you, ma’am, and you, Anne my honey, if you will join me and a few friends at a leetle homely supper that I shall gi’e to please the chap now he’s come? I can do no less than have a bit of a randy, as the saying is, now that he’s here safe and sound.’

Mrs. Garland wanted to catch her daughter’s eye; she was in some doubt about her answer. But Anne’s eye was not to be caught, for she hated hints, nods, and calculations of any kind in matters which should be regulated by impulse; and the matron replied, ‘If so be ‘tis possible, we’ll be there. You will tell us the day?’

He would, as soon as he had seen son John. ‘‘Twill be rather untidy, you know, owing to my having no womenfolks in the house; and my man David is a poor dunder-headed feller for getting up a feast. Poor chap! his sight is bad, that’s true, and he’s very good at making the beds, and oiling the legs of the chairs and other furniture, or I should have got rid of him years ago.’

‘You should have a woman to attend to the house, Loveday,’ said the widow.

‘Yes, I should, but — . Well, ‘tis a fine day, neighbours. Hark! I fancy I hear the noise of pots and pans up at the camp, or my ears deceive me. Poor fellows, they must be hungry! Good day t’ye, ma’am.’ And the miller went away.

All that afternoon Overcombe continued in a ferment of interest in the military investment, which brought the excitement of an invasion without the strife. There were great discussions on the merits and appearance of the soldiery. The event opened up, to the girls unbounded possibilities of adoring and being adored, and to the young men an embarrassment of dashing acquaintances which quite superseded falling in love. Thirteen of these lads incontinently stated within the space of a quarter of an hour that there was nothing in the world like going for a soldier. The young women stated little, but perhaps thought the more; though, in justice, they glanced round towards the encampment from the corners of their blue and brown eyes in the most demure and modest manner that could be desired.

In the evening the village was lively with soldiers’ wives; a tree full of starlings would not have rivalled the chatter that was going on. These ladies were very brilliantly dressed, with more regard for colour than for material. Purple, red, and blue bonnets were numerous, with bunches of cocks’ feathers; and one had on an Arcadian hat of green sarcenet, turned up in front to show her cap underneath. It had once belonged to an officer’s lady, and was not so much stained, except where the occasional storms of rain, incidental to a military life, had caused the green to run and stagnate in curious watermarks like peninsulas and islands. Some of the prettiest of these butterfly wives had been fortunate enough to get lodgings in the cottages, and were thus spared the necessity of living in huts and tents on the down. Those who had not been so fortunate were not rendered more amiable by the success of their sisters-in-arms, and called them names which brought forth retorts and rejoinders; till the end of these alternative remarks seemed dependent upon the close of the day.

One of these new arrivals, who had a rosy nose and a slight thickness of voice, which, as Anne said, she couldn’t help, poor thing, seemed to have seen so much of the world, and to have been in so many campaigns, that Anne would have liked to take her into their own house, so as to acquire some of that practical knowledge of the history of England which the lady possessed, and which could not be got from books. But the narrowness of Mrs. Garland’s rooms absolutely forbade this, and the houseless treasury of experience was obliged to look for quarters elsewhere.

That night Anne retired early to bed. The events of the day, cheerful as they were in themselves, had been unusual enough to give her a slight headache. Before getting into bed she went to the window, and lifted the white curtains that hung across it. The moon was shining, though not as yet into the valley, but just peeping above the ridge of the down, where the white cones of the encampment were softly touched by its light. The quarter-guard and foremost tents showed themselves prominently; but the body of the camp, the officers’ tents, kitchens, canteen, and appurtenances in the rear were blotted out by the ground, because of its height above her. She could discern the forms of one or two sentries moving to and fro across the disc of the moon at intervals. She

could hear the frequent shuffling and tossing of the horses tied to the pickets; and in the other direction the miles-long voice of the sea, whispering a louder note at those points of its length where hampered in its ebb and flow by some jutting promontory or group of boulders. Louder sounds suddenly broke this approach to silence; they came from the camp of dragoons, were taken up further to the right by the camp of the Hanoverians, and further on still by the body of infantry. It was tattoo. Feeling no desire to sleep, she listened yet longer, looked at Charles's Wain swinging over the church tower, and the moon ascending higher and higher over the right-hand streets of tents, where, instead of parade and bustle, there was nothing going on but snores and dreams, the tired soldiers lying by this time under their proper canvases, radiating like spokes from the pole of each tent.

At last Anne gave up thinking, and retired like the rest. The night wore on, and, except the occasional 'All's well' of the sentries, no voice was heard in the camp or in the village below.

CHAPTER III.

THE MILL BECOMES AN IMPORTANT CENTRE OF OPERATIONS

The next morning Miss Garland awoke with an impression that something more than usual was going on, and she recognized as soon as she could clearly reason that the proceedings, whatever they might be, lay not far away from her bedroom window. The sounds were chiefly those of pickaxes and shovels. Anne got up, and, lifting the corner of the curtain about an inch, peeped out.

A number of soldiers were busily engaged in making a zigzag path down the incline from the camp to the river-head at the back of the house, and judging from the quantity of work already got through they must have begun very early. Squads of men were working at several equidistant points in the proposed pathway, and by the time that Anne had dressed herself each section of the length had been connected with those above and below it, so that a continuous and easy track was formed from the crest of the down to the bottom of the steep.

The down rested on a bed of solid chalk, and the surface exposed by the roadmakers formed a white ribbon, serpentine from top to bottom.

Then the relays of working soldiers all disappeared, and, not long after, a troop of dragoons in watering order rode forward at the top and began to wind down the new path. They came lower and closer, and at last were immediately beneath her window, gathering themselves up on the space by the mill-pond. A number of the horses entered it at the shallow part, drinking and splashing and tossing about. Perhaps as many as thirty, half of them with riders on their backs, were in the water at one time; the thirsty animals drank, stamped, flounced, and drank again, letting the clear, cool water dribble luxuriously from their mouths. Miller Loveday was looking on from over his garden hedge, and many admiring villagers were gathered around.

Gazing up higher, Anne saw other troops descending by the new road from the camp, those which had already been to the pond making room for these by withdrawing along the village lane and returning to the top by a circuitous route.

Suddenly the miller exclaimed, as in fulfilment of expectation, 'Ah, John, my boy; good morning!' And the reply of 'Morning, father,' came from a well-mounted soldier near him, who did not, however, form one of the watering party. Anne could not see his face very clearly, but she had no doubt that this was John Loveday.

There were tones in the voice which reminded her of old times, those of her very infancy, when Johnny Loveday had been top boy in the village school, and had wanted to learn painting of her father. The deeps and shallows of the mill-pond being better known to him than to any other man in the camp, he had apparently come down on that account, and was cautioning some of the horsemen against riding too far in towards the mill-head.

Since her childhood and his enlistment Anne had seen him only once, and then but casually, when he was home on a short furlough. His figure was not much changed from what it had been; but the many sunrises and sunsets which had passed since that day, developing her from a comparative child to womanhood, had abstracted some of his angularities, reddened his skin, and given him a foreign look. It was interesting to see what years of training and service had done for this man. Few would have supposed that the white and the blue coats of miller and soldier covered the forms of father and son.

Before the last troop of dragoons rode off they were welcomed in a body by Miller Loveday, who still stood in his outer garden, this being a plot lying below the mill-tail, and stretching to the water-side. It was just the time of year when cherries are ripe, and hang in clusters under their dark leaves. While the troopers loitered on their horses, and chatted to the miller across the stream, he gathered bunches of the fruit, and held them up over the garden hedge for the acceptance of anybody who would have them; whereupon the soldiers rode into the water to where it had washed holes in the garden bank, and, reining their horses there, caught the cherries in their forage-caps, or received bunches of them on the ends of their switches, with the dignified laugh that became martial men when stooping to slightly boyish amusement. It was a cheerful, careless, unpremeditated half-hour, which returned like the scent of a flower to the memories of some of those who enjoyed it, even at a distance of many years after, when they lay wounded and weak in foreign lands.

Then dragoons and horses wheeled off as the others had done; and troops of the German Legion next came down and entered in panoramic procession the space below Anne's eyes, as if on purpose to gratify her. These were notable by their mustachios, and queues wound tightly with brown ribbon to the level of their broad shoulder-blades. They were charmed, as the others had been, by the head and neck of Miss Garland in the little square window overlooking the scene of operations, and saluted her with devoted foreign civility, and in such overwhelming numbers that the modest

girl suddenly withdrew herself into the room, and had a private blush between the chest of drawers and the washing-stand.

When she came downstairs her mother said, 'I have been thinking what I ought to wear to Miller Loveday's to-night.'

'To Miller Loveday's?' said Anne.

'Yes. The party is to-night. He has been in here this morning to tell me that he has seen his son, and they have fixed this evening.'

'Do you think we ought to go, mother?' said Anne slowly, and looking at the smaller features of the window-flowers.

'Why not?' said Mrs. Garland.

'He will only have men there except ourselves, will he? And shall we be right to go alone among 'em?'

Anne had not recovered from the ardent gaze of the gallant York Hussars, whose voices reached her even now in converse with Loveday.

'La, Anne, how proud you are!' said Widow Garland. 'Why, isn't he our nearest neighbour and our landlord? and don't he always fetch our faggots from the wood, and keep us in vegetables for next to nothing?'

'That's true,' said Anne.

'Well, we can't be distant with the man. And if the enemy land next autumn, as everybody says they will, we shall have quite to depend upon the miller's waggon and horses. He's our only friend.'

'Yes, so he is,' said Anne. 'And you had better go, mother; and I'll stay at home. They will be all men; and I don't like going.'

Mrs. Garland reflected. 'Well, if you don't want to go, I don't,' she said. 'Perhaps, as you are growing up, it would be better to stay at home this time. Your father was a professional man, certainly.' Having spoken as a mother, she sighed as a woman.

'Why do you sigh, mother?'

'You are so prim and stiff about everything.'

'Very well — we'll go.'

'O no — I am not sure that we ought. I did not promise, and there will be no trouble in keeping away.'

Anne apparently did not feel certain of her own opinion, and, instead of supporting or contradicting, looked thoughtfully down, and abstractedly brought her hands together on her bosom, till her fingers met tip to tip.

As the day advanced the young woman and her mother became aware that great preparations were in progress in the miller's wing of the house. The partitioning between the Lovedays and the Garlands was not very thorough, consisting in many cases of a simple screwing up of the doors in the dividing walls; and thus when the mill began any new performances they proclaimed themselves at once in the more private dwelling. The smell of Miller Loveday's pipe came down Mrs. Garland's chimney of an evening with the greatest regularity. Every time that he poked his fire they knew from the vehemence or deliberateness of the blows the precise state of his mind; and

when he wound his clock on Sunday nights the whirr of that monitor reminded the widow to wind hers. This transit of noises was most perfect where Loveday's lobby adjoined Mrs. Garland's pantry; and Anne, who was occupied for some time in the latter apartment, enjoyed the privilege of hearing the visitors arrive and of catching stray sounds and words without the connecting phrases that made them entertaining, to judge from the laughter they evoked. The arrivals passed through the house and went into the garden, where they had tea in a large summer-house, an occasional blink of bright colour, through the foliage, being all that was visible of the assembly from Mrs. Garland's windows. When it grew dusk they all could be heard coming indoors to finish the evening in the parlour.

Then there was an intensified continuation of the above-mentioned signs of enjoyment, talkings and haw-haws, runnings upstairs and runnings down, a slamming of doors and a clinking of cups and glasses; till the proudest adjoining tenant without friends on his own side of the partition might have been tempted to wish for entrance to that merry dwelling, if only to know the cause of these fluctuations of hilarity, and to see if the guests were really so numerous, and the observations so very amusing as they seemed.

The stagnation of life on the Garland side of the party-wall began to have a very gloomy effect by the contrast. When, about half-past nine o'clock, one of these tantalising bursts of gaiety had resounded for a longer time than usual, Anne said, 'I believe, mother, that you are wishing you had gone.'

'I own to feeling that it would have been very cheerful if we had joined in,' said Mrs. Garland, in a hankering tone. 'I was rather too nice in listening to you and not going. The parson never calls upon us except in his spiritual capacity. Old Derriman is hardly genteel; and there's nobody left to speak to. Lonely people must accept what company they can get.'

'Or do without it altogether.'

'That's not natural, Anne; and I am surprised to hear a young woman like you say such a thing. Nature will not be stifled in that way. . . .' (Song and powerful chorus heard through partition.) 'I declare the room on the other side of the wall seems quite a paradise compared with this.'

'Mother, you are quite a girl,' said Anne in slightly superior accents. 'Go in and join them by all means.'

'O no — not now,' said her mother, resignedly shaking her head. 'It is too late now. We ought to have taken advantage of the invitation. They would look hard at me as a poor mortal who had no real business there, and the miller would say, with his broad smile, "Ah, you be obliged to come round."'"

While the sociable and unaspiring Mrs. Garland continued thus to pass the evening in two places, her body in her own house and her mind in the miller's, somebody knocked at the door, and directly after the elder Loveday himself was admitted to the room. He was dressed in a suit between grand and gay, which he used for such

occasions as the present, and his blue coat, yellow and red waistcoat with the three lower buttons unfastened, steel-buckled shoes and speckled stockings, became him very well in Mrs. Martha Garland's eyes.

'Your servant, ma'am,' said the miller, adopting as a matter of propriety the raised standard of politeness required by his higher costume. 'Now, begging your pardon, I can't hae this. 'Tis unnatural that you two ladies should be biding here and we under the same roof making merry without ye. Your husband, poor man — lovely picters that a' would make to be sure — would have been in with us long ago if he had been in your place. I can take no nay from ye, upon my honour. You and maidy Anne must come in, if it be only for half-an-hour. John and his friends have got passes till twelve o'clock to-night, and, saving a few of our own village folk, the lowest visitor present is a very genteel German corporal. If you should hae any misgivings on the score of respectability, ma'am, we'll pack off the underbred ones into the back kitchen.'

Widow Garland and Anne looked yes at each other after this appeal.

'We'll follow you in a few minutes,' said the elder, smiling; and she rose with Anne to go upstairs.

'No, I'll wait for ye,' said the miller doggedly; 'or perhaps you'll alter your mind again.'

While the mother and daughter were upstairs dressing, and saying laughingly to each other, 'Well, we must go now,' as if they hadn't wished to go all the evening, other steps were heard in the passage; and the miller cried from below, 'Your pardon, Mrs. Garland; but my son John has come to help fetch ye. Shall I ask him in till ye be ready?'

'Certainly; I shall be down in a minute,' screamed Anne's mother in a slanting voice towards the staircase.

When she descended, the outline of the trumpet-major appeared half-way down the passage. 'This is John,' said the miller simply. 'John, you can mind Mrs. Martha Garland very well?'

'Very well, indeed,' said the dragoon, coming in a little further. 'I should have called to see her last time, but I was only home a week. How is your little girl, ma'am?'

Mrs. Garland said Anne was quite well. 'She is grown-up now. She will be down in a moment.'

There was a slight noise of military heels without the door, at which the trumpet-major went and put his head outside, and said, 'All right — coming in a minute,' when voices in the darkness replied, 'No hurry.'

'More friends?' said Mrs. Garland.

'O, it is only Buck and Jones come to fetch me,' said the soldier. 'Shall I ask 'em in a minute, Mrs. Garland, ma'am?'

'O yes,' said the lady; and the two interesting forms of Trumpeter Buck and Saddler-sergeant Jones then came forward in the most friendly manner; whereupon other steps were heard without, and it was discovered that Sergeant-master-tailor Brett

and Farrier-extraordinary Johnson were outside, having come to fetch Messrs. Buck and Jones, as Buck and Jones had come to fetch the trumpet-major.

As there seemed a possibility of Mrs. Garland's small passage being choked up with human figures personally unknown to her, she was relieved to hear Anne coming downstairs.

'Here's my little girl,' said Mrs. Garland, and the trumpet-major looked with a sort of awe upon the muslin apparition who came forward, and stood quite dumb before her. Anne recognized him as the trooper she had seen from her window, and welcomed him kindly. There was something in his honest face which made her feel instantly at home with him.

At this frankness of manner Loveday — who was not a ladies' man — blushed, and made some alteration in his bodily posture, began a sentence which had no end, and showed quite a boy's embarrassment. Recovering himself, he politely offered his arm, which Anne took with a very pretty grace. He conducted her through his comrades, who glued themselves perpendicularly to the wall to let her pass, and then they went out of the door, her mother following with the miller, and supported by the body of troopers, the latter walking with the usual cavalry gait, as if their thighs were rather too long for them. Thus they crossed the threshold of the mill-house and up the passage, the paving of which was worn into a gutter by the ebb and flow of feet that had been going on there ever since Tudor times.

CHAPTER IV.

WHO WERE PRESENT AT THE MILLER'S LITTLE ENTERTAINMENT

When the group entered the presence of the company a lull in the conversation was caused by the sight of new visitors, and (of course) by the charm of Anne's appearance; until the old men, who had daughters of their own, perceiving that she was only a half-formed girl, resumed their tales and toss-potting with unconcern.

Miller Loveday had fraternized with half the soldiers in the camp since their arrival, and the effect of this upon his party was striking — both chromatically and otherwise. Those among the guests who first attracted the eye were the sergeants and sergeant-majors of Loveday's regiment, fine hearty men, who sat facing the candles, entirely resigned to physical comfort. Then there were other non-commissioned officers, a German, two Hungarians, and a Swede, from the foreign hussars — young men with a look of sadness on their faces, as if they did not much like serving so far from home. All of them spoke English fairly well. Old age was represented by Simon Burden the pensioner, and the shady side of fifty by Corporal Tullidge, his friend and neighbour, who was hard of hearing, and sat with his hat on over a red cotton handkerchief that was wound several times round his head. These two veterans were employed as watchers at the neighbouring beacon, which had lately been erected by the Lord-Lieutenant for firing whenever the descent on the coast should be made. They lived in a little hut on

the hill, close by the heap of faggots; but to-night they had found deputies to watch in their stead.

On a lower plane of experience and qualifications came neighbour James Comfort, of the Volunteers, a soldier by courtesy, but a blacksmith by rights; also William Tremlett and Anthony Cripplestraw, of the local forces. The two latter men of war were dressed merely as villagers, and looked upon the regulars from a humble position in the background. The remainder of the party was made up of a neighbouring dairyman or two, and their wives, invited by the miller, as Anne was glad to see, that she and her mother should not be the only women there.

The elder Loveday apologized in a whisper to Mrs. Garland for the presence of the inferior villagers. 'But as they are learning to be brave defenders of their home and country, ma'am, as fast as they can master the drill, and have worked for me off and on these many years, I've asked 'em in, and thought you'd excuse it.'

'Certainly, Miller Loveday,' said the widow.

'And the same of old Burden and Tullidge. They have served well and long in the Foot, and even now have a hard time of it up at the beacon in wet weather. So after giving them a meal in the kitchen I just asked 'em in to hear the singing. They faithfully promise that as soon as ever the gunboats appear in view, and they have fired the beacon, to run down here first, in case we shouldn't see it. 'Tis worth while to be friendly with 'em, you see, though their tempers be queer.'

'Quite worth while, miller,' said she.

Anne was rather embarrassed by the presence of the regular military in such force, and at first confined her words to the dairymen's wives she was acquainted with, and to the two old soldiers of the parish.

'Why didn't ye speak to me afore, chiel?' said one of these, Corporal Tullidge, the elderly man with the hat, while she was talking to old Simon Burden. 'I met ye in the lane yesterday,' he added reproachfully, 'but ye didn't notice me at all.'

'I am very sorry for it,' she said; but, being afraid to shout in such a company, the effect of her remark upon the corporal was as if she had not spoken at all.

'You was coming along with yer head full of some high notions or other no doubt,' continued the uncompromising corporal in the same loud voice. 'Ah, 'tis the young bucks that get all the notice nowadays, and old folks are quite forgot! I can mind well enough how young Bob Loveday used to lie in wait for ye.'

Anne blushed deeply, and stopped his too excursive discourse by hastily saying that she always respected old folks like him. The corporal thought she inquired why he always kept his hat on, and answered that it was because his head was injured at Valenciennes, in July, Ninety-three. 'We were trying to bomb down the tower, and a piece of the shell struck me. I was no more nor less than a dead man for two days. If it hadn't a been for that and my smashed arm I should have come home none the worse for my five-and-twenty years' service.'

'You have got a silver plate let into yer head, haven't ye, corpel?' said Anthony Cripplestraw, who had drawn near. 'I have heard that the way they morticed yer skull

was a beautiful piece of workmanship. Perhaps the young woman would like to see the place? 'Tis a curious sight, Mis'ess Anne; you don't see such a wovnd every day.'

'No, thank you,' said Anne hurriedly, dreading, as did all the young people of Overcombe, the spectacle of the corporal uncovered. He had never been seen in public without the hat and the handkerchief since his return in Ninety-four; and strange stories were told of the ghastliness of his appearance bare-headed, a little boy who had accidentally beheld him going to bed in that state having been frightened into fits.

'Well, if the young woman don't want to see yer head, maybe she'd like to hear yer arm?' continued Cripplestraw, earnest to please her.

'Hey?' said the corporal.

'Your arm hurt too?' cried Anne.

'Knocked to a pummy at the same time as my head,' said Tullidge dispassionately.

'Rattle yer arm, corpel, and show her,' said Cripplestraw.

'Yes, sure,' said the corporal, raising the limb slowly, as if the glory of exhibition had lost some of its novelty, though he was willing to oblige. Twisting it mercilessly about with his right hand he produced a crunching among the bones at every motion, Cripplestraw seeming to derive great satisfaction from the ghastly sound.

'How very shocking!' said Anne, painfully anxious for him to leave off.

'O, it don't hurt him, bless ye. Do it, corpel?' said Cripplestraw.

'Not a bit,' said the corporal, still working his arm with great energy.

'There's no life in the bones at all. No life in 'em, I tell her, corpel!'

'None at all.'

'They be as loose as a bag of ninepins,' explained Cripplestraw in continuation. 'You can feel 'em quite plain, Mis'ess Anne. If ye would like to, he'll undo his sleeve in a minute to oblege ye?'

'O no, no, please not! I quite understand,' said the young woman.

'Do she want to hear or see any more, or don't she?' the corporal inquired, with a sense that his time was getting wasted.

Anne explained that she did not on any account; and managed to escape from the corner.

CHAPTER V.

THE SONG AND THE STRANGER

The trumpet-major now contrived to place himself near her, Anne's presence having evidently been a great pleasure to him since the moment of his first seeing her. She was quite at her ease with him, and asked him if he thought that Buonaparte would really come during the summer, and many other questions which the gallant dragoon could not answer, but which he nevertheless liked to be asked. William Tremlett, who had not enjoyed a sound night's rest since the First Consul's menace had become known,

pricked up his ears at sound of this subject, and inquired if anybody had seen the terrible flat-bottomed boats that the enemy were to cross in.

‘My brother Robert saw several of them paddling about the shore the last time he passed the Straits of Dover,’ said the trumpet-major; and he further startled the company by informing them that there were supposed to be more than fifteen hundred of these boats, and that they would carry a hundred men apiece. So that a descent of one hundred and fifty thousand men might be expected any day as soon as Boney had brought his plans to bear.

‘Lord ha’ mercy upon us!’ said William Tremlett.

‘The night-time is when they will try it, if they try it at all,’ said old Tullidge, in the tone of one whose watch at the beacon must, in the nature of things, have given him comprehensive views of the situation. ‘It is my belief that the point they will choose for making the shore is just over there,’ and he nodded with indifference towards a section of the coast at a hideous nearness to the house in which they were assembled, whereupon Fencible Tremlett, and Cripplestraw of the Locals, tried to show no signs of trepidation.

‘When d’ye think ‘twill be?’ said Volunteer Comfort, the blacksmith.

‘I can’t answer to a day,’ said the corporal, ‘but it will certainly be in a down-channel tide; and instead of pulling hard against it, he’ll let his boats drift, and that will bring ‘em right into Budmouth Bay. ‘Twill be a beautiful stroke of war, if so be ‘tis quietly done!’

‘Beautiful,’ said Cripplestraw, moving inside his clothes. ‘But how if we should be all abed, corpel? You can’t expect a man to be brave in his shirt, especially we Locals, that have only got so far as shoulder fire-locks.’

‘He’s not coming this summer. He’ll never come at all,’ said a tall sergeant-major decisively.

Loveday the soldier was too much engaged in attending upon Anne and her mother to join in these surmises, bestirring himself to get the ladies some of the best liquor the house afforded, which had, as a matter of fact, crossed the Channel as privately as Buonaparte wished his army to do, and had been landed on a dark night over the cliff. After this he asked Anne to sing, but though she had a very pretty voice in private performances of that nature, she declined to oblige him; turning the subject by making a hesitating inquiry about his brother Robert, whom he had mentioned just before.

‘Robert is as well as ever, thank you, Miss Garland,’ he said. ‘He is now mate of the brig Pewit — rather young for such a command; but the owner puts great trust in him.’ The trumpet-major added, deepening his thoughts to a profounder view of the person discussed, ‘Bob is in love.’

Anne looked conscious, and listened attentively; but Loveday did not go on.

‘Much?’ she asked.

‘I can’t exactly say. And the strange part of it is that he never tells us who the woman is. Nobody knows at all.’

‘He will tell, of course?’ said Anne, in the remote tone of a person with whose sex such matters had no connection whatever.

Loveday shook his head, and the *tete-a-tete* was put an end to by a burst of singing from one of the sergeants, who was followed at the end of his song by others, each giving a ditty in his turn; the singer standing up in front of the table, stretching his chin well into the air, as though to abstract every possible wrinkle from his throat, and then plunging into the melody. When this was over one of the foreign hussars — the genteel German of Miller Loveday’s description, who called himself a Hungarian, and in reality belonged to no definite country — performed at Trumpet-major Loveday’s request the series of wild motions that he denominated his national dance, that Anne might see what it was like. Miss Garland was the flower of the whole company; the soldiers one and all, foreign and English, seemed to be quite charmed by her presence, as indeed they well might be, considering how seldom they came into the society of such as she.

Anne and her mother were just thinking of retiring to their own dwelling when Sergeant Stanner of the — th Foot, who was recruiting at Budmouth, began a satirical song: —

When law'-yers strive' to heal' a breach',
And par-sons prac'-tise what' they preach';
Then lit'-tle Bo-ney he'll pounce down',
And march' his men' on Lon'-don town'!
Chorus. — Rol'-li-cum ro'-rum, tol'-lol-lo'-rum,
Rol'-li-cum ro'-rum, tol'-lol-lay.
When jus'-ti-ces' hold e'qual scales',
And rogues' are on'-ly found' in jails';
Then lit'tle Bo'-ney he'll pounce down',
And march' his men' on Lon'-don town'!
Chorus. — Rol'-li-cum ro'-rum, tol'-lol-lo'-rum,
Rol'-li-cum ro'-rum, tol'-lol-lay.
When rich' men find' their wealth' a curse',
And fill' there-with' the poor' man's purse';
Then lit'-tle Bo'-ney he'll pounce down',
And march' his men' on Lon'-don town'!
Chorus. — Rol'-li-cum ro'-rum, tol'-lol-lo'-rum,
Rol'-li-cum ro'-rum, tol'-lol-lay.

Poor Stanner! In spite of his satire, he fell at the bloody battle of Albuera a few years after this pleasantly spent summer at the Georgian watering-place, being mortally wounded and trampled down by a French hussar when the brigade was deploying into line under Beresford.

While Miller Loveday was saying ‘Well done, Mr. Stanner!’ at the close of the thirteenth stanza, which seemed to be the last, and Mr. Stanner was modestly expressing

his regret that he could do no better, a stentorian voice was heard outside the window shutter repeating,

Rol'-li-cum ro'-rum, tol'-lol-lo'-rum,
Rol'-li-cum ro'-rum, tol'-lol-lay.

The company was silent in a moment at this reinforcement, and only the military tried not to look surprised. While all wondered who the singer could be somebody entered the porch; the door opened, and in came a young man, about the size and weight of the Farnese Hercules, in the uniform of the yeomanry cavalry.

“’Tis young Squire Derriman, old Mr. Derriman’s nephew,” murmured voices in the background.

Without waiting to address anybody, or apparently seeing who were gathered there, the colossal man waved his cap above his head and went on in tones that shook the window-panes: —

When hus'-bands with' their wives' agree',
And maids' won't wed' from mod'-es-ty',
Then lit'-tle Bo'-ney he'll pounce down',
And march' his men' on Lon'-don town'!
Chorus. — Rol'-li-cum ro'-rum, tol'-lol-lo'-rum,
Rol'-li-cum ro'-rum, tol'-lol-lay.

It was a verse which had been omitted by the gallant Stanner, out of respect to the ladies.

The new-comer was red-haired and of florid complexion, and seemed full of a conviction that his whim of entering must be their pleasure, which for the moment it was.

‘No ceremony, good men all,’ he said; ‘I was passing by, and my ear was caught by the singing. I like singing; ’tis warming and cheering, and shall not be put down. I should like to hear anybody say otherwise.’

‘Welcome, Master Derriman,’ said the miller, filling a glass and handing it to the yeoman. ‘Come all the way from quarters, then? I hardly knowed ye in your soldier’s clothes. You’d look more natural with a spud in your hand, sir. I shouldn’t ha’ known ye at all if I hadn’t heard that you were called out.’

‘More natural with a spud! — have a care, miller,’ said the young giant, the fire of his complexion increasing to scarlet. ‘I don’t mean anger, but — but — a soldier’s honour, you know!’

The military in the background laughed a little, and the yeoman then for the first time discovered that there were more regulars present than one. He looked momentarily disconcerted, but expanded again to full assurance.

‘Right, right, Master Derriman, no offence — ’twas only my joke,’ said the genial miller. ‘Everybody’s a soldier nowadays. Drink a drap o’ this cordial, and don’t mind words.’

The young man drank without the least reluctance, and said, 'Yes, miller, I am called out. 'Tis ticklish times for us soldiers now; we hold our lives in our hands — What are those fellows grinning at behind the table? — I say, we do!'

'Staying with your uncle at the farm for a day or two, Mr. Derriman?'

'No, no; as I told you, six mile off. Billeted at Casterbridge. But I have to call and see the old, old —'

'Gentleman?'

'Gentleman! — no, skinflint. He lives upon the sweepings of the barton; ha, ha!' And the speaker's regular white teeth showed themselves like snow in a Dutch cabbage. 'Well, well, the profession of arms makes a man proof against all that. I take things as I find 'em.'

'Quite right, Master Derriman. Another drop?'

'No, no. I'll take no more than is good for me — no man should; so don't tempt me.'

The yeoman then saw Anne, and by an unconscious gravitation went towards her and the other women, flinging a remark to John Loveday in passing. 'Ah, Loveday! I heard you were come; in short, I come o' purpose to see you. Glad to see you enjoying yourself at home again.'

The trumpet-major replied civilly, though not without grimness, for he seemed hardly to like Derriman's motion towards Anne.

'Widow Garland's daughter! — yes, 'tis surely. You remember me? I have been here before. Festus Derriman, Yeomanry Cavalry.'

Anne gave a little curtsy. 'I know your name is Festus — that's all.'

'Yes, 'tis well known — especially latterly.' He dropped his voice to confidence pitch. 'I suppose your friends here are disturbed by my coming in, as they don't seem to talk much? I don't mean to interrupt the party; but I often find that people are put out by my coming among 'em, especially when I've got my regimentals on.'

'La! and are they?'

'Yes; 'tis the way I have.' He further lowered his tone, as if they had been old friends, though in reality he had only seen her three or four times. 'And how did you come to be here? Dash my wig, I don't like to see a nice young lady like you in this company. You should come to some of our yeomanry sprees in Casterbridge or Shottsford-Forum. O, but the girls do come! The yeomanry are respected men, men of good substantial families, many farming their own land; and every one among us rides his own charger, which is more than these cussed fellows do.' He nodded towards the dragoons.

'Hush, hush! Why, these are friends and neighbours of Miller Loveday, and he is a great friend of ours — our best friend,' said Anne with great emphasis, and reddening at the sense of injustice to their host. 'What are you thinking of, talking like that? It is ungenerous in you.'

'Ha, ha! I've affronted you. Isn't that it, fair angel, fair — what do you call it? — fair vestal? Ah, well! would you was safe in my own house! But honour must be minded

now, not courting. Rollicum-rorum, tol-lol-lorum. Pardon me, my sweet, I like ye! It may be a come down for me, owning land; but I do like ye.'

'Sir, please be quiet,' said Anne, distressed.

'I will, I will. Well, Corporal Tullidge, how's your head?' he said, going towards the other end of the room, and leaving Anne to herself.

The company had again recovered its liveliness, and it was a long time before the bouncing Rufus who had joined them could find heart to tear himself away from their society and good liquors, although he had had quite enough of the latter before he entered. The natives received him at his own valuation, and the soldiers of the camp, who sat beyond the table, smiled behind their pipes at his remarks, with a pleasant twinkle of the eye which approached the satirical, John Loveday being not the least conspicuous in this bearing. But he and his friends were too courteous on such an occasion as the present to challenge the young man's large remarks, and readily permitted him to set them right on the details of camping and other military routine, about which the troopers seemed willing to let persons hold any opinion whatever, provided that they themselves were not obliged to give attention to it; showing, strangely enough, that if there was one subject more than another which never interested their minds, it was the art of war. To them the art of enjoying good company in Overcombe Mill, the details of the miller's household, the swarming of his bees, the number of his chickens, and the fatness of his pigs, were matters of infinitely greater concern.

The present writer, to whom this party has been described times out of number by members of the Loveday family and other aged people now passed away, can never enter the old living-room of Overcombe Mill without beholding the genial scene through the mists of the seventy or eighty years that intervene between then and now. First and brightest to the eye are the dozen candles, scattered about regardless of expense, and kept well snuffed by the miller, who walks round the room at intervals of five minutes, snuffers in hand, and nips each wick with great precision, and with something of an executioner's grim look upon his face as he closes the snuffers upon the neck of the candle. Next to the candle-light show the red and blue coats and white breeches of the soldiers — nearly twenty of them in all besides the ponderous Derriman — the head of the latter, and, indeed, the heads of all who are standing up, being in dangerous proximity to the black beams of the ceiling. There is not one among them who would attach any meaning to 'Vittoria,' or gather from the syllables 'Waterloo' the remotest idea of his own glory or death. Next appears the correct and innocent Anne, little thinking what things Time has in store for her at no great distance off. She looks at Derriman with a half-uneasy smile as he clanks hither and thither, and hopes he will not single her out again to hold a private dialogue with — which, however, he does, irresistibly attracted by the white muslin figure. She must, of course, look a little gracious again now, lest his mood should turn from sentimental to quarrelsome — no impossible contingency with the yeoman-soldier, as her quick perception had noted.

'Well, well; this idling won't do for me, folks,' he at last said, to Anne's relief. 'I ought not to have come in, by rights; but I heard you enjoying yourselves, and thought

it might be worth while to see what you were up to; I have several miles to go before bedtime;' and stretching his arms, lifting his chin, and shaking his head, to eradicate any unseemly curve or wrinkle from his person, the yeoman wished them an off-hand good-night, and departed.

'You should have teased him a little more, father,' said the trumpet-major drily. 'You could soon have made him as crabbed as a bear.'

'I didn't want to provoke the chap — 'twasn't worth while. He came in friendly enough,' said the gentle miller without looking up.

'I don't think he was overmuch friendly,' said John.

'Tis as well to be neighbourly with folks, if they be not quite unbearable,' his father genially replied, as he took off his coat to go and draw more ale — this periodical stripping to the shirt-sleeves being necessitated by the narrowness of the cellar and the smeary effect of its numerous cobwebs upon best clothes.

Some of the guests then spoke of Fess Derriman as not such a bad young man if you took him right and humoured him; others said that he was nobody's enemy but his own; and the elder ladies mentioned in a tone of interest that he was likely to come into a deal of money at his uncle's death. The person who did not praise was the one who knew him best, who had known him as a boy years ago, when he had lived nearer to Overcombe than he did at present. This unappreciative person was the trumpet-major.

CHAPTER VI.

OLD MR. DERRIMAN OF OXWELL HALL

At this time in the history of Overcombe one solitary newspaper occasionally found its way into the village. It was lent by the postmaster at Budmouth (who, in some mysterious way, got it for nothing through his connection with the mail) to Mr. Derriman at the Hall, by whom it was handed on to Mrs. Garland when it was not more than a fortnight old. Whoever remembers anything about the old farmer-squire will, of course, know well enough that this delightful privilege of reading history in long columns was not accorded to the Widow Garland for nothing. It was by such ingenuous means that he paid her for her daughter's occasional services in reading aloud to him and making out his accounts, in which matters the farmer, whose guineas were reported to touch five figures — some said more — was not expert.

Mrs. Martha Garland, as a respectable widow, occupied a twilight rank between the benighted villagers and the well-informed gentry, and kindly made herself useful to the former as letter-writer and reader, and general translator from the printing tongue. It was not without satisfaction that she stood at her door of an evening, newspaper in hand, with three or four cottagers standing round, and poured down their open throats any paragraph that she might choose to select from the stirring ones of the period. When she had done with the sheet Mrs. Garland passed it on to the miller, the

millar to the grinder, and the grinder to the grinder's boy, in whose hands it became subdivided into half pages, quarter pages, and irregular triangles, and ended its career as a paper cap, a flagon bung, or a wrapper for his bread and cheese.

Notwithstanding his compact with Mrs. Garland, old Mr. Derriman kept the paper so long, and was so chary of wasting his man's time on a merely intellectual errand, that unless she sent for the journal it seldom reached her hands. Anne was always her messenger. The arrival of the soldiers led Mrs. Garland to despatch her daughter for it the day after the party; and away she went in her hat and pelisse, in a direction at right angles to that of the encampment on the hill.

Walking across the fields for the distance of a mile or two, she came out upon the high-road by a wicket-gate. On the other side of the way was the entrance to what at first sight looked like a neglected meadow, the gate being a rotten one, without a bottom rail, and broken-down palings lying on each side. The dry hard mud of the opening was marked with several horse and cow tracks, that had been half obliterated by fifty score sheep tracks, surcharged with the tracks of a man and a dog. Beyond this geological record appeared a carriage-road, nearly grown over with grass, which Anne followed. It descended by a gentle slope, dived under dark-rinded elm and chestnut trees, and conducted her on till the hiss of a waterfall and the sound of the sea became audible, when it took a bend round a swamp of fresh watercress and brooklime that had once been a fish pond. Here the grey, weather-worn front of a building edged from behind the trees. It was Oxwell Hall, once the seat of a family now extinct, and of late years used as a farmhouse.

Benjamin Derriman, who owned the crumbling place, had originally been only the occupier and tenant-farmer of the fields around. His wife had brought him a small fortune, and during the growth of their only son there had been a partition of the Oxwell estate, giving the farmer, now a widower, the opportunity of acquiring the building and a small portion of the land attached on exceptionally low terms. But two years after the purchase the boy died, and Derriman's existence was paralyzed forthwith. It was said that since that event he had devised the house and fields to a distant female relative, to keep them out of the hands of his detested nephew; but this was not certainly known.

The hall was as interesting as mansions in a state of declension usually are, as the excellent county history showed. That popular work in folio contained an old plate dedicated to the last scion of the original owners, from which drawing it appeared that in 1750, the date of publication, the windows were covered with little scratches like black flashes of lightning; that a horn of hard smoke came out of each of the twelve chimneys; that a lady and a lap-dog stood on the lawn in a strenuously walking position; and a substantial cloud and nine flying birds of no known species hung over the trees to the north-east.

The rambling and neglected dwelling had all the romantic excellencies and practical drawbacks which such mildewed places share in common with caves, mountains, wildernesses, glens, and other homes of poesy that people of taste wish to live and die

in. Mustard and cress could have been raised on the inner plaster of the dewy walls at any height not exceeding three feet from the floor; and mushrooms of the most refined and thin-stemmed kinds grew up through the chinks of the larder paving. As for the outside, Nature, in the ample time that had been given her, had so mingled her flings and effacements with the marks of human wear and tear upon the house, that it was often hard to say in which of the two or if in both, any particular obliteration had its origin. The keenness was gone from the mouldings of the doorways, but whether worn out by the rubbing past of innumerable people's shoulders, and the moving of their heavy furniture, or by Time in a grander and more abstract form, did not appear. The iron stanchions inside the window-panes were eaten away to the size of wires at the bottom where they entered the stone, the condensed breathings of generations having settled there in pools and rusted them. The panes themselves had either lost their shine altogether or become iridescent as a peacock's tail. In the middle of the porch was a vertical sun-dial, whose gnomon swayed loosely about when the wind blew, and cast its shadow hither and thither, as much as to say, 'Here's your fine model dial; here's any time for any man; I am an old dial; and shiftiness is the best policy.'

Anne passed under the arched gateway which screened the main front; over it was the porter's lodge, reached by a spiral staircase. Across the archway was fixed a row of wooden hurdles, one of which Anne opened and closed behind her. Their necessity was apparent as soon as she got inside. The quadrangle of the ancient pile was a bed of mud and manure, inhabited by calves, geese, ducks, and sow pigs surprisingly large, with young ones surprisingly small. In the groined porch some heifers were amusing themselves by stretching up their necks and licking the carved stone capitals that supported the vaulting. Anne went on to a second and open door, across which was another hurdle to keep the live stock from absolute community with the inmates. There being no knocker, she knocked by means of a short stick which was laid against the post for that purpose; but nobody attending, she entered the passage, and tried an inner door.

A slight noise was heard inside, the door opened about an inch, and a strip of decayed face, including the eye and some forehead wrinkles, appeared within the crevice.

'Please I have come for the paper,' said Anne.

'O, is it you, dear Anne?' whined the inmate, opening the door a little further. 'I could hardly get to the door to open it, I am so weak.'

The speaker was a wizened old gentleman, in a coat the colour of his farmyard, breeches of the same hue, unbuttoned at the knees, revealing a bit of leg above his stocking and a dazzlingly white shirt-frill to compensate for this untidiness below. The edge of his skull round his eye-sockets was visible through the skin, and he had a mouth whose corners made towards the back of his head on the slightest provocation. He walked with great apparent difficulty back into the room, Anne following him.

'Well, you can have the paper if you want it; but you never give me much time to see what's in en! Here's the paper.' He held it out, but before she could take it he drew

it back again, saying, 'I have not had my share o' the paper by a good deal, what with my weak sight, and people coming so soon for en. I am a poor put-upon soul; but my "Duty of Man" will be left to me when the newspaper is gone.' And he sank into his chair with an air of exhaustion.

Anne said that she did not wish to take the paper if he had not done with it, and that she was really later in the week than usual, owing to the soldiers.

'Soldiers, yes — rot the soldiers! And now hedges will be broke, and hens' nests robbed, and sucking-pigs stole, and I don't know what all. Who's to pay for't, sure? I reckon that because the soldiers be come you don't mean to be kind enough to read to me what I hadn't time to read myself.'

She would read if he wished, she said; she was in no hurry. And sitting herself down she unfolded the paper.

"Dinner at Carlton House"?"

'No, faith. 'Tis nothing to I.'

"Defence of the country"?"

'Ye may read that if ye will. I hope there will be no billeting in this parish, or any wild work of that sort; for what would a poor old lamiger like myself do with soldiers in his house, and nothing to feed 'em with?'

Anne began reading, and continued at her task nearly ten minutes, when she was interrupted by the appearance in the quadrangular slough without of a large figure in the uniform of the yeomanry cavalry.

'What do you see out there?' said the farmer with a start, as she paused and slowly blushed.

'A soldier — one of the yeomanry,' said Anne, not quite at her ease.

'Scrounch it all — 'tis my nephew!' exclaimed the old man, his face turning to a phosphoric pallor, and his body twitching with innumerable alarms as he formed upon his face a gasping smile of joy, with which to welcome the new-coming relative. 'Read on, prithee, Miss Garland.'

Before she had read far the visitor straddled over the door-hurdle into the passage and entered the room.

'Well, nunc, how do you feel?' said the giant, shaking hands with the farmer in the manner of one violently ringing a hand-bell. 'Glad to see you.'

'Bad and weakish, Festus,' replied the other, his person responding passively to the rapid vibrations imparted. 'O, be tender, please — a little softer, there's a dear nephew! My arm is no more than a cobweb.'

'Ah, poor soul!'

'Yes, I am not much more than a skeleton, and can't bear rough usage.'

'Sorry to hear that; but I'll bear your affliction in mind. Why, you are all in a tremble, Uncle Benjy!'

"'Tis because I am so gratified,' said the old man. 'I always get all in a tremble when I am taken by surprise by a beloved relation.'

‘Ah, that’s it!’ said the yeoman, bringing his hand down on the back of his uncle’s chair with a loud smack, at which Uncle Benjy nervously sprang three inches from his seat and dropped into it again. ‘Ask your pardon for frightening ye, uncle. ‘Tis how we do in the army, and I forgot your nerves. You have scarcely expected to see me, I dare say, but here I am.’

‘I am glad to see ye. You are not going to stay long, perhaps?’

‘Quite the contrary. I am going to stay ever so long!’

‘O I see! I am so glad, dear Festus. Ever so long, did ye say?’

‘Yes, ever so long,’ said the young gentleman, sitting on the slope of the bureau and stretching out his legs as props. ‘I am going to make this quite my own home whenever I am off duty, as long as we stay out. And after that, when the campaign is over in the autumn, I shall come here, and live with you like your own son, and help manage your land and your farm, you know, and make you a comfortable old man.’

‘Ah! How you do please me!’ said the farmer, with a horrified smile, and grasping the arms of his chair to sustain himself.

‘Yes; I have been meaning to come a long time, as I knew you’d like to have me, Uncle Benjy; and ‘tishn’t in my heart to refuse you.’

‘You always was kind that way!’

‘Yes; I always was. But I ought to tell you at once, not to disappoint you, that I shan’t be here always — all day, that is, because of my military duties as a cavalry man.’

‘O, not always? That’s a pity!’ exclaimed the farmer with a cheerful eye.

‘I knew you’d say so. And I shan’t be able to sleep here at night sometimes, for the same reason.’

‘Not sleep here o’ nights?’ said the old gentleman, still more relieved. ‘You ought to sleep here — you certainly ought; in short, you must. But you can’t!’

‘Not while we are with the colours. But directly that’s over — the very next day — I’ll stay here all day, and all night too, to oblige you, since you ask me so very kindly.’

‘Th-thank ye, that will be very nice!’ said Uncle Benjy.

‘Yes, I knew ‘twould relieve ye.’ And he kindly stroked his uncle’s head, the old man expressing his enjoyment at the affectionate token by a death’s-head grimace. ‘I should have called to see you the other night when I passed through here,’ Festus continued; ‘but it was so late that I couldn’t come so far out of my way. You won’t think it unkind?’

‘Not at all, if you couldn’t. I never shall think it unkind if you really can’t come, you know, Festy.’ There was a few minutes’ pause, and as the nephew said nothing Uncle Benjy went on: ‘I wish I had a little present for ye. But as ill-luck would have it we have lost a deal of stock this year, and I have had to pay away so much.’

‘Poor old man — I know you have. Shall I lend you a seven-shilling piece, Uncle Benjy?’

‘Ha, ha! — you must have your joke; well, I’ll think o’ that. And so they expect Buonaparty to choose this very part of the coast for his landing, hey? And that the yeomanry be to stand in front as the forlorn hope?’

‘Who says so?’ asked the florid son of Mars, losing a little redness.

‘The newspaper-man.’

‘O, there’s nothing in that,’ said Festus bravely. ‘The gover’nment thought it possible at one time; but they don’t know.’

Festus turned himself as he talked, and now said abruptly: ‘Ah, who’s this? Why, ‘tis our little Anne!’ He had not noticed her till this moment, the young woman having at his entry kept her face over the newspaper, and then got away to the back part of the room. ‘And are you and your mother always going to stay down there in the mill-house watching the little fishes, Miss Anne?’

She said that it was uncertain, in a tone of truthful precision which the question was hardly worth, looking forcedly at him as she spoke. But she blushed fitfully, in her arms and hands as much as in her face. Not that she was overpowered by the great boots, formidable spurs, and other fierce appliances of his person, as he imagined; simply she had not been prepared to meet him there.

‘I hope you will, I am sure, for my own good,’ said he, letting his eyes linger on the round of her cheek.

Anne became a little more dignified, and her look showed reserve. But the yeoman on perceiving this went on talking to her in so civil a way that he irresistibly amused her, though she tried to conceal all feeling. At a brighter remark of his than usual her mouth moved, her upper lip playing uncertainly over her white teeth; it would stay still — no, it would withdraw a little way in a smile; then it would flutter down again; and so it wavered like a butterfly in a tender desire to be pleased and smiling, and yet to be also sedate and composed; to show him that she did not want compliments, and yet that she was not so cold as to wish to repress any genuine feeling he might be anxious to utter.

‘Shall you want any more reading, Mr. Derriman?’ said she, interrupting the younger man in his remarks. ‘If not, I’ll go homeward.’

‘Don’t let me hinder you longer,’ said Festus. ‘I’m off in a minute or two, when your man has cleaned my boots.’

‘Ye don’t hinder us, nephew. She must have the paper: ‘tis the day for her to have ‘n. She might read a little more, as I have had so little profit out o’ en hitherto. Well, why don’t ye speak? Will ye, or won’t ye, my dear?’

‘Not to two,’ she said.

‘Ho, ho! damn it, I must go then, I suppose,’ said Festus, laughing; and unable to get a further glance from her he left the room and clanked into the back yard, where he saw a man; holding up his hand he cried, ‘Anthony Cripplestraw!’

Cripplestraw came up in a trot, moved a lock of his hair and replaced it, and said, ‘Yes, Maister Derriman.’ He was old Mr. Derriman’s odd hand in the yard and garden,

and like his employer had no great pretensions to manly beauty, owing to a limpness of backbone and speciality of mouth, which opened on one side only, giving him a triangular smile.

‘Well, Cripplestraw, how is it to-day?’ said Festus, with socially-superior heartiness.

‘Middlin’, considering, Maister Derriman. And how’s yerself?’

‘Fairish. Well, now, see and clean these military boots of mine. I’ll cock my foot up on this bench. This pigsty of my uncle’s is not fit for a soldier to come into.’

‘Yes, Maister Derriman, I will. No, ‘tis not fit, Maister Derriman.’

‘What stock has uncle lost this year, Cripplestraw?’

‘Well, let’s see, sir. I can call to mind that we’ve lost three chickens, a tom-pigeon, and a weakly sucking-pig, one of a fare of ten. I can’t think of no more, Maister Derriman.’

‘H’m, not a large quantity of cattle. The old rascal!’

‘No, ‘tis not a large quantity. Old what did you say, sir?’

‘O nothing. He’s within there.’ Festus flung his forehead in the direction of a right line towards the inner apartment. ‘He’s a regular sniche one.’

‘Hee, hee; fie, fie, Master Derriman!’ said Cripplestraw, shaking his head in delighted censure. ‘Gentlefolks shouldn’t talk so. And an officer, Mr. Derriman! ‘Tis the duty of all cavalry gentlemen to bear in mind that their blood is a knowed thing in the country, and not to speak ill o’t.’

‘He’s close-fisted.’

‘Well, maister, he is — I own he is a little. ‘Tis the nater of some old venerable gentlemen to be so. We’ll hope he’ll treat ye well in yer fortune, sir.’

‘Hope he will. Do people talk about me here, Cripplestraw?’ asked the yeoman, as the other continued busy with his boots.

‘Well, yes, sir; they do off and on, you know. They says you be as fine a piece of calvery flesh and bones as was ever growed on fallow-ground; in short, all owns that you be a fine fellow, sir. I wish I wasn’t no more afraid of the French than you be; but being in the Locals, Maister Derriman, I assure ye I dream of having to defend my country every night; and I don’t like the dream at all.’

‘You should take it careless, Cripplestraw, as I do; and ‘twould soon come natural to you not to mind it at all. Well, a fine fellow is not everything, you know. O no. There’s as good as I in the army, and even better.’

‘And they say that when you fall this summer, you’ll die like a man.’

‘When I fall?’

‘Yes, sure, Maister Derriman. Poor soul o’ thee! I shan’t forget ‘ee as you lie mouldering in yer soldier’s grave.’

‘Hey?’ said the warrior uneasily. ‘What makes ‘em think I am going to fall?’

‘Well, sir, by all accounts the yeomanry will be put in front.’

‘Front! That’s what my uncle has been saying.’

‘Yes, and by all accounts ‘tis true. And naterelley they’ll be mowed down like grass; and you among ‘em, poor young galliant officer!’

‘Look here, Cripplestraw. This is a reg’lar foolish report. How can yeomanry be put in front? Nobody’s put in front. We yeomanry have nothing to do with Buonaparte’s landing. We shall be away in a safe place, guarding the possessions and jewels. Now, can you see, Cripplestraw, any way at all that the yeomanry can be put in front? Do you think they really can?’

‘Well, maister, I am afraid I do,’ said the cheering Cripplestraw. ‘And I know a great warrior like you is only too glad o’ the chance. ‘Twill be a great thing for ye, death and glory! In short, I hope from my heart you will be, and I say so very often to folk — in fact, I pray at night for’t.’

‘O! cuss you! you needn’t pray about it.’

‘No, Maister Derriman, I won’t.’

‘Of course my sword will do its duty. That’s enough. And now be off with ye.’

Festus gloomily returned to his uncle’s room and found that Anne was just leaving. He was inclined to follow her at once, but as she gave him no opportunity for doing this he went to the window, and remained tapping his fingers against the shutter while she crossed the yard.

‘Well, nephew, you are not gone yet?’ said the farmer, looking dubiously at Festus from under one eyelid. ‘You see how I am. Not by any means better, you see; so I can’t entertain ‘ee as well as I would.’

‘You can’t, nunc, you can’t. I don’t think you are worse — if I do, dash my wig. But you’ll have plenty of opportunities to make me welcome when you are better. If you are not so brisk inwardly as you was, why not try change of air? This is a dull, damp hole.’

‘‘Tis, Festus; and I am thinking of moving.’

‘Ah, where to?’ said Festus, with surprise and interest.

‘Up into the garret in the north corner. There is no fireplace in the room; but I shan’t want that, poor soul o’ me.’

‘‘Tis not moving far.’

‘‘Tis not. But I have not a soul belonging to me within ten mile; and you know very well that I couldn’t afford to go to lodgings that I had to pay for.’

‘I know it — I know it, Uncle Benjy! Well, don’t be disturbed. I’ll come and manage for you as soon as ever this Boney alarm is over; but when a man’s country calls he must obey, if he is a man.’

‘A splendid spirit!’ said Uncle Benjy, with much admiration on the surface of his countenance. ‘I never had it. How could it have got into the boy?’

‘From my mother’s side, perhaps.’

‘Perhaps so. Well, take care of yourself, nephew,’ said the farmer, waving his hand impressively. ‘Take care! In these warlike times your spirit may carry ye into the arms of the enemy; and you are the last of the family. You should think of this, and not let your bravery carry ye away.’

‘Don’t be disturbed, uncle; I’ll control myself,’ said Festus, betrayed into self-complacency against his will. ‘At least I’ll do what I can, but nature will out

sometimes. Well, I'm off.' He began humming 'Brighton Camp,' and, promising to come again soon, retired with assurance, each yard of his retreat adding private joyousness to his uncle's form.

When the bulky young man had disappeared through the porter's lodge, Uncle Benjy showed preternatural activity for one in his invalid state, jumping up quickly without his stick, at the same time opening and shutting his mouth quite silently like a thirsty frog, which was his way of expressing mirth. He ran upstairs as quick as an old squirrel, and went to a dormer window which commanded a view of the grounds beyond the gate, and the footpath that stretched across them to the village.

'Yes, yes!' he said in a suppressed scream, dancing up and down, 'he's after her: she've hit en!' For there appeared upon the path the figure of Anne Garland, and, hastening on at some little distance behind her, the swaggering shape of Festus. She became conscious of his approach, and moved more quickly. He moved more quickly still, and overtook her. She turned as if in answer to a call from him, and he walked on beside her, till they were out of sight. The old man then played upon an imaginary fiddle for about half a minute; and, suddenly discontinuing these signs of pleasure, went downstairs again.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW THEY TALKED IN THE PASTURES

'You often come this way?' said Festus to Anne rather before he had overtaken her.

'I come for the newspaper and other things,' she said, perplexed by a doubt whether he were there by accident or design.

They moved on in silence, Festus beating the grass with his switch in a masterful way. 'Did you speak, Mis'ess Anne?' he asked.

'No,' said Anne.

'Ten thousand pardons. I thought you did. Now don't let me drive you out of the path. I can walk among the high grass and giltycups — they will not yellow my stockings as they will yours. Well, what do you think of a lot of soldiers coming to the neighbourhood in this way?'

'I think it is very lively, and a great change,' she said with demure seriousness.

'Perhaps you don't like us warriors as a body?'

Anne smiled without replying.

'Why, you are laughing!' said the yeoman, looking searchingly at her and blushing like a little fire. 'What do you see to laugh at?'

'Did I laugh?' said Anne, a little scared at his sudden mortification.

'Why, yes; you know you did, you young sneerer,' he said like a cross baby. 'You are laughing at me — that's who you are laughing at! I should like to know what you would do without such as me if the French were to drop in upon ye any night?'

'Would you help to beat them off?' said she.

‘Can you ask such a question? What are we for? But you don’t think anything of soldiers.’

O yes, she liked soldiers, she said, especially when they came home from the wars, covered with glory; though when she thought what doings had won them that glory she did not like them quite so well. The gallant and appeased yeoman said he supposed her to mean chopping off heads, blowing out brains, and that kind of business, and thought it quite right that a tender-hearted thing like her should feel a little horrified. But as for him, he should not mind such another Blenheim this summer as the army had fought a hundred years ago, or whenever it was — dash his wig if he should mind it at all. ‘Hullo! now you are laughing again; yes, I saw you!’ And the choleric Festus turned his blue eyes and flushed face upon her as though he would read her through. Anne strove valiantly to look calmly back; but her eyes could not face his, and they fell. ‘You did laugh!’ he repeated.

‘It was only a tiny little one,’ she murmured.

‘Ah — I knew you did!’ thundered he. ‘Now what was it you laughed at?’

‘I only — thought that you were — merely in the yeomanry,’ she murmured slyly.

‘And what of that?’

‘And the yeomanry only seem farmers that have lost their senses.’

‘Yes, yes! I knew you meant some jeering o’ that sort, Mistress Anne. But I suppose ‘tis the way of women, and I take no notice. I’ll confess that some of us are no great things: but I know how to draw a sword, don’t I? — say I don’t just to provoke me.’

‘I am sure you do,’ said Anne sweetly. ‘If a Frenchman came up to you, Mr. Derriman, would you take him on the hip, or on the thigh?’

‘Now you are flattering!’ he said, his white teeth uncovering themselves in a smile. ‘Well, of course I should draw my sword — no, I mean my sword would be already drawn; and I should put spurs to my horse — charger, as we call it in the army; and I should ride up to him and say — no, I shouldn’t say anything, of course — men never waste words in battle; I should take him with the third guard, low point, and then coming back to the second guard — ’

‘But that would be taking care of yourself — not hitting at him.’

‘How can you say that!’ he cried, the beams upon his face turning to a lurid cloud in a moment. ‘How can you understand military terms who’ve never had a sword in your life? I shouldn’t take him with the sword at all.’ He went on with eager sulkiness, ‘I should take him with my pistol. I should pull off my right glove, and throw back my goat-skin; then I should open my priming-pan, prime, and cast about — no, I shouldn’t, that’s wrong; I should draw my right pistol, and as soon as loaded, seize the weapon by the butt; then at the word “Cock your pistol” I should — ’

‘Then there is plenty of time to give such words of command in the heat of battle?’ said Anne innocently.

‘No!’ said the yeoman, his face again in flames. ‘Why, of course I am only telling you what would be the word of command if — there now! you la — ’

‘I didn’t; ‘pon my word I didn’t!’

‘No, I don’t think you did; it was my mistake. Well, then I come smartly to Present, looking well along the barrel — along the barrel — and fire. Of course I know well enough how to engage the enemy! But I expect my old uncle has been setting you against me.’

‘He has not said a word,’ replied Anne; ‘though I have heard of you, of course.’

‘What have you heard? Nothing good, I dare say. It makes my blood boil within me!’

‘O, nothing bad,’ said she assuringly. ‘Just a word now and then.’

‘Now, come, tell me, there’s a dear. I don’t like to be crossed. It shall be a sacred secret between us. Come, now!’

Anne was embarrassed, and her smile was uncomfortable. ‘I shall not tell you,’ she said at last.

‘There it is again!’ said the yeoman, throwing himself into a despair. ‘I shall soon begin to believe that my name is not worth sixpence about here!’

‘I tell you ‘twas nothing against you,’ repeated Anne.

‘That means it might have been for me,’ said Festus, in a mollified tone. ‘Well, though, to speak the truth, I have a good many faults, some people will praise me, I suppose. ‘Twas praise?’

‘It was.’

‘Well, I am not much at farming, and I am not much in company, and I am not much at figures, but perhaps I must own, since it is forced upon me, that I can show as fine a soldier’s figure on the Esplanade as any man of the cavalry.’

‘You can,’ said Anne; for though her flesh crept in mortal terror of his irascibility, she could not resist the fearful pleasure of leading him on. ‘You look very well; and some say, you are — ’

‘What? Well, they say I am good-looking. I don’t make myself, so ‘tis no praise. Hullo! what are you looking across there for?’

‘Only at a bird that I saw fly out of that tree,’ said Anne.

‘What? Only at a bird, do you say?’ he heaved out in a voice of thunder. ‘I see your shoulders a-shaking, young madam. Now don’t you provoke me with that laughing! By God, it won’t do!’

‘Then go away!’ said Anne, changed from mirthfulness to irritation by his rough manner. ‘I don’t want your company, you great bragging thing! You are so touchy there’s no bearing with you. Go away!’

‘No, no, Anne; I am wrong to speak to you so. I give you free liberty to say what you will to me. Say I am not a bit of a soldier, or anything! Abuse me — do now, there’s a dear. I’m scum, I’m froth, I’m dirt before the besom — yes!’

‘I have nothing to say, sir. Stay where you are till I am out of this field.’

‘Well, there’s such command in your looks that I ha’n’t heart to go against you. You will come this way to-morrow at the same time? Now, don’t be uncivil.’

She was too generous not to forgive him, but the short little lip murmured that she did not think it at all likely she should come that way to-morrow.

‘Then Sunday?’ he said.

‘Not Sunday,’ said she.

‘Then Monday — Tuesday — Wednesday, surely?’ he went on experimentally.

She answered that she should probably not see him on either day, and, cutting short the argument, went through the wicket into the other field. Festus paused, looking after her; and when he could no longer see her slight figure he swept away his deliberations, began singing, and turned off in the other direction.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANNE MAKES A CIRCUIT OF THE CAMP

When Anne was crossing the last field, she saw approaching her an old woman with wrinkled cheeks, who surveyed the earth and its inhabitants through the medium of brass-rimmed spectacles. Shaking her head at Anne till the glasses shone like two moons, she said, ‘Ah, ah; I zeed ye! If I had only kept on my short ones that I use for reading the Collect and Gospel I shouldn’t have zeed ye; but thinks I, I be going out o’ doors, and I’ll put on my long ones, little thinking what they’d show me. Ay, I can tell folk at any distance with these — ’tis a beautiful pair for out o’ doors; though my short ones be best for close work, such as darning, and catching fleas, that’s true.’

‘What have you seen, Granny Seamore?’ said Anne.

‘Fie, fie, Miss Nancy! you know,’ said Granny Seamore, shaking her head still. ‘But he’s a fine young feller, and will have all his uncle’s money when ‘a’s gone.’ Anne said nothing to this, and looking ahead with a smile passed Granny Seamore by.

Festus, the subject of the remark, was at this time about three-and-twenty, a fine fellow as to feet and inches, and of a remarkably warm tone in skin and hair. Symptoms of beard and whiskers had appeared upon him at a very early age, owing to his persistent use of the razor before there was any necessity for its operation. The brave boy had scraped unseen in the out-house, in the cellar, in the wood-shed, in the stable, in the unused parlour, in the cow-stalls, in the barn, and wherever he could set up his triangular bit of looking-glass without observation, or extemporize a mirror by sticking up his hat on the outside of a window-pane. The result now was that, did he neglect to use the instrument he once had trifled with, a fine rust broke out upon his countenance on the first day, a golden lichen on the second, and a fiery stubble on the third to a degree which admitted of no further postponement.

His disposition divided naturally into two, the boastful and the cantankerous. When Festus put on the big pot, as it is classically called, he was quite blinded ipso facto to the diverting effect of that mood and manner upon others; but when disposed to be envious or quarrelsome he was rather shrewd than otherwise, and could do some pretty strokes of satire. He was both liked and abused by the girls who knew him, and though they were pleased by his attentions, they never failed to ridicule him behind his back. In his cups (he knew those vessels, though only twenty-three) he first became

noisy, then excessively friendly, and then invariably nagging. During childhood he had made himself renowned for his pleasant habit of pouncing down upon boys smaller and poorer than himself, and knocking their birds' nests out of their hands, or overturning their little carts of apples, or pouring water down their backs; but his conduct became singularly the reverse of aggressive the moment the little boys' mothers ran out to him, brandishing brooms, frying-pans, skimmers, and whatever else they could lay hands on by way of weapons. He then fled and hid behind bushes, under faggots, or in pits till they had gone away; and on one such occasion was known to creep into a badger's hole quite out of sight, maintaining that post with great firmness and resolution for two or three hours. He had brought more vulgar exclamations upon the tongues of respectable parents in his native parish than any other boy of his time. When other youngsters snowballed him he ran into a place of shelter, where he kneaded snowballs of his own, with a stone inside, and used these formidable missiles in returning their pleasantry. Sometimes he got fearfully beaten by boys his own age, when he would roar most lustily, but fight on in the midst of his tears, blood, and cries.

He was early in love, and had at the time of the story suffered from the ravages of that passion thirteen distinct times. He could not love lightly and gaily; his love was earnest, cross-tempered, and even savage. It was a positive agony to him to be ridiculed by the object of his affections, and such conduct drove him into a frenzy if persisted in. He was a torment to those who behaved humbly towards him, cynical with those who denied his superiority, and a very nice fellow towards those who had the courage to ill-use him.

This stalwart gentleman and Anne Garland did not cross each other's paths again for a week. Then her mother began as before about the newspaper, and, though Anne did not much like the errand, she agreed to go for it on Mrs. Garland pressing her with unusual anxiety. Why her mother was so persistent on so small a matter quite puzzled the girl; but she put on her hat and started.

As she had expected, Festus appeared at a stile over which she sometimes went for shortness' sake, and showed by his manner that he awaited her. When she saw this she kept straight on, as if she would not enter the park at all.

'Surely this is your way?' said Festus.

'I was thinking of going round by the road,' she said.

'Why is that?'

She paused, as if she were not inclined to say. 'I go that way when the grass is wet,' she returned at last.

'It is not wet now,' he persisted; 'the sun has been shining on it these nine hours.' The fact was that the way by the path was less open than by the road, and Festus wished to walk with her uninterrupted. 'But, of course, it is nothing to me what you do.' He flung himself from the stile and walked away towards the house.

Anne, supposing him really indifferent, took the same way, upon which he turned his head and waited for her with a proud smile.

'I cannot go with you,' she said decisively.

‘Nonsense, you foolish girl! I must walk along with you down to the corner.’

‘No, please, Mr. Derriman; we might be seen.’

‘Now, now — that’s shyness!’ he said jocosely.

‘No; you know I cannot let you.’

‘But I must.’

‘But I do not allow it.’

‘Allow it or not, I will.’

‘Then you are unkind, and I must submit,’ she said, her eyes brimming with tears.

‘Ho, ho; what a shame of me! My wig, I won’t do any such thing for the world,’ said the repentant yeoman. ‘Haw, haw; why, I thought your “go away” meant “come on,” as it does with so many of the women I meet, especially in these clothes. Who was to know you were so confoundedly serious?’

As he did not go Anne stood still and said nothing.

‘I see you have a deal more caution and a deal less good-nature than I ever thought you had,’ he continued emphatically.

‘No, sir; it is not any planned manner of mine at all,’ she said earnestly. ‘But you will see, I am sure, that I could not go down to the hall with you without putting myself in a wrong light.’

‘Yes; that’s it, that’s it. I am only a fellow in the yeomanry cavalry — a plain soldier, I may say; and we know what women think of such: that they are a bad lot — men you mustn’t speak to for fear of losing your character — chaps you avoid in the roads — chaps that come into a house like oxen, daub the stairs wi’ their boots, stain the furniture wi’ their drink, talk rubbish to the servants, abuse all that’s holy and righteous, and are only saved from being carried off by Old Nick because they are wanted for Boney.’

‘Indeed, I didn’t know you were thought so bad of as that,’ said she simply.

‘What! don’t my uncle complain to you of me? You are a favourite of that handsome, nice old gaffer’s, I know.’

‘Never.’

‘Well, what do we think of our nice trumpet-major, hey?’

Anne closed her mouth up tight, built it up, in fact, to show that no answer was coming to that question.

‘O now, come, seriously, Loveday is a good fellow, and so is his father.’

‘I don’t know.’

‘What a close little rogue you are! There is no getting anything out of you. I believe you would say “I don’t know,” to every mortal question, so very discreet as you are. Upon my heart, there are some women who would say “I don’t know,” to “Will ye marry me?”’

The brightness upon Anne’s cheek and in her eyes during this remark showed that there was a fair quantity of life and warmth beneath the discretion he complained of. Having spoken thus, he drew aside that she might pass, and bowed very low. Anne formally inclined herself and went on.

She had been at vexation point all the time that he was present, from a haunting sense that he would not have spoken to her so freely had she been a young woman with thriving male relatives to keep forward admirers in check. But she had been struck, now as at their previous meeting, with the power she possessed of working him up either to irritation or to complacency at will; and this consciousness of being able to play upon him as upon an instrument disposed her to a humorous considerateness, and made her tolerate even while she rebuffed him.

When Anne got to the hall the farmer, as usual, insisted upon her reading what he had been unable to get through, and held the paper tightly in his skinny hand till she had agreed. He sent her to a hard chair that she could not possibly injure to the extent of a pennyworth by sitting in it a twelvemonth, and watched her from the outer angle of his near eye while she bent over the paper. His look might have been suggested by the sight that he had witnessed from his window on the last occasion of her visit, for it partook of the nature of concern. The old man was afraid of his nephew, physically and morally, and he began to regard Anne as a fellow-sufferer under the same despot. After this sly and curious gaze at her he withdrew his eye again, so that when she casually lifted her own there was nothing visible but his keen bluish profile as before.

When the reading was about half-way through, the door behind them opened, and footsteps crossed the threshold. The farmer diminished perceptibly in his chair, and looked fearful, but pretended to be absorbed in the reading, and quite unconscious of an intruder. Anne felt the presence of the swashing Festus, and stopped her reading.

‘Please go on, Miss Anne,’ he said, ‘I am not going to speak a word.’ He withdrew to the mantelpiece and leaned against it at his ease.

‘Go on, do ye, maidy Anne,’ said Uncle Benjy, keeping down his tremblings by a great effort to half their natural extent.

Anne’s voice became much lower now that there were two listeners, and her modesty shrank somewhat from exposing to Festus the appreciative modulations which an intelligent interest in the subject drew from her when unembarrassed. But she still went on that he might not suppose her to be disconcerted, though the ensuing ten minutes was one of disquietude. She knew that the bothering yeoman’s eyes were travelling over her from his position behind, creeping over her shoulders, up to her head, and across her arms and hands. Old Benjy on his part knew the same thing, and after sundry endeavours to peep at his nephew from the corner of his eye, he could bear the situation no longer.

‘Do ye want to say anything to me, nephew?’ he quaked.

‘No, uncle, thank ye,’ said Festus heartily. ‘I like to stay here, thinking of you and looking at your back hair.’

The nervous old man writhed under this vivisection, and Anne read on; till, to the relief of both, the gallant fellow grew tired of his amusement and went out of the room. Anne soon finished her paragraph and rose to go, determined never to come again as long as Festus haunted the precincts. Her face grew warmer as she thought that he would be sure to waylay her on her journey home to-day.

On this account, when she left the house, instead of going in the customary direction, she bolted round to the further side, through the bushes, along under the kitchen-garden wall, and through a door leading into a rutted cart-track, which had been a pleasant gravelled drive when the fine old hall was in its prosperity. Once out of sight of the windows she ran with all her might till she had quitted the park by a route directly opposite to that towards her home. Why she was so seriously bent upon doing this she could hardly tell but the instinct to run was irresistible.

It was necessary now to clamber over the down to the left of the camp, and make a complete circuit round the latter — infantry, cavalry, sutlers, and all — descending to her house on the other side. This tremendous walk she performed at a rapid rate, never once turning her head, and avoiding every beaten track to keep clear of the knots of soldiers taking a walk. When she at last got down to the levels again she paused to fetch breath, and murmured, ‘Why did I take so much trouble? He would not, after all, have hurt me.’

As she neared the mill an erect figure with a blue body and white thighs descended before her from the down towards the village, and went past the mill to a stile beyond, over which she usually returned to her house. Here he lingered. On coming nearer Anne discovered this person to be Trumpet-major Loveday; and not wishing to meet anybody just now Anne passed quickly on, and entered the house by the garden door.

‘My dear Anne, what a time you have been gone!’ said her mother.

‘Yes, I have been round by another road.’

‘Why did you do that?’

Anne looked thoughtful and reticent, for her reason was almost too silly a one to confess. ‘Well, I wanted to avoid a person who is very busy trying to meet me — that’s all,’ she said.

Her mother glanced out of the window. ‘And there he is, I suppose,’ she said, as John Loveday, tired of looking for Anne at the stile, passed the house on his way to his father’s door. He could not help casting his eyes towards their window, and, seeing them, he smiled.

Anne’s reluctance to mention Festus was such that she did not correct her mother’s error, and the dame went on: ‘Well, you are quite right, my dear. Be friendly with him, but no more at present. I have heard of your other affair, and think it is a very wise choice. I am sure you have my best wishes in it, and I only hope it will come to a point.’

‘What’s that?’ said the astonished Anne.

‘You and Mr. Festus Derriman, dear. You need not mind me; I have known it for several days. Old Granny Seamore called here Saturday, and told me she saw him coming home with you across Park Close last week, when you went for the newspaper; so I thought I’d send you again to-day, and give you another chance.’

‘Then you didn’t want the paper — and it was only for that!’

‘He’s a very fine young fellow; he looks a thorough woman’s protector.’

‘He may look it,’ said Anne.

‘He has given up the freehold farm his father held at Pitstock, and lives in independence on what the land brings him. And when Farmer Derriman dies, he’ll have all the old man’s, for certain. He’ll be worth ten thousand pounds, if a penny, in money, besides sixteen horses, cart and hack, a fifty-cow dairy, and at least five hundred sheep.’

Anne turned away, and instead of informing her mother that she had been running like a doe to escape the interesting heir-presumptive alluded to, merely said ‘Mother, I don’t like this at all.’

CHAPTER IX.

ANNE IS KINDLY FETCHED BY THE TRUMPET-MAJOR

After this, Anne would on no account walk in the direction of the hall for fear of another encounter with young Derriman. In the course of a few days it was told in the village that the old farmer had actually gone for a week’s holiday and change of air to the Royal watering-place near at hand, at the instance of his nephew Festus. This was a wonderful thing to hear of Uncle Benjy, who had not slept outside the walls of Oxwell Hall for many a long year before; and Anne well imagined what extraordinary pressure must have been put upon him to induce him to take such a step. She pictured his unhappiness at the bustling watering-place, and hoped no harm would come to him.

She spent much of her time indoors or in the garden, hearing little of the camp movements beyond the periodical Ta-ta-ta-taa of the trumpeters sounding their various ingenious calls for watch-setting, stables, feed, boot-and-saddle, parade, and so on, which made her think how clever her friend the trumpet-major must be to teach his pupils to play those pretty little tunes so well.

On the third morning after Uncle Benjy’s departure, she was disturbed as usual while dressing by the tramp of the troops down the slope to the mill-pond, and during the now familiar stamping and splashing which followed there sounded upon the glass of the window a slight smack, which might have been caused by a whip or switch. She listened more particularly, and it was repeated.

As John Loveday was the only dragoon likely to be aware that she slept in that particular apartment, she imagined the signal to come from him, though wondering that he should venture upon such a freak of familiarity.

Wrapping herself up in a red cloak, she went to the window, gently drew up a corner of the curtain, and peeped out, as she had done many times before. Nobody who was not quite close beneath her window could see her face; but as it happened, somebody was close. The soldiers whose floundering Anne had heard were not Loveday’s dragoons, but a troop of the York Hussars, quite oblivious of her existence. They had passed on out of the water, and instead of them there sat Festus Derriman alone on his horse, and in plain clothes, the water reaching up to the animal’s belly, and Festus’ heels elevated over the saddle to keep them out of the stream, which threatened to wash

rider and horse into the deep mill-head just below. It was plainly he who had struck her lattice, for in a moment he looked up, and their eyes met. Festus laughed loudly, and slapped her window again; and just at that moment the dragoons began prancing down the slope in review order. She could not but wait a minute or two to see them pass. While doing so she was suddenly led to draw back, drop the corner of the curtain, and blush privately in her room. She had not only been seen by Festus Derriman, but by John Loveday, who, riding along with his trumpet slung up behind him, had looked over his shoulder at the phenomenon of Derriman beneath Anne's bedroom window and seemed quite astounded at the sight.

She was quite vexed at the conjunction of incidents, and went no more to the window till the dragoons had ridden far away and she had heard Festus's horse labouriously wade on to dry land. When she looked out there was nobody left but Miller Loveday, who usually stood in the garden at this time of the morning to say a word or two to the soldiers, of whom he already knew so many, and was in a fair way of knowing many more, from the liberality with which he handed round mugs of cheering liquor whenever parties of them walked that way.

In the afternoon of this day Anne walked to a christening party at a neighbour's in the adjoining parish of Springham, intending to walk home again before it got dark; but there was a slight fall of rain towards evening, and she was pressed by the people of the house to stay over the night. With some hesitation she accepted their hospitality; but at ten o'clock, when they were thinking of going to bed, they were startled by a smart rap at the door, and on it being unbolted a man's form was seen in the shadows outside.

'Is Miss Garland here?' the visitor inquired, at which Anne suspended her breath.

'Yes,' said Anne's entertainer, warily.

'Her mother is very anxious to know what's become of her. She promised to come home.' To her great relief Anne recognized the voice as John Loveday's, and not Festus Derriman's.

'Yes, I did, Mr. Loveday,' said she, coming forward; 'but it rained, and I thought my mother would guess where I was.'

Loveday said with diffidence that it had not rained anything to speak of at the camp, or at the mill, so that her mother was rather alarmed.

'And she asked you to come for me?' Anne inquired.

This was a question which the trumpet-major had been dreading during the whole of his walk thither. 'Well, she didn't exactly ask me,' he said rather lamely, but still in a manner to show that Mrs. Garland had indirectly signified such to be her wish. In reality Mrs. Garland had not addressed him at all on the subject. She had merely spoken to his father on finding that her daughter did not return, and received an assurance from the miller that the precious girl was doubtless quite safe. John heard of this inquiry, and, having a pass that evening, resolved to relieve Mrs. Garland's mind on his own responsibility. Ever since his morning view of Festus under her window he

had been on thorns of anxiety, and his thrilling hope now was that she would walk back with him.

He shifted his foot nervously as he made the bold request. Anne felt at once that she would go. There was nobody in the world whose care she would more readily be under than the trumpet-major's in a case like the present. He was their nearest neighbour's son, and she had liked his single-minded ingenuousness from the first moment of his return home.

When they had started on their walk, Anne said in a practical way, to show that there was no sentiment whatever in her acceptance of his company, 'Mother was much alarmed about me, perhaps?'

'Yes; she was uneasy,' he said; and then was compelled by conscience to make a clean breast of it. 'I know she was uneasy, because my father said so. But I did not see her myself. The truth is, she doesn't know I am come.'

Anne now saw how the matter stood; but she was not offended with him. What woman could have been? They walked on in silence, the respectful trumpet-major keeping a yard off on her right as precisely as if that measure had been fixed between them. She had a great feeling of civility toward him this evening, and spoke again. 'I often hear your trumpeters blowing the calls. They do it beautifully, I think.'

'Pretty fair; they might do better,' said he, as one too well-mannered to make much of an accomplishment in which he had a hand.

'And you taught them how to do it?'

'Yes, I taught them.'

'It must require wonderful practice to get them into the way of beginning and finishing so exactly at one time. It is like one throat doing it all. How came you to be a trumpeter, Mr. Loveday?'

'Well, I took to it naturally when I was a little boy,' said he, betrayed into quite a gushing state by her delightful interest. 'I used to make trumpets of paper, eldersticks, elrot stems, and even stinging-nettle stalks, you know. Then father set me to keep the birds off that little barley-ground of his, and gave me an old horn to frighten 'em with. I learnt to blow that horn so that you could hear me for miles and miles. Then he bought me a clarinet, and when I could play that I borrowed a serpent, and I learned to play a tolerable bass. So when I 'listed I was picked out for training as trumpeter at once.'

'Of course you were.'

'Sometimes, however, I wish I had never joined the army. My father gave me a very fair education, and your father showed me how to draw horses — on a slate, I mean. Yes, I ought to have done more than I have.'

'What, did you know my father?' she asked with new interest.

'O yes, for years. You were a little mite of a thing then; and you used to cry when we big boys looked at you, and made pig's eyes at you, which we did sometimes. Many and many a time have I stood by your poor father while he worked. Ah, you don't remember much about him; but I do!'

Anne remained thoughtful; and the moon broke from behind the clouds, lighting up the wet foliage with a twinkling brightness, and lending to each of the trumpet-major's buttons and spurs a little ray of its own. They had come to Oxwell park gate, and he said, 'Do you like going across, or round by the lane?'

'We may as well go by the nearest road,' said Anne.

They entered the park, following the half-obliterated drive till they came almost opposite the hall, when they entered a footpath leading on to the village. While here-about they heard a shout, or chorus of exclamation, apparently from within the walls of the dark buildings near them.

'What was that?' said Anne.

'I don't know,' said her companion. 'I'll go and see.'

He went round the intervening swamp of watercress and brooklime which had once been the fish-pond, crossed by a culvert the trickling brook that still flowed that way, and advanced to the wall of the house. Boisterous noises were resounding from within, and he was tempted to go round the corner, where the low windows were, and look through a chink into the room whence the sounds proceeded.

It was the room in which the owner dined — traditionally called the great parlour — and within it sat about a dozen young men of the yeomanry cavalry, one of them being Festus. They were drinking, laughing, singing, thumping their fists on the tables, and enjoying themselves in the very perfection of confusion. The candles, blown by the breeze from the partly opened window, had guttered into coffin handles and shrouds, and, choked by their long black wicks for want of snuffing, gave out a smoky yellow light. One of the young men might possibly have been in a maudlin state, for he had his arm round the neck of his next neighbour. Another was making an incoherent speech to which nobody was listening. Some of their faces were red, some were sallow; some were sleepy, some wide awake. The only one among them who appeared in his usual frame of mind was Festus, whose huge, burly form rose at the head of the table, enjoying with a serene and triumphant aspect the difference between his own condition and that of his neighbours. While the trumpet-major looked, a young woman, niece of Anthony Cripplestraw, and one of Uncle Benjy's servants, was called in by one of the crew, and much against her will a fiddle was placed in her hands, from which they made her produce discordant screeches.

The absence of Uncle Benjy had, in fact, been contrived by young Derriman that he might make use of the hall on his own account. Cripplestraw had been left in charge, and Festus had found no difficulty in forcing from that dependent the keys of whatever he required. John Loveday turned his eyes from the scene to the neighbouring moonlit path, where Anne still stood waiting. Then he looked into the room, then at Anne again. It was an opportunity of advancing his own cause with her by exposing Festus, for whom he began to entertain hostile feelings of no mean force.

'No; I can't do it,' he said. "'Tis underhand. Let things take their chance.'

He moved away, and then perceived that Anne, tired of waiting, had crossed the stream, and almost come up with him.

‘What is the noise about?’ she said.

‘There’s company in the house,’ said Loveday.

‘Company? Farmer Derriman is not at home,’ said Anne, and went on to the window whence the rays of light leaked out, the trumpet-major standing where he was. He saw her face enter the beam of candlelight, stay there for a moment, and quickly withdraw. She came back to him at once. ‘Let us go on,’ she said.

Loveday imagined from her tone that she must have an interest in Derriman, and said sadly, ‘You blame me for going across to the window, and leading you to follow me.’

‘Not a bit,’ said Anne, seeing his mistake as to the state of her heart, and being rather angry with him for it. ‘I think it was most natural, considering the noise.’

Silence again. ‘Derriman is sober as a judge,’ said Loveday, as they turned to go. ‘It was only the others who were noisy.’

‘Whether he is sober or not is nothing whatever to me,’ said Anne.

‘Of course not. I know it,’ said the trumpet-major, in accents expressing unhappiness at her somewhat curt tone, and some doubt of her assurance.

Before they had emerged from the shadow of the hall some persons were seen moving along the road. Loveday was for going on just the same; but Anne, from a shy feeling that it was as well not to be seen walking alone with a man who was not her lover, said —

‘Mr. Loveday, let us wait here a minute till they have passed.’

On nearer view the group was seen to comprise a man on a piebald horse, and another man walking beside him. When they were opposite the house they halted, and the rider dismounted, whereupon a dispute between him and the other man ensued, apparently on a question of money.

‘Tis old Mr. Derriman come home!’ said Anne. ‘He has hired that horse from the bathing-machine to bring him. Only fancy!’

Before they had gone many steps further the farmer and his companion had ended their dispute, and the latter mounted the horse and cantered away, Uncle Benjy coming on to the house at a nimble pace. As soon as he observed Loveday and Anne, he fell into a feebler gait; when they came up he recognized Anne.

‘And you have torn yourself away from King George’s Esplanade so soon, Farmer Derriman?’ said she.

‘Yes, faith! I couldn’t bide at such a ruination place,’ said the farmer. ‘Your hand in your pocket every minute of the day. ‘Tis a shilling for this, half-a-crown for that; if you only eat one egg, or even a poor windfall of an apple, you’ve got to pay; and a bunch o’ radishes is a halfpenny, and a quart o’ cider a good tuppence three-farthings at lowest reckoning. Nothing without paying! I couldn’t even get a ride homeward upon that screw without the man wanting a shilling for it, when my weight didn’t take a penny out of the beast. I’ve saved a penn’orth or so of shoelather to be sure; but the saddle was so rough wi’ patches that ‘a took twopence out of the seat of my best breeches. King George hev’ ruined the town for other folks. More than that, my

nephew promised to come there to-morrow to see me, and if I had stayed I must have treated en. Hey — what's that?'

It was a shout from within the walls of the building, and Loveday said —
'Your nephew is here, and has company.'

'My nephew here?' gasped the old man. 'Good folks, will you come up to the door with me? I mean — hee — hee — just for company! Dear me, I thought my house was as quiet as a church?'

They went back to the window, and the farmer looked in, his mouth falling apart to a greater width at the corners than in the middle, and his fingers assuming a state of radiation.

'Tis my best silver tankards they've got, that I've never used! O! 'tis my strong beer! 'Tis eight candles guttering away, when I've used nothing but twenties myself for the last half-year!'

'You didn't know he was here, then?' said Loveday.

'O no!' said the farmer, shaking his head half-way. 'Nothing's known to poor I! There's my best rummers jingling as careless as if 'twas tin cups; and my table scratched, and my chairs wrenched out of joint. See how they tilt 'em on the two back legs — and that's ruin to a chair! Ah! when I be gone he won't find another old man to make such work with, and provide goods for his breaking, and house-room and drink for his tear-brass set!'

'Comrades and fellow-soldiers,' said Festus to the hot farmers and yeomen he entertained within, 'as we have vowed to brave danger and death together, so we'll share the couch of peace. You shall sleep here to-night, for it is getting late. My scram blue-vinnied gallicrow of an uncle takes care that there shan't be much comfort in the house, but you can curl up on the furniture if beds run short. As for my sleep, it won't be much. I'm melancholy! A woman has, I may say, got my heart in her pocket, and I have hers in mine. She's not much — to other folk, I mean — but she is to me. The little thing came in my way, and conquered me. I fancy that simple girl! I ought to have looked higher — I know it; what of that? 'Tis a fate that may happen to the greatest men.'

'Whash her name?' said one of the warriors, whose head occasionally drooped upon his epaulettes, and whose eyes fell together in the casual manner characteristic of the tired soldier. (It was really Farmer Stubb, of Duddle Hole.)

'Her name? Well, 'tis spelt, A, N — but, by gad, I won't give ye her name here in company. She don't live a hundred miles off, however, and she wears the prettiest cap-ribbons you ever saw. Well, well, 'tis weakness! She has little, and I have much; but I do adore that girl, in spite of myself!'

'Let's go on,' said Anne.

'Prithee stand by an old man till he's got into his house!' implored Uncle Benjy. 'I only ask ye to bide within call. Stand back under the trees, and I'll do my poor best to give no trouble.'

‘I’ll stand by you for half-an-hour, sir,’ said Loveday. ‘After that I must bolt to camp.’

‘Very well; bide back there under the trees,’ said Uncle Benjy. ‘I don’t want to spite ‘em?’

‘You’ll wait a few minutes, just to see if he gets in?’ said the trumpet-major to Anne as they retired from the old man.

‘I want to get home,’ said Anne anxiously.

When they had quite receded behind the tree-trunks and he stood alone, Uncle Benjy, to their surprise, set up a loud shout, altogether beyond the imagined power of his lungs.

‘Man a-lost! man a-lost!’ he cried, repeating the exclamation several times; and then ran and hid himself behind a corner of the building. Soon the door opened, and Festus and his guests came tumbling out upon the green.

‘Tis our duty to help folks in distress,’ said Festus. ‘Man a-lost, where are you?’

‘Twas across there,’ said one of his friends.

‘No! ‘twas here,’ said another.

Meanwhile Uncle Benjy, coming from his hiding-place, had scampered with the quickness of a boy up to the door they had quitted, and slipped in. In a moment the door flew together, and Anne heard him bolting and barring it inside. The revellers, however, did not notice this, and came on towards the spot where the trumpet-major and Anne were standing.

‘Here’s succour at hand, friends,’ said Festus. ‘We are all king’s men; do not fear us.’

‘Thank you,’ said Loveday; ‘so are we.’ He explained in two words that they were not the distressed traveller who had cried out, and turned to go on.

‘Tis she! my life, ‘tis she said Festus, now first recognizing Anne. ‘Fair Anne, I will not part from you till I see you safe at your own dear door.’

‘She’s in my hands,’ said Loveday civilly, though not without firmness, ‘so it is not required, thank you.’

‘Man, had I but my sword — ’

‘Come,’ said Loveday, ‘I don’t want to quarrel. Let’s put it to her. Whichever of us she likes best, he shall take her home. Miss Anne, which?’

Anne would much rather have gone home alone, but seeing the remainder of the yeomanly party staggering up she thought it best to secure a protector of some kind. How to choose one without offending the other and provoking a quarrel was the difficulty.

‘You must both walk home with me,’ she adroitly said, ‘one on one side, and one on the other. And if you are not quite civil to one another all the time, I’ll never speak to either of you again.’

They agreed to the terms, and the other yeomen arriving at this time said they would go also as rearguard.

‘Very well,’ said Anne. ‘Now go and get your hats, and don’t be long.’

‘Ah, yes; our hats,’ said the yeomanry, whose heads were so hot that they had forgotten their nakedness till then.

‘You’ll wait till we’ve got ‘em — we won’t be a moment,’ said Festus eagerly.

Anne and Loveday said yes, and Festus ran back to the house, followed by all his band.

‘Now let’s run and leave ‘em,’ said Anne, when they were out of hearing.

‘But we’ve promised to wait!’ said the trumpet-major in surprise.

‘Promised to wait!’ said Anne indignantly. ‘As if one ought to keep such a promise to drunken men as that. You can do as you like, I shall go.’

‘It is hardly fair to leave the chaps,’ said Loveday reluctantly, and looking back at them. But she heard no more, and flitting off under the trees, was soon lost to his sight.

Festus and the rest had by this time reached Uncle Benjy’s door, which they were discomfited and astonished to find closed. They began to knock, and then to kick at the venerable timber, till the old man’s head, crowned with a tasselled nightcap, appeared at an upper window, followed by his shoulders, with apparently nothing on but his shirt, though it was in truth a sheet thrown over his coat.

‘Fie, fie upon ye all for making such a hullabaloo at a weak old man’s door,’ he said, yawning. ‘What’s in ye to rouse honest folks at this time o’ night?’

‘Hang me — why — it’s Uncle Benjy! Haw — haw — haw?’ said Festus. ‘Nunc, why how the devil’s this? ‘Tis I — Festus — wanting to come in.’

‘O no, no, my clever man, whoever you be!’ said Uncle Benjy in a tone of incredulous integrity. ‘My nephew, dear boy, is miles away at quarters, and sound asleep by this time, as becomes a good soldier. That story won’t do to-night, my man, not at all.’

‘Upon my soul ‘tis I,’ said Festus.

‘Not to-night, my man; not to-night! Anthony, bring my blunderbuss,’ said the farmer, turning and addressing nobody inside the room.

‘Let’s break in the window-shutters,’ said one of the others.

‘My wig, and we will!’ said Festus. ‘What a trick of the old man!’

‘Get some big stones,’ said the yeomen, searching under the wall.

‘No; forbear, forbear,’ said Festus, beginning to be frightened at the spirit he had raised. ‘I forget; we should drive him into fits, for he’s subject to ‘em, and then perhaps ‘twould be manslaughter. Comrades, we must march! No, we’ll lie in the barn. I’ll see into this, take my word for ‘t. Our honour is at stake. Now let’s back to see my beauty home.’

‘We can’t, as we hav’n’t got our hats,’ said one of his fellow-troopers — in domestic life Jacob Noakes, of Muckleford Farm.

‘No more we can,’ said Festus, in a melancholy tone. ‘But I must go to her and tell her the reason. She pulls me in spite of all.’

‘She’s gone. I saw her flee across park while we were knocking at the door,’ said another of the yeomanry.

‘Gone!’ said Festus, grinding his teeth and putting himself into a rigid shape. ‘Then ‘tis my enemy — he has tempted her away with him! But I am a rich man, and he’s poor, and rides the King’s horse while I ride my own. Could I but find that fellow, that regular, that common man, I would — ’

‘Yes?’ said the trumpet-major, coming up behind him.

‘I,’ — said Festus, starting round, — ‘I would seize him by the hand and say, “Guard her; if you are my friend, guard her from all harm!”’

‘A good speech. And I will, too,’ said Loveday heartily.

‘And now for shelter,’ said Festus to his companions.

They then unceremoniously left Loveday, without wishing him good-night, and proceeded towards the barn. He crossed the park and ascended the down to the camp, grieved that he had given Anne cause of complaint, and fancying that she held him of slight account beside his wealthier rival.

CHAPTER X.

THE MATCH-MAKING VIRTUES OF A DOUBLE GARDEN

Anne was so flurried by the military incidents attending her return home that she was almost afraid to venture alone outside her mother’s premises. Moreover, the numerous soldiers, regular and otherwise, that haunted Overcombe and its neighbourhood, were getting better acquainted with the villagers, and the result was that they were always standing at garden gates, walking in the orchards, or sitting gossiping just within cottage doors, with the bowls of their tobacco-pipes thrust outside for politeness’ sake, that they might not defile the air of the household. Being gentlemen of a gallant and most affectionate nature, they naturally turned their heads and smiled if a pretty girl passed by, which was rather disconcerting to the latter if she were unused to society. Every belle in the village soon had a lover, and when the belles were all allotted those who scarcely deserved that title had their turn, many of the soldiers being not at all particular about half-an-inch of nose more or less, a trifling deficiency of teeth, or a larger crop of freckles than is customary in the Saxon race. Thus, with one and another, courtship began to be practised in Overcombe on rather a large scale, and the dispossessed young men who had been born in the place were left to take their walks alone, where, instead of studying the works of nature, they meditated gross outrages on the brave men who had been so good as to visit their village.

Anne watched these romantic proceedings from her window with much interest, and when she saw how triumphantly other handsome girls of the neighbourhood walked by on the gorgeous arms of Lieutenant Knockheelmann, Cornet Flitzenhart, and Captain Klaspenkissen, of the thrilling York Hussars, who swore the most picturesque foreign oaths, and had a wonderful sort of estate or property called the Vaterland in their country across the sea, she was filled with a sense of her own loneliness. It made her think of things which she tried to forget, and to look into a little drawer at something

soft and brown that lay in a curl there, wrapped in paper. At last she could bear it no longer, and went downstairs.

‘Where are you going?’ said Mrs. Garland.

‘To see the folks, because I am so gloomy!’

‘Certainly not at present, Anne.’

‘Why not, mother?’ said Anne, blushing with an indefinite sense of being very wicked.

‘Because you must not. I have been going to tell you several times not to go into the street at this time of day. Why not walk in the morning? There’s young Mr. Derriman would be glad to — ’

‘Don’t mention him, mother, don’t!’

‘Well then, dear, walk in the garden.’

So poor Anne, who really had not the slightest wish to throw her heart away upon a soldier, but merely wanted to displace old thoughts by new, turned into the inner garden from day to day, and passed a good many hours there, the pleasant birds singing to her, and the delightful butterflies alighting on her hat, and the horrid ants running up her stockings.

This garden was undivided from Loveday’s, the two having originally been the single garden of the whole house. It was a quaint old place, enclosed by a thorn hedge so shapely and dense from incessant clipping that the mill-boy could walk along the top without sinking in — a feat which he often performed as a means of filling out his day’s work. The soil within was of that intense fat blackness which is only seen after a century of constant cultivation. The paths were grassed over, so that people came and went upon them without being heard. The grass harboured slugs, and on this account the miller was going to replace it by gravel as soon as he had time; but as he had said this for thirty years without doing it, the grass and the slugs seemed likely to remain.

The miller’s man attended to Mrs. Garland’s piece of the garden as well as to the larger portion, digging, planting, and weeding indifferently in both, the miller observing with reason that it was not worth while for a helpless widow lady to hire a man for her little plot when his man, working alongside, could tend it without much addition to his labour. The two households were on this account even more closely united in the garden than within the mill. Out there they were almost one family, and they talked from plot to plot with a zest and animation which Mrs. Garland could never have anticipated when she first removed thither after her husband’s death.

The lower half of the garden, farthest from the road, was the most snug and sheltered part of this snug and sheltered enclosure, and it was well watered as the land of Lot. Three small brooks, about a yard wide, ran with a tinkling sound from side to side between the plots, crossing the path under wood slabs laid as bridges, and passing out of the garden through little tunnels in the hedge. The brooks were so far overhung at their brinks by grass and garden produce that, had it not been for their perpetual babbling, few would have noticed that they were there. This was where Anne liked

best to linger when her excursions became restricted to her own premises; and in a spot of the garden not far removed the trumpet-major loved to linger also.

Having by virtue of his office no stable duty to perform, he came down from the camp to the mill almost every day; and Anne, finding that he adroitly walked and sat in his father's portion of the garden whenever she did so in the other half, could not help smiling and speaking to him. So his epaulettes and blue jacket, and Anne's yellow gipsy hat, were often seen in different parts of the garden at the same time; but he never intruded into her part of the enclosure, nor did she into Loveday's. She always spoke to him when she saw him there, and he replied in deep, firm accents across the gooseberry bushes, or through the tall rows of flowering peas, as the case might be. He thus gave her accounts at fifteen paces of his experiences in camp, in quarters, in Flanders, and elsewhere; of the difference between line and column, of forced marches, billeting, and such-like, together with his hopes of promotion. Anne listened at first indifferently; but knowing no one else so good-natured and experienced, she grew interested in him as in a brother. By degrees his gold lace, buckles, and spurs lost all their strangeness and were as familiar to her as her own clothes.

At last Mrs. Garland noticed this growing friendship, and began to despair of her motherly scheme of uniting Anne to the moneyed Festus. Why she could not take prompt steps to check interference with her plans arose partly from her nature, which was the reverse of managing, and partly from a new emotional circumstance with which she found it difficult to reckon. The near neighbourhood that had produced the friendship of Anne for John Loveday was slowly effecting a warmer liking between her mother and his father.

Thus the month of July passed. The troop horses came with the regularity of clock-work twice a day down to drink under her window, and, as the weather grew hotter, kicked up their heels and shook their heads furiously under the maddening sting of the dun-fly. The green leaves in the garden became of a darker dye, the gooseberries ripened, and the three brooks were reduced to half their winter volume.

At length the earnest trumpet-major obtained Mrs. Garland's consent to take her and her daughter to the camp, which they had not yet viewed from any closer point than their own windows. So one afternoon they went, the miller being one of the party. The villagers were by this time driving a roaring trade with the soldiers, who purchased of them every description of garden produce, milk, butter, and eggs at liberal prices. The figures of these rural sutlers could be seen creeping up the slopes, laden like bees, to a spot in the rear of the camp, where there was a kind of market-place on the greensward.

Mrs. Garland, Anne, and the miller were conducted from one place to another, and on to the quarter where the soldiers' wives lived who had not been able to get lodgings in the cottages near. The most sheltered place had been chosen for them, and snug huts had been built for their use by their husbands, of clods, hurdles, a little thatch, or whatever they could lay hands on. The trumpet-major conducted his friends thence to

the large barn which had been appropriated as a hospital, and to the cottage with its windows bricked up, that was used as the magazine; then they inspected the lines of shining dark horses (each representing the then high figure of two-and-twenty guineas purchase money), standing patiently at the ropes which stretched from one picket-post to another, a bank being thrown up in front of them as a protection at night.

They passed on to the tents of the German Legion, a well-grown and rather dandy set of men, with a poetical look about their faces which rendered them interesting to feminine eyes. Hanoverians, Saxons, Prussians, Swedes, Hungarians, and other foreigners were numbered in their ranks. They were cleaning arms, which they leant carefully against a rail when the work was complete.

On their return they passed the mess-house, a temporary wooden building with a brick chimney. As Anne and her companions went by, a group of three or four of the hussars were standing at the door talking to a dashing young man, who was expatiating on the qualities of a horse that one was inclined to buy. Anne recognized Festus Derriman in the seller, and Cripplestraw was trotting the animal up and down. As soon as she caught the yeoman's eye he came forward, making some friendly remark to the miller, and then turning to Miss Garland, who kept her eyes steadily fixed on the distant landscape till he got so near that it was impossible to do so longer. Festus looked from Anne to the trumpet-major, and from the trumpet-major back to Anne, with a dark expression of face, as if he suspected that there might be a tender understanding between them.

'Are you offended with me?' he said to her in a low voice of repressed resentment.

'No,' said Anne.

'When are you coming to the hall again?'

'Never, perhaps.'

'Nonsense, Anne,' said Mrs. Garland, who had come near, and smiled pleasantly on Festus. 'You can go at any time, as usual.'

'Let her come with me now, Mrs. Garland; I should be pleased to walk along with her. My man can lead home the horse.'

'Thank you, but I shall not come,' said Miss Anne coldly.

The widow looked unhappily in her daughter's face, distressed between her desire that Anne should encourage Festus, and her wish to consult Anne's own feelings.

'Leave her alone, leave her alone,' said Festus, his gaze blackening. 'Now I think of it I am glad she can't come with me, for I am engaged;' and he stalked away.

Anne moved on with her mother, young Loveday silently following, and they began to descend the hill.

'Well, where's Mr. Loveday?' asked Mrs. Garland.

'Father's behind,' said John.

Mrs. Garland looked behind her solicitously; and the miller, who had been waiting for the event, beckoned to her.

'I'll overtake you in a minute,' she said to the younger pair, and went back, her colour, for some unaccountable reason, rising as she

did so. The miller and she then came on slowly together, conversing in very low tones, and when they got to the bottom they stood still. Loveday and Anne waited for them, saying but little to each other, for the rencounter with Festus had damped the spirits of both. At last the widow's private talk with Miller Loveday came to an end, and she hastened onward, the miller going in another direction to meet a man on business. When she reached the trumpet-major and Anne she was looking very bright and rather flurried, and seemed sorry when Loveday said that he must leave them and return to the camp. They parted in their usual friendly manner, and Anne and her mother were left to walk the few remaining yards alone.

'There, I've settled it,' said Mrs. Garland. 'Anne, what are you thinking about? I have settled in my mind that it is all right.'

'What's all right?' said Anne.

'That you do not care for Derriman, and mean to encourage John Loveday. What's all the world so long as folks are happy! Child, don't take any notice of what I have said about Festus, and don't meet him any more.'

'What a weathercock you are, mother! Why should you say that just now?'

'It is easy to call me a weathercock,' said the matron, putting on the look of a good woman; 'but I have reasoned it out, and at last, thank God, I have got over my ambition. The Lovedays are our true and only friends, and Mr. Festus Derriman, with all his money, is nothing to us at all.'

'But,' said Anne, 'what has made you change all of a sudden from what you have said before?'

'My feelings and my reason, which I am thankful for!'

Anne knew that her mother's sentiments were naturally so versatile that they could not be depended on for two days together; but it did not occur to her for the moment that a change had been helped on in the present case by a romantic talk between Mrs. Garland and the miller. But Mrs. Garland could not keep the secret long. She chatted gaily as she walked, and before they had entered the house she said, 'What do you think Mr Loveday has been saying to me, dear Anne?'

Anne did not know at all.

'Why, he has asked me to marry him.'

CHAPTER XI.

OUR PEOPLE ARE AFFECTED BY THE PRESENCE OF ROYALTY

To explain the miller's sudden proposal it is only necessary to go back to that moment when Anne, Festus, and Mrs. Garland were talking together on the down. John Loveday had fallen behind so as not to interfere with a meeting in which he was de-

cidedly superfluous; and his father, who guessed the trumpet-major's secret, watched his face as he stood. John's face was sad, and his eyes followed Mrs. Garland's encouraging manner to Festus in a way which plainly said that every parting of her lips was tribulation to him. The miller loved his son as much as any miller or private gentleman could do, and he was pained to see John's gloom at such a trivial circumstance. So what did he resolve but to help John there and then by precipitating a matter which, had he himself been the only person concerned, he would have delayed for another six months.

He had long liked the society of his impulsive, tractable neighbour, Mrs. Garland; had mentally taken her up and pondered her in connection with the question whether it would not be for the happiness of both if she were to share his home, even though she was a little his superior in antecedents and knowledge. In fact he loved her; not tragically, but to a very creditable extent for his years; that is, next to his sons, Bob and John, though he knew very well of that ploughed-ground appearance near the corners of her once handsome eyes, and that the little depression in her right cheek was not the lingering dimple it was poetically assumed to be, but a result of the abstraction of some worn-out nether millstones within the cheek by Rootle, the Budmouth man, who lived by such practices on the heads of the elderly. But what of that, when he had lost two to each one of hers, and exceeded her in age by some eight years! To do John a service, then, he quickened his designs, and put the question to her while they were standing under the eyes of the younger pair.

Mrs. Garland, though she had been interested in the miller for a long time, and had for a moment now and then thought on this question as far as, 'Suppose he should, 'If he were to,' and so on, had never thought much further; and she was really taken by surprise when the question came. She answered without affectation that she would think over the proposal; and thus they parted.

Her mother's infirmity of purpose set Anne thinking, and she was suddenly filled with a conviction that in such a case she ought to have some purpose herself. Mrs. Garland's complacency at the miller's offer had, in truth, amazed her. While her mother had held up her head, and recommended Festus, it had seemed a very pretty thing to rebel; but the pressure being removed an awful sense of her own responsibility took possession of her mind. As there was no longer anybody to be wise or ambitious for her, surely she should be wise and ambitious for herself, discountenance her mother's attachment, and encourage Festus in his addresses, for her own and her mother's good. There had been a time when a Loveday thrilled her own heart; but that was long ago, before she had thought of position or differences. To wake into cold daylight like this, when and because her mother had gone into the land of romance, was dreadful and new to her, and like an increase of years without living them.

But it was easier to think that she ought to marry the yeoman than to take steps for doing it; and she went on living just as before, only with a little more thoughtfulness in her eyes.

Two days after the visit to the camp, when she was again in the garden, Soldier Loveday said to her, at a distance of five rows of beans and a parsley-bed —

‘You have heard the news, Miss Garland?’

‘No,’ said Anne, without looking up from a book she was reading.

‘The King is coming to-morrow.’

‘The King?’ She looked up then.

‘Yes; to Gloucester Lodge; and he will pass this way. He can’t arrive till long past the middle of the night, if what they say is true, that he is timed to change horses at Woodyates Inn — between Mid and South Wessex — at twelve o’clock,’ continued Loveday, encouraged by her interest to cut off the parsley-bed from the distance between them.

Miller Loveday came round the corner of the house.

‘Have ye heard about the King coming, Miss Maily Anne?’ he said.

Anne said that she had just heard of it; and the trumpet-major, who hardly welcomed his father at such a moment, explained what he knew of the matter.

‘And you will go with your regiment to meet ‘em, I suppose?’ said old Loveday.

Young Loveday said that the men of the German Legion were to perform that duty. And turning half from his father, and half towards Anne, he added, in a tentative tone, that he thought he might get leave for the night, if anybody would like to be taken to the top of the Ridgeway over which the royal party must pass.

Anne, knowing by this time of the budding hope in the gallant dragoon’s mind, and not wishing to encourage it, said, ‘I don’t want to go.’

The miller looked disappointed as well as John.

‘Your mother might like to?’

‘Yes, I am going indoors, and I’ll ask her if you wish me to,’ said she.

She went indoors and rather coldly told her mother of the proposal. Mrs. Garland, though she had determined not to answer the miller’s question on matrimony just yet, was quite ready for this jaunt, and in spite of Anne she sailed off at once to the garden to hear more about it. When she re-entered, she said —

‘Anne, I have not seen the King or the King’s horses for these many years; and I am going.’

‘Ah, it is well to be you, mother,’ said Anne, in an elderly tone.

‘Then you won’t come with us?’ said Mrs. Garland, rather rebuffed.

‘I have very different things to think of,’ said her daughter with virtuous emphasis, ‘than going to see sights at that time of night.’

Mrs. Garland was sorry, but resolved to adhere to the arrangement. The night came on; and it having gone abroad that the King would pass by the road, many of the villagers went out to see the procession. When the two Lovedays and Mrs. Garland were gone, Anne bolted the door for security, and sat down to think again on her grave responsibilities in the choice of a husband, now that her natural guardian could no longer be trusted.

A knock came to the door.

Anne's instinct was at once to be silent, that the comer might think the family had retired.

The knocking person, however, was not to be easily persuaded. He had in fact seen rays of light over the top of the shutter, and, unable to get an answer, went on to the door of the mill, which was still going, the miller sometimes grinding all night when busy. The grinder accompanied the stranger to Mrs. Garland's door.

'The daughter is certainly at home, sir,' said the grinder. 'I'll go round to t'other side, and see if she's there, Master Derriman.'

'I want to take her out to see the King,' said Festus.

Anne had started at the sound of the voice. No opportunity could have been better for carrying out her new convictions on the disposal of her hand. But in her mortal dislike of Festus, Anne forgot her principles, and her idea of keeping herself above the Lovedays. Tossing on her hat and blowing out the candle, she slipped out at the back door, and hastily followed in the direction that her mother and the rest had taken. She overtook them as they were beginning to climb the hill.

'What! you have altered your mind after all?' said the widow. 'How came you to do that, my dear?'

'I thought I might as well come,' said Anne.

'To be sure you did,' said the miller heartily. 'A good deal better than biding at home there.'

John said nothing, though she could almost see through the gloom how glad he was that she had altered her mind. When they reached the ridge over which the highway stretched they found many of their neighbours who had got there before them idling on the grass border between the roadway and the hedge, enjoying a sort of midnight picnic, which it was easy to do, the air being still and dry. Some carriages were also standing near, though most people of the district who possessed four wheels, or even two, had driven into the town to await the King there. From this height could be seen in the distance the position of the watering-place, an additional number of lanterns, lamps, and candles having been lighted to-night by the loyal burghers to grace the royal entry, if it should occur before dawn.

Mrs. Garland touched Anne's elbow several times as they walked, and the young woman at last understood that this was meant as a hint to her to take the trumpet-major's arm, which its owner was rather suggesting than offering to her. Anne wondered what infatuation was possessing her mother, declined to take the arm, and contrived to get in front with the miller, who mostly kept in the van to guide the others' footsteps. The trumpet-major was left with Mrs. Garland, and Anne's encouraging pursuit of them induced him to say a few words to the former.

'By your leave, ma'am, I'll speak to you on something that concerns my mind very much indeed?'

'Certainly.'

'It is my wish to be allowed to pay my addresses to your daughter.'

'I thought you meant that,' said Mrs. Garland simply.

‘And you’ll not object?’

‘I shall leave it to her. I don’t think she will agree, even if I do.’

The soldier sighed, and seemed helpless. ‘Well, I can but ask her,’ he said.

The spot on which they had finally chosen to wait for the King was by a field gate, whence the white road could be seen for a long distance northwards by day, and some little distance now. They lingered and lingered, but no King came to break the silence of that beautiful summer night. As half-hour after half-hour glided by, and nobody came, Anne began to get weary; she knew why her mother did not propose to go back, and regretted the reason. She would have proposed it herself, but that Mrs. Garland seemed so cheerful, and as wide awake as at noonday, so that it was almost a cruelty to disturb her.

The trumpet-major at last made up his mind, and tried to draw Anne into a private conversation. The feeling which a week ago had been a vague and piquant aspiration, was to-day altogether too lively for the reasoning of this warm-hearted soldier to regulate. So he persevered in his intention to catch her alone, and at last, in spite of her manoeuvres to the contrary, he succeeded. The miller and Mrs. Garland had walked about fifty yards further on, and Anne and himself were left standing by the gate.

But the gallant musician’s soul was so much disturbed by tender vibrations and by the sense of his presumption that he could not begin; and it may be questioned if he would ever have broached the subject at all, had not a distant church clock opportunely assisted him by striking the hour of three. The trumpet-major heaved a breath of relief.

‘That clock strikes in G sharp,’ he said.

‘Indeed — G sharp?’ said Anne civilly.

‘Yes. ‘Tis a fine-toned bell. I used to notice that note when I was a boy.’

‘Did you — the very same?’

‘Yes; and since then I had a wager about that bell with the bandmaster of the North Wessex Militia. He said the note was G; I said it wasn’t. When we found it G sharp we didn’t know how to settle it.’

‘It is not a deep note for a clock.’

‘O no! The finest tenor bell about here is the bell of Peter’s, Casterbridge — in E flat. Tum-m-m-m — that’s the note — tum-m-m-m.’ The trumpet-major sounded from far down his throat what he considered to be E flat, with a parenthetic sense of luxury unquenchable even by his present distraction.

‘Shall we go on to where my mother is?’ said Anne, less impressed by the beauty of the note than the trumpet-major himself was.

‘In one minute,’ he said tremulously. ‘Talking of music — I fear you don’t think the rank of a trumpet-major much to compare with your own?’

‘I do. I think a trumpet-major a very respectable man.’

‘I am glad to hear you say that. It is given out by the King’s command that trumpet-majors are to be considered respectable.’

‘Indeed! Then I am, by chance, more loyal than I thought for.’

‘I get a good deal a year extra to the trumpeters, because of my position.’

‘That’s very nice.’

‘And I am not supposed ever to drink with the trumpeters who serve beneath me.’

‘Naturally.’

‘And, by the orders of the War Office, I am to exert over them (that’s the government word) exert over them full authority; and if any one behaves towards me with the least impropriety, or neglects my orders, he is to be confined and reported.’

‘It is really a dignified post,’ she said, with, however, a reserve of enthusiasm which was not altogether encouraging.

‘And of course some day I shall,’ stammered the dragoon — ‘shall be in rather a better position than I am at present.’

‘I am glad to hear it, Mr. Loveday.’

‘And in short, Mistress Anne,’ continued John Loveday bravely and desperately, ‘may I pay court to you in the hope that — no, no, don’t go away! — you haven’t heard yet — that you may make me the happiest of men; not yet, but when peace is proclaimed and all is smooth and easy again? I can’t put it any better, though there’s more to be explained.’

‘This is most awkward,’ said Anne, evidently with pain. ‘I cannot possibly agree; believe me, Mr. Loveday, I cannot.’

‘But there’s more than this. You would be surprised to see what snug rooms the married trumpet- and sergeant-majors have in quarters.’

‘Barracks are not all; consider camp and war.’

‘That brings me to my strong point!’ exclaimed the soldier hopefully. ‘My father is better off than most non-commissioned officers’ fathers; and there’s always a home for you at his house in any emergency. I can tell you privately that he has enough to keep us both, and if you wouldn’t hear of barracks, well, peace once established, I’d live at home as a miller and farmer — next door to your own mother.’

‘My mother would be sure to object,’ expostulated Anne.

‘No; she leaves it all to you.’

‘What! you have asked her?’ said Anne, with surprise.

‘Yes. I thought it would not be honourable to act otherwise.’

‘That’s very good of you,’ said Anne, her face warming with a generous sense of his straightforwardness. ‘But my mother is so entirely ignorant of a soldier’s life, and the life of a soldier’s wife — she is so simple in all such matters, that I cannot listen to you any more readily for what she may say.’

‘Then it is all over for me,’ said the poor trumpet-major, wiping his face and putting away his handkerchief with an air of finality.

Anne was silent. Any woman who has ever tried will know without explanation what an unpalatable task it is to dismiss, even when she does not love him, a man who has all the natural and moral qualities she would desire, and only fails in the social. Would-be lovers are not so numerous, even with the best women, that the sacrifice of

one can be felt as other than a good thing wasted, in a world where there are few good things.

‘You are not angry, Miss Garland?’ said he, finding that she did not speak.

‘O no. Don’t let us say anything more about this now.’ And she moved on.

When she drew near to the miller and her mother she perceived that they were engaged in a conversation of that peculiar kind which is all the more full and communicative from the fact of definitive words being few. In short, here the game was succeeding which with herself had failed. It was pretty clear from the symptoms, marks, tokens, telegraphs, and general byplay between widower and widow, that Miller Loveday must have again said to Mrs. Garland some such thing as he had said before, with what result this time she did not know.

As the situation was delicate, Anne halted awhile apart from them. The trumpet-major, quite ignorant of how his cause was entered into by the white-coated man in the distance (for his father had not yet told him of his designs upon Mrs. Garland), did not advance, but stood still by the gate, as though he were attending a princess, waiting till he should be called up. Thus they lingered, and the day began to break. Mrs. Garland and the miller took no heed of the time, and what it was bringing to earth and sky, so occupied were they with themselves; but Anne in her place and the trumpet-major in his, each in private thought of no bright kind, watched the gradual glory of the east through all its tones and changes. The world of birds and insects got lively, the blue and the yellow and the gold of Loveday’s uniform again became distinct; the sun bored its way upward, the fields, the trees, and the distant landscape kindled to flame, and the trumpet-major, backed by a lilac shadow as tall as a steeple, blazed in the rays like a very god of war.

It was half-past three o’clock. A short time after, a rattle of horses and wheels reached their ears from the quarter in which they gazed, and there appeared upon the white line of road a moving mass, which presently ascended the hill and drew near.

Then there arose a huzza from the few knots of watchers gathered there, and they cried, ‘Long live King Jarge!’ The cortege passed abreast. It consisted of three travelling-carriages, escorted by a detachment of the German Legion. Anne was told to look in the first carriage — a post-chariot drawn by four horses — for the King and Queen, and was rewarded by seeing a profile reminding her of the current coin of the realm; but as the party had been travelling all night, and the spectators here gathered were few, none of the royal family looked out of the carriage windows. It was said that the two elder princesses were in the same carriage, but they remained invisible. The next vehicle, a coach and four, contained more princesses, and the third some of their attendants.

‘Thank God, I have seen my King!’ said Mrs. Garland, when they had all gone by.

Nobody else expressed any thankfulness, for most of them had expected a more pompous procession than the bucolic tastes of the King cared to indulge in; and one old man said grimly that that sight of dusty old leather coaches was not worth waiting for. Anne looked hither and thither in the bright rays of the day, each of her eyes

having a little sun in it, which gave her glance a peculiar golden fire, and kindled the brown curls grouped over her forehead to a yellow brilliancy, and made single hairs, blown astray by the night, look like lacquered wires. She was wondering if Festus were anywhere near, but she could not see him.

Before they left the ridge they turned their attention towards the Royal watering-place, which was visible at this place only as a portion of the sea-shore, from which the night-mist was rolling slowly back. The sea beyond was still wrapped in summer fog, the ships in the roads showing through it as black spiders suspended in the air. While they looked and walked a white jet of smoke burst from a spot which the miller knew to be the battery in front of the King's residence, and then the report of guns reached their ears. This announcement was answered by a salute from the Castle of the adjoining Isle, and the ships in the neighbouring anchorage. All the bells in the town began ringing. The King and his family had arrived.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW EVERYBODY GREAT AND SMALL CLIMBED TO THE TOP OF THE DOWNS

As the days went on, echoes of the life and bustle of the town reached the ears of the quiet people in Overcombe hollow — exciting and moving those unimportant natives as a ground-swell moves the weeds in a cave. Travelling-carriages of all kinds and colours climbed and descended the road that led towards the seaside borough. Some contained those personages of the King's suite who had not kept pace with him in his journey from Windsor; others were the coaches of aristocracy, big and little, whom news of the King's arrival drew thither for their own pleasure: so that the highway, as seen from the hills about Overcombe, appeared like an ant-walk — a constant succession of dark spots creeping along its surface at nearly uniform rates of progress, and all in one direction.

The traffic and intelligence between camp and town passed in a measure over the villagers' heads. It being summer time the miller was much occupied with business, and the trumpet-major was too constantly engaged in marching between the camp and Gloucester Lodge with the rest of the dragoons to bring his friends any news for some days.

At last he sent a message that there was to be a review on the downs by the King, and that it was fixed for the day following. This information soon spread through the village and country round, and next morning the whole population of Overcombe — except two or three very old men and women, a few babies and their nurses, a cripple, and Corporal Tullidge — ascended the slope with the crowds from afar, and awaited the events of the day.

The miller wore his best coat on this occasion, which meant a good deal. An Overcombe man in those days would have a best coat, and keep it as a best coat half his

life. The miller's had seen five and twenty summers chiefly through the chinks of a clothes-box, and was not at all shabby as yet, though getting singular. But that could not be helped; common coats and best coats were distinct species, and never interchangeable. Living so near the scene of the review he walked up the hill, accompanied by Mrs. Garland and Anne as usual.

It was a clear day, with little wind stirring, and the view from the downs, one of the most extensive in the county, was unclouded. The eye of any observer who cared for such things swept over the wave-washed town, and the bay beyond, and the Isle, with its pebble bank, lying on the sea to the left of these, like a great crouching animal tethered to the mainland. On the extreme east of the marine horizon, St. Aldhelm's Head closed the scene, the sea to the southward of that point glaring like a mirror under the sun. Inland could be seen Badbury Rings, where a beacon had been recently erected; and nearer, Rainbarrow, on Egdon Heath, where another stood: farther to the left Bulbarrow, where there was yet another. Not far from this came Nettlecombe Tout; to the west, Dogberry Hill, and Black'on near to the foreground, the beacon thereon being built of furze faggots thatched with straw, and standing on the spot where the monument now raises its head.

At nine o'clock the troops marched upon the ground — some from the camps in the vicinity, and some from quarters in the different towns round about. The approaches to the down were blocked with carriages of all descriptions, ages, and colours, and with pedestrians of every class. At ten the royal personages were said to be drawing near, and soon after the King, accompanied by the Dukes of Cambridge and Cumberland, and a couple of generals, appeared on horseback, wearing a round hat turned up at the side, with a cockade and military feather. (Sensation among the crowd.) Then the Queen and three of the princesses entered the field in a great coach drawn by six beautiful cream-coloured horses. Another coach, with four horses of the same sort, brought the two remaining princesses. (Confused acclamations, 'There's King Jarge!' 'That's Queen Sharlett!' 'Princess 'Lizabeth!' 'Princesses Sophiar and Meelyer!' etc., from the surrounding spectators.)

Anne and her party were fortunate enough to secure a position on the top of one of the barrows which rose here and there on the down; and the miller having gallantly constructed a little cairn of flints, he placed the two women thereon, by which means they were enabled to see over the heads, horses, and coaches of the multitudes below and around. At the march-past the miller's eye, which had been wandering about for the purpose, discovered his son in his place by the trumpeters, who had moved forwards in two ranks, and were sounding the march.

'That's John!' he cried to the widow. 'His trumpet-sling is of two colours, d'ye see; and the others be plain.'

Mrs. Garland too saw him now, and enthusiastically admired him from her hands upwards, and Anne silently did the same. But before the young woman's eyes had quite left the trumpet-major they fell upon the figure of Yeoman Festus riding with his troop, and keeping his face at a medium between haughtiness and mere bravery.

He certainly looked as soldierly as any of his own corps, and felt more soldierly than half-a-dozen, as anybody could see by observing him. Anne got behind the miller, in case Festus should discover her, and, regardless of his monarch, rush upon her in a rage with, 'Why the devil did you run away from me that night — hey, madam?' But she resolved to think no more of him just now, and to stick to Loveday, who was her mother's friend. In this she was helped by the stirring tones which burst from the latter gentleman and his subordinates from time to time.

'Well,' said the miller complacently, 'there's few of more consequence in a regiment than a trumpeter. He's the chap that tells 'em what to do, after all. Hey, Mrs. Garland?'

'So he is, miller,' said she.

'They could no more do without Jack and his men than they could without generals.'

'Indeed they could not,' said Mrs. Garland again, in a tone of pleasant agreement with any one in Great Britain or Ireland.

It was said that the line that day was three miles long, reaching from the high ground on the right of where the people stood to the turnpike road on the left. After the review came a sham fight, during which action the crowd dispersed more widely over the downs, enabling Widow Garland to get still clearer glimpses of the King, and his handsome charger, and the head of the Queen, and the elbows and shoulders of the princesses in the carriages, and fractional parts of General Garth and the Duke of Cumberland; which sights gave her great gratification. She tugged at her daughter at every opportunity, exclaiming, 'Now you can see his feather!' 'There's her hat!' 'There's her Majesty's India muslin shawl!' in a minor form of ecstasy, that made the miller think her more girlish and animated than her daughter Anne.

In those military manoeuvres the miller followed the fortunes of one man; Anne Garland of two. The spectators, who, unlike our party, had no personal interest in the soldiery, saw only troops and battalions in the concrete, straight lines of red, straight lines of blue, white lines formed of innumerable knee-breeches, black lines formed of many gaiters, coming and going in kaleidoscopic change. Who thought of every point in the line as an isolated man, each dwelling all to himself in the hermitage of his own mind? One person did, a young man far removed from the barrow where the Garlands and Miller Loveday stood. The natural expression of his face was somewhat obscured by the bronzing effects of rough weather, but the lines of his mouth showed that affectionate impulses were strong within him — perhaps stronger than judgment well could regulate. He wore a blue jacket with little brass buttons, and was plainly a seafaring man.

Meanwhile, in the part of the plain where rose the tumulus on which the miller had established himself, a broad-brimmed tradesman was elbowing his way along. He saw Mr. Loveday from the base of the barrow, and beckoned to attract his attention. Loveday went halfway down, and the other came up as near as he could.

'Miller,' said the man, 'a letter has been lying at the post-office for you for the last three days. If I had known that I should see ye here I'd have brought it along with me.'

The miller thanked him for the news, and they parted, Loveday returning to the summit. 'What a very strange thing!' he said to Mrs. Garland, who had looked inquiringly at his face, now very grave. 'That was Budmouth postmaster, and he says there's a letter for me. Ah, I now call to mind that there was a letter in the candle three days ago this very night — a large red one; but foolish-like I thought nothing o't. Who can that letter be from?'

A letter at this time was such an event for hamleteers, even of the miller's respectable standing, that Loveday thenceforward was thrown into a fit of abstraction which prevented his seeing any more of the sham fight, or the people, or the King. Mrs. Garland imbibed some of his concern, and suggested that the letter might come from his son Robert.

'I should naturally have thought that,' said Miller Loveday; 'but he wrote to me only two months ago, and his brother John heard from him within the last four weeks, when he was just about starting on another voyage. If you'll pardon me, Mrs. Garland, ma'am, I'll see if there's any Overcombe man here who is going to Budmouth to-day, so that I may get the letter by night-time. I cannot possibly go myself.'

So Mr. Loveday left them for awhile; and as they were so near home Mrs. Garland did not wait on the barrow for him to come back, but walked about with Anne a little time, until they should be disposed to trot down the slope to their own door. They listened to a man who was offering one guinea to receive ten in case Buonaparte should be killed in three months, and to other entertainments of that nature, which at this time were not rare. Once during their peregrination the eyes of the sailor before-mentioned fell upon Anne; but he glanced over her and passed her unheedingly by. Loveday the elder was at this time on the other side of the line, looking for a messenger to the town. At twelve o'clock the review was over, and the King and his family left the hill. The troops then cleared off the field, the spectators followed, and by one o'clock the downs were again bare.

They still spread their grassy surface to the sun as on that beautiful morning not, historically speaking, so very long ago; but the King and his fifteen thousand armed men, the horses, the bands of music, the princesses, the cream-coloured teams — the gorgeous centre-piece, in short, to which the downs were but the mere mount or margin — how entirely have they all passed and gone! — lying scattered about the world as military and other dust, some at Talavera, Albuera, Salamanca, Vittoria, Toulouse, and Waterloo; some in home churchyards; and a few small handfuls in royal vaults.

In the afternoon John Loveday, lightened of his trumpet and trappings, appeared at the old mill-house door, and beheld Anne standing at hers.

'I saw you, Miss Garland,' said the soldier gaily.

'Where was I?' said she, smiling.

'On the top of the big mound — to the right of the King.'

'And I saw you; lots of times,' she rejoined.

Loveday seemed pleased. 'Did you really take the trouble to find me? That was very good of you.'

‘Her eyes followed you everywhere,’ said Mrs. Garland from an upper window.

‘Of course I looked at the dragoons most,’ said Anne, disconcerted. ‘And when I looked at them my eyes naturally fell upon the trumpets. I looked at the dragoons generally, no more.’

She did not mean to show any vexation to the trumpet-major, but he fancied otherwise, and stood repressed. The situation was relieved by the arrival of the miller, still looking serious.

‘I am very much concerned, John; I did not go to the review for nothing. There’s a letter a-waiting for me at Budmouth, and I must get it before bedtime, or I shan’t sleep a wink.’

‘I’ll go, of course,’ said John; ‘and perhaps Miss Garland would like to see what’s doing there to-day? Everybody is gone or going; the road is like a fair.’

He spoke pleadingly, but Anne was not won to assent.

‘You can drive in the gig; ‘twill do Blossom good,’ said the miller.

‘Let David drive Miss Garland,’ said the trumpet-major, not wishing to coerce her; ‘I would just as soon walk.’

Anne joyfully welcomed this arrangement, and a time was fixed for the start.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CONVERSATION IN THE CROWD

In the afternoon they drove off, John Loveday being nowhere visible. All along the road they passed and were overtaken by vehicles of all descriptions going in the same direction; among them the extraordinary machines which had been invented for the conveyance of troops to any point of the coast on which the enemy should land; they consisted of four boards placed across a sort of trolley, thirty men of the volunteer companies riding on each.

The popular Georgian watering-place was in a paroxysm of gaiety. The town was quite overpowered by the country round, much to the town’s delight and profit. The fear of invasion was such that six frigates lay in the roads to ensure the safety of the royal family, and from the regiments of horse and foot quartered at the barracks, or encamped on the hills round about, a picket of a thousand men mounted guard every day in front of Gloucester Lodge, where the King resided. When Anne and her attendant reached this point, which they did on foot, stabling the horse on the outskirts of the town, it was about six o’clock. The King was on the Esplanade, and the soldiers were just marching past to mount guard. The band formed in front of the King, and all the officers saluted as they went by.

Anne now felt herself close to and looking into the stream of recorded history, within whose banks the littlest things are great, and outside which she and the general bulk of the human race were content to live on as an unreckoned, unheeded superfluity.

When she turned from her interested gaze at this scene, there stood John Loveday. She had had a presentiment that he would turn up in this mysterious way. It was marvellous that he could have got there so quickly; but there he was — not looking at the King, or at the crowd, but waiting for the turn of her head.

‘Trumpet-major, I didn’t see you,’ said Anne demurely. ‘How is it that your regiment is not marching past?’

‘We take it by turns, and it is not our turn,’ said Loveday.

She wanted to know then if they were afraid that the King would be carried off by the First Consul. Yes, Loveday told her; and his Majesty was rather venturesome. A day or two before he had gone so far to sea that he was nearly caught by some of the enemy’s cruisers. ‘He is anxious to fight Boney single-handed,’ he said.

‘What a good, brave King!’ said Anne.

Loveday seemed anxious to come to more personal matters. ‘Will you let me take you round to the other side, where you can see better?’ he asked. ‘The Queen and the princesses are at the window.’

Anne passively assented. ‘David, wait here for me,’ she said; ‘I shall be back again in a few minutes.’

The trumpet-major then led her off triumphantly, and they skirted the crowd and came round on the side towards the sands. He told her everything he could think of, military and civil, to which Anne returned pretty syllables and parenthetic words about the colour of the sea and the curl of the foam — a way of speaking that moved the soldier’s heart even more than long and direct speeches would have done.

‘And that other thing I asked you?’ he ventured to say at last.

‘We won’t speak of it.’

‘You don’t dislike me?’

‘O no!’ she said, gazing at the bathing-machines, digging children, and other common objects of the seashore, as if her interest lay there rather than with him.

‘But I am not worthy of the daughter of a genteel professional man — that’s what you mean?’

‘There’s something more than worthiness required in such cases, you know,’ she said, still without calling her mind away from surrounding scenes. ‘Ah, there are the Queen and princesses at the window!’

‘Something more?’

‘Well, since you will make me speak, I mean the woman ought to love the man.’

The trumpet-major seemed to be less concerned about this than about her supposed superiority. ‘If it were all right on that point, would you mind the other?’ he asked, like a man who knows he is too persistent, yet who cannot be still.

‘How can I say, when I don’t know? What a pretty chip hat the elder princess wears?’

Her companion’s general disappointment extended over him almost to his lace and his plume. ‘Your mother said, you know, Miss Anne — ’

‘Yes, that’s the worst of it,’ she said. ‘Let us go back to David; I have seen all I want to see, Mr. Loveday.’

The mass of the people had by this time noticed the Queen and princesses at the window, and raised a cheer, to which the ladies waved their embroidered handkerchiefs. Anne went back towards the pavement with her trumpet-major, whom all the girls envied her, so fine-looking a soldier was he; and not only for that, but because it was well known that he was not a soldier from necessity, but from patriotism, his father having repeatedly offered to set him up in business: his artistic taste in preferring a horse and uniform to a dirty, rumbling flour-mill was admired by all. She, too, had a very nice appearance in her best clothes as she walked along — the sarcenet hat, muslin shawl, and tight-sleeved gown being of the newest Overcombe fashion, that was only about a year old in the adjoining town, and in London three or four. She could not be harsh to Loveday and dismiss him curtly, for his musical pursuits had refined him, educated him, and made him quite poetical. To-day he had been particularly well-mannered and tender; so, instead of answering, ‘Never speak to me like this again,’ she merely put him off with a ‘Let us go back to David.’

When they reached the place where they had left him David was gone.

Anne was now positively vexed. ‘What shall I do?’ she said.

‘He’s only gone to drink the King’s health,’ said Loveday, who had privately given David the money for performing that operation. ‘Depend upon it, he’ll be back soon.’

‘Will you go and find him?’ said she, with intense propriety in her looks and tone.

‘I will,’ said Loveday reluctantly; and he went.

Anne stood still. She could now escape her gallant friend, for, although the distance was long, it was not impossible to walk home. On the other hand, Loveday was a good and sincere fellow, for whom she had almost a brotherly feeling, and she shrank from such a trick. While she stood and mused, scarcely heeding the music, the marching of the soldiers, the King, the dukes, the brilliant staff, the attendants, and the happy groups of people, her eyes fell upon the ground.

Before her she saw a flower lying — a crimson sweet-william — fresh and uninjured. An instinctive wish to save it from destruction by the passengers’ feet led her to pick it up; and then, moved by a sudden self-consciousness, she looked around. She was standing before an inn, and from an upper window Festus Derriman was leaning with two or three kindred spirits of his cut and kind. He nodded eagerly, and signified to her that he had thrown the flower.

What should she do? To throw it away would seem stupid, and to keep it was awkward. She held it between her finger and thumb, twirled it round on its axis and twirled it back again, regarding and yet not examining it. Just then she saw the trumpet-major coming back.

‘I can’t find David anywhere,’ he said; and his heart was not sorry as he said it.

Anne was still holding out the sweet-william as if about to drop it, and, scarcely knowing what she did under the distressing sense that she was watched, she offered the flower to Loveday.

His face brightened with pleasure as he took it. 'Thank you, indeed,' he said.

Then Anne saw what a misleading blunder she had committed towards Loveday in playing to the yeoman. Perhaps she had sown the seeds of a quarrel.

'It was not my sweet-william,' she said hastily; 'it was lying on the ground. I don't mean anything by giving it to you.'

'But I'll keep it all the same,' said the innocent soldier, as if he knew a good deal about womankind; and he put the flower carefully inside his jacket, between his white waistcoat and his heart.

Festus, seeing this, enlarged himself wrathfully, got hot in the face, rose to his feet, and glared down upon them like a turnip-lantern.

'Let us go away,' said Anne timorously.

'I'll see you safe to your own door, depend upon me,' said Loveday. 'But — I had near forgot — there's father's letter, that he's so anxiously waiting for! Will you come with me to the post-office? Then I'll take you straight home.'

Anne, expecting Festus to pounce down every minute, was glad to be off anywhere; so she accepted the suggestion, and they went along the parade together.

Loveday set this down as a proof of Anne's relenting. Thus in joyful spirits he entered the office, paid the postage, and received the letter.

'It is from Bob, after all!' he said. 'Father told me to read it at once, in case of bad news. Ask your pardon for keeping you a moment.' He broke the seal and read, Anne standing silently by.

'He is coming home to be married,' said the trumpet-major, without looking up.

Anne did not answer. The blood swept impetuously up her face at his words, and as suddenly went away again, leaving her rather paler than before. She disguised her agitation and then overcame it, Loveday observing nothing of this emotional performance.

'As far as I can understand he will be here Saturday,' he said.

'Indeed!' said Anne quite calmly. 'And who is he going to marry?'

'That I don't know,' said John, turning the letter about. 'The woman is a stranger.'

At this moment the miller entered the office hastily.

'Come, John,' he cried, 'I have been waiting and waiting for that there letter till I was nigh crazy!'

John briefly explained the news, and when his father had recovered from his astonishment, taken off his hat, and wiped the exact line where his forehead joined his hair, he walked with Anne up the street, leaving John to return alone. The miller was so absorbed in his mental perspective of Bob's marriage, that he saw nothing of the gaieties they passed through; and Anne seemed also so much impressed by the same intelligence, that she crossed before the inn occupied by Festus without showing a recollection of his presence there.

CHAPTER XIV.

LATER IN THE EVENING OF THE SAME DAY

When they reached home the sun was going down. It had already been noised abroad that miller Loveday had received a letter, and, his cart having been heard coming up the lane, the population of Overcombe drew down towards the mill as soon as he had gone indoors — a sudden flash of brightness from the window showing that he had struck such an early light as nothing but the immediate deciphering of literature could require. Letters were matters of public moment, and everybody in the parish had an interest in the reading of those rare documents; so that when the miller had placed the candle, slanted himself, and called in Mrs. Garland to have her opinion on the meaning of any hieroglyphics that he might encounter in his course, he found that he was to be additionally assisted by the opinions of the other neighbours, whose persons appeared in the doorway, partly covering each other like a hand of cards, yet each showing a large enough piece of himself for identification. To pass the time while they were arranging themselves, the miller adopted his usual way of filling up casual intervals, that of snuffing the candle.

‘We heard you had got a letter, Maister Loveday,’ they said.

‘Yes; “Southampton, the twelfth of August, dear father,”’ said Loveday; and they were as silent as relations at the reading of a will. Anne, for whom the letter had a singular fascination, came in with her mother and sat down.

Bob stated in his own way that having, since landing, taken into consideration his father’s wish that he should renounce a seafaring life and become a partner in the mill, he had decided to agree to the proposal; and with that object in view he would return to Overcombe in three days from the time of writing.

He then said incidentally that since his voyage he had been in lodgings at Southampton, and during that time had become acquainted with a lovely and virtuous young maiden, in whom he found the exact qualities necessary to his happiness. Having known this lady for the full space of a fortnight he had had ample opportunities of studying her character, and, being struck with the recollection that, if there was one thing more than another necessary in a mill which had no mistress, it was somebody who could play that part with grace and dignity, he had asked Miss Matilda Johnson to be his wife. In her kindness she, though sacrificing far better prospects, had agreed; and he could not but regard it as a happy chance that he should have found at the nick of time such a woman to adorn his home, whose innocence was as stunning as her beauty. Without much ado, therefore, he and she had arranged to be married at once, and at Overcombe, that his father might not be deprived of the pleasures of the wedding feast. She had kindly consented to follow him by land in the course of a few days, and to live in the house as their guest for the week or so previous to the ceremony.

‘‘Tis a proper good letter,’ said Mrs. Comfort from the background. ‘I never heerd true love better put out of hand in my life; and they seem ‘nation fond of one another.’

‘He haven’t knowed her such a very long time,’ said Job Mitchell dubiously.

‘That’s nothing,’ said Esther Beach. ‘Nater will find her way, very rapid when the time’s come for’t. Well, ‘tis good news for ye, miller.’

‘Yes, sure, I hope ‘tis,’ said Loveday, without, however, showing any great hurry to burst into the frantic form of fatherly joy which the event should naturally have produced, seeming more disposed to let off his feelings by examining thoroughly into the fibres of the letter-paper.

‘I was five years a-courting my wife,’ he presently remarked. ‘But folks were slower about everything in them days. Well, since she’s coming we must make her welcome. Did any of ye catch by my reading which day it is he means? What with making out the penmanship, my mind was drawn off from the sense here and there.’

‘He says in three days,’ said Mrs. Garland. ‘The date of the letter will fix it.’

On examination it was found that the day appointed was the one nearly expired; at which the miller jumped up and said, ‘Then he’ll be here before bedtime. I didn’t gather till now that he was coming afore Saturday. Why, he may drop in this very minute!’

He had scarcely spoken when footsteps were heard coming along the front, and they presently halted at the door. Loveday pushed through the neighbours and rushed out; and, seeing in the passage a form which obscured the declining light, the miller seized hold of him, saying, ‘O my dear Bob; then you are come!’

‘Scrounch it all, miller, don’t quite pull my poor shoulder out of joint! Whatever is the matter?’ said the new-comer, trying to release himself from Loveday’s grasp of affection. It was Uncle Benjy.

‘Thought ‘twas my son!’ faltered the miller, sinking back upon the toes of the neighbours who had closely followed him into the entry. ‘Well, come in, Mr. Derriman, and make yerself at home. Why, you haven’t been here for years! Whatever has made you come now, sir, of all times in the world?’

‘Is he in there with ye?’ whispered the farmer with misgiving.

‘Who?’

‘My nephew, after that maid that he’s so mighty smit with?’

‘O no; he never calls here.’

Farmer Derriman breathed a breath of relief. ‘Well, I’ve called to tell ye,’ he said, ‘that there’s more news of the French. We shall have ‘em here this month as sure as a gun. The gunboats be all ready — near two thousand of ‘em — and the whole army is at Boulogne. And, miller, I know ye to be an honest man.’

Loveday did not say nay.

‘Neighbour Loveday, I know ye to be an honest man,’ repeated the old squireen. ‘Can I speak to ye alone?’

As the house was full, Loveday took him into the garden, all the while upon tenter-hooks, not lest Buonaparte should appear in their midst, but lest Bob should come whilst he was not there to receive him. When they had got into a corner Uncle Benjy said, ‘Miller, what with the French, and what with my nephew Festus, I assure ye my

life is nothing but wherit from morning to night. Miller Loveday, you are an honest man.'

Loveday nodded.

'Well, I've come to ask a favour — to ask if you will take charge of my few poor title-deeds and documents and suchlike, while I am away from home next week, lest anything should befall me, and they should be stole away by Boney or Festus, and I should have nothing left in the wide world? I can trust neither banks nor lawyers in these terrible times; and I am come to you.'

Loveday after some hesitation agreed to take care of anything that Derriman should bring, whereupon the farmer said he would call with the parchments and papers alluded to in the course of a week. Derriman then went away by the garden gate, mounted his pony, which had been tethered outside, and rode on till his form was lost in the shades.

The miller rejoined his friends, and found that in the meantime John had arrived. John informed the company that after parting from his father and Anne he had rambled to the harbour, and discovered the Pewit by the quay. On inquiry he had learnt that she came in at eleven o'clock, and that Bob had gone ashore.

'We'll go and meet him,' said the miller. "'Tis still light out of doors.'

So, as the dew rose from the meads and formed fleeces in the hollows, Loveday and his friends and neighbours strolled out, and loitered by the stiles which hampered the footpath from Overcombe to the high road at intervals of a hundred yards. John Loveday, being obliged to return to camp, was unable to accompany them, but Widow Garland thought proper to fall in with the procession. When she had put on her bonnet she called to her daughter. Anne said from upstairs that she was coming in a minute; and her mother walked on without her.

What was Anne doing? Having hastily unlocked a receptacle for emotional objects of small size, she took thence the little folded paper with which we have already become acquainted, and, striking a light from her private tinder-box, she held the paper, and curl of hair it contained, in the candle till they were burnt. Then she put on her hat and followed her mother and the rest of them across the moist grey fields, cheerfully singing in an undertone as she went, to assure herself of her indifference to circumstances.

CHAPTER XV.

'CAPTAIN' BOB LOVEDAY OF THE MERCHANT SERVICE

While Loveday and his neighbours were thus rambling forth, full of expectancy, some of them, including Anne in the rear, heard the crackling of light wheels along the curved lane to which the path was the chord. At once Anne thought, 'Perhaps that's he, and we are missing him.' But recent events were not of a kind to induce her to say anything; and the others of the company did not reflect on the sound.

Had they gone across to the hedge which hid the lane, and looked through it, they would have seen a light cart driven by a boy, beside whom was seated a seafaring man, apparently of good standing in the merchant service, with his feet outside on the shaft. The vehicle went over the main bridge, turned in upon the other bridge at the tail of the mill, and halted by the door. The sailor alighted, showing himself to be a well-shaped, active, and fine young man, with a bright eye, an anonymous nose, and of such a rich complexion by exposure to ripening suns that he might have been some connection of the foreigner who calls his likeness the Portrait of a Gentleman in galleries of the Old Masters. Yet in spite of this, and though Bob Loveday had been all over the world from Cape Horn to Peking, and from India's coral strand to the White Sea, the most conspicuous of all the marks that he had brought back with him was an increased resemblance to his mother, who had lain all the time beneath Overcombe church wall.

Captain Loveday tried the house door; finding this locked he went to the mill door: this was locked also, the mill being stopped for the night.

'They are not at home,' he said to the boy. 'But never mind that. Just help to unload the things and then I'll pay you, and you can drive off home.'

The cart was unloaded, and the boy was dismissed, thanking the sailor profusely for the payment rendered. Then Bob Loveday, finding that he had still some leisure on his hands, looked musingly east, west, north, south, and nadir; after which he bestirred himself by carrying his goods, article by article, round to the back door, out of the way of casual passers. This done, he walked round the mill in a more regardful attitude, and surveyed its familiar features one by one — the panes of the grinding-room, now as heretofore clouded with flour as with stale hoar-frost; the meal lodged in the corners of the window-sills, forming a soil in which lichens grew without ever getting any bigger, as they had done since his smallest infancy; the mosses on the plinth towards the river, reaching as high as the capillary power of the walls would fetch up moisture for their nourishment, and the penned mill-pond, now as ever on the point of overflowing into the garden. Everything was the same.

When he had had enough of this it occurred to Loveday that he might get into the house in spite of the locked doors; and by entering the garden, placing a pole from the fork of an apple-tree to the window-sill of a bedroom on that side, and climbing across like a Barbary ape, he entered the window and stepped down inside. There was something anomalous in being close to the familiar furniture without having first seen his father, and its silent, impassive shine was not cheering; it was as if his relations were all dead, and only their tables and chests of drawers left to greet him. He went downstairs and seated himself in the dark parlour. Finding this place, too, rather solitary, and the tick of the invisible clock preternaturally loud, he unearthed the tinder-box, obtained a light, and set about making the house comfortable for his father's return, divining that the miller had gone out to meet him by the wrong road.

Robert's interest in this work increased as he proceeded, and he bustled round and round the kitchen as lightly as a girl. David, the indoor factotum, having lost himself

among the quart pots of Budmouth, there had been nobody left here to prepare supper, and Bob had it all to himself. In a short time a fire blazed up the chimney, a tablecloth was found, the plates were clapped down, and a search made for what provisions the house afforded, which, in addition to various meats, included some fresh eggs of the elongated shape that produces cockerels when hatched, and had been set aside on that account for putting under the next broody hen.

A more reckless cracking of eggs than that which now went on had never been known in Overcombe since the last large christening; and as Loveday gashed one on the side, another at the end, another longways, and another diagonally, he acquired adroitness by practice, and at last made every son of a hen of them fall into two hemispheres as neatly as if it opened by a hinge. From eggs he proceeded to ham, and from ham to kidneys, the result being a brilliant fry.

Not to be tempted to fall to before his father came back, the returned navigator emptied the whole into a dish, laid a plate over the top, his coat over the plate, and his hat over his coat. Thus completely stopping in the appetizing smell, he sat down to await events. He was relieved from the tediousness of doing this by hearing voices outside; and in a minute his father entered.

‘Glad to welcome ye home, father,’ said Bob. ‘And supper is just ready.’

‘Lard, lard — why, Captain Bob’s here!’ said Mrs. Garland.

‘And we’ve been out waiting to meet thee!’ said the miller, as he entered the room, followed by representatives of the houses of Cripplestraw, Comfort, Mitchell, Beach, and Snooks, together with some small beginnings of Fencible Tremlett’s posterity. In the rear came David, and quite in the vanishing-point of the composition, Anne the fair.

‘I drove over; and so was forced to come by the road,’ said Bob.

‘And we went across the fields, thinking you’d walk,’ said his father.

‘I should have been here this morning; but not so much as a wheelbarrow could I get for my traps; everything was gone to the review. So I went too, thinking I might meet you there. I was then obliged to return to the harbour for the luggage.’

Then there was a welcoming of Captain Bob by pulling out his arms like drawers and shutting them again, smacking him on the back as if he were choking, holding him at arm’s length as if he were of too large type to read close. All which persecution Bob bore with a wide, genial smile that was shaken into fragments and scattered promiscuously among the spectators.

‘Get a chair for ‘n!’ said the miller to David, whom they had met in the fields and found to have got nothing worse by his absence than a slight slant in his walk.

‘Never mind — I am not tired — I have been here ever so long,’ said Bob. ‘And I — ’ But the chair having been placed behind him, and a smart touch in the hollow of a person’s knee by the edge of that piece of furniture having a tendency to make the person sit without further argument, Bob sank down dumb, and the others drew up other chairs at a convenient nearness for easy analytic vision and the subtler forms of good fellowship. The miller went about saying, ‘David, the nine best glasses from the

corner cupboard!' — 'David, the corkscrew!' — 'David, whisk the tail of thy smock-frock round the inside of these quart pots afore you draw drink in 'em — they be an inch thick in dust!' — 'David, lower that chimney-crook a couple of notches that the flame may touch the bottom of the kettle, and light three more of the largest candles!' — 'If you can't get the cork out of the jar, David, bore a hole in the tub of Hollands that's buried under the scroff in the fuel-house; d'ye hear? — Dan Brown left en there yesterday as a return for the little porker I gied en.'

When they had all had a thimbleful round, and the superfluous neighbours had reluctantly departed, one by one, the inmates gave their minds to the supper, which David had begun to serve up.

'What be you rolling back the tablecloth for, David?' said the miller.

'Maister Bob have put down one of the under sheets by mistake, and I thought you might not like it, sir, as there's ladies present!'

'Faith, 'twas the first thing that came to hand,' said Robert. 'It seemed a tablecloth to me.'

'Never mind — don't pull off the things now he's laid 'em down — let it bide,' said the miller. 'But where's Widow Garland and Maily Anne?'

'They were here but a minute ago,' said David. 'Depend upon it they have slinked off 'cause they be shy.'

The miller at once went round to ask them to come back and sup with him; and while he was gone David told Bob in confidence what an excellent place he had for an old man.

'Yes, Cap'n Bob, as I suppose I must call ye; I've worked for yer father these eight-and-thirty years, and we have always got on very well together. Trusts me with all the keys, lends me his sleeve-waistcoat, and leaves the house entirely to me. Widow Garland next door, too, is just the same with me, and treats me as if I was her own child.'

'She must have married young to make you that, David.'

'Yes, yes — I'm years older than she. 'Tis only my common way of speaking.'

Mrs. Garland would not come in to supper, and the meal proceeded without her, Bob recommending to his father the dish he had cooked, in the manner of a householder to a stranger just come. The miller was anxious to know more about his son's plans for the future, but would not for the present interrupt his eating, looking up from his own plate to appreciate Bob's travelled way of putting English victuals out of sight, as he would have looked at a mill on improved principles.

David had only just got the table clear, and set the plates in a row under the bakehouse table for the cats to lick, when the door was hastily opened, and Mrs. Garland came in, looking concerned.

'I have been waiting to hear the plates removed to tell you how frightened we are at something we hear at the back-door. It seems like robbers muttering; but when I look out there's nobody there!'

‘This must be seen to,’ said the miller, rising promptly. ‘David, light the middle-sized lantern. I’ll go and search the garden.’

‘And I’ll go too,’ said his son, taking up a cudgel. ‘Lucky I’ve come home just in time!’

They went out stealthily, followed by the widow and Anne, who had been afraid to stay alone in the house under the circumstances. No sooner were they beyond the door when, sure enough, there was the muttering almost close at hand, and low upon the ground, as from persons lying down in hiding.

‘Bless my heart!’ said Bob, striking his head as though it were some enemy’s: ‘why, ‘tis my luggage. I’d quite forgot it!’

‘What!’ asked his father.

‘My luggage. Really, if it hadn’t been for Mrs. Garland it would have stayed there all night, and they, poor things! would have been starved. I’ve got all sorts of articles for ye. You go inside, and I’ll bring ‘em in. ‘Tis parrots that you hear a muttering, Mrs. Garland. You needn’t be afraid any more.’

‘Parrots?’ said the miller. ‘Well, I’m glad ‘tis no worse. But how couldst forget so, Bob?’

The packages were taken in by David and Bob, and the first unfastened were three, wrapped in cloths, which being stripped off revealed three cages, with a gorgeous parrot in each.

‘This one is for you, father, to hang up outside the door, and amuse us,’ said Bob. ‘He’ll talk very well, but he’s sleepy to-night. This other one I brought along for any neighbour that would like to have him. His colours are not so bright; but ‘tis a good bird. If you would like to have him you are welcome to him,’ he said, turning to Anne, who had been tempted forward by the birds. ‘You have hardly spoken yet, Miss Anne, but I recollect you very well. How much taller you have got, to be sure!’

Anne said she was much obliged, but did not know what she could do with such a present. Mrs. Garland accepted it for her, and the sailor went on — ‘Now this other bird I hardly know what to do with; but I dare say he’ll come in for something or other.’

‘He is by far the prettiest,’ said the widow. ‘I would rather have it than the other, if you don’t mind.’

‘Yes,’ said Bob, with embarrassment. ‘But the fact is, that bird will hardly do for ye, ma’am. He’s a hard swearer, to tell the truth; and I am afraid he’s too old to be broken of it.’

‘How dreadful!’ said Mrs. Garland.

‘We could keep him in the mill,’ suggested the miller. ‘It won’t matter about the grinder hearing him, for he can’t learn to cuss worse than he do already!’

‘The grinder shall have him, then,’ said Bob. ‘The one I have given you, ma’am, has no harm in him at all. You might take him to church o’ Sundays as far as that goes.’

The sailor now untied a small wooden box about a foot square, perforated with holes. 'Here are two marmosets,' he continued. 'You can't see them to-night; but they are beauties — the tufted sort.'

'What's a marmoset?' said the miller.

'O, a little kind of monkey. They bite strangers rather hard, but you'll soon get used to 'em.'

'They are wrapped up in something, I declare,' said Mrs. Garland, peeping in through a chink.

'Yes, that's my flannel shirt,' said Bob apologetically. 'They suffer terribly from cold in this climate, poor things! and I had nothing better to give them. Well, now, in this next box I've got things of different sorts.'

The latter was a regular seaman's chest, and out of it he produced shells of many sizes and colours, carved ivories, queer little caskets, gorgeous feathers, and several silk handkerchiefs, which articles were spread out upon all the available tables and chairs till the house began to look like a bazaar.

'What a lovely shawl!' exclaimed Widow Garland, in her interest forestalling the regular exhibition by looking into the box at what was coming.

'O yes,' said the mate, pulling out a couple of the most bewitching shawls that eyes ever saw. 'One of these I am going to give to that young lady I am shortly to be married to, you know, Mrs. Garland. Has father told you about it? Matilda Johnson, of Southampton, that's her name.'

'Yes, we know all about it,' said the widow.

'Well, I shall give one of these shawls to her — because, of course, I ought to.'

'Of course,' said she.

'But the other one I've got no use for at all; and,' he continued, looking round, 'will you have it, Miss Anne? You refused the parrot, and you ought not to refuse this.'

'Thank you,' said Anne calmly, but much distressed; 'but really I don't want it, and couldn't take it.'

'But do have it!' said Bob in hurt tones, Mrs. Garland being all the while on tenter-hooks lest Anne should persist in her absurd refusal.

'Why, there's another reason why you ought to!' said he, his face lighting up with recollections. 'It never came into my head till this moment that I used to be your beau in a humble sort of way. Faith, so I did, and we used to meet at places sometimes, didn't we — that is, when you were not too proud; and once I gave you, or somebody else, a bit of my hair in fun.'

'It was somebody else,' said Anne quickly.

'Ah, perhaps it was,' said Bob innocently. 'But it was you I used to meet, or try to, I am sure. Well, I've never thought of that boyish time for years till this minute! I am sure you ought to accept some one gift, dear, out of compliment to those old times!'

Anne drew back and shook her head, for she would not trust her voice.

'Well, Mrs. Garland, then you shall have it,' said Bob, tossing the shawl to that ready receiver. 'If you don't, upon my life I will throw it out to the first beggar I see.'

Now, here's a parcel of cap ribbons of the splndidest sort I could get. Have these — do, Anne!

'Yes, do,' said Mrs. Garland.

'I promised them to Matilda,' continued Bob; 'but I am sure she won't want 'em, as she has got some of her own: and I would as soon see them upon your head, my dear, as upon hers.'

'I think you had better keep them for your bride if you have promised them to her,' said Mrs. Garland mildly.

'It wasn't exactly a promise. I just said, "Til, there's some cap ribbons in my box, if you would like to have them." But she's got enough things already for any bride in creation. Anne, now you shall have 'em — upon my soul you shall — or I'll fling them down the mill-tail!'

Anne had meant to be perfectly firm in refusing everything, for reasons obvious even to that poor waif, the meanest capacity; but when it came to this point she was absolutely compelled to give in, and reluctantly received the cap ribbons in her arms, blushing fitfully, and with her lip trembling in a motion which she tried to exhibit as a smile.

'What would Tilly say if she knew!' said the miller slyly.

'Yes, indeed — and it is wrong of him!' Anne instantly cried, tears running down her face as she threw the parcel of ribbons on the floor. 'You'd better bestow your gifts where you bestow your l — l — love, Mr. Loveday — that's what I say!' And Anne turned her back and went away.

'I'll take them for her,' said Mrs. Garland, quickly picking up the parcel.

'Now that's a pity,' said Bob, looking regretfully after Anne. 'I didn't remember that she was a quick-tempered sort of girl at all. Tell her, Mrs. Garland, that I ask her pardon. But of course I didn't know she was too proud to accept a little present — how should I? Upon my life if it wasn't for Matilda I'd — Well, that can't be, of course.'

'What's this?' said Mrs. Garland, touching with her foot a large package that had been laid down by Bob unseen.

'That's a bit of baccy for myself,' said Robert meekly.

The examination of presents at last ended, and the two families parted for the night. When they were alone, Mrs. Garland said to Anne, 'What a close girl you are! I am sure I never knew that Bob Loveday and you had walked together: you must have been mere children.'

'O yes — so we were,' said Anne, now quite recovered. 'It was when we first came here, about a year after father died. We did not walk together in any regular way. You know I have never thought the Lovedays high enough for me. It was only just — nothing at all, and I had almost forgotten it.'

It is to be hoped that somebody's sins were forgiven her that night before she went to bed.

When Bob and his father were left alone, the miller said, 'Well, Robert, about this young woman of thine — Matilda what's her name?'

'Yes, father — Matilda Johnson. I was just going to tell ye about her.'

The miller nodded, and sipped his mug.

'Well, she is an excellent body,' continued Bob; 'that can truly be said — a real charmer, you know — a nice good comely young woman, a miracle of genteel breeding, you know, and all that. She can throw her hair into the nicest curls, and she's got splendid gowns and headclothes. In short, you might call her a land mermaid. She'll make such a first-rate wife as there never was.'

'No doubt she will,' said the miller; 'for I have never known thee wanting in sense in a jeneral way.' He turned his cup round on its axis till the handle had travelled a complete circle. 'How long did you say in your letter that you had known her?'

'A fortnight.'

'Not very long.'

'It don't sound long, 'tis true; and 'twas really longer — 'twas fifteen days and a quarter. But hang it, father, I could see in the twinkling of an eye that the girl would do. I know a woman well enough when I see her — I ought to, indeed, having been so much about the world. Now, for instance, there's Widow Garland and her daughter. The girl is a nice little thing; but the old woman — O no!' Bob shook his head.

'What of her?' said his father, slightly shifting in his chair.

'Well, she's, she's — I mean, I should never have chose her, you know. She's of a nice disposition, and young for a widow with a grown-up daughter; but if all the men had been like me she would never have had a husband. I like her in some respects; but she's a style of beauty I don't care for.'

'O, if 'tis only looks you are thinking of,' said the miller, much relieved, 'there's nothing to be said, of course. Though there's many a duchess worse-looking, if it comes to argument, as you would find, my son,' he added, with a sense of having been mollified too soon.

The mate's thoughts were elsewhere by this time.

'As to my marrying Matilda, thinks I, here's one of the very genteelest sort, and I may as well do the job at once. So I chose her. She's a dear girl; there's nobody like her, search where you will.'

'How many did you choose her out from?' inquired his father.

'Well, she was the only young woman I happened to know in Southampton, that's true. But what of that? It would have been all the same if I had known a hundred.'

'Her father is in business near the docks, I suppose?'

'Well, no. In short, I didn't see her father.'

'Her mother?'

'Her mother? No, I didn't. I think her mother is dead; but she has got a very rich aunt living at Melchester. I didn't see her aunt, because there wasn't time to go; but of course we shall know her when we are married.'

‘Yes, yes, of course,’ said the miller, trying to feel quite satisfied. ‘And she will soon be here?’

‘Ay, she’s coming soon,’ said Bob. ‘She has gone to this aunt’s at Melchester to get her things packed, and suchlike, or she would have come with me. I am going to meet the coach at the King’s Arms, Casterbridge, on Sunday, at one o’clock. To show what a capital sort of wife she’ll be, I may tell you that she wanted to come by the Mercury, because ‘tis a little cheaper than the other. But I said, “For once in your life do it well, and come by the Royal Mail, and I’ll pay.” I can have the pony and trap to fetch her, I suppose, as ‘tis too far for her to walk?’

‘Of course you can, Bob, or anything else. And I’ll do all I can to give you a good wedding feast.’

CHAPTER XVI.

THEY MAKE READY FOR THE ILLUSTRIOUS STRANGER

Preparations for Matilda’s welcome, and for the event which was to follow, at once occupied the attention of the mill. The miller and his man had but dim notions of housewifery on any large scale; so the great wedding cleaning was kindly supervised by Mrs. Garland, Bob being mostly away during the day with his brother, the trumpet-major, on various errands, one of which was to buy paint and varnish for the gig that Matilda was to be fetched in, which he had determined to decorate with his own hands.

By the widow’s direction the old familiar incrustation of shining dirt, imprinted along the back of the settle by the heads of countless jolly sitters, was scrubbed and scraped away; the brown circle round the nail whereon the miller hung his hat, stained by the brim in wet weather, was whitened over; the tawny smudges of bygone shoulders in the passage were removed without regard to a certain genial and historical value which they had acquired. The face of the clock, coated with verdigris as thick as a diachylon plaister, was rubbed till the figures emerged into day; while, inside the case of the same chronometer, the cobwebs that formed triangular hammocks, which the pendulum could hardly wade through, were cleared away at one swoop.

Mrs. Garland also assisted at the invasion of worm-eaten cupboards, where layers of ancient smells lingered on in the stagnant air, and recalled to the reflective nose the many good things that had been kept there. The upper floors were scrubbed with such abundance of water that the old-established death-watches, wood-lice, and flour-worms were all drowned, the suds trickling down into the room below in so lively and novel a manner as to convey the romantic notion that the miller lived in a cave with dripping stalactites.

They moved what had never been moved before — the oak coffer, containing the miller’s wardrobe — a tremendous weight, what with its locks, hinges, nails, dirt, framework, and the hard stratification of old jackets, waistcoats, and knee-breeches at

the bottom, never disturbed since the miller's wife died, and half pulverized by the moths, whose flattened skeletons lay amid the mass in thousands.

'It fairly makes my back open and shut!' said Loveday, as, in obedience to Mrs. Garland's direction, he lifted one corner, the grinder and David assisting at the others. 'All together: speak when ye be going to heave. Now!'

The pot covers and skimmers were brought to such a state that, on examining them, the beholder was not conscious of utensils, but of his own face in a condition of hideous elasticity. The broken clock-line was mended, the kettles rocked, the creeper nailed up, and a new handle put to the warming-pan. The large household lantern was cleaned out, after three years of uninterrupted accumulation, the operation yielding a conglomerate of candle-snuffs, candle-ends, remains of matches, lamp-black, and eleven ounces and a half of good grease — invaluable as dubbing for skitty boots and ointment for cart-wheels.

Everybody said that the mill residence had not been so thoroughly scoured for twenty years. The miller and David looked on with a sort of awe tempered by gratitude, tacitly admitting by their gaze that this was beyond what they had ever thought of. Mrs. Garland supervised all with disinterested benevolence. It would never have done, she said, for his future daughter-in-law to see the house in its original state. She would have taken a dislike to him, and perhaps to Bob likewise.

'Why don't ye come and live here with me, and then you would be able to see to it at all times?' said the miller as she bustled about again. To which she answered that she was considering the matter, and might in good time. He had previously informed her that his plan was to put Bob and his wife in the part of the house that she, Mrs. Garland, occupied, as soon as she chose to enter his, which relieved her of any fear of being incommoded by Matilda.

The cooking for the wedding festivities was on a proportionate scale of thoroughness. They killed the four supernumerary chickens that had just begun to crow, and the little curly-tailed barrow pig, in preference to the sow; not having been put up fattening for more than five weeks it was excellent small meat, and therefore more delicate and likely to suit a town-bred lady's taste than the large one, which, having reached the weight of fourteen score, might have been a little gross to a cultured palate. There were also provided a cold chine, stuffed veal, and two pigeon pies. Also thirty rings of black-pot, a dozen of white-pot, and ten knots of tender and well-washed chitterlings, cooked plain in case she should like a change.

As additional reserves there were sweetbreads, and five milts, sewed up at one side in the form of a chrysalis, and stuffed with thyme, sage, parsley, mint, groats, rice, milk, chopped egg, and other ingredients. They were afterwards roasted before a slow fire, and eaten hot.

The business of chopping so many herbs for the various stuffings was found to be aching work for women; and David, the miller, the grinder, and the grinder's boy being fully occupied in their proper branches, and Bob being very busy painting the gig and touching up the harness, Loveday called in a friendly dragoon of John's regiment who

was passing by, and he, being a muscular man, willingly chopped all the afternoon for a quart of strong, judiciously administered, and all other victuals found, taking off his jacket and gloves, rolling up his shirt-sleeves and unfastening his collar in an honourable and energetic way.

All windfalls and maggot-cored codlins were excluded from the apple pies; and as there was no known dish large enough for the purpose, the puddings were stirred up in the milking-pail, and boiled in the three-legged bell-metal crock, of great weight and antiquity, which every travelling tinker for the previous thirty years had tapped with his stick, coveted, made a bid for, and often attempted to steal.

In the liquor line Loveday laid in an ample barrel of Casterbridge 'strong beer.' This renowned drink — now almost as much a thing of the past as Falstaff's favourite beverage — was not only well calculated to win the hearts of soldiers blown dry and dusty by residence in tents on a hill-top, but of any wayfarer whatever in that land. It was of the most beautiful colour that the eye of an artist in beer could desire; full in body, yet brisk as a volcano; piquant, yet without a twang; luminous as an autumn sunset; free from streakiness of taste; but, finally, rather heady. The masses worshipped it, the minor gentry loved it more than wine, and by the most illustrious county families it was not despised. Anybody brought up for being drunk and disorderly in the streets of its natal borough, had only to prove that he was a stranger to the place and its liquor to be honourably dismissed by the magistrates, as one overtaken in a fault that no man could guard against who entered the town unawares.

In addition, Mr. Loveday also tapped a hogshead of fine cider that he had had mellowing in the house for several months, having bought it of an honest down-country man, who did not colour, for any special occasion like the present. It had been pressed from fruit judiciously chosen by an old hand — Horner and Cleeves apple for the body, a few Tom-Putts for colour, and just a dash of Old Five-corners for sparkle — a selection originally made to please the palate of a well-known temperate earl who was a regular cider-drinker, and lived to be eighty-eight.

On the morning of the Sunday appointed for her coming Captain Bob Loveday set out to meet his bride. He had been all the week engaged in painting the gig, assisted by his brother at odd times, and it now appeared of a gorgeous yellow, with blue streaks, and tassels at the corners, and red wheels outlined with a darker shade. He put in the pony at half-past eleven, Anne looking at him from the door as he packed himself into the vehicle and drove off. There may be young women who look out at young men driving to meet their brides as Anne looked at Captain Bob, and yet are quite indifferent to the circumstances; but they are not often met with.

So much dust had been raised on the highway by traffic resulting from the presence of the Court at the town further on, that brambles hanging from the fence, and giving a friendly scratch to the wanderer's face, were dingy as church cobwebs; and the grass on the margin had assumed a paper-shaving hue. Bob's father had wished him to take David, lest, from want of recent experience at the whip, he should meet with any mishap; but, picturing to himself the awkwardness of three in such circumstances, Bob

would not hear of this; and nothing more serious happened to his driving than that the wheel-marks formed two serpentine lines along the road during the first mile or two, before he had got his hand in, and that the horse shied at a milestone, a piece of paper, a sleeping tramp, and a wheelbarrow, just to make use of the opportunity of being in bad hands.

He entered Casterbridge between twelve and one, and, putting up at the Old Greyhound, walked on to the Bow. Here, rather dusty on the ledges of his clothes, he stood and waited while the people in their best summer dresses poured out of the three churches round him. When they had all gone, and a smell of cinders and gravy had spread down the ancient high-street, and the pie-dishes from adjacent bakehouses had all travelled past, he saw the mail coach rise above the arch of Grey's Bridge, a quarter of a mile distant, surmounted by swaying knobs, which proved to be the heads of the outside travellers.

'That's the way for a man's bride to come to him,' said Robert to himself with a feeling of poetry; and as the horn sounded and the horses clattered up the street he walked down to the inn. The knot of hostlers and inn-servants had gathered, the horses were dragged from the vehicle, and the passengers for Casterbridge began to descend. Captain Bob eyed them over, looked inside, looked outside again; to his disappointment Matilda was not there, nor her boxes, nor anything that was hers. Neither coachman nor guard had seen or heard of such a person at Melchester; and Bob walked slowly away.

Depressed by forebodings to an extent which took away nearly a third of his appetite, he sat down in the parlour of the Old Greyhound to a slice from the family joint of the landlord. This gentleman, who dined in his shirt-sleeves, partly because it was August, and partly from a sense that they would not be so fit for public view further on in the week, suggested that Bob should wait till three or four that afternoon, when the road-waggon would arrive, as the lost lady might have preferred that mode of conveyance; and when Bob appeared rather hurt at the suggestion, the landlord's wife assured him, as a woman who knew good life, that many genteel persons travelled in that way during the present high price of provisions. Loveday, who knew little of travelling by land, readily accepted her assurance and resolved to wait.

Wandering up and down the pavement, or leaning against some hot wall between the waggon-office and the corner of the street above, he passed the time away. It was a still, sunny, drowsy afternoon, and scarcely a soul was visible in the length and breadth of the street. The office was not far from All Saints' Church, and the church-windows being open, he could hear the afternoon service from where he lingered as distinctly as if he had been one of the congregation. Thus he was mentally conducted through the Psalms, through the first and second lessons, through the burst of fiddles and clarionets which announced the evening-hymn, and well into the sermon, before any signs of the waggon could be seen upon the London road.

The afternoon sermons at this church being of a dry and metaphysical nature at that date, it was by a special providence that the waggon-office was placed near the

ancient fabric, so that whenever the Sunday waggon was late, which it always was in hot weather, in cold weather, in wet weather, and in weather of almost every other sort, the rattle, dismounting, and swearing outside completely drowned the parson's voice within, and sustained the flagging interest of the congregation at precisely the right moment. No sooner did the charity children begin to writhe on their benches, and adult snores grow audible, than the waggon arrived.

Captain Loveday felt a kind of sinking in his poetry at the possibility of her for whom they had made such preparations being in the slow, unwieldy vehicle which crunched its way towards him; but he would not give in to the weakness. Neither would he walk down the street to meet the waggon, lest she should not be there. At last the broad wheels drew up against the kerb, the waggoner with his white smock-frock, and whip as long as a fishing-line, descended from the pony on which he rode alongside, and the six broad-chested horses backed from their collars and shook themselves. In another moment something showed forth, and he knew that Matilda was there.

Bob felt three cheers rise within him as she stepped down; but it being Sunday he did not utter them. In dress, Miss Johnson passed his expectations — a green and white gown, with long, tight sleeves, a green silk handkerchief round her neck and crossed in front, a green parasol, and green gloves. It was strange enough to see this verdant caterpillar turn out of a road-waggon, and gracefully shake herself free from the bits of straw and fluff which would usually gather on the raiment of the grandest travellers by that vehicle.

'But, my dear Matilda,' said Bob, when he had kissed her three times with much publicity — the practical step he had determined on seeming to demand that these things should no longer be done in a corner — 'my dear Matilda, why didn't you come by the coach, having the money for't and all?'

'That's my scrimping!' said Matilda in a delightful gush. 'I know you won't be offended when you know I did it to save against a rainy day!'

Bob, of course, was not offended, though the glory of meeting her had been less; and even if vexation were possible, it would have been out of place to say so. Still, he would have experienced no little surprise had he learnt the real reason of his Matilda's change of plan. That angel had, in short, so wildly spent Bob's and her own money in the adornment of her person before setting out, that she found herself without a sufficient margin for her fare by coach, and had scrimped from sheer necessity.

'Well, I have got the trap out at the Greyhound,' said Bob. 'I don't know whether it will hold your luggage and us too; but it looked more respectable than the waggon on a Sunday, and if there's not room for the boxes I can walk alongside.'

'I think there will be room,' said Miss Johnson mildly. And it was soon very evident that she spoke the truth; for when her property was deposited on the pavement, it consisted of a trunk about eighteen inches long, and nothing more.

'O — that's all!' said Captain Loveday, surprised.

'That's all,' said the young woman assuringly. 'I didn't want to give trouble, you know, and what I have besides I have left at my aunt's.'

‘Yes, of course,’ he answered readily. ‘And as it’s no bigger, I can carry it in my hand to the inn, and so it will be no trouble at all.’

He caught up the little box, and they went side by side to the Greyhound; and in ten minutes they were trotting up the Southern Road.

Bob did not hurry the horse, there being many things to say and hear, for which the present situation was admirably suited. The sun shone occasionally into Matilda’s face as they drove on, its rays picking out all her features to a great nicety. Her eyes would have been called brown, but they were really eel-colour, like many other nice brown eyes; they were well-shaped and rather bright, though they had more of a broad shine than a sparkle. She had a firm, sufficient nose, which seemed to say of itself that it was good as noses go. She had rather a picturesque way of wrapping her upper in her lower lip, so that the red of the latter showed strongly. Whenever she gazed against the sun towards the distant hills, she brought into her forehead, without knowing it, three short vertical lines — not there at other times — giving her for the moment rather a hard look. And in turning her head round to a far angle, to stare at something or other that he pointed out, the drawn flesh of her neck became a mass of lines. But Bob did not look at these things, which, of course, were of no significance; for had she not told him, when they compared ages, that she was a little over two-and-twenty?

As Nature was hardly invented at this early point of the century, Bob’s Matilda could not say much about the glamour of the hills, or the shimmering of the foliage, or the wealth of glory in the distant sea, as she would doubtless have done had she lived later on; but she did her best to be interesting, asking Bob about matters of social interest in the neighbourhood, to which she seemed quite a stranger.

‘Is your watering-place a large city?’ she inquired when they mounted the hill where the Overcombe folk had waited for the King.

‘Bless you, my dear — no! ‘Twould be nothing if it wasn’t for the Royal Family, and the lords and ladies, and the regiments of soldiers, and the frigates, and the King’s messengers, and the actors and actresses, and the games that go on.’

At the words ‘actors and actresses,’ the innocent young thing pricked up her ears.

‘Does Elliston pay as good salaries this summer as in — ?’

‘O, you know about it then? I thought — ’

‘O no, no! I have heard of Budmouth — read in the papers, you know, dear Robert, about the doings there, and the actors and actresses, you know.’

‘Yes, yes, I see. Well, I have been away from England a long time, and don’t know much about the theatre in the town; but I’ll take you there some day. Would it be a treat to you?’

‘O, an amazing treat!’ said Miss Johnson, with an ecstasy in which a close observer might have discovered a tinge of ghastliness.

‘You’ve never been into one perhaps, dear?’

‘N — never,’ said Matilda flatly. ‘Whatever do I see yonder — a row of white things on the down?’

‘Yes, that’s a part of the encampment above Overcombe. Lots of soldiers are encamped about here; those are the white tops of their tents.’

He pointed to a wing of the camp that had become visible. Matilda was much interested.

‘It will make it very lively for us,’ he added, ‘especially as John is there.’

She thought so too, and thus they chatted on.

CHAPTER XVII.

TWO FAINTING FITS AND A BEWILDERMENT

Meanwhile Miller Loveday was expecting the pair with interest; and about five o’clock, after repeated outlooks, he saw two specks the size of caraway seeds on the far line of ridge where the sunlit white of the road met the blue of the sky. Then the remainder parts of Bob and his lady became visible, and then the whole vehicle, end on, and he heard the dry rattle of the wheels on the dusty road. Miller Loveday’s plan, as far as he had formed any, was that Robert and his wife should live with him in the millhouse until Mrs. Garland made up her mind to join him there; in which event her present house would be made over to the young couple. Upon all grounds, he wished to welcome becomingly the woman of his son’s choice, and came forward promptly as they drew up at the door.

‘What a lovely place you’ve got here!’ said Miss Johnson, when the miller had received her from the captain. ‘A real stream of water, a real mill-wheel, and real fowls, and everything!’

‘Yes, ‘tis real enough,’ said Loveday, looking at the river with balanced sentiments; ‘and so you will say when you’ve lived here a bit as mis’ess, and had the trouble of claning the furniture.’

At this Miss Johnson looked modest, and continued to do so till Anne, not knowing they were there, came round the corner of the house, with her prayer-book in her hand, having just arrived from church. Bob turned and smiled to her, at which Miss Johnson looked glum. How long she would have remained in that phase is unknown, for just then her ears were assailed by a loud bass note from the other side, causing her to jump round.

‘O la! what dreadful thing is it?’ she exclaimed, and beheld a cow of Loveday’s, of the name of Crumpler, standing close to her shoulder. It being about milking-time, she had come to look up David and hasten on the operation.

‘O, what a horrid bull! — it did frighten me so. I hope I shan’t faint,’ said Matilda.

The miller immediately used the formula which has been uttered by the proprietors of live stock ever since Noah’s time. ‘She won’t hurt ye. Hoosh, Crumpler! She’s as timid as a mouse, ma’am.’

But as Crumpler persisted in making another terrific inquiry for David, Matilda could not help closing her eyes and saying, ‘O, I shall be gored to death!’ her head falling

back upon Bob's shoulder, which — seeing the urgent circumstances, and knowing her delicate nature — he had providentially placed in a position to catch her. Anne Garland, who had been standing at the corner of the house, not knowing whether to go back or come on, at this felt her womanly sympathies aroused. She ran and dipped her handkerchief into the splashing mill-tail, and with it damped Matilda's face. But as her eyes still remained closed, Bob, to increase the effect, took the handkerchief from Anne and wrung it out on the bridge of Matilda's nose, whence it ran over the rest of her face in a stream.

'O, Captain Loveday!' said Anne, 'the water is running over her green silk handkerchief, and into her pretty reticule!'

'There — if I didn't think so!' exclaimed Matilda, opening her eyes, starting up, and promptly pulling out her own handkerchief, with which she wiped away the drops, and an unimportant trifle of her complexion, assisted by Anne, who, in spite of her background of antagonistic emotions, could not help being interested.

'That's right!' said the miller, his spirits reviving with the revival of Matilda. 'The lady is not used to country life; are you, ma'am?'

'I am not,' replied the sufferer. 'All is so strange about here!'

Suddenly there spread into the firmament, from the direction of the down: —

'Ra, ta, ta! Ta-ta-ta-ta-ta! Ra, ta, ta!'

'O dear, dear! more hideous country sounds, I suppose?' she inquired, with another start.

'O no,' said the miller cheerfully. "'Tis only my son John's trumpeter chaps at the camp of dragoons just above us, a-blowing Mess, or Feed, or Picket, or some other of their vagaries. John will be much pleased to tell you the meaning on't when he comes down. He's trumpet-major, as you may know, ma'am.'

'O yes; you mean Captain Loveday's brother. Dear Bob has mentioned him.'

'If you come round to Widow Garland's side of the house, you can see the camp,' said the miller.

'Don't force her; she's tired with her long journey,' said Mrs. Garland humanely, the widow having come out in the general wish to see Captain Bob's choice. Indeed, they all behaved towards her as if she were a tender exotic, which their crude country manners might seriously injure.

She went into the house, accompanied by Mrs. Garland and her daughter; though before leaving Bob she managed to whisper in his ear, 'Don't tell them I came by waggon, will you, dear?' — a request which was quite needless, for Bob had long ago determined to keep that a dead secret; not because it was an uncommon mode of travel, but simply that it was hardly the usual conveyance for a gorgeous lady to her bridal.

As the men had a feeling that they would be superfluous indoors just at present, the miller assisted David in taking the horse round to the stables, Bob following, and leaving Matilda to the women. Indoors, Miss Johnson admired everything: the new parrots and marmosets, the black beams of the ceiling, the double-corner cupboard

with the glass doors, through which gleamed the remainders of sundry china sets acquired by Bob's mother in her housekeeping — two-handled sugar-basins, no-handled tea-cups, a tea-pot like a pagoda, and a cream-jug in the form of a spotted cow. This sociability in their visitor was returned by Mrs. Garland and Anne; and Miss Johnson's pleasing habit of partly dying whenever she heard any unusual bark or bellow added to her piquancy in their eyes. But conversation, as such, was naturally at first of a nervous, tentative kind, in which, as in the works of some minor poets, the sense was considerably led by the sound.

'You get the sea-breezes here, no doubt?'

'O yes, dear; when the wind is that way.'

'Do you like windy weather?'

'Yes; though not now, for it blows down the young apples.'

'Apples are plentiful, it seems. You country-folk call St. Swithin's their christening day, if it rains?'

'Yes, dear. Ah me! I have not been to a christening for these many years; the baby's name was George, I remember — after the King.'

'I hear that King George is still staying at the town here. I hope he'll stay till I have seen him!'

'He'll wait till the corn turns yellow; he always does.'

'How very fashionable yellow is getting for gloves just now!'

'Yes. Some persons wear them to the elbow, I hear.'

'Do they? I was not aware of that. I struck my elbow last week so hard against the door of my aunt's mansion that I feel the ache now.'

Before they were quite overwhelmed by the interest of this discourse, the miller and Bob came in. In truth, Mrs. Garland found the office in which he had placed her — that of introducing a strange woman to a house which was not the widow's own — a rather awkward one, and yet almost a necessity. There was no woman belonging to the house except that wondrous compendium of usefulness, the intermittent maid-servant, whom Loveday had, for appearances, borrowed from Mrs. Garland, and Mrs. Garland was in the habit of borrowing from the girl's mother. And as for the demi-woman David, he had been informed as peremptorily as Pharaoh's baker that the office of housemaid and bedmaker was taken from him, and would be given to this girl till the wedding was over, and Bob's wife took the management into her own hands.

They all sat down to high tea, Anne and her mother included, and the captain sitting next to Miss Johnson. Anne had put a brave face upon the matter — outwardly, at least — and seemed in a fair way of subduing any lingering sentiment which Bob's return had revived. During the evening, and while they still sat over the meal, John came down on a hurried visit, as he had promised, ostensibly on purpose to be introduced to his intended sister-in-law, but much more to get a word and a smile from his beloved Anne. Before they saw him, they heard the trumpet-major's smart step coming round the corner of the house, and in a moment his form darkened the door. As it was Sunday, he appeared in his full-dress laced coat, white waistcoat and breeches, and

towering plume, the latter of which he instantly lowered, as much from necessity as good manners, the beam in the mill-house ceiling having a tendency to smash and ruin all such head-gear without warning.

‘John, we’ve been hoping you would come down,’ said the miller, ‘and so we have kept the tay about on purpose. Draw up, and speak to Mrs. Matilda Johnson. . . . Ma’am, this is Robert’s brother.’

‘Your humble servant, ma’am,’ said the trumpet-major gallantly.

As it was getting dusk in the low, small-paned room, he instinctively moved towards Miss Johnson as he spoke, who sat with her back to the window. He had no sooner noticed her features than his helmet nearly fell from his hand; his face became suddenly fixed, and his natural complexion took itself off, leaving a greenish yellow in its stead. The young person, on her part, had no sooner looked closely at him than she said weakly, ‘Robert’s brother!’ and changed colour yet more rapidly than the soldier had done. The faintness, previously half counterfeit, seized on her now in real earnest.

‘I don’t feel well,’ she said, suddenly rising by an effort. ‘This warm day has quite upset me!’

There was a regular collapse of the tea-party, like that of the Hamlet play scene. Bob seized his sweetheart and carried her upstairs, the miller exclaiming, ‘Ah, she’s terribly worn by the journey! I thought she was when I saw her nearly go off at the blare of the cow. No woman would have been frightened at that if she’d been up to her natural strength.’

‘That, and being so very shy of men, too, must have made John’s handsome regimentals quite overpowering to her, poor thing,’ added Mrs. Garland, following the catastrophic young lady upstairs, whose indisposition was this time beyond question. And yet, by some perversity of the heart, she was as eager now to make light of her faintness as she had been to make much of it two or three hours ago.

The miller and John stood like straight sticks in the room the others had quitted, John’s face being hastily turned towards a caricature of Buonaparte on the wall that he had not seen more than a hundred and fifty times before.

‘Come, sit down and have a dish of tea, anyhow,’ said his father at last. ‘She’ll soon be right again, no doubt.’

‘Thanks; I don’t want any tea,’ said John quickly. And, indeed, he did not, for he was in one gigantic ache from head to foot.

The light had been too dim for anybody to notice his amazement; and not knowing where to vent it, the trumpet-major said he was going out for a minute. He hastened to the bakehouse; but David being there, he went to the pantry; but the maid being there, he went to the cart-shed; but a couple of tramps being there, he went behind a row of French beans in the garden, where he let off an ejaculation the most pious that he had uttered that Sabbath day: ‘Heaven! what’s to be done!’

And then he walked wildly about the paths of the dusky garden, where the trickling of the brooks seemed loud by comparison with the stillness around; treading recklessly on the cracking snails that had come forth to feed, and entangling his spurs in the long

grass till the rowels were choked with its blades. Presently he heard another person approaching, and his brother's shape appeared between the stubborn tree and the hedge.

'O, is it you?' said the mate.

'Yes. I am — taking a little air.'

'She is getting round nicely again; and as I am not wanted indoors just now, I am going into the village to call upon a friend or two I have not been able to speak to as yet.'

John took his brother Bob's hand. Bob rather wondered why.

'All right, old boy,' he said. 'Going into the village? You'll be back again, I suppose, before it gets very late?'

'O yes,' said Captain Bob cheerfully, and passed out of the garden.

John allowed his eyes to follow his brother till his shape could not be seen, and then he turned and again walked up and down.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE NIGHT AFTER THE ARRIVAL

John continued his sad and heavy pace till walking seemed too old and worn-out a way of showing sorrow so new, and he leant himself against the fork of an apple-tree like a log. There the trumpet-major remained for a considerable time, his face turned towards the house, whose ancient, many-chimneyed outline rose against the darkened sky, and just shut out from his view the camp above. But faint noises coming thence from horses restless at the pickets, and from visitors taking their leave, recalled its existence, and reminded him that, in consequence of Matilda's arrival, he had obtained leave for the night — a fact which, owing to the startling emotions that followed his entry, he had not yet mentioned to his friends.

While abstractedly considering how he could best use that privilege under the new circumstances which had arisen, he heard Farmer Derriman drive up to the front door and hold a conversation with his father. The old man had at last apparently brought the tin box of private papers that he wished the miller to take charge of during Derriman's absence; and it being a calm night, John could hear, though he little heeded, Uncle Benjy's reiterated supplications to Loveday to keep it safe from fire and thieves. Then Uncle Benjy left, and John's father went upstairs to deposit the box in a place of security, the whole proceeding reaching John's preoccupied comprehension merely as voices during sleep.

The next thing was the appearance of a light in the bedroom which had been assigned to Matilda Johnson. This effectually aroused the trumpet-major, and with a stealthiness unusual in him he went indoors. No light was in the lower rooms, his father, Mrs. Garland, and Anne having gone out on the bridge to look at the new moon. John went upstairs on tip-toe, and along the uneven passage till he came to her

door. It was standing ajar, a band of candlelight shining across the passage and up the opposite wall. As soon as he entered the radiance he saw her. She was standing before the looking-glass, apparently lost in thought, her fingers being clasped behind her head in abstraction, and the light falling full upon her face.

‘I must speak to you,’ said the trumpet-major.

She started, turned and grew paler than before; and then, as if moved by a sudden impulse, she swung the door wide open, and, coming out, said quite collectedly and with apparent pleasantness, ‘O yes; you are my Bob’s brother! I didn’t, for a moment, recognize you.’

‘But you do now?’

‘As Bob’s brother.’

‘You have not seen me before?’

‘I have not,’ she answered, with a face as impassible as Talleyrand’s.

‘Good God!’

‘I have not!’ she repeated.

‘Nor any of the — th Dragoons? Captain Jolly, for instance?’

‘No.’

‘You mistake. I’ll remind you of particulars,’ he said drily. And he did remind her at some length.

‘Never!’ she said desperately.

But she had miscalculated her staying powers, and her adversary’s character. Five minutes after that she was in tears, and the conversation had resolved itself into words, which, on the soldier’s part, were of the nature of commands, tempered by pity, and were a mere series of entreaties on hers.

The whole scene did not last ten minutes. When it was over, the trumpet-major walked from the doorway where they had been standing, and brushed moisture from his eyes. Reaching a dark lumber-room, he stood still there to calm himself, and then descended by a Flemish-ladder to the bakehouse, instead of by the front stairs. He found that the others, including Bob, had gathered in the parlour during his absence and lighted the candles.

Miss Johnson, having sent down some time before John re-entered the house to say that she would prefer to keep her room that evening, was not expected to join them, and on this account Bob showed less than his customary liveliness. The miller wishing to keep up his son’s spirits, expressed his regret that, it being Sunday night, they could have no songs to make the evening cheerful; when Mrs. Garland proposed that they should sing psalms which, by choosing lively tunes and not thinking of the words, would be almost as good as ballads.

This they did, the trumpet-major appearing to join in with the rest; but as a matter of fact no sound came from his moving lips. His mind was in such a state that he derived no pleasure even from Anne Garland’s presence, though he held a corner of the same book with her, and was treated in a winsome way which it was not her usual practice

to indulge in. She saw that his mind was clouded, and, far from guessing the reason why, was doing her best to clear it.

At length the Garlands found that it was the hour for them to leave, and John Loveday at the same time wished his father and Bob good-night, and went as far as Mrs. Garland's door with her.

He had said not a word to show that he was free to remain out of camp, for the reason that there was painful work to be done, which it would be best to do in secret and alone. He lingered near the house till its reflected window-lights ceased to glimmer upon the mill-pond, and all within the dwelling was dark and still. Then he entered the garden and waited there till the back door opened, and a woman's figure timorously came forward. John Loveday at once went up to her, and they began to talk in low yet dissentient tones.

They had conversed about ten minutes, and were parting as if they had come to some painful arrangement, Miss Johnson sobbing bitterly, when a head stealthily arose above the dense hedgerow, and in a moment a shout burst from its owner.

'Thieves! thieves! — my tin box! — thieves! thieves!'

Matilda vanished into the house, and John Loveday hastened to the hedge. 'For heaven's sake, hold your tongue, Mr. Derriman!' he exclaimed.

'My tin box!' said Uncle Benjy. 'O, only the trumpet-major!'

'Your box is safe enough, I assure you. It was only' — here the trumpet-major gave vent to an artificial laugh — 'only a sly bit of courting, you know.'

'Ha, ha, I see!' said the relieved old squireen. 'Courting Miss Anne! Then you've ousted my nephew, trumpet-major! Well, so much the better. As for myself, the truth on't is that I haven't been able to go to bed easy, for thinking that possibly your father might not take care of what I put under his charge; and at last I thought I would just step over and see if all was safe here before I turned in. And when I saw your two shapes my poor nerves magnified ye to housebreakers, and Boneys, and I don't know what all.'

'You have alarmed the house,' said the trumpet-major, hearing the clicking of flint and steel in his father's bedroom, followed in a moment by the rise of a light in the window of the same apartment. 'You have got me into difficulty,' he added gloomily, as his father opened the casement.

'I am sorry for that,' said Uncle Benjy. 'But step back; I'll put it all right again.'

'What, for heaven's sake, is the matter?' said the miller, his tasselled nightcap appearing in the opening.

'Nothing, nothing!' said the farmer. 'I was uneasy about my few bonds and documents, and I walked this way, miller, before going to bed, as I start from home tomorrow morning. When I came down by your garden-hedge, I thought I saw thieves, but it turned out to be — to be —'

Here a lump of earth from the trumpet-major's hand struck Uncle Benjy in the back as a reminder.

'To be — the bough of a cherry-tree a-waving in the wind. Good-night.'

‘No thieves are like to try my house,’ said Miller Loveday. ‘Now don’t you come alarming us like this again, farmer, or you shall keep your box yourself, begging your pardon for saying so. Good-night t’ ye!’

‘Miller, will ye just look, since I am here — just look and see if the box is all right? there’s a good man! I am old, you know, and my poor remains are not what my original self was. Look and see if it is where you put it, there’s a good, kind man.’

‘Very well,’ said the miller good-humouredly.

‘Neighbour Loveday! on second thoughts I will take my box home again, after all, if you don’t mind. You won’t deem it ill of me? I have no suspicion, of course; but now I think on’t there’s rivalry between my nephew and your son; and if Festus should take it into his head to set your house on fire in his enmity, ‘twould be bad for my deeds and documents. No offence, miller, but I’ll take the box, if you don’t mind.’

‘Faith! I don’t mind,’ said Loveday. ‘But your nephew had better think twice before he lets his enmity take that colour.’ Receding from the window, he took the candle to a back part of the room and soon reappeared with the tin box.

‘I won’t trouble ye to dress,’ said Derriman considerately; ‘let en down by anything you have at hand.’

The box was lowered by a cord, and the old man clasped it in his arms. ‘Thank ye!’ he said with heartfelt gratitude. ‘Good-night!’

The miller replied and closed the window, and the light went out.

‘There, now I hope you are satisfied, sir?’ said the trumpet-major.

‘Quite, quite!’ said Derriman; and, leaning on his walking-stick, he pursued his lonely way.

That night Anne lay awake in her bed, musing on the traits of the new friend who had come to her neighbour’s house. She would not be critical, it was ungenerous and wrong; but she could not help thinking of what interested her. And were there, she silently asked, in Miss Johnson’s mind and person such rare qualities as placed that lady altogether beyond comparison with herself? O yes, there must be; for had not Captain Bob singled out Matilda from among all other women, herself included? Of course, with his world-wide experience, he knew best.

When the moon had set, and only the summer stars threw their light into the great damp garden, she fancied that she heard voices in that direction. Perhaps they were the voices of Bob and Matilda taking a lover’s walk before retiring. If so, how sleepy they would be next day, and how absurd it was of Matilda to pretend she was tired! Ruminating in this way, and saying to herself that she hoped they would be happy, Anne fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIX.

MISS JOHNSON’S BEHAVIOUR CAUSES NO LITTLE SURPRISE

Partly from the excitement of having his Matilda under the paternal roof, Bob rose next morning as early as his father and the grinder, and, when the big wheel began to patter and the little ones to mumble in response, went to sun himself outside the mill-front, among the fowls of brown and speckled kinds which haunted that spot, and the ducks that came up from the mill-tail.

Standing on the worn-out mill-stone inlaid in the gravel, he talked with his father on various improvements of the premises, and on the proposed arrangements for his permanent residence there, with an enjoyment that was half based upon this prospect of the future, and half on the penetrating warmth of the sun to his back and shoulders. Then the different troops of horses began their morning scramble down to the mill-pond, and, after making it very muddy round the edge, ascended the slope again. The bustle of the camp grew more and more audible, and presently David came to say that breakfast was ready.

‘Is Miss Johnson downstairs?’ said the miller; and Bob listened for the answer, looking at a blue sentinel aloft on the down.

‘Not yet, maister,’ said the excellent David.

‘We’ll wait till she’s down,’ said Loveday. ‘When she is, let us know.’

David went indoors again, and Loveday and Bob continued their morning survey by ascending into the mysterious quivering recesses of the mill, and holding a discussion over a second pair of burr-stones, which had to be re-dressed before they could be used again. This and similar things occupied nearly twenty minutes, and, looking from the window, the elder of the two was reminded of the time of day by seeing Mrs. Garland’s table-cloth fluttering from her back door over the heads of a flock of pigeons that had alighted for the crumbs.

‘I suppose David can’t find us,’ he said, with a sense of hunger that was not altogether strange to Bob. He put out his head and shouted.

‘The lady is not down yet,’ said his man in reply.

‘No hurry, no hurry,’ said the miller, with cheerful emptiness. ‘Bob, to pass the time we’ll look into the garden.’

‘She’ll get up sooner than this, you know, when she’s signed articles and got a berth here,’ Bob observed apologetically.

‘Yes, yes,’ said Loveday; and they descended into the garden.

Here they turned over sundry flat stones and killed the slugs sheltered beneath them from the coming heat of the day, talking of slugs in all their branches — of the brown and the black, of the tough and the tender, of the reason why there were so many in the garden that year, of the coming time when the grass-walks harbouring them were to be taken up and gravel laid, and of the relatively exterminatory merits of a pair of scissors and the heel of the shoe. At last the miller said, ‘Well, really, Bob, I’m hungry; we must begin without her.’

They were about to go in, when David appeared with haste in his motions, his eyes wider vertically than crosswise, and his cheeks nearly all gone.

‘Maister, I’ve been to call her; and as ‘a didn’t speak I rapped, and as ‘a didn’t answer I kicked, and not being latched the door opened, and — she’s gone!’

Bob went off like a swallow towards the house, and the miller followed like the rather heavy man that he was. That Miss Matilda was not in her room, or a scrap of anything belonging to her, was soon apparent. They searched every place in which she could possibly hide or squeeze herself, every place in which she could not, but found nothing at all.

Captain Bob was quite wild with astonishment and grief. When he was quite sure that she was nowhere in his father’s house, he ran into Mrs. Garland’s, and telling them the story so hastily that they hardly understood the particulars, he went on towards Comfort’s house, intending to raise the alarm there, and also at Mitchell’s, Beach’s, Cripplestraw’s, the parson’s, the clerk’s, the camp of dragoons, of hussars, and so on through the whole county. But he paused, and thought it would be hardly expedient to publish his discomfiture in such a way. If Matilda had left the house for any freakish reason he would not care to look for her, and if her deed had a tragic intent she would keep aloof from camp and village.

In his trouble he thought of Anne. She was a nice girl and could be trusted. To her he went, and found her in a state of excitement and anxiety which equalled his own.

‘‘Tis so lonely to cruise for her all by myself!’ said Bob disconsolately, his forehead all in wrinkles, ‘and I’ve thought you would come with me and cheer the way?’

‘Where shall we search?’ said Anne.

‘O, in the holes of rivers, you know, and down wells, and in quarries, and over cliffs, and like that. Your eyes might catch the loom of any bit of a shawl or bonnet that I should overlook, and it would do me a real service. Please do come!’

So Anne took pity upon him, and put on her hat and went, the miller and David having gone off in another direction. They examined the ditches of fields, Bob going round by one fence and Anne by the other, till they met at the opposite side. Then they peeped under culverts, into outhouses, and down old wells and quarries, till the theory of a tragical end had nearly spent its force in Bob’s mind, and he began to think that Matilda had simply run away. However, they still walked on, though by this time the sun was hot and Anne would gladly have sat down.

‘Now, didn’t you think highly of her, Miss Garland?’ he inquired, as the search began to languish.

‘O yes,’ said Anne, ‘very highly.’

‘She was really beautiful; no nonsense about her looks, was there?’

‘None. Her beauty was thoroughly ripe — not too young. We should all have got to love her. What can have possessed her to go away?’

‘I don’t know, and, upon my life, I shall soon be drove to say I don’t care!’ replied the mate despairingly. ‘Let me pilot ye down over those stones,’ he added, as Anne began to descend a rugged quarry. He stepped forward, leapt down, and turned to her.

She gave him her hand and sprang down. Before he relinquished his hold, Captain Bob raised her fingers to his lips and kissed them.

‘O, Captain Loveday!’ cried Anne, snatching away her hand in genuine dismay, while a tear rose unexpectedly to each eye. ‘I never heard of such a thing! I won’t go an inch further with you, sir; it is too barefaced!’ And she turned and ran off.

‘Upon my life I didn’t mean it!’ said the repentant captain, hastening after. ‘I do love her best — indeed I do — and I don’t love you at all! I am not so fickle as that! I merely just for the moment admired you as a sweet little craft, and that’s how I came to do it. You know, Miss Garland,’ he continued earnestly, and still running after, ‘’tis like this: when you come ashore after having been shut up in a ship for eighteen months, women-folks seem so new and nice that you can’t help liking them, one and all in a body; and so your heart is apt to get scattered and to yaw a bit; but of course I think of poor Matilda most, and shall always stick to her.’ He heaved a sigh of tremendous magnitude, to show beyond the possibility of doubt that his heart was still in the place that honour required.

‘I am glad to hear that — of course I am very glad!’ said she, with quick petulance, keeping her face turned from him. ‘And I hope we shall find her, and that the wedding will not be put off, and that you’ll both be happy. But I won’t look for her any more! No; I don’t care to look for her — and my head aches. I am going home!’

‘And so am I,’ said Robert promptly.

‘No, no; go on looking for her, of course — all the afternoon, and all night. I am sure you will, if you love her.’

‘O yes; I mean to. Still, I ought to convoy you home first?’

‘No, you ought not; and I shall not accept your company. Good-morning, sir!’ And she went off over one of the stone stiles with which the spot abounded, leaving the friendly sailor standing in the field.

He sighed again, and, observing the camp not far off, thought he would go to his brother John and ask him his opinion on the sorrowful case. On reaching the tents he found that John was not at liberty just at that time, being engaged in practising the trumpeters; and leaving word that he wished the trumpet-major to come down to the mill as soon as possible, Bob went back again.

‘’Tis no good looking for her,’ he said gloomily. ‘She liked me well enough, but when she came here and saw the house, and the place, and the old horse, and the plain furniture, she was disappointed to find us all so homely, and felt she didn’t care to marry into such a family!’

His father and David had returned with no news.

‘Yes, ’tis as I’ve been thinking, father,’ Bob said. ‘We weren’t good enough for her, and she went away in scorn!’

‘Well, that can’t be helped,’ said the miller. ‘What we be, we be, and have been for generations. To my mind she seemed glad enough to get hold of us!’

‘Yes, yes — for the moment — because of the flowers, and birds, and what’s pretty in the place,’ said Bob tragically. ‘But you don’t know, father — how should you know, who have hardly been out of Overcombe in your life? — you don’t know what delicate

feelings are in a real refined woman's mind. Any little vulgar action unreaves their nerves like a marline-spike. Now I wonder if you did anything to disgust her?'

'Faith! not that I know of,' said Loveday, reflecting. 'I didn't say a single thing that I should naturally have said, on purpose to give no offence.'

'You was always very homely, you know, father.'

'Yes; so I was,' said the miller meekly.

'I wonder what it could have been,' Bob continued, wandering about restlessly. 'You didn't go drinking out of the big mug with your mouth full, or wipe your lips with your sleeve?'

'That I'll swear I didn't!' said the miller firmly. 'Thinks I, there's no knowing what I may do to shock her, so I'll take my solid victuals in the bakehouse, and only a crumb and a drop in her company for manners.'

'You could do no more than that, certainly,' said Bob gently.

'If my manners be good enough for well-brought-up people like the Garlands, they be good enough for her,' continued the miller, with a sense of injustice.

'That's true. Then it must have been David. David, come here! How did you behave before that lady? Now, mind you speak the truth!'

'Yes, Mr. Captain Robert,' said David earnestly. 'I assure ye she was served like a royal queen. The best silver spoons wez put down, and yer poor grandfer's silver tanket, as you seed, and the feather cushion for her to sit on — '

'Now I've got it!' said Bob decisively, bringing down his hand upon the window-sill. 'Her bed was hard! — and there's nothing shocks a true lady like that. The bed in that room always was as hard as the Rock of Gibraltar!'

'No, Captain Bob! The beds were changed — wasn't they maister? We put the goose bed in her room, and the flock one, that used to be there, in yours.'

'Yes, we did,' corroborated the miller. 'David and I changed 'em with our own hands, because they were too heavy for the women to move.'

'Sure I didn't know I had the flock bed,' murmured Bob. 'I slept on, little thinking what I was going to wake to. Well, well, she's gone; and search as I will I shall never find another like her! She was too good for me. She must have carried her box with her own hands, poor girl. As far as that goes, I could overtake her even now, I dare say; but I won't entreat her against her will — not I.'

Miller Loveday and David, feeling themselves to be rather a desecration in the presence of Bob's sacred emotions, managed to edge off by degrees, the former burying himself in the most floury recesses of the mill, his invariable resource when perturbed, the rumbling having a soothing effect upon the nerves of those properly trained to its music.

Bob was so impatient that, after going up to her room to assure himself once more that she had not undressed, but had only lain down on the outside of the bed, he went out of the house to meet John, and waited on the sunny slope of the down till his brother appeared. John looked so brave and shapely and warlike that, even in Bob's present distress, he could not but feel an honest and affectionate pride at owning such

a relative. Yet he fancied that John did not come along with the same swinging step he had shown yesterday; and when the trumpet-major got nearer he looked anxiously at the mate and waited for him to speak first.

‘You know our great trouble, John?’ said Robert, gazing stoically into his brother’s eyes.

‘Come and sit down, and tell me all about it,’ answered the trumpet-major, showing no surprise.

They went towards a slight ravine, where it was easier to sit down than on the flat ground, and here John reclined among the grasshoppers, pointing to his brother to do the same.

‘But do you know what it is?’ said Robert. ‘Has anybody told ye?’

‘I do know,’ said John. ‘She’s gone; and I am thankful!’

‘What!’ said Bob, rising to his knees in amazement.

‘I’m at the bottom of it,’ said the trumpet-major slowly.

‘You, John?’

‘Yes; and if you will listen I’ll tell you all. Do you remember what happened when I came into the room last night? Why, she turned colour and nearly fainted away. That was because she knew me.’

Bob stared at his brother with a face of pain and distrust.

‘For once, Bob, I must say something that will hurt thee a good deal,’ continued John. ‘She was not a woman who could possibly be your wife — and so she’s gone.’

‘You sent her off?’

‘Well, I did.’

‘John! — Tell me right through — tell me!’

‘Perhaps I had better,’ said the trumpet-major, his blue eyes resting on the far distant sea, that seemed to rise like a wall as high as the hill they sat upon.

And then he told a tale of Miss Johnson and the — th Dragoons which wrung his heart as much in the telling as it did Bob’s to hear, and which showed that John had been temporarily cruel to be ultimately kind. Even Bob, excited as he was, could discern from John’s manner of speaking what a terrible undertaking that night’s business had been for him. To justify the course he had adopted the dictates of duty must have been imperative; but the trumpet-major, with a becoming reticence which his brother at the time was naturally unable to appreciate, scarcely dwelt distinctly enough upon the compelling cause of his conduct. It would, indeed, have been hard for any man, much less so modest a one as John, to do himself justice in that remarkable relation, when the listener was the lady’s lover; and it is no wonder that Robert rose to his feet and put a greater distance between himself and John.

‘And what time was it?’ he asked in a hard, suppressed voice.

‘It was just before one o’clock.’

‘How could you help her to go away?’

‘I had a pass. I carried her box to the coach-office. She was to follow at dawn.’

‘But she had no money.’

‘Yes, she had; I took particular care of that.’ John did not add, as he might have done, that he had given her, in his pity, all the money he possessed, and at present had only eighteen-pence in the world. ‘Well, it is over, Bob; so sit ye down, and talk with me of old times,’ he added.

‘Ah, Jack, it is well enough for you to speak like that,’ said the disquieted sailor; ‘but I can’t help feeling that it is a cruel thing you have done. After all, she would have been snug enough for me. Would I had never found out this about her! John, why did you interfere? You had no right to overhaul my affairs like this. Why didn’t you tell me fairly all you knew, and let me do as I chose? You have turned her out of the house, and it’s a shame! If she had only come to me! Why didn’t she?’

‘Because she knew it was best to do otherwise.’

‘Well, I shall go after her,’ said Bob firmly.

‘You can do as you like,’ said John; ‘but I would advise you strongly to leave matters where they are.’

‘I won’t leave matters where they are,’ said Bob impetuously. ‘You have made me miserable, and all for nothing. I tell you she was good enough for me; and as long as I knew nothing about what you say of her history, what difference would it have made to me? Never was there a young woman who was better company; and she loved a merry song as I do myself. Yes, I’ll follow her.’

‘O, Bob,’ said John; ‘I hardly expected this!’

‘That’s because you didn’t know your man. Can I ask you to do me one kindness? I don’t suppose I can. Can I ask you not to say a word against her to any of them at home?’

‘Certainly. The very reason why I got her to go off silently, as she has done, was because nothing should be said against her here, and no scandal should be heard of.’

‘That may be; but I’m off after her. Marry that girl I will.’

‘You’ll be sorry.’

‘That we shall see,’ replied Robert with determination; and he went away rapidly towards the mill. The trumpet-major had no heart to follow — no good could possibly come of further opposition; and there on the down he remained like a graven image till Bob had vanished from his sight into the mill.

Bob entered his father’s only to leave word that he was going on a renewed search for Matilda, and to pack up a few necessaries for his journey. Ten minutes later he came out again with a bundle in his hand, and John saw him go diagonally across the lower fields towards the high-road.

‘And this is all the good I have done!’ said John, musingly readjusting his stock where it cut his neck, and descending towards the mill.

CHAPTER XX.

HOW THEY LESSENERED THE EFFECT OF THE CALAMITY

Meanwhile Anne Garland had gone home, and, being weary with her ramble in search of Matilda, sat silent in a corner of the room. Her mother was passing the time in giving utterance to every conceivable surmise on the cause of Miss Johnson's disappearance that the human mind could frame, to which Anne returned monosyllabic answers, the result, not of indifference, but of intense preoccupation. Presently Loveday, the father, came to the door; her mother vanished with him, and they remained closeted together a long time. Anne went into the garden and seated herself beneath the branching tree whose boughs had sheltered her during so many hours of her residence here. Her attention was fixed more upon the miller's wing of the irregular building before her than upon that occupied by her mother, for she could not help expecting every moment to see some one run out with a wild face and announce some awful clearing up of the mystery.

Every sound set her on the alert, and hearing the tread of a horse in the lane she looked round eagerly. Gazing at her over the hedge was Festus Derriman, mounted on such an incredibly tall animal that he could see to her very feet over the thick and broad thorn fence. She no sooner recognized him than she withdrew her glance; but as his eyes were fixed steadily upon her this was a futile manoeuvre.

'I saw you look round!' he exclaimed crossly. 'What have I done to make you behave like that? Come, Miss Garland, be fair. 'Tis no use to turn your back upon me.' As she did not turn he went on — 'Well, now, this is enough to provoke a saint. Now I tell you what, Miss Garland; here I'll stay till you do turn round, if 'tis all the afternoon. You know my temper — what I say I mean.' He seated himself firmly in the saddle, plucked some leaves from the hedge, and began humming a song, to show how absolutely indifferent he was to the flight of time.

'What have you come for, that you are so anxious to see me?' inquired Anne, when at last he had wearied her patience, rising and facing him with the added independence which came from a sense of the hedge between them.

'There, I knew you would turn round!' he said, his hot angry face invaded by a smile in which his teeth showed like white hemmed in by red at chess.

'What do you want, Mr. Derriman?' said she.

'"What do you want, Mr. Derriman?" — now listen to that! Is that my encouragement?'

Anne bowed superciliously, and moved away.

'I have just heard news that explains all that,' said the giant, eyeing her movements with somnolent irascibility. 'My uncle has been letting things out. He was here late last night, and he saw you.'

'Indeed he didn't,' said Anne.

'O, now! He saw Trumpet-major Loveday courting somebody like you in that garden walk; and when he came you ran indoors.'

'It is not true, and I wish to hear no more.'

'Upon my life, he said so! How can you do it, Miss Garland, when I, who have enough money to buy up all the Lovedays, would gladly come to terms with ye? What

a simpleton you must be, to pass me over for him! There, now you are angry because I said simpleton! — I didn't mean simpleton, I meant misguided — misguided rosebud! That's it — run off,' he continued in a raised voice, as Anne made towards the garden door. 'But I'll have you yet. Much reason you have to be too proud to stay with me. But it won't last long; I shall marry you, madam, if I choose, as you'll see.'

When he was quite gone, and Anne had calmed down from the not altogether unrelished fear and excitement that he always caused her, she returned to her seat under the tree, and began to wonder what Festus Derriman's story meant, which, from the earnestness of his tone, did not seem like a pure invention. It suddenly flashed upon her mind that she herself had heard voices in the garden, and that the persons seen by Farmer Derriman, of whose visit and reclamation of his box the miller had told her, might have been Matilda and John Loveday. She further recalled the strange agitation of Miss Johnson on the preceding evening, and that it occurred just at the entry of the dragoon, till by degrees suspicion amounted to conviction that he knew more than any one else supposed of that lady's disappearance.

It was just at this time that the trumpet-major descended to the mill after his talk with his brother on the down. As fate would have it, instead of entering the house he turned aside to the garden and walked down that pleasant enclosure, to learn if he were likely to find in the other half of it the woman he loved so well.

Yes, there she was, sitting on the seat of logs that he had repaired for her, under the apple-tree; but she was not facing in his direction. He walked with a noisier tread, he coughed, he shook a bough, he did everything, in short, but the one thing that Festus did in the same circumstances — call out to her. He would not have ventured on that for the world. Any of his signs would have been sufficient to attract her a day or two earlier; now she would not turn. At last, in his fond anxiety, he did what he had never done before without an invitation, and crossed over into Mrs. Garland's half of the garden, till he stood before her.

When she could not escape him she arose, and, saying 'Good afternoon, trumpet-major,' in a glacial manner unusual with her, walked away to another part of the garden.

Loveday, quite at a loss, had not the strength of mind to persevere further. He had a vague apprehension that some imperfect knowledge of the previous night's unhappy business had reached her; and, unable to remedy the evil without telling more than he dared, he went into the mill, where his father still was, looking doleful enough, what with his concern at events and the extra quantity of flour upon his face through sticking so closely to business that day.

'Well, John; Bob has told you all, of course? A queer, strange, perplexing thing, isn't it? I can't make it out at all. There must be something wrong in the woman, or it couldn't have happened. I haven't been so upset for years.'

'Nor have I. I wouldn't it should have happened for all I own in the world,' said the dragoon. 'Have you spoke to Anne Garland to-day — or has anybody been talking to her?'

‘Festus Derriman rode by half-an-hour ago, and talked to her over the hedge.’

John guessed the rest, and, after standing on the threshold in silence awhile, walked away towards the camp.

All this time his brother Robert had been hastening along in pursuit of the woman who had withdrawn from the scene to avoid the exposure and complete overthrow which would have resulted had she remained. As the distance lengthened between himself and the mill, Bob was conscious of some cooling down of the excitement that had prompted him to set out; but he did not pause in his walk till he had reached the head of the river which fed the mill-stream. Here, for some indefinite reason, he allowed his eyes to be attracted by the bubbling spring whose waters never failed or lessened, and he stopped as if to look longer at the scene; it was really because his mind was so absorbed by John’s story.

The sun was warm, the spot was a pleasant one, and he deposited his bundle and sat down. By degrees, as he reflected, first on John’s view and then on his own, his convictions became unsettled; till at length he was so balanced between the impulse to go on and the impulse to go back, that a puff of wind either way would have been well-nigh sufficient to decide for him. When he allowed John’s story to repeat itself in his ears, the reasonableness and good sense of his advice seemed beyond question. When, on the other hand, he thought of his poor Matilda’s eyes, and her, to him, pleasant ways, their charming arrangements to marry, and her probable willingness still, he could hardly bring himself to do otherwise than follow on the road at the top of his speed.

This strife of thought was so well maintained that sitting and standing, he remained on the borders of the spring till the shadows had stretched out eastwards, and the chance of overtaking Matilda had grown considerably less. Still he did not positively go towards home. At last he took a guinea from his pocket, and resolved to put the question to the hazard. ‘Heads I go; tails I don’t.’ The piece of gold spun in the air and came down heads.

‘No, I won’t go, after all,’ he said. ‘I won’t be steered by accidents any more.’

He picked up his bundle and switch, and retraced his steps towards Overcombe Mill, knocking down the brambles and nettles as he went with gloomy and indifferent blows. When he got within sight of the house he beheld David in the road.

‘All right — all right again, captain!’, shouted that retainer. ‘A wedding after all! Hurrah!’

‘Ah — she’s back again?’ cried Bob, seizing David, ecstatically, and dancing round with him.

‘No — but it’s all the same! it is of no consequence at all, and no harm will be done! Maister and Mrs. Garland have made up a match, and mean to marry at once, that the wedding victuals may not be wasted! They felt ‘twould be a thousand pities to let such good things get blue-vinned for want of a ceremony to use ‘em upon, and at last they have thought of this.’

‘Victuals — I don’t care for the victuals!’ bitterly cried Bob, in a tone of far higher thought. ‘How you disappoint me!’ and he went slowly towards the house.

His father appeared in the opening of the mill-door, looking more cheerful than when they had parted. ‘What, Robert, you’ve been after her?’ he said. ‘Faith, then, I wouldn’t have followed her if I had been as sure as you were that she went away in scorn of us. Since you told me that, I have not looked for her at all.’

‘I was wrong, father,’ Bob replied gravely, throwing down his bundle and stick. ‘Matilda, I find, has not gone away in scorn of us; she has gone away for other reasons. I followed her some way; but I have come back again. She may go.’

‘Why is she gone?’ said the astonished miller.

Bob had intended, for Matilda’s sake, to give no reason to a living soul for her departure. But he could not treat his father thus reservedly; and he told.

‘She has made great fools of us,’ said the miller deliberately; ‘and she might have made us greater ones. Bob, I thought th’ hadst more sense.’

‘Well, don’t say anything against her, father,’ implored Bob. ‘’Twas a sorry haul, and there’s an end on’t. Let her down quietly, and keep the secret. You promise that?’

‘I do.’ Loveday the elder remained thinking awhile, and then went on — ‘Well, what I was going to say is this: I’ve hit upon a plan to get out of the awkward corner she has put us in. What you’ll think of it I can’t say.’

‘David has just given me the heads.’

‘And do it hurt your feelings, my son, at such a time?’

‘No — I’ll bring myself to bear it, anyhow! Why should I object to other people’s happiness because I have lost my own?’ said Bob, with saintly self-sacrifice in his air.

‘Well said!’ answered the miller heartily. ‘But you may be sure that there will be no unseemly rejoicing, to disturb ye in your present frame of mind. All the morning I felt more ashamed than I cared to own at the thought of how the neighbours, great and small, would laugh at what they would call your folly, when they knew what had happened; so I resolved to take this step to stave it off, if so be ’twas possible. And when I saw Mrs. Garland I knew I had done right. She pitied me so much for having had the house cleaned in vain, and laid in provisions to waste, that it put her into the humour to agree. We mean to do it right off at once, afore the pies and cakes get mouldy and the blackpot stale. ’Twas a good thought of mine and hers, and I am glad ’tis settled,’ he concluded cheerfully.

‘Poor Matilda!’ murmured Bob.

‘There — I was afraid ’twould hurt thy feelings,’ said the miller, with self-reproach: ‘making preparations for thy wedding, and using them for my own!’

‘No,’ said Bob heroically; ‘it shall not. It will be a great comfort in my sorrow to feel that the splendid grub, and the ale, and your stunning new suit of clothes, and the great table-cloths you’ve bought, will be just as useful now as if I had married myself. Poor Matilda! But you won’t expect me to join in — you hardly can. I can sheer off that day very easily, you know.’

‘Nonsense, Bob!’ said the miller reproachfully.

‘I couldn’t stand it — I should break down.’

‘Deuce take me if I would have asked her, then, if I had known ‘twas going to drive thee out of the house! Now, come, Bob, I’ll find a way of arranging it and sobering it down, so that it shall be as melancholy as you can require — in short, just like a funeral, if thou’lt promise to stay?’

‘Very well,’ said the afflicted one. ‘On that condition I’ll stay.’

CHAPTER XXI.

‘UPON THE HILL HE TURNED’

Having entered into this solemn compact with his son, the elder Loveday’s next action was to go to Mrs. Garland, and ask her how the toning down of the wedding had best be done. ‘It is plain enough that to make merry just now would be slighting Bob’s feelings, as if we didn’t care who was not married, so long as we were,’ he said. ‘But then, what’s to be done about the victuals?’

‘Give a dinner to the poor folk,’ she suggested. ‘We can get everything used up that way.’

‘That’s true’ said the miller. ‘There’s enough of ‘em in these times to carry off any extras whatsoever.’

‘And it will save Bob’s feelings wonderfully. And they won’t know that the dinner was got for another sort of wedding and another sort of guests; so you’ll have their good-will for nothing.’

The miller smiled at the subtlety of the view. ‘That can hardly be called fair,’ he said. ‘Still, I did mean some of it for them, for the friends we meant to ask would not have cleared all.’

Upon the whole the idea pleased him well, particularly when he noticed the forlorn look of his sailor son as he walked about the place, and pictured the inevitably jarring effect of fiddles and tambourines upon Bob’s shattered nerves at such a crisis, even if the notes of the former were dulled by the application of a mute, and Bob shut up in a distant bedroom — a plan which had at first occurred to him. He therefore told Bob that the surcharged larder was to be emptied by the charitable process above alluded to, and hoped he would not mind making himself useful in such a good and gloomy work. Bob readily fell in with the scheme, and it was at once put in hand and the tables spread.

The alacrity with which the substituted wedding was carried out, seemed to show that the worthy pair of neighbours would have joined themselves into one long ago, had there previously occurred any domestic incident dictating such a step as an apposite expedient, apart from their personal wish to marry.

The appointed morning came, and the service quietly took place at the cheerful hour of ten, in the face of a triangular congregation, of which the base was the front pew, and the apex the west door. Mrs. Garland dressed herself in the muslin shawl like Queen

Charlotte's, that Bob had brought home, and her best plum-coloured gown, beneath which peeped out her shoes with red rosettes. Anne was present, but she considerably toned herself down, so as not to too seriously damage her mother's appearance. At moments during the ceremony she had a distressing sense that she ought not to be born, and was glad to get home again.

The interest excited in the village, though real, was hardly enough to bring a serious blush to the face of coyness. Neighbours' minds had become so saturated by the abundance of showy military and regal incident lately vouchsafed to them, that the wedding of middle-aged civilians was of small account, excepting in so far that it solved the question whether or not Mrs. Garland would consider herself too genteel to mate with a grinder of corn.

In the evening, Loveday's heart was made glad by seeing the baked and boiled in rapid process of consumption by the kitchenful of people assembled for that purpose. Three-quarters of an hour were sufficient to banish for ever his fears as to spoilt food. The provisions being the cause of the assembly, and not its consequence, it had been determined to get all that would not keep consumed on that day, even if highways and hedges had to be searched for operators. And, in addition to the poor and needy, every cottager's daughter known to the miller was invited, and told to bring her lover from camp — an expedient which, for letting daylight into the inside of full platters, was among the most happy ever known.

While Mr. and Mrs. Loveday, Anne, and Bob were standing in the parlour, discussing the progress of the entertainment in the next room, John, who had not been down all day, entered the house and looked in upon them through the open door.

'How's this, John? Why didn't you come before?'

'Had to see the captain, and — other duties,' said the trumpet-major, in a tone which showed no great zeal for explanations.

'Well, come in, however,' continued the miller, as his son remained with his hand on the door-post, surveying them reflectively.

'I cannot stay long,' said John, advancing. 'The Route is come, and we are going away.'

'Going away! Where to?'

'To Exonbury.'

'When?'

'Friday morning.'

'All of you?'

'Yes; some to-morrow and some next day. The King goes next week.'

'I am sorry for this,' said the miller, not expressing half his sorrow by the simple utterance. 'I wish you could have been here to-day, since this is the case,' he added, looking at the horizon through the window.

Mrs. Loveday also expressed her regret, which seemed to remind the trumpet-major of the event of the day, and he went to her and tried to say something befitting the occasion. Anne had not said that she was either sorry or glad, but John Loveday

fancied that she had looked rather relieved than otherwise when she heard his news. His conversation with Bob on the down made Bob's manner, too, remarkably cool, notwithstanding that he had after all followed his brother's advice, which it was as yet too soon after the event for him to rightly value. John did not know why the sailor had come back, never supposing that it was because he had thought better of going, and said to him privately, 'You didn't overtake her?'

'I didn't try to,' said Bob.

'And you are not going to?'

'No; I shall let her drift.'

'I am glad indeed, Bob; you have been wise,' said John heartily.

Bob, however, still loved Matilda too well to be other than dissatisfied with John and the event that he had precipitated, which the elder brother only too promptly perceived; and it made his stay that evening of short duration. Before leaving he said with some hesitation to his father, including Anne and her mother by his glance, 'Do you think to come up and see us off?'

The miller answered for them all, and said that of course they would come. 'But you'll step down again between now and then?' he inquired.

'I'll try to.' He added after a pause, 'In case I should not, remember that Revalley will sound at half past five; we shall leave about eight. Next summer, perhaps, we shall come and camp here again.'

'I hope so,' said his father and Mrs. Loveday.

There was something in John's manner which indicated to Anne that he scarcely intended to come down again; but the others did not notice it, and she said nothing. He departed a few minutes later, in the dusk of the August evening, leaving Anne still in doubt as to the meaning of his private meeting with Miss Johnson.

John Loveday had been going to tell them that on the last night, by an especial privilege, it would be in his power to come and stay with them until eleven o'clock, but at the moment of leaving he abandoned the intention. Anne's attitude had chilled him, and made him anxious to be off. He utilized the spare hours of that last night in another way.

This was by coming down from the outskirts of the camp in the evening, and seating himself near the brink of the mill-pond as soon as it was quite dark; where he watched the lights in the different windows till one appeared in Anne's bedroom, and she herself came forward to shut the casement, with the candle in her hand. The light shone out upon the broad and deep mill-head, illuminating to a distinct individuality every moth and gnat that entered the quivering chain of radiance stretching across the water towards him, and every bubble or atom of froth that floated into its width. She stood for some time looking out, little thinking what the darkness concealed on the other side of that wide stream; till at length she closed the casement, drew the curtains, and retreated into the room. Presently the light went out, upon which John Loveday returned to camp and lay down in his tent.

The next morning was dull and windy, and the trumpets of the — th sounded Reveille for the last time on Overcombe Down. Knowing that the Dragoons were going away, Anne had slept heedfully, and was at once awakened by the smart notes. She looked out of the window, to find that the miller was already astir, his white form being visible at the end of his garden, where he stood motionless, watching the preparations. Anne also looked on as well as she could through the dim grey gloom, and soon she saw the blue smoke from the cooks' fires creeping fitfully along the ground, instead of rising in vertical columns, as it had done during the fine weather season. Then the men began to carry their bedding to the waggons, and others to throw all refuse into the trenches, till the down was lively as an ant-hill. Anne did not want to see John Loveday again, but hearing the household astir, she began to dress at leisure, looking out at the camp the while.

When the soldiers had breakfasted, she saw them selling and giving away their superfluous crockery to the natives who had clustered round; and then they pulled down and cleared away the temporary kitchens which they had constructed when they came. A tapping of tent-pegs and wriggling of picket-posts followed, and soon the cones of white canvas, now almost become a component part of the landscape, fell to the ground. At this moment the miller came indoors and asked at the foot of the stairs if anybody was going up the hill with him.

Anne felt that, in spite of the cloud hanging over John in her mind, it would ill become the present moment not to see him off, and she went downstairs to her mother, who was already there, though Bob was nowhere to be seen. Each took an arm of the miller, and thus climbed to the top of the hill. By this time the men and horses were at the place of assembly, and, shortly after the mill-party reached level ground, the troops slowly began to move forward. When the trumpet-major, half buried in his uniform, arms, and horse-furniture, drew near to the spot where the Lovedays were waiting to see him pass, his father turned anxiously to Anne and said, 'You will shake hands with John?'

Anne faintly replied 'Yes,' and allowed the miller to take her forward on his arm to the trackway, so as to be close to the flank of the approaching column. It came up, many people on each side grasping the hands of the troopers in bidding them farewell; and as soon as John Loveday saw the members of his father's household, he stretched down his hand across his right pistol for the same performance. The miller gave his, then Mrs. Loveday gave hers, and then the hand of the trumpet-major was extended towards Anne. But as the horse did not absolutely stop, it was a somewhat awkward performance for a young woman to undertake, and, more on that account than on any other, Anne drew back, and the gallant trooper passed by without receiving her adieu. Anne's heart reproached her for a moment; and then she thought that, after all, he was not going off to immediate battle, and that she would in all probability see him again at no distant date, when she hoped that the mystery of his conduct would be explained. Her thoughts were interrupted by a voice at her elbow: 'Thank heaven, he's gone! Now there's a chance for me.'

She turned, and Festus Derriman was standing by her.

‘There’s no chance for you,’ she said indignantly.

‘Why not?’

‘Because there’s another left!’

The words had slipped out quite unintentionally, and she blushed quickly. She would have given anything to be able to recall them; but he had heard, and said, ‘Who?’

Anne went forward to the miller to avoid replying, and Festus caught her no more.

‘Has anybody been hanging about Overcombe Mill except Loveday’s son the soldier?’ he asked of a comrade.

‘His son the sailor,’ was the reply.

‘O — his son the sailor,’ said Festus slowly. ‘Damn his son the sailor!’

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TWO HOUSEHOLDS UNITED

At this particular moment the object of Festus Derriman’s fulmination was assuredly not dangerous as a rival. Bob, after abstractedly watching the soldiers from the front of the house till they were out of sight, had gone within doors and seated himself in the mill-parlour, where his father found him, his elbows resting on the table and his forehead on his hands, his eyes being fixed upon a document that lay open before him.

‘What art perusing, Bob, with such a long face?’

Bob sighed, and then Mrs. Loveday and Anne entered. ‘‘Tis only a state-paper that I fondly thought I should have a use for,’ he said gloomily. And, looking down as before, he cleared his voice, as if moved inwardly to go on, and began to read in feeling tones from what proved to be his nullified marriage licence: —

“‘Timothy Titus Philemon, by permission Bishop of Bristol: To our well-beloved Robert Loveday, of the parish of Overcombe, Bachelor; and Matilda Johnson, of the same parish, Spinster. Greeting.’”

Here Anne sighed, but contrived to keep down her sigh to a mere nothing.

‘Beautiful language, isn’t it!’ said Bob. ‘I was never greeted like that afore!’

‘Yes; I have often thought it very excellent language myself,’ said Mrs. Loveday.

‘Come to that, the old gentleman will greet thee like it again any day for a couple of guineas,’ said the miller.

‘That’s not the point, father! You never could see the real meaning of these things. . . . Well, then he goes on: “Whereas ye are, as it is alleged, determined to enter into the holy estate of matrimony —” But why should I read on? It all means nothing now — nothing, and the splendid words are all wasted upon air. It seems as if I had been hailed by some venerable hoary prophet, and had turned away, put the helm hard up, and wouldn’t hear.’

Nobody replied, feeling probably that sympathy could not meet the case, and Bob went on reading the rest of it to himself, occasionally heaving a breath like the wind in a ship's shrouds.

'I wouldn't set my mind so much upon her, if I was thee,' said his father at last.

'Why not?'

'Well, folk might call thee a fool, and say thy brains were turning to water.'

Bob was apparently much struck by this thought, and, instead of continuing the discourse further, he carefully folded up the licence, went out, and walked up and down the garden. It was startlingly apt what his father had said; and, worse than that, what people would call him might be true, and the liquefaction of his brains turn out to be no fable. By degrees he became much concerned, and the more he examined himself by this new light the more clearly did he perceive that he was in a very bad way.

On reflection he remembered that since Miss Johnson's departure his appetite had decreased amazingly. He had eaten in meat no more than fourteen or fifteen ounces a day, but one-third of a quartern pudding on an average, in vegetables only a small heap of potatoes and half a York cabbage, and no gravy whatever; which, considering the usual appetite of a seaman for fresh food at the end of a long voyage, was no small index of the depression of his mind. Then he had waked once every night, and on one occasion twice. While dressing each morning since the gloomy day he had not whistled more than seven bars of a hornpipe without stopping and falling into thought of a most painful kind; and he had told none but absolutely true stories of foreign parts to the neighbouring villagers when they saluted and clustered about him, as usual, for anything he chose to pour forth — except that story of the whale whose eye was about as large as the round pond in Derriman's ewe-lease — which was like tempting fate to set a seal for ever upon his tongue as a traveller. All this enervation, mental and physical, had been produced by Matilda's departure.

He also considered what he had lost of the rational amusements of manhood during these unfortunate days. He might have gone to the neighbouring fashionable resort every afternoon, stood before Gloucester Lodge till the King and Queen came out, held his hat in his hand, and enjoyed their Majesties' smiles at his homage all for nothing — watched the picket-mounting, heard the different bands strike up, observed the staff; and, above all, have seen the pretty town girls go trip-trip-trip along the esplanade, deliberately fixing their innocent eyes on the distant sea, the grey cliffs, and the sky, and accidentally on the soldiers and himself.

'I'll raze out her image,' he said. 'She shall make a fool of me no more.' And his resolve resulted in conduct which had elements of real greatness.

He went back to his father, whom he found in the mill-loft. "'Tis true, father, what you say,' he observed: 'my brains will turn to bilge-water if I think of her much longer. By the oath of a — navigator, I wish I could sigh less and laugh more! She's gone — why can't I let her go, and be happy? But how begin?'

'Take it careless, my son,' said the miller, 'and lay yourself out to enjoy snacks and cordials.'

‘Ah — that’s a thought!’ said Bob.

‘Baccy is good for’t. So is sperrits. Though I don’t advise thee to drink neat.’

‘Baccy — I’d almost forgot it!’ said Captain Loveday.

He went to his room, hastily untied the package of tobacco that he had brought home, and began to make use of it in his own way, calling to David for a bottle of the old household mead that had lain in the cellar these eleven years. He was discovered by his father three-quarters of an hour later as a half-invisible object behind a cloud of smoke.

The miller drew a breath of relief. ‘Why, Bob,’ he said, ‘I thought the house was a-fire!’

‘I’m smoking rather fast to drown my reflections, father. ‘Tis no use to chaw.’

To tempt his attenuated appetite the unhappy mate made David cook an omelet and bake a seed-cake, the latter so richly compounded that it opened to the knife like a freckled buttercup. With the same object he stuck night-lines into the banks of the mill-pond, and drew up next morning a family of fat eels, some of which were skinned and prepared for his breakfast. They were his favourite fish, but such had been his condition that, until the moment of making this effort, he had quite forgotten their existence at his father’s back-door.

In a few days Bob Loveday had considerably improved in tone and vigour. One other obvious remedy for his dejection was to indulge in the society of Miss Garland, love being so much more effectually got rid of by displacement than by attempted annihilation. But Loveday’s belief that he had offended her beyond forgiveness, and his ever-present sense of her as a woman who by education and antecedents was fitted to adorn a higher sphere than his own, effectually kept him from going near her for a long time, notwithstanding that they were inmates of one house. The reserve was, however, in some degree broken by the appearance one morning, later in the season, of the point of a saw through the partition which divided Anne’s room from the Loveday half of the house. Though she dined and supped with her mother and the Loveday family, Miss Garland had still continued to occupy her old apartments, because she found it more convenient there to pursue her hobbies of wool-work and of copying her father’s old pictures. The division wall had not as yet been broken down.

As the saw worked its way downwards under her astonished gaze Anne jumped up from her drawing; and presently the temporary canvassing and papering which had sealed up the old door of communication was cut completely through. The door burst open, and Bob stood revealed on the other side, with the saw in his hand.

‘I beg your ladyship’s pardon,’ he said, taking off the hat he had been working in, as his handsome face expanded into a smile. ‘I didn’t know this door opened into your private room.’

‘Indeed, Captain Loveday!’

‘I am pulling down the division on principle, as we are now one family. But I really thought the door opened into your passage.’

‘It don’t matter; I can get another room.’

‘Not at all. Father wouldn’t let me turn you out. I’ll close it up again.’

But Anne was so interested in the novelty of a new doorway that she walked through it, and found herself in a dark low passage which she had never seen before.

‘It leads to the mill,’ said Bob. ‘Would you like to go in and see it at work? But perhaps you have already.’

‘Only into the ground floor.’

‘Come all over it. I am practising as grinder, you know, to help my father.’

She followed him along the dark passage, in the side of which he opened a little trap, when she saw a great slimy cavern, where the long arms of the mill-wheel flung themselves slowly and distractedly round, and splashing water-drops caught the little light that strayed into the gloomy place, turning it into stars and flashes. A cold mist-laden puff of air came into their faces, and the roar from within made it necessary for Anne to shout as she said, ‘It is dismal! let us go on.’

Bob shut the trap, the roar ceased, and they went on to the inner part of the mill, where the air was warm and nutty, and pervaded by a fog of flour. Then they ascended the stairs, and saw the stones lumbering round and round, and the yellow corn running down through the hopper. They climbed yet further to the top stage, where the wheat lay in bins, and where long rays like feelers stretched in from the sun through the little window, got nearly lost among cobwebs and timber, and completed their course by marking the opposite wall with a glowing patch of gold.

In his earnestness as an exhibitor Bob opened the bolter, which was spinning rapidly round, the result being that a dense cloud of flour rolled out in their faces, reminding Anne that her complexion was probably much paler by this time than when she had entered the mill. She thanked her companion for his trouble, and said she would now go down. He followed her with the same deference as hitherto, and with a sudden and increasing sense that of all cures for his former unhappy passion this would have been the nicest, the easiest, and the most effectual, if he had only been fortunate enough to keep her upon easy terms. But Miss Garland showed no disposition to go further than accept his services as a guide; she descended to the open air, shook the flour from her like a bird, and went on into the garden amid the September sunshine, whose rays lay level across the blue haze which the earth gave forth. The gnats were dancing up and down in airy companies, the nasturtium flowers shone out in groups from the dark hedge over which they climbed, and the mellow smell of the decline of summer was exhaled by everything. Bob followed her as far as the gate, looked after her, thought of her as the same girl who had half encouraged him years ago, when she seemed so superior to him; though now they were almost equal she apparently thought him beneath her. It was with a new sense of pleasure that his mind flew to the fact that she was now an inmate of his father’s house.

His obsequious bearing was continued during the next week. In the busy hours of the day they seldom met, but they regularly encountered each other at meals, and these cheerful occasions began to have an interest for him quite irrespective of dishes and cups. When Anne entered and took her seat she was always loudly hailed by

Miller Loveday as he whetted his knife; but from Bob she condescended to accept no such familiar greeting, and they often sat down together as if each had a blind eye in the direction of the other. Bob sometimes told serious and correct stories about sea-captains, pilots, boatswains, mates, able seamen, and other curious fauna of the marine world; but these were directly addressed to his father and Mrs. Loveday, Anne being included at the clinching-point by a glance only. He sometimes opened bottles of sweet cider for her, and then she thanked him; but even this did not lead to her encouraging his chat.

One day when Anne was paring an apple she was left at table with the young man. 'I have made something for you,' he said.

She looked all over the table; nothing was there save the ordinary remnants.

'O I don't mean that it is here; it is out by the bridge at the mill-head.'

He arose, and Anne followed with curiosity in her eyes, and with her firm little mouth pouted up to a puzzled shape. On reaching the mossy mill-head she found that he had fixed in the keen damp draught which always prevailed over the wheel an Æolian harp of large size. At present the strings were partly covered with a cloth. He lifted it, and the wires began to emit a weird harmony which mingled curiously with the plashing of the wheel.

'I made it on purpose for you, Miss Garland,' he said.

She thanked him very warmly, for she had never seen anything like such an instrument before, and it interested her. 'It was very thoughtful of you to make it,' she added. 'How came you to think of such a thing?'

'O I don't know exactly,' he replied, as if he did not care to be questioned on the point. 'I have never made one in my life till now.'

Every night after this, during the mournful gales of autumn, the strange mixed music of water, wind, and strings met her ear, swelling and sinking with an almost supernatural cadence. The character of the instrument was far enough removed from anything she had hitherto seen of Bob's hobbies; so that she marvelled pleasantly at the new depths of poetry this contrivance revealed as existent in that young seaman's nature, and allowed her emotions to flow out yet a little further in the old direction, notwithstanding her late severe resolve to bar them back.

One breezy night, when the mill was kept going into the small hours, and the wind was exactly in the direction of the water-current, the music so mingled with her dreams as to wake her: it seemed to rhythmically set itself to the words, 'Remember me! think of me!' She was much impressed; the sounds were almost too touching; and she spoke to Bob the next morning on the subject.

'How strange it is that you should have thought of fixing that harp where the water gushes!' she gently observed. 'It affects me almost painfully at night. You are poetical, Captain Bob. But it is too — too sad!'

'I will take it away,' said Captain Bob promptly. 'It certainly is too sad; I thought so myself. I myself was kept awake by it one night.'

'How came you to think of making such a peculiar thing?'

‘Well,’ said Bob, ‘it is hardly worth saying why. It is not a good place for such a queer noisy machine; and I’ll take it away.’

‘On second thoughts,’ said Anne, ‘I should like it to remain a little longer, because it sets me thinking.’

‘Of me?’ he asked with earnest frankness.

Anne’s colour rose fast.

‘Well, yes,’ she said, trying to infuse much plain matter-of-fact into her voice. ‘Of course I am led to think of the person who invented it.’

Bob seemed unaccountably embarrassed, and the subject was not pursued. About half-an-hour later he came to her again, with something of an uneasy look.

‘There was a little matter I didn’t tell you just now, Miss Garland,’ he said. ‘About that harp thing, I mean. I did make it, certainly, but it was my brother John who asked me to do it, just before he went away. John is very musical, as you know, and he said it would interest you; but as he didn’t ask me to tell, I did not. Perhaps I ought to have, and not have taken the credit to myself.’

‘O, it is nothing!’ said Anne quickly. ‘It is a very incomplete instrument after all, and it will be just as well for you to take it away as you first proposed.’

He said that he would, but he forgot to do it that day; and the following night there was a high wind, and the harp cried and moaned so movingly that Anne, whose window was quite near, could hardly bear the sound with its new associations. John Loveday was present to her mind all night as an ill-used man; and yet she could not own that she had ill-used him.

The harp was removed next day. Bob, feeling that his credit for originality was damaged in her eyes, by way of recovering it set himself to paint the summer-house which Anne frequented, and when he came out he assured her that it was quite his own idea.

‘It wanted doing, certainly,’ she said, in a neutral tone.

‘It is just about troublesome.’

‘Yes; you can’t quite reach up. That’s because you are not very tall; is it not, Captain Loveday?’

‘You never used to say things like that.’

‘O, I don’t mean that you are much less than tall! Shall I hold the paint for you, to save your stepping down?’

‘Thank you, if you would.’

She took the paint-pot, and stood looking at the brush as it moved up and down in his hand.

‘I hope I shall not sprinkle your fingers,’ he observed as he dipped.

‘O, that would not matter! You do it very well.’

‘I am glad to hear that you think so.’

‘But perhaps not quite so much art is demanded to paint a summer-house as to paint a picture?’

Thinking that, as a painter's daughter, and a person of education superior to his own, she spoke with a flavour of sarcasm, he felt humbled and said —

'You did not use to talk like that to me.'

'I was perhaps too young then to take any pleasure in giving pain,' she observed daringly.

'Does it give you pleasure?'

Anne nodded.

'I like to give pain to people who have given pain to me,' she said smartly, without removing her eyes from the green liquid in her hand.

'I ask your pardon for that.'

'I didn't say I meant you — though I did mean you.'

Bob looked and looked at her side face till he was bewitched into putting down his brush.

'It was that stupid forgetting of 'ee for a time!' he exclaimed. 'Well, I hadn't seen you for so very long — consider how many years! O, dear Anne!' he said, advancing to take her hand, 'how well we knew one another when we were children! You was a queen to me then; and so you are now, and always.'

Possibly Anne was thrilled pleasantly enough at having brought the truant village lad to her feet again; but he was not to find the situation so easy as he imagined, and her hand was not to be taken yet.

'Very pretty!' she said, laughing. 'And only six weeks since Miss Johnson left.'

'Zounds, don't say anything about that!' implored Bob. 'I swear that I never — never deliberately loved her — for a long time together, that is; it was a sudden sort of thing, you know. But towards you — I have more or less honoured and respectfully loved you, off and on, all my life. There, that's true.'

Anne retorted quickly —

'I am willing, off and on, to believe you, Captain Robert. But I don't see any good in your making these solemn declarations.'

'Give me leave to explain, dear Miss Garland. It is to get you to be pleased to renew an old promise — made years ago — that you'll think o' me.'

'Not a word of any promise will I repeat.'

'Well, well, I won't urge 'ee to-day. Only let me beg of you to get over the quite wrong notion you have of me; and it shall be my whole endeavour to fetch your gracious favour.'

Anne turned away from him and entered the house, whither in the course of a quarter of an hour he followed her, knocking at her door, and asking to be let in. She said she was busy; whereupon he went away, to come back again in a short time and receive the same answer.

'I have finished painting the summer-house for you,' he said through the door.

'I cannot come to see it. I shall be engaged till supper-time.'

She heard him breathe a heavy sigh and withdraw, murmuring something about his bad luck in being cut away from the starn like this. But it was not over yet. When

supper-time came and they sat down together, she took upon herself to reprove him for what he had said to her in the garden.

Bob made his forehead express despair.

‘Now, I beg you this one thing,’ he said. ‘Just let me know your whole mind. Then I shall have a chance to confess my faults and mend them, or clear my conduct to your satisfaction.’

She answered with quickness, but not loud enough to be heard by the old people at the other end of the table — ‘Then, Captain Loveday, I will tell you one thing, one fault, that perhaps would have been more proper to my character than to yours. You are too easily impressed by new faces, and that gives me a bad opinion of you — yes, a bad opinion.’

‘O, that’s it!’ said Bob slowly, looking at her with the intense respect of a pupil for a master, her words being spoken in a manner so precisely between jest and earnest that he was in some doubt how they were to be received. ‘Impressed by new faces. It is wrong, certainly, of me.’

The popping of a cork, and the pouring out of strong beer by the miller with a view to giving it a head, were apparently distractions sufficient to excuse her in not attending further to him; and during the remainder of the sitting her gentle chiding seemed to be sinking seriously into his mind. Perhaps her own heart ached to see how silent he was; but she had always meant to punish him. Day after day for two or three weeks she preserved the same demeanour, with a self-control which did justice to her character. And, on his part, considering what he had to put up with — how she eluded him, snapped him off, refused to come out when he called her, refused to see him when he wanted to enter the little parlour which she had now appropriated to her private use, his patience testified strongly to his good-humour.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MILITARY PREPARATIONS ON AN EXTENDED SCALE

Christmas had passed. Dreary winter with dark evenings had given place to more dreary winter with light evenings. Rapid thaws had ended in rain, rain in wind, wind in dust. Showery days had come — the season of pink dawns and white sunsets; and people hoped that the March weather was over.

The chief incident that concerned the household at the mill was that the miller, following the example of all his neighbours, had become a volunteer, and duly appeared twice a week in a red, long-tailed military coat, pipe-clayed breeches, black cloth gaiters, a heel-balled helmet-hat, with a tuft of green wool, and epaulettes of the same colour and material. Bob still remained neutral. Not being able to decide whether to enrol himself as a sea-fencible, a local militia-man, or a volunteer, he simply went on dancing attendance upon Anne. Mrs. Loveday had become awake to the fact that the pair of young people stood in a curious attitude towards each other; but as they were never

seen with their heads together, and scarcely ever sat even in the same room, she could not be sure what their movements meant.

Strangely enough (or perhaps naturally enough), since entering the Loveday family herself, she had gradually grown to think less favourably of Anne doing the same thing, and reverted to her original idea of encouraging Festus; this more particularly because he had of late shown such perseverance in haunting the precincts of the mill, presumably with the intention of lighting upon the young girl. But the weather had kept her mostly indoors.

One afternoon it was raining in torrents. Such leaves as there were on trees at this time of year — those of the laurel and other evergreens — staggered beneath the hard blows of the drops which fell upon them, and afterwards could be seen trickling down the stems beneath and silently entering the ground. The surface of the mill-pond leapt up in a thousand spirts under the same downfall, and clucked like a hen in the rat-holes along the banks as it undulated under the wind. The only dry spot visible from the front windows of the mill-house was the inside of a small shed, on the opposite side of the courtyard. While Mrs. Loveday was noticing the threads of rain descending across its interior shade, Festus Derriman walked up and entered it for shelter, which, owing to the lumber within, it but scantily afforded to a man who would have been a match for one of Frederick William's Patagonians.

It was an excellent opportunity for helping on her scheme. Anne was in the back room, and by asking him in till the rain was over she would bring him face to face with her daughter, whom, as the days went on, she increasingly wished to marry other than a Loveday, now that the romance of her own alliance with the millet had in some respects worn off. She was better provided for than before; she was not unhappy; but the plain fact was that she had married beneath her. She beckoned to Festus through the window-pane; he instantly complied with her signal, having in fact placed himself there on purpose to be noticed; for he knew that Miss Garland would not be out-of-doors on such a day.

'Good afternoon, Mrs. Loveday,' said Festus on entering. 'There now — if I didn't think that's how it would be!' His voice had suddenly warmed to anger, for he had seen a door close in the back part of the room, a lithe figure having previously slipped through.

Mrs. Loveday turned, observed that Anne was gone, and said, 'What is it?' as if she did not know.

'O, nothing, nothing!' said Festus crossly. 'You know well enough what it is, ma'am; only you make pretence otherwise. But I'll bring her to book yet. You shall drop your haughty airs, my charmer! She little thinks I have kept an account of 'em all.'

'But you must treat her politely, sir,' said Mrs. Loveday, secretly pleased at these signs of uncontrollable affection.

'Don't tell me of politeness or generosity, ma'am! She is more than a match for me. She regularly gets over me. I have passed by this house five-and-fifty times since last Martinmas, and this is all my reward for't!'

‘But you will stay till the rain is over, sir?’

‘No. I don’t mind rain. I’m off again. She’s got somebody else in her eye!’ And the yeoman went out, slamming the door.

Meanwhile the slippery object of his hopes had gone along the dark passage, passed the trap which opened on the wheel, and through the door into the mill, where she was met by Bob, who looked up from the flour-shoot inquiringly and said, ‘You want me, Miss Garland?’

‘O no,’ said she. ‘I only want to be allowed to stand here a few minutes.’

He looked at her to know if she meant it, and finding that she did, returned to his post. When the mill had rumbled on a little longer he came back.

‘Bob,’ she said, when she saw him move, ‘remember that you are at work, and have no time to stand close to me.’

He bowed and went to his original post again, Anne watching from the window till Festus should leave. The mill rumbled on as before, and at last Bob came to her for the third time. ‘Now, Bob — ’ she began.

‘On my honour, ‘tis only to ask a question. Will you walk with me to church next Sunday afternoon?’

‘Perhaps I will,’ she said. But at this moment the yeoman left the house, and Anne, to escape further parley, returned to the dwelling by the way she had come.

Sunday afternoon arrived, and the family was standing at the door waiting for the church bells to begin. From that side of the house they could see southward across a paddock to the rising ground further ahead, where there grew a large elm-tree, beneath whose boughs footpaths crossed in different directions, like meridians at the pole. The tree was old, and in summer the grass beneath it was quite trodden away by the feet of the many trysters and idlers who haunted the spot. The tree formed a conspicuous object in the surrounding landscape.

While they looked, a foot soldier in red uniform and white breeches came along one of the paths, and stopping beneath the elm, took from his pocket a paper, which he proceeded to nail up by the four corners to the trunk. He drew back, looked at it, and went on his way. Bob got his glass from indoors and levelled it at the placard, but after looking for a long time he could make out nothing but a lion and a unicorn at the top. Anne, who was ready for church, moved away from the door, though it was yet early, and showed her intention of going by way of the elm. The paper had been so impressively nailed up that she was curious to read it even at this theological time. Bob took the opportunity of following, and reminded her of her promise.

‘Then walk behind me not at all close,’ she said.

‘Yes,’ he replied, immediately dropping behind.

The ludicrous humility of his manner led her to add playfully over her shoulder, ‘It serves you right, you know.’

‘I deserve anything, but I must take the liberty to say that I hope my behaviour about Matil — , in forgetting you awhile, will not make ye wish to keep me always behind?’

She replied confidentially, 'Why I am so earnest not to be seen with you is that I may appear to people to be independent of you. Knowing what I do of your weaknesses I can do no otherwise. You must be schooled into — '

'O, Anne,' sighed Bob, 'you hit me hard — too hard! If ever I do win you I am sure I shall have fairly earned you.'

'You are not what you once seemed to be,' she returned softly. 'I don't quite like to let myself love you.' The last words were not very audible, and as Bob was behind he caught nothing of them, nor did he see how sentimental she had become all of a sudden. They walked the rest of the way in silence, and coming to the tree read as follows: —

ADDRESS TO ALL RANKS AND DESCRIPTIONS OF ENGLISHMEN.

Friends and Countrymen, — The French are now assembling the largest force that ever was prepared to invade this Kingdom, with the professed purpose of effecting our complete Ruin and Destruction. They do not disguise their intentions, as they have often done to other Countries; but openly boast that they will come over in such Numbers as cannot be resisted.

Wherever the French have lately appeared they have spared neither Rich nor Poor, Old nor Young; but like a Destructive Pestilence have laid waste and destroyed every Thing that before was fair and flourishing.

On this occasion no man's service is compelled, but you are invited voluntarily to come forward in defence of everything that is dear to you, by entering your Names on the Lists which are sent to the Tything-man of every Parish, and engaging to act either as Associated Volunteers bearing Arms, as Pioneers and Labourers, or as Drivers of Waggon.

As Associated Volunteers you will be called out only once a week, unless the actual Landing of the Enemy should render your further Services necessary.

As Pioneers or Labourers you will be employed in Breaking up Roads to hinder the Enemy's advance.

Those who have Pickaxes, Spades, Shovels, Bill-hooks, or other Working Implements, are desired to mention them to the Constable or Tything-man of their Parish, in order that they may be entered on the Lists opposite their Homes, to be used if necessary. .

It is thought desirable to give you this Explanation, that you may not be ignorant of the Duties to which you may be called. But if the love of true Liberty and honest Fame has not ceased to animate the Hearts of Englishmen, Pay, though necessary, will be the least Part of your Reward. You will find your best Recompense in having done your Duty to your King and Country by driving back or destroying your old and implacable Enemy, envious of your Freedom and Happiness, and therefore seeking to destroy them; in having protected your Wives and Children from Death, or worse than Death, which will follow the Success of such Inveterate Foes.

Rouse, therefore, and unite as one man in the best of Causes! United we may defy the World to conquer us; but Victory will never belong to those who are slothful and unprepared.

‘I must go and join at once!’ said Bob.

Anne turned to him, all the playfulness gone from her face. ‘I wish we lived in the north of England, Bob, so as to be further away from where he’ll land!’ she murmured uneasily.

‘Where we are would be Paradise to me, if you would only make it so.’

‘It is not right to talk so lightly at such a serious time,’ she thoughtfully returned, going on towards the church.

On drawing near, they saw through the boughs of a clump of intervening trees, still leafless, but bursting into buds of amber hue, a glittering which seemed to be reflected from points of steel. In a few moments they heard above the tender chiming of the church bells the loud voice of a man giving words of command, at which all the metallic points suddenly shifted like the bristles of a porcupine, and glistened anew.

‘‘Tis the drilling,’ said Loveday. ‘They drill now between the services, you know, because they can’t get the men together so readily in the week. It makes me feel that I ought to be doing more than I am!’

When they had passed round the belt of trees, the company of recruits became visible, consisting of the able-bodied inhabitants of the hamlets thereabout, more or less known to Bob and Anne. They were assembled on the green plot outside the churchyard-gate, dressed in their common clothes, and the sergeant who had been putting them through their drill was the man who nailed up the proclamation. He was now engaged in untying a canvas money-bag, from which he drew forth a handful of shillings, giving one to each man in payment for his attendance.

‘Men, I dismissed ye too soon — parade, parade again, I say,’ he cried. ‘My watch is fast, I find. There’s another twenty minutes afore the worship of God commences. Now all of you that ha’n’t got firelocks, fall in at the lower end. Eyes right and dress!’

As every man was anxious to see how the rest stood, those at the end of the line pressed forward for that purpose, till the line assumed the form of a bow.

‘Look at ye now! Why, you are all a crooking in! Dress, dress!’

They dressed forthwith; but impelled by the same motive they soon resumed their former figure, and so they were despairingly permitted to remain.

‘Now, I hope you’ll have a little patience,’ said the sergeant, as he stood in the centre of the arc, ‘and pay strict attention to the word of command, just exactly as I give it out to ye; and if I should go wrong, I shall be much obliged to any friend who’ll put me right again, for I have only been in the army three weeks myself, and we are all liable to mistakes.’

‘So we be, so we be,’ said the line heartily.

‘‘Tention, the whole, then. Poise fawlocks! Very well done!’

‘Please, what must we do that haven’t got no firelocks!’ said the lower end of the line in a helpless voice.

‘Now, was ever such a question! Why, you must do nothing at all, but think how you’d poise ‘em if you had ‘em. You middle men, that are armed with hurdle-sticks and cabbage-stumps just to make-believe, must of course use ‘em as if they were the real thing. Now then, cock fawlocks! Present! Fire! (Pretend to, I mean, and the same time throw yer imagination into the field o’ battle.) Very good — very good indeed; except that some of you were a little too soon, and the rest a little too late.’

‘Please, sergeant, can I fall out, as I am master-player in the choir, and my bass-viol strings won’t stand at this time o’ year, unless they be screwed up a little before the passon comes in?’

‘How can you think of such trifles as churchgoing at such a time as this, when your own native country is on the point of invasion?’ said the sergeant sternly. ‘And, as you know, the drill ends three minutes afore church begins, and that’s the law, and it wants a quarter of an hour yet. Now, at the word Prime, shake the powder (supposing you’ve got it) into the priming-pan, three last fingers behind the rammer; then shut your pans, drawing your right arm nimble-like towards your body. I ought to have told ye before this, that at Hand your katridge, seize it and bring it with a quick motion to your mouth, bite the top well off, and don’t swaller so much of the powder as to make ye hawk and spet instead of attending to your drill. What’s that man a-saying of in the rear rank?’

‘Please, sir, ‘tis Anthony Cripplestraw, wanting to know how he’s to bite off his katridge, when he haven’t a tooth left in ‘s head?’

‘Man! Why, what’s your genius for war? Hold it up to your right-hand man’s mouth, to be sure, and let him nip it off for ye. Well, what have you to say, Private Tremlett? Don’t ye understand English?’

‘Ask yer pardon, sergeant; but what must we infantry of the awkward squad do if Boney comes afore we get our firelocks?’

‘Take a pike, like the rest of the incapables. You’ll find a store of them ready in the corner of the church tower. Now then — Shoulder — r — r — r — ’

‘There, they be tinging in the passon!’ exclaimed David, Miller Loveday’s man, who also formed one of the company, as the bells changed from chiming all three together to a quick beating of one. The whole line drew a breath of relief, threw down their arms, and began running off.

‘Well, then, I must dismiss ye,’ said the sergeant. ‘Come back — come back! Next drill is Tuesday afternoon at four. And, mind, if your masters won’t let ye leave work soon enough, tell me, and I’ll write a line to Gover’nment! ‘Tention! To the right — left wheel, I mean — no, no — right wheel. Mar — r — r — rch!’

Some wheeled to the right and some to the left, and some obliging men, including Cripplestraw, tried to wheel both ways.

‘Stop, stop; try again! ‘Cruits and comrades, unfortunately when I’m in a hurry I can never remember my right hand from my left, and never could as a boy. You must excuse me, please. Practice makes perfect, as the saying is; and, much as I’ve learnt since I ‘listed, we always find something new. Now then, right wheel! march! halt!’

Stand at ease! dismiss! I think that's the order o't, but I'll look in the Gover'ment book afore Tuesday.'

Many of the company who had been drilled preferred to go off and spend their shillings instead of entering the church; but Anne and Captain Bob passed in. Even the interior of the sacred edifice was affected by the agitation of the times. The religion of the country had, in fact, changed from love of God to hatred of Napoleon Buonaparte; and, as if to remind the devout of this alteration, the pikes for the pikemen (all those accepted men who were not otherwise armed) were kept in the church of each parish. There, against the wall, they always stood — a whole sheaf of them, formed of new ash stems, with a spike driven in at one end, the stick being preserved from splitting by a ferule. And there they remained, year after year, in the corner of the aisle, till they were removed and placed under the gallery stairs, and thence ultimately to the belfry, where they grew black, rusty, and worm-eaten, and were gradually stolen and carried off by sextons, parish clerks, whitewashers, window-menders, and other church servants for use at home as rake-stems, benefit-club staves, and pick-handles, in which degraded situations they may still occasionally be found.

But in their new and shining state they had a terror for Anne, whose eyes were involuntarily drawn towards them as she sat at Bob's side during the service, filling her with bloody visions of their possible use not far from the very spot on which they were now assembled. The sermon, too, was on the subject of patriotism; so that when they came out she began to harp uneasily upon the probability of their all being driven from their homes.

Bob assured her that with the sixty thousand regulars, the militia reserve of a hundred and twenty thousand, and the three hundred thousand volunteers, there was not much to fear.

'But I sometimes have a fear that poor John will be killed,' he continued after a pause. 'He is sure to be among the first that will have to face the invaders, and the trumpeters get picked off.'

'There is the same chance for him as for the others,' said Anne.

'Yes — yes — the same chance, such as it is. You have never liked John since that affair of Matilda Johnson, have you?'

'Why?' she quickly asked.

'Well,' said Bob timidly, 'as it is a ticklish time for him, would it not be worth while to make up any differences before the crash comes?'

'I have nothing to make up,' said Anne, with some distress. She still fully believed the trumpet-major to have smuggled away Miss Johnson because of his own interest in that lady, which must have made his professions to herself a mere pastime; but that very conduct had in it the curious advantage to herself of setting Bob free.

'Since John has been gone,' continued her companion, 'I have found out more of his meaning, and of what he really had to do with that woman's flight. Did you know that he had anything to do with it?'

'Yes.'

‘That he got her to go away?’

She looked at Bob with surprise. He was not exasperated with John, and yet he knew so much as this.

‘Yes,’ she said; ‘what did it mean?’

He did not explain to her then; but the possibility of John’s death, which had been newly brought home to him by the military events of the day, determined him to get poor John’s character cleared. Reproaching himself for letting her remain so long with a mistaken idea of him, Bob went to his father as soon as they got home, and begged him to get Mrs. Loveday to tell Anne the true reason of John’s objection to Miss Johnson as a sister-in-law.

‘She thinks it is because they were old lovers new met, and that he wants to marry her,’ he exclaimed to his father in conclusion.

‘Then that’s the meaning of the split between Miss Nancy and Jack,’ said the miller.

‘What, were they any more than common friends?’ asked Bob uneasily.

‘Not on her side, perhaps.’

‘Well, we must do it,’ replied Bob, painfully conscious that common justice to John might bring them into hazardous rivalry, yet determined to be fair. ‘Tell it all to Mrs. Loveday, and get her to tell Anne.’

CHAPTER XXIV.

A LETTER, A VISITOR, AND A TIN BOX

The result of the explanation upon Anne was bitter self-reproach. She was so sorry at having wronged the kindly soldier that next morning she went by herself to the down, and stood exactly where his tent had covered the sod on which he had lain so many nights, thinking what sadness he must have suffered because of her at the time of packing up and going away. After that she wiped from her eyes the tears of pity which had come there, descended to the house, and wrote an impulsive letter to him, in which occurred the following passages, indiscreet enough under the circumstances:

‘I find all justice, all rectitude, on your side, John; and all impertinence, all inconsiderateness, on mine. I am so much convinced of your honour in the whole transaction, that I shall for the future mistrust myself in everything. And if it be possible, whenever I differ from you on any point I shall take an hour’s time for consideration before I say that I differ. If I have lost your friendship, I have only myself to thank for it; but I sincerely hope that you can forgive.’

After writing this she went to the garden, where Bob was shearing the spring grass from the paths. ‘What is John’s direction?’ she said, holding the sealed letter in her hand.

‘Exonbury Barracks,’ Bob faltered, his countenance sinking.

She thanked him and went indoors. When he came in, later in the day, he passed the door of her empty sitting-room and saw the letter on the mantelpiece. He disliked the sight of it. Hearing voices in the other room, he entered and found Anne and her mother there, talking to Cripplestraw, who had just come in with a message from Squire Derriman, requesting Miss Garland, as she valued the peace of mind of an old and troubled man, to go at once and see him.

‘I cannot go,’ she said, not liking the risk that such a visit involved.

An hour later Cripplestraw shambled again into the passage, on the same errand.

‘Maister’s very poorly, and he hopes that you’ll come, Mis’ess Anne. He wants to see ‘ee very particular about the French.’

Anne would have gone in a moment, but for the fear that some one besides the farmer might encounter her, and she answered as before.

Another hour passed, and the wheels of a vehicle were heard. Cripplestraw had come for the third time, with a horse and gig; he was dressed in his best clothes, and brought with him on this occasion a basket containing raisins, almonds, oranges, and sweet cakes. Offering them to her as a gift from the old farmer, he repeated his request for her to accompany him, the gig and best mare having been sent as an additional inducement.

‘I believe the old gentleman is in love with you, Anne,’ said her mother.

‘Why couldn’t he drive down himself to see me?’ Anne inquired of Cripplestraw.

‘He wants you at the house, please.’

‘Is Mr. Festus with him?’

‘No; he’s away to Budmouth.’

‘I’ll go,’ said she.

‘And I may come and meet you?’ said Bob.

‘There’s my letter — what shall I do about that?’ she said, instead of answering him. ‘Take my letter to the post-office, and you may come,’ she added.

He said yes and went out, Cripplestraw retreating to the door till she should be ready.

‘What letter is it?’ said her mother.

‘Only one to John,’ said Anne. ‘I have asked him to forgive my suspicions. I could do no less.’

‘Do you want to marry him?’ asked Mrs. Loveday bluntly.

‘Mother!’

‘Well; he will take that letter as an encouragement. Can’t you see that he will, you foolish girl?’

Anne did see instantly. ‘Of course!’ she said. ‘Tell Robert that he need not go.’

She went to her room to secure the letter. It was gone from the mantelpiece, and on inquiry it was found that the miller, seeing it there, had sent David with it to Budmouth hours ago. Anne said nothing, and set out for Oxwell Hall with Cripplestraw.

‘William,’ said Mrs. Loveday to the miller when Anne was gone and Bob had resumed his work in the garden, ‘did you get that letter sent off on purpose?’

‘Well, I did. I wanted to make sure of it. John likes her, and now ‘twill be made up; and why shouldn’t he marry her? I’ll start him in business, if so be she’ll have him.’

‘But she is likely to marry Festus Derriman.’

‘I don’t want her to marry anybody but John,’ said the miller doggedly.

‘Not if she is in love with Bob, and has been for years, and he with her?’ asked his wife triumphantly.

‘In love with Bob, and he with her?’ repeated Loveday.

‘Certainly,’ said she, going off and leaving him to his reflections.

When Anne reached the hall she found old Mr. Derriman in his customary chair. His complexion was more ashen, but his movement in rising at her entrance, putting a chair and shutting the door behind her, were much the same as usual.

‘Thank God you’ve come, my dear girl,’ he said earnestly. ‘Ah, you don’t trip across to read to me now! Why did ye cost me so much to fetch you? Fie! A horse and gig, and a man’s time in going three times. And what I sent ye cost a good deal in Budmouth market, now everything is so dear there, and ‘twould have cost more if I hadn’t bought the raisins and oranges some months ago, when they were cheaper. I tell you this because we are old friends, and I have nobody else to tell my troubles to. But I don’t begrudge anything to ye since you’ve come.’

‘I am not much pleased to come, even now,’ said she. ‘What can make you so seriously anxious to see me?’

‘Well, you be a good girl and true; and I’ve been thinking that of all people of the next generation that I can trust, you are the best. ‘Tis my bonds and my title-deeds, such as they be, and the leases, you know, and a few guineas in packets, and more than these, my will, that I have to speak about. Now do ye come this way.’

‘O, such things as those!’ she returned, with surprise. ‘I don’t understand those things at all.’

‘There’s nothing to understand. ‘Tis just this. The French will be here within two months; that’s certain. I have it on the best authority, that the army at Boulogne is ready, the boats equipped, the plans laid, and the First Consul only waits for a tide. Heaven knows what will become o’ the men o’ these parts! But most likely the women will be spared. Now I’ll show ‘ee.’

He led her across the hall to a stone staircase of semi-circular plan, which conducted to the cellars.

‘Down here?’ she said.

‘Yes; I must trouble ye to come down here. I have thought and thought who is the woman that can best keep a secret for six months, and I say, “Anne Garland.” You won’t be married before then?’

‘O no!’ murmured the young woman.

‘I wouldn’t expect ye to keep a close tongue after such a thing as that. But it will not be necessary.’

When they reached the bottom of the steps he struck a light from a tinder-box, and unlocked the middle one of three doors which appeared in the whitewashed wall

opposite. The rays of the candle fell upon the vault and sides of a long low cellar, littered with decayed woodwork from other parts of the hall, among the rest stair-balusters, carved finials, tracery panels, and wainscoting. But what most attracted her eye was a small flagstone turned up in the middle of the floor, a heap of earth beside it, and a measuring-tape. Derriman went to the corner of the cellar, and pulled out a clamped box from under the straw. 'You be rather heavy, my dear, eh?' he said, affectionately addressing the box as he lifted it. 'But you are going to be put in a safe place, you know, or that rascal will get hold of ye, and carry ye off and ruin me.' He then with some difficulty lowered the box into the hole, raked in the earth upon it, and lowered the flagstone, which he was a long time in fixing to his satisfaction. Miss Garland, who was romantically interested, helped him to brush away the fragments of loose earth; and when he had scattered over the floor a little of the straw that lay about, they again ascended to upper air.

'Is this all, sir?' said Anne.

'Just a moment longer, honey. Will you come into the great parlour?'

She followed him thither.

'If anything happens to me while the fighting is going on — it may be on these very fields — you will know what to do,' he resumed. 'But first please sit down again, there's a dear, whilst I write what's in my head. See, there's the best paper, and a new quill that I've afforded myself for't.'

'What a strange business! I don't think I much like it, Mr. Derriman,' she said, seating herself.

He had by this time begun to write, and murmured as he wrote —

"Twenty-three and a half from N.W. Sixteen and three-quarters from N.E." — There, that's all. Now I seal it up and give it to you to keep safe till I ask ye for it, or you hear of my being trampled down by the enemy.'

'What does it mean?' she asked, as she received the paper.

'Clk! Ha! ha! Why, that's the distance of the box from the two corners of the cellar. I measured it before you came. And, my honey, to make all sure, if the French soldiery are after ye, tell your mother the meaning on't, or any other friend, in case they should put ye to death, and the secret be lost. But that I am sure I hope they won't do, though your pretty face will be a sad bait to the soldiers. I often have wished you was my daughter, honey; and yet in these times the less cares a man has the better, so I am glad you bain't. Shall my man drive you home?'

'No, no,' she said, much depressed by the words he had uttered. 'I can find my way. You need not trouble to come down.'

'Then take care of the paper. And if you outlive me, you'll find I have not forgot you.'

CHAPTER XXV.

FESTUS SHOWS HIS LOVE

Festus Derriman had remained in the Royal watering-place all that day, his horse being sick at stables; but, wishing to coax or bully from his uncle a remount for the coming summer, he set off on foot for Oxwell early in the evening. When he drew near to the village, or rather to the hall, which was a mile from the village, he overtook a slim, quick-eyed woman, sauntering along at a leisurely pace. She was fashionably dressed in a green spencer, with 'Mameluke' sleeves, and wore a velvet Spanish hat and feather.

'Good afternoon t'ye, ma'am,' said Festus, throwing a sword-and-pistol air into his greeting. 'You are out for a walk?'

'I am out for a walk, captain,' said the lady, who had criticized him from the crevice of her eye, without seeming to do much more than continue her demure look forward, and gave the title as a sop to his apparent character.

'From the town? — I'd swear it, ma'am; 'pon my honour I would!'

'Yes, I am from the town, sir,' said she.

'Ah, you are a visitor! I know every one of the regular inhabitants; we soldiers are in and out there continually. Festus Derriman, Yeomanry Cavalry, you know. The fact is, the watering-place is under our charge; the folks will be quite dependent upon us for their deliverance in the coming struggle. We hold our lives in our hands, and theirs, I may say, in our pockets. What made you come here, ma'am, at such a critical time?'

'I don't see that it is such a critical time?'

'But it is, though; and so you'd say if you was as much mixed up with the military affairs of the nation as some of us.'

The lady smiled. 'The King is coming this year, anyhow,' said she.

'Never!' said Festus firmly. 'Ah, you are one of the attendants at court perhaps, come on ahead to get the King's chambers ready, in case Boney should not land?'

'No,' she said; 'I am connected with the theatre, though not just at the present moment. I have been out of luck for the last year or two; but I have fetched up again. I join the company when they arrive for the season.'

Festus surveyed her with interest. 'Faith! and is it so? Well, ma'am, what part do you play?'

'I am mostly the leading lady — the heroine,' she said, drawing herself up with dignity.

'I'll come and have a look at ye if all's well, and the landing is put off — hang me if I don't! — Hullo, hullo, what do I see?'

His eyes were stretched towards a distant field, which Anne Garland was at that moment hastily crossing, on her way from the hall to Overcombe.

'I must be off. Good-day to ye, dear creature!' he exclaimed, hurrying forward.

The lady said, 'O, you droll monster!' as she smiled and watched him stride ahead.

Festus bounded on over the hedge, across the intervening patch of green, and into the field which Anne was still crossing. In a moment or two she looked back, and seeing the well-known Herculean figure of the yeoman behind her felt rather alarmed, though she determined to show no difference in her outward carriage. But to maintain her natural gait was beyond her powers. She spasmodically quickened her pace; fruitlessly, however, for he gained upon her, and when within a few strides of her exclaimed, 'Well, my darling!' Anne started off at a run.

Festus was already out of breath, and soon found that he was not likely to overtake her. On she went, without turning her head, till an unusual noise behind compelled her to look round. His face was in the act of falling back; he swerved on one side, and dropped like a log upon a convenient hedgerow-bank which bordered the path. There he lay quite still.

Anne was somewhat alarmed; and after standing at gaze for two or three minutes, drew nearer to him, a step and a half at a time, wondering and doubting, as a meek ewe draws near to some strolling vagabond who flings himself on the grass near the flock.

'He is in a swoon!' she murmured.

Her heart beat quickly, and she looked around. Nobody was in sight; she advanced a step nearer still and observed him again. Apparently his face was turning to a livid hue, and his breathing had become obstructed.

'Tis not a swoon; 'tis apoplexy!' she said, in deep distress. 'I ought to untie his neck.' But she was afraid to do this, and only drew a little closer still.

Miss Garland was now within three feet of him, whereupon the senseless man, who could hold his breath no longer, sprang to his feet and darted at her, saying, 'Ha! ha! a scheme for a kiss!'

She felt his arm slipping round her neck; but, twirling about with amazing dexterity, she wriggled from his embrace and ran away along the field. The force with which she had extricated herself was sufficient to throw Festus upon the grass, and by the time that he got upon his legs again she was many yards off. Uttering a word which was not exactly a blessing, he immediately gave chase; and thus they ran till Anne entered a meadow divided down the middle by a brook about six feet wide. A narrow plank was thrown loosely across at the point where the path traversed this stream, and when Anne reached it she at once scampered over. At the other side she turned her head to gather the probabilities of the situation, which were that Festus Derriman would overtake her even now. By a sudden forethought she stooped, seized the end of the plank, and endeavoured to drag it away from the opposite bank. But the weight was too great for her to do more than slightly move it, and with a desperate sigh she ran on again, having lost many valuable seconds.

But her attempt, though ineffectual in dragging it down, had been enough to unsettle the little bridge; and when Derriman reached the middle, which he did half a minute later, the plank turned over on its edge, tilting him bodily into the river. The

water was not remarkably deep, but as the yeoman fell flat on his stomach he was completely immersed; and it was some time before he could drag himself out. When he arose, dripping on the bank, and looked around, Anne had vanished from the mead. Then Festus's eyes glowed like carbuncles, and he gave voice to fearful imprecations, shaking his fist in the soft summer air towards Anne, in a way that was terrible for any maiden to behold. Wading back through the stream, he walked along its bank with a heavy tread, the water running from his coat-tails, wrists, and the tips of his ears, in silvery dribbles, that sparkled pleasantly in the sun. Thus he hastened away, and went round by a by-path to the hall.

Meanwhile the author of his troubles was rapidly drawing nearer to the mill, and soon, to her inexpressible delight, she saw Bob coming to meet her. She had heard the flounce, and, feeling more secure from her pursuer, had dropped her pace to a quick walk. No sooner did she reach Bob than, overcome by the excitement of the moment, she flung herself into his arms. Bob instantly enclosed her in an embrace so very thorough that there was no possible danger of her falling, whatever degree of exhaustion might have given rise to her somewhat unexpected action; and in this attitude they silently remained, till it was borne in upon Anne that the present was the first time in her life that she had ever been in such a position. Her face then burnt like a sunset, and she did not know how to look up at him. Feeling at length quite safe, she suddenly resolved not to give way to her first impulse to tell him the whole of what had happened, lest there should be a dreadful quarrel and fight between Bob and the yeoman, and great difficulties caused in the Loveday family on her account, the miller having important wheat transactions with the Derrimans.

'You seem frightened, dearest Anne,' said Bob tenderly.

'Yes,' she replied. 'I saw a man I did not like the look of, and he was inclined to follow me. But, worse than that, I am troubled about the French. O Bob! I am afraid you will be killed, and my mother, and John, and your father, and all of us hunted down!'

'Now I have told you, dear little heart, that it cannot be. We shall drive 'em into the sea after a battle or two, even if they land, which I don't believe they will. We've got ninety sail of the line, and though it is rather unfortunate that we should have declared war against Spain at this ticklish time, there's enough for all.' And Bob went into elaborate statistics of the navy, army, militia, and volunteers, to prolong the time of holding her. When he had done speaking he drew rather a heavy sigh.

'What's the matter, Bob?'

'I haven't been yet to offer myself as a sea-fencible, and I ought to have done it long ago.'

'You are only one. Surely they can do without you?'

Bob shook his head. She arose from her restful position, her eye catching his with a shamefaced expression of having given way at last. Loveday drew from his pocket a paper, and said, as they slowly walked on, 'Here's something to make us brave and patriotic. I bought it in Budmouth. Isn't it a stirring picture?'

It was a hieroglyphic profile of Napoleon. The hat represented a maimed French eagle; the face was ingeniously made up of human carcasses, knotted and writhing together in such directions as to form a physiognomy; a band, or stock, shaped to resemble the English Channel, encircled his throat, and seemed to choke him; his epaulette was a hand tearing a cobweb that represented the treaty of peace with England; and his ear was a woman crouching over a dying child.

‘It is dreadful!’ said Anne. ‘I don’t like to see it.’

She had recovered from her emotion, and walked along beside him with a grave, subdued face. Bob did not like to assume the privileges of an accepted lover and draw her hand through his arm; for, conscious that she naturally belonged to a politer grade than his own, he feared lest her exhibition of tenderness were an impulse which cooler moments might regret. A perfect Paul-and-Virginia life had not absolutely set in for him as yet, and it was not to be hastened by force. When they had passed over the bridge into the mill-front they saw the miller standing at the door with a face of concern.

‘Since you have been gone,’ he said, ‘a Government man has been here, and to all the houses, taking down the numbers of the women and children, and their ages and the number of horses and waggons that can be mustered, in case they have to retreat inland, out of the way of the invading army.’

The little family gathered themselves together, all feeling the crisis more seriously than they liked to express. Mrs. Loveday thought how ridiculous a thing social ambition was in such a conjuncture as this, and vowed that she would leave Anne to love where she would. Anne, too, forgot the little peculiarities of speech and manner in Bob and his father, which sometimes jarred for a moment upon her more refined sense, and was thankful for their love and protection in this looming trouble.

On going upstairs she remembered the paper which Farmer Derriman had given her, and searched in her bosom for it. She could not find it there. ‘I must have left it on the table,’ she said to herself. It did not matter; she remembered every word. She took a pen and wrote a duplicate, which she put safely away.

But Anne was wrong. She had, after all, placed the paper where she supposed, and there it ought to have been. But in escaping from Festus, when he feigned apoplexy, it had fallen out upon the grass. Five minutes after that event, when pursuer and pursued were two or three fields ahead, the gaily-dressed woman whom the yeoman had overtaken, peeped cautiously through the stile into the corner of the field which had been the scene of the scramble; and seeing the paper she climbed over, secured it, loosened the wafer without tearing the sheet, and read the memorandum within. Unable to make anything of its meaning, the saunterer put it in her pocket, and, dismissing the matter from her mind, went on by the by-path which led to the back of the mill. Here, behind the hedge, she stood and surveyed the old building for some time, after which she meditatively turned, and retraced her steps towards the Royal watering-place.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE ALARM

The night which followed was historic and memorable. Mrs. Loveday was awakened by the boom of a distant gun: she told the miller, and they listened awhile. The sound was not repeated, but such was the state of their feelings that Mr. Loveday went to Bob's room and asked if he had heard it. Bob was wide awake, looking out of the window; he had heard the ominous sound, and was inclined to investigate the matter. While the father and son were dressing they fancied that a glare seemed to be rising in the sky in the direction of the beacon hill. Not wishing to alarm Anne and her mother, the miller assured them that Bob and himself were merely going out of doors to inquire into the cause of the report, after which they plunged into the gloom together. A few steps' progress opened up more of the sky, which, as they had thought, was indeed irradiated by a lurid light; but whether it came from the beacon or from a more distant point they were unable to clearly tell. They pushed on rapidly towards higher ground.

Their excitement was merely of a piece with that of all men at this critical juncture. Everywhere expectation was at fever heat. For the last year or two only five-and-twenty miles of shallow water had divided quiet English homesteads from an enemy's army of a hundred and fifty thousand men. We had taken the matter lightly enough, eating and drinking as in the days of Noe, and singing satires without end. We punned on Buonaparte and his gunboats, chalked his effigy on stage-coaches, and published the same in prints. Still, between these bursts of hilarity, it was sometimes recollected that England was the only European country which had not succumbed to the mighty little man who was less than human in feeling, and more than human in will; that our spirit for resistance was greater than our strength; and that the Channel was often calm. Boats built of wood which was greenly growing in its native forest three days before it was bent as wales to their sides, were ridiculous enough; but they might be, after all, sufficient for a single trip between two visible shores.

The English watched Buonaparte in these preparations, and Buonaparte watched the English. At the distance of Boulogne details were lost, but we were impressed on fine days by the novel sight of a huge army moving and twinkling like a school of mackerel under the rays of the sun. The regular way of passing an afternoon in the coast towns was to stroll up to the signal posts and chat with the lieutenant on duty there about the latest inimical object seen at sea. About once a week there appeared in the newspapers either a paragraph concerning some adventurous English gentleman who had sailed out in a pleasure-boat till he lay near enough to Boulogne to see Buonaparte standing on the heights among his marshals; or else some lines about a mysterious stranger with a foreign accent, who, after collecting a vast deal of information on our resources, had hired a boat at a southern port, and vanished with it towards France before his intention could be divined.

In forecasting his grand venture, Buonaparte postulated the help of Providence to a remarkable degree. Just at the hour when his troops were on board the flat-bottomed

boats and ready to sail, there was to be a great fog, that should spread a vast obscurity over the length and breadth of the Channel, and keep the English blind to events on the other side. The fog was to last twenty-four hours, after which it might clear away. A dead calm was to prevail simultaneously with the fog, with the twofold object of affording the boats easy transit and dooming our ships to lie motionless. Thirdly, there was to be a spring tide, which should combine its manoeuvres with those of the fog and calm.

Among the many thousands of minor Englishmen whose lives were affected by these tremendous designs may be numbered our old acquaintance Corporal Tullidge, who sported the crushed arm, and poor old Simon Burden, the dazed veteran who had fought at Minden. Instead of sitting snugly in the settle of the Old Ship, in the village adjoining Overcombe, they were obliged to keep watch on the hill. They made themselves as comfortable as was possible in the circumstances, dwelling in a hut of clods and turf, with a brick chimney for cooking. Here they observed the nightly progress of the moon and stars, grew familiar with the heaving of moles, the dancing of rabbits on the hillocks, the distant hoot of owls, the bark of foxes from woods further inland; but saw not a sign of the enemy. As, night after night, they walked round the two ricks which it was their duty to fire at a signal — one being of furze for a quick flame, the other of turf, for a long, slow radiance — they thought and talked of old times, and drank patriotically from a large wood flagon that was filled every day.

Bob and his father soon became aware that the light was from the beacon. By the time that they reached the top it was one mass of towering flame, from which the sparks fell on the green herbage like a fiery dew; the forms of the two old men being seen passing and re-passing in the midst of it. The Lovedays, who came up on the smoky side, regarded the scene for a moment, and then emerged into the light.

‘Who goes there?’ said Corporal Tullidge, shouldering a pike with his sound arm. ‘O, ‘tis neighbour Loveday!’

‘Did you get your signal to fire it from the east?’ said the miller hastily.

‘No; from Abbotsea Beach.’

‘But you are not to go by a coast signal!’

‘Chok’ it all, wasn’t the Lord-Lieutenant’s direction, whenever you see Rainbarrow’s Beacon burn to the nor’east’ard, or Haggardon to the nor’west’ard, or the actual presence of the enemy on the shore?’

‘But is he here?’

‘No doubt o’t! The beach light is only just gone down, and Simon heard the guns even better than I.’

‘Hark, hark! I hear ‘em!’ said Bob.

They listened with parted lips, the night wind blowing through Simon Burden’s few teeth as through the ruins of Stonehenge. From far down on the lower levels came the noise of wheels and the tramp of horses upon the turnpike road.

‘Well, there must be something in it,’ said Miller Loveday gravely. ‘Bob, we’ll go home and make the women-folk safe, and then I’ll don my soldier’s clothes and be off. God knows where our company will assemble!’

They hastened down the hill, and on getting into the road waited and listened again. Travellers began to come up and pass them in vehicles of all descriptions. It was difficult to attract their attention in the dim light, but by standing on the top of a wall which fenced the road Bob was at last seen.

‘What’s the matter?’ he cried to a butcher who was flying past in his cart, his wife sitting behind him without a bonnet.

‘The French have landed!’ said the man, without drawing rein.

‘Where?’ shouted Bob.

‘In West Bay; and all Budmouth is in uproar!’ replied the voice, now faint in the distance.

Bob and his father hastened on till they reached their own house. As they had expected, Anne and her mother, in common with most of the people, were both dressed, and stood at the door bonneted and shawled, listening to the traffic on the neighbouring highway, Mrs. Loveday having secured what money and small valuables they possessed in a huge pocket which extended all round her waist, and added considerably to her weight and diameter.

‘‘Tis true enough,’ said the miller: ‘he’s come! You and Anne and the maid must be off to Cousin Jim’s at King’s-Bere, and when you get there you must do as they do. I must assemble with the company.’

‘And I?’ said Bob.

‘Thou’st better run to the church, and take a pike before they be all gone.’

The horse was put into the gig, and Mrs. Loveday, Anne, and the servant-maid were hastily packed into the vehicle, the latter taking the reins; David’s duties as a fighting-man forbidding all thought of his domestic offices now. Then the silver tankard, teapot, pair of candlesticks like Ionic columns, and other articles too large to be pocketed were thrown into a basket and put up behind. Then came the leave-taking, which was as sad as it was hurried. Bob kissed Anne, and there was no affectation in her receiving that mark of affection as she said through her tears, ‘God bless you!’ At last they moved off in the dim light of dawn, neither of the three women knowing which road they were to take, but trusting to chance to find it.

As soon as they were out of sight Bob went off for a pike, and his father, first new-flinting his firelock, proceeded to don his uniform, pipe-claying his breeches with such cursory haste as to bespatter his black gaiters with the same ornamental compound. Finding when he was ready that no bugle had as yet sounded, he went with David to the cart-house, dragged out the waggon, and put therein some of the most useful and easily-handled goods, in case there might be an opportunity for conveying them away. By the time this was done and the waggon pushed back and locked in, Bob had returned with his weapon, somewhat mortified at being doomed to this low form of defence. The miller gave his son a parting grasp of the hand, and arranged to meet

him at King's-Bere at the first opportunity if the news were true; if happily false, here at their own house.

'Bother it all!' he exclaimed, looking at his stock of flints.

'What?' said Bob.

'I've got no ammunition: not a blessed round!'

'Then what's the use of going?' asked his son.

The miller paused. 'O, I'll go,' he said. 'Perhaps somebody will lend me a little if I get into a hot corner?'

'Lend ye a little! Father, you was always so simple!' said Bob reproachfully.

'Well — I can bagnet a few, anyhow,' said the miller.

The bugle had been blown ere this, and Loveday the father disappeared towards the place of assembly, his empty cartridge-box behind him. Bob seized a brace of loaded pistols which he had brought home from the ship, and, armed with these and a pike, he locked the door and sallied out again towards the turnpike road.

By this time the yeomanry of the district were also on the move, and among them Festus Derriman, who was sleeping at his uncle's, and had been awakened by Cripplestraw. About the time when Bob and his father were descending from the beacon the stalwart yeoman was standing in the stable-yard adjusting his straps, while Cripplestraw saddled the horse. Festus clanked up and down, looked gloomily at the beacon, heard the retreating carts and carriages, and called Cripplestraw to him, who came from the stable leading the horse at the same moment that Uncle Benjy peeped unobserved from a mullioned window above their heads, the distant light of the beacon fire touching up his features to the complexion of an old brass clock-face.

'I think that before I start, Cripplestraw,' said Festus, whose lurid visage was undergoing a bleaching process curious to look upon, 'you shall go on to Budmouth, and make a bold inquiry whether the cowardly enemy is on shore as yet, or only looming in the bay.'

'I'd go in a moment, sir,' said the other, 'if I hadn't my bad leg again. I should have joined my company afore this; but they said at last drill that I was too old. So I shall wait up in the hay-loft for tidings as soon as I have packed you off, poor gentleman!'

'Do such alarms as these, Cripplestraw, ever happen without foundation? Buona-partie is a wretch, a miserable wretch, and this may be only a false alarm to disappoint such as me?'

'O no, sir; O no!'

'But sometimes there are false alarms?'

'Well, sir, yes. There was a pretended sally o' gunboats last year.'

'And was there nothing else pretended — something more like this, for instance?'

Cripplestraw shook his head. 'I notice yer modesty, Mr. Festus, in making light of things. But there never was, sir. You may depend upon it he's come. Thank God, my duty as a Local don't require me to go to the front, but only the valiant men like my master. Ah, if Boney could only see 'ee now, sir, he'd know too well there is nothing to be got from such a determined skilful officer but blows and musket-balls!'

‘Yes, yes. Cripplestraw, if I ride off to Budmouth and meet ‘em, all my training will be lost. No skill is required as a forlorn hope.’

‘True; that’s a point, sir. You would outshine ‘em all, and be picked off at the very beginning as a too-dangerous brave man.’

‘But if I stay here and urge on the faint-hearted ones, or get up into the turret-stair by that gateway, and pop at the invaders through the loophole, I shouldn’t be so completely wasted, should I?’

‘You would not, Mr. Derriman. But, as you was going to say next, the fire in yer veins won’t let ye do that. You are valiant; very good: you don’t want to husband yer valiance at home. The arg’ment is plain.’

‘If my birth had been more obscure,’ murmured the yeoman, ‘and I had only been in the militia, for instance, or among the humble pikemen, so much wouldn’t have been expected of me — of my fiery nature. Cripplestraw, is there a drop of brandy to be got at in the house? I don’t feel very well.’

‘Dear nephew,’ said the old gentleman from above, whom neither of the others had as yet noticed, ‘I haven’t any spirits opened — so unfortunate! But there’s a beautiful barrel of crab-apple cider in draught; and there’s some cold tea from last night.’

‘What, is he listening?’ said Festus, staring up. ‘Now I warrant how glad he is to see me forced to go — called out of bed without breakfast, and he quite safe, and sure to escape because he’s an old man! — Cripplestraw, I like being in the yeomanry cavalry; but I wish I hadn’t been in the ranks; I wish I had been only the surgeon, to stay in the rear while the bodies are brought back to him — I mean, I should have thrown my heart at such a time as this more into the labour of restoring wounded men and joining their shattered limbs together — u-u-ugh! — more than I can into causing the wounds — I am too humane, Cripplestraw, for the ranks!’

‘Yes, yes,’ said his companion, depressing his spirits to a kindred level. ‘And yet, such is fate, that, instead of joining men’s limbs together, you’ll have to get your own joined — poor young sojer! — all through having such a warlike soul.’

‘Yes,’ murmured Festus, and paused. ‘You can’t think how strange I feel here, Cripplestraw,’ he continued, laying his hand upon the centre buttons of his waistcoat. ‘How I do wish I was only the surgeon!’

He slowly mounted, and Uncle Benjy, in the meantime, sang to himself as he looked on, ‘Twen-ty-three and half from N.W. Six-teen and three-quar-ters from N.E.’

‘What’s that old mummy singing?’ said Festus savagely.

‘Only a hymn for preservation from our enemies, dear nephew,’ meekly replied the farmer, who had heard the remark. ‘Twen-ty-three and half from N.W.’

Festus allowed his horse to move on a few paces, and then turned again, as if struck by a happy invention. ‘Cripplestraw,’ he began, with an artificial laugh, ‘I am obliged to confess, after all — I must see her! ‘Tisn’t nature that makes me draw back — ’tis love. I must go and look for her.’

‘A woman, sir?’

‘I didn’t want to confess it; but ‘tis a woman. Strange that I should be drawn so entirely against my natural wish to rush at ‘em!’

Cripplestraw, seeing which way the wind blew, found it advisable to blow in harmony. ‘Ah, now at last I see, sir! Spite that few men live that be worthy to command ye; spite that you could rush on, marshal the troops to victory, as I may say; but then — what of it? there’s the unhappy fate of being smit with the eyes of a woman, and you are unmanned! Maister Derriman, who is himself, when he’s got a woman round his neck like a millstone?’

‘It is something like that.’

‘I feel the case. Be you valiant? — I know, of course, the words being a matter of form — be you valiant, I ask? Yes, of course. Then don’t you waste it in the open field. Hoard it up, I say, sir, for a higher class of war — the defence of yer adorable lady. Think what you owe her at this terrible time! Now, Maister Derriman, once more I ask ye to cast off that first haughty wish to rush to Budmouth, and to go where your mis’ess is defenceless and alone.’

‘I will, Cripplestraw, now you put it like that!’

‘Thank ye, thank ye heartily, Maister Derriman. Go now and hide with her.’

‘But can I? Now, hang flattery! — can a man hide without a stain? Of course I would not hide in any mean sense; no, not I!’

‘If you be in love, ‘tis plain you may, since it is not your own life, but another’s, that you are concerned for, and you only save your own because it can’t be helped.’

‘‘Tis true, Cripplestraw, in a sense. But will it be understood that way? Will they see it as a brave hiding?’

‘Now, sir, if you had not been in love I own to ye that hiding would look queer, but being to save the tears, groans, fits, swowndings, and perhaps death of a comely young woman, yer principle is good; you honourably retreat because you be too gallant to advance. This sounds strange, ye may say, sir; but it is plain enough to less fiery minds.’

Festus did for a moment try to uncover his teeth in a natural smile, but it died away. ‘Cripplestraw, you flatter me; or do you mean it? Well, there’s truth in it. I am more gallant in going to her than in marching to the shore. But we cannot be too careful about our good names, we soldiers. I must not be seen. I’m off.’

Cripplestraw opened the hurdle which closed the arch under the portico gateway, and Festus passed under, Uncle Benjamin singing, Twen-ty-three and a half from N.W. with a sort of sublime ecstasy, feeling, as Festus had observed, that his money was safe, and that the French would not personally molest an old man in such a ragged, mildewed coat as that he wore, which he had taken the precaution to borrow from a scarecrow in one of his fields for the purpose.

Festus rode on full of his intention to seek out Anne, and under cover of protecting her retreat accompany her to King’s-Bere, where he knew the Lovedays had relatives. In the lane he met Granny Seamore, who, having packed up all her possessions in a small basket, was placidly retreating to the mountains till all should be over.

‘Well, granny, have ye seen the French?’ asked Festus.

‘No,’ she said, looking up at him through her brazen spectacles. ‘If I had I shouldn’t ha’ seed thee!’

‘Faugh!’ replied the yeoman, and rode on. Just as he reached the old road, which he had intended merely to cross and avoid, his countenance fell. Some troops of regulars, who appeared to be dragoons, were rattling along the road. Festus hastened towards an opposite gate, so as to get within the field before they should see him; but, as ill-luck would have it, as soon as he got inside, a party of six or seven of his own yeomanry troop were straggling across the same field and making for the spot where he was. The dragoons passed without seeing him; but when he turned out into the road again it was impossible to retreat towards Overcombe village because of the yeomen. So he rode straight on, and heard them coming at his heels. There was no other gate, and the highway soon became as straight as a bowstring. Unable thus to turn without meeting them, and caught like an eel in a water-pipe, Festus drew nearer and nearer to the fateful shore. But he did not relinquish hope. Just ahead there were cross-roads, and he might have a chance of slipping down one of them without being seen. On reaching the spot he found that he was not alone. A horseman had come up the right-hand lane and drawn rein. It was an officer of the German legion, and seeing Festus he held up his hand. Festus rode up to him and saluted.

‘It ist false report!’ said the officer.

Festus was a man again. He felt that nothing was too much for him. The officer, after some explanation of the cause of alarm, said that he was going across to the road which led by the moor, to stop the troops and volunteers converging from that direction, upon which Festus offered to give information along the Casterbridge road. The German crossed over, and was soon out of sight in the lane, while Festus turned back upon the way by which he had come. The party of yeomanry cavalry was rapidly drawing near, and he soon recognized among them the excited voices of Stubb of Duddle Hole, Noakes of Muckleford, and other comrades of his orgies at the hall. It was a magnificent opportunity, and Festus drew his sword. When they were within speaking distance he reined round his charger’s head to Budmouth and shouted, ‘On, comrades, on! I am waiting for you. You have been a long time getting up with me, seeing the glorious nature of our deeds to-day!’

‘Well said, Derriman, well said!’ replied the foremost of the riders. ‘Have you heard anything new?’

‘Only that he’s here with his tens of thousands, and that we are to ride to meet him sword in hand as soon as we have assembled in the town ahead here.’

‘O Lord!’ said Noakes, with a slight falling of the lower jaw.

‘The man who quails now is unworthy of the name of yeoman,’ said Festus, still keeping ahead of the other troopers and holding up his sword to the sun. ‘O Noakes, fie, fie! You begin to look pale, man.’

‘Faith, perhaps you’d look pale,’ said Noakes, with an envious glance upon Festus’s daring manner, ‘if you had a wife and family depending upon ye!’

'I'll take three frog-eating Frenchmen single-handed!' rejoined Derriman, still flourishing his sword.

'They have as good swords as you; as you will soon find,' said another of the yeomen.

'If they were three times armed,' said Festus — 'ay, thrice three times — I would attempt 'em three to one. How do you feel now, my old friend Stubb?' (turning to another of the warriors.) 'O, friend Stubb! no bouncing health to our lady-loves in Oxwell Hall this summer as last. Eh, Brownjohn?'

'I am afraid not,' said Brownjohn gloomily.

'No rattling dinners at Stacie's Hotel, and the King below with his staff. No wrenching off door-knockers and sending 'em to the bakehouse in a pie that nobody calls for. Weeks of cut-and-thrust work rather!'

'I suppose so.'

'Fight how we may we shan't get rid of the cursed tyrant before autumn, and many thousand brave men will lie low before it's done,' remarked a young yeoman with a calm face, who meant to do his duty without much talking.

'No grinning matches at Mai-dun Castle this summer,' Festus resumed; 'no thread-the-needle at Greenhill Fair, and going into shows and driving the showman crazy with cock-a-doodle-doo!'

'I suppose not.'

'Does it make you seem just a trifle uncomfortable, Noakes? Keep up your spirits, old comrade. Come, forward! we are only ambling on like so many donkey-women. We have to get into Budmouth, join the rest of the troop, and then march along the coast west'ard, as I imagine. At this rate we shan't be well into the thick of battle before twelve o'clock. Spur on, comrades. No dancing on the green, Lockham, this year in the moonlight! You was tender upon that girl; gad, what will become o' her in the struggle?'

'Come, come, Derriman,' expostulated Lockham — 'this is all very well, but I don't care for 't. I am as ready to fight as any man, but — '

'Perhaps when you get into battle, Derriman, and see what it's like, your courage will cool down a little,' added Noakes on the same side, but with secret admiration of Festus's reckless bravery.

'I shall be bayoneted first,' said Festus. 'Now let's rally, and on!'

Since Festus was determined to spur on wildly, the rest of the yeomen did not like to seem behindhand, and they rapidly approached the town. Had they been calm enough to reflect, they might have observed that for the last half-hour no carts or carriages had met them on the way, as they had done further back. It was not till the troopers reached the turnpike that they learnt what Festus had known a quarter of an hour before. At the intelligence Derriman sheathed his sword with a sigh; and the party soon fell in with comrades who had arrived there before them, whereupon the source and details of the alarm were boisterously discussed.

'What, didn't you know of the mistake till now?' asked one of these of the newcomers. 'Why, when I was dropping over the hill by the cross-roads I looked back and

saw that man talking to the messenger, and he must have told him the truth.' The speaker pointed to Festus. They turned their indignant eyes full upon him. That he had sported with their deepest feelings, while knowing the rumour to be baseless, was soon apparent to all.

'Beat him black and blue with the flat of our blades!' shouted two or three, turning their horses' heads to drop back upon Derriman, in which move they were followed by most of the party.

But Festus, foreseeing danger from the unexpected revelation, had already judiciously placed a few intervening yards between himself and his fellow-yeomen, and now, clapping spurs to his horse, rattled like thunder and lightning up the road homeward. His ready flight added hotness to their pursuit, and as he rode and looked fearfully over his shoulder he could see them following with enraged faces and drawn swords, a position which they kept up for a distance of more than a mile. Then he had the satisfaction of seeing them drop off one by one, and soon he and his panting charger remained alone on the highway.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DANGER TO ANNE

He stopped and reflected how to turn this rebuff to advantage. Baulked in his project of entering the watering-place and enjoying congratulations upon his patriotic bearing during the advance, he sulkily considered that he might be able to make some use of his enforced retirement by riding to Overcombe and glorifying himself in the eyes of Miss Garland before the truth should have reached that hamlet. Having thus decided he spurred on in a better mood.

By this time the volunteers were on the march, and as Derriman ascended the road he met the Overcombe company, in which trudged Miller Loveday shoulder to shoulder with the other substantial householders of the place and its neighbourhood, duly equipped with pouches, cross-belts, firelocks, flint-boxes, pickers, worms, magazines, priming-horns, heel-ball, and pomatum. There was nothing to be gained by further suppression of the truth, and briefly informing them that the danger was not so immediate as had been supposed, Festus galloped on. At the end of another mile he met a large number of pikemen, including Bob Loveday, whom the yeoman resolved to sound upon the whereabouts of Anne. The circumstances were such as to lead Bob to speak more frankly than he might have done on reflection, and he told Festus the direction in which the women had been sent. Then Festus informed the group that the report of invasion was false, upon which they all turned to go homeward with greatly relieved spirits.

Bob walked beside Derriman's horse for some distance. Loveday had instantly made up his mind to go and look for the women, and ease their anxiety by letting them know the good news as soon as possible. But he said nothing of this to Festus during their

return together; nor did Festus tell Bob that he also had resolved to seek them out, and by anticipating every one else in that enterprise, make of it a glorious opportunity for bringing Miss Garland to her senses about him. He still resented the ducking that he had received at her hands, and was not disposed to let that insult pass without obtaining some sort of sweet revenge.

As soon as they had parted Festus cantered on over the hill, meeting on his way the Longpuddle volunteers, sixty rank and file, under Captain Cunningham; the Casterbridge company, ninety strong (known as the 'Consideration Company' in those days), under Captain Strickland; and others — all with anxious faces and covered with dust. Just passing the word to them and leaving them at halt, he proceeded rapidly onward in the direction of King's-Bere. Nobody appeared on the road for some time, till after a ride of several miles he met a stray corporal of volunteers, who told Festus in answer to his inquiry that he had certainly passed no gig full of women of the kind described. Believing that he had missed them by following the highway, Derriman turned back into a lane along which they might have chosen to journey for privacy's sake, notwithstanding the badness and uncertainty of its track. Arriving again within five miles of Overcombe, he at length heard tidings of the wandering vehicle and its precious burden, which, like the Ark when sent away from the country of the Philistines, had apparently been left to the instincts of the beast that drew it. A labouring man, just at daybreak, had seen the helpless party going slowly up a distant drive, which he pointed out.

No sooner had Festus parted from this informant than he beheld Bob approaching, mounted on the miller's second and heavier horse. Bob looked rather surprised, and Festus felt his coming glory in danger.

'They went down that lane,' he said, signifying precisely the opposite direction to the true one. 'I, too, have been on the look-out for missing friends.'

As Festus was riding back there was no reason to doubt his information, and Loveday rode on as misdirected. Immediately that he was out of sight Festus reversed his course, and followed the track which Anne and her companions were last seen to pursue.

This road had been ascended by the gig in question nearly two hours before the present moment. Molly, the servant, held the reins, Mrs. Loveday sat beside her, and Anne behind. Their progress was but slow, owing partly to Molly's want of skill, and partly to the steepness of the road, which here passed over downs of some extent, and was rarely or never mended. It was an anxious morning for them all, and the beauties of the early summer day fell upon unheeding eyes. They were too anxious even for conjecture, and each sat thinking her own thoughts, occasionally glancing westward, or stopping the horse to listen to sounds from more frequented roads along which other parties were retreating. Once, while they listened and gazed thus, they saw a glittering in the distance, and heard the tramp of many horses. It was a large body of cavalry going in the direction of the King's watering-place, the same regiment of dragoons, in fact, which Festus had seen further on in its course. The women in the gig had no doubt that these men were marching at once to engage the enemy. By way of varying

the monotony of the journey Molly occasionally burst into tears of horror, believing Buonaparte to be in countenance and habits precisely what the caricatures represented him. Mrs. Loveday endeavoured to establish cheerfulness by assuring her companions of the natural civility of the French nation, with whom unprotected women were safe from injury, unless through the casual excesses of soldiery beyond control. This was poor consolation to Anne, whose mind was more occupied with Bob than with herself, and a miserable fear that she would never again see him alive so paled her face and saddened her gaze forward, that at last her mother said, 'Who was you thinking of, my dear?' Anne's only reply was a look at her mother, with which a tear mingled.

Molly whipped the horse, by which she quickened his pace for five yards, when he again fell into the perverse slowness that showed how fully conscious he was of being the master-mind and chief personage of the four. Whenever there was a pool of water by the road he turned aside to drink a mouthful, and remained there his own time in spite of Molly's tug at the reins and futile fly-flapping on his rump. They were now in the chalk district, where there were no hedges, and a rough attempt at mending the way had been made by throwing down huge lumps of that glaring material in heaps, without troubling to spread it or break them abroad. The jolting here was most distressing, and seemed about to snap the springs.

'How that wheel do wamble,' said Molly at last. She had scarcely spoken when the wheel came off, and all three were precipitated over it into the road.

Fortunately the horse stood still, and they began to gather themselves up. The only one of the three who had suffered in the least from the fall was Anne, and she was only conscious of a severe shaking which had half stupefied her for the time. The wheel lay flat in the road, so that there was no possibility of driving further in their present plight. They looked around for help. The only friendly object near was a lonely cottage, from its situation evidently the home of a shepherd.

The horse was unharnessed and tied to the back of the gig, and the three women went across to the house. On getting close they found that the shutters of all the lower windows were closed, but on trying the door it opened to the hand. Nobody was within; the house appeared to have been abandoned in some confusion, and the probability was that the shepherd had fled on hearing the alarm. Anne now said that she felt the effects of her fall too severely to be able to go any further just then, and it was agreed that she should be left there while Mrs. Loveday and Molly went on for assistance, the elder lady deeming Molly too young and vacant-minded to be trusted to go alone. Molly suggested taking the horse, as the distance might be great, each of them sitting alternately on his back while the other led him by the head. This they did, Anne watching them vanish down the white and lumpy road.

She then looked round the room, as well as she could do so by the light from the open door. It was plain, from the shutters being closed, that the shepherd had left his house before daylight, the candle and extinguisher on the table pointing to the same conclusion. Here she remained, her eyes occasionally sweeping the bare, sunny expanse of down, that was only relieved from absolute emptiness by the overturned gig hard

by. The sheep seemed to have gone away, and scarcely a bird flew across to disturb the solitude. Anne had risen early that morning, and leaning back in the withy chair, which she had placed by the door, she soon fell into an uneasy doze, from which she was awakened by the distant tramp of a horse. Feeling much recovered from the effects of the overturn, she eagerly rose and looked out. The horse was not Miller Loveday's, but a powerful bay, bearing a man in full yeomanry uniform.

Anne did not wait to recognize further; instantly re-entering the house, she shut the door and bolted it. In the dark she sat and listened: not a sound. At the end of ten minutes, thinking that the rider if he were not Festus had carelessly passed by, or that if he were Festus he had not seen her, she crept softly upstairs and peeped out of the window. Excepting the spot of shade, formed by the gig as before, the down was quite bare. She then opened the casement and stretched out her neck.

'Ha, young madam! There you are! I knew 'ee! Now you are caught!' came like a clap of thunder from a point three or four feet beneath her, and turning down her frightened eyes she beheld Festus Derriman lurking close to the wall. His attention had first been attracted by her shutting the door of the cottage; then by the overturned gig; and after making sure, by examining the vehicle, that he was not mistaken in her identity, he had dismounted, led his horse round to the side, and crept up to entrap her.

Anne started back into the room, and remained still as a stone. Festus went on — 'Come, you must trust to me. The French have landed. I have been trying to meet with you every hour since that confounded trick you played me. You threw me into the water. Faith, it was well for you I didn't catch ye then! I should have taken a revenge in a better way than I shall now. I mean to have that kiss of ye. Come, Miss Nancy; do you hear? — 'Tis no use for you to lurk inside there. You'll have to turn out as soon as Boney comes over the hill — Are you going to open the door, I say, and speak to me in a civil way? What do you think I am, then, that you should barricade yourself against me as if I was a wild beast or Frenchman? Open the door, or put out your head, or do something; or 'pon my soul I'll break in the door!'

It occurred to Anne at this point of the tirade that the best policy would be to temporize till somebody should return, and she put out her head and face, now grown somewhat pale.

'That's better,' said Festus. 'Now I can talk to you. Come, my dear, will you open the door? Why should you be afraid of me?'

'I am not altogether afraid of you; I am safe from the French here,' said Anne, not very truthfully, and anxiously casting her eyes over the vacant down.

'Then let me tell you that the alarm is false, and that no landing has been attempted. Now will you open the door and let me in? I am tired. I have been on horseback ever since daylight, and have come to bring you the good tidings.'

Anne looked as if she doubted the news.

'Come,' said Festus.

‘No, I cannot let you in,’ she murmured, after a pause.

‘Dash my wig, then,’ he cried, his face flaming up, ‘I’ll find a way to get in! Now, don’t you provoke me! You don’t know what I am capable of. I ask you again, will you open the door?’

‘Why do you wish it?’ she said faintly.

‘I have told you I want to sit down; and I want to ask you a question.’

‘You can ask me from where you are.’

‘I cannot ask you properly. It is about a serious matter: whether you will accept my heart and hand. I am not going to throw myself at your feet; but I ask you to do your duty as a woman, namely, give your solemn word to take my name as soon as the war is over and I have time to attend to you. I scorn to ask it of a haughty hussy who will only speak to me through a window; however, I put it to you for the last time, madam.’

There was no sign on the down of anybody’s return, and she said, ‘I’ll think of it, sir.’

‘You have thought of it long enough; I want to know. Will you or won’t you?’

‘Very well; I think I will.’ And then she felt that she might be buying personal safety too dearly by shuffling thus, since he would spread the report that she had accepted him, and cause endless complication. ‘No,’ she said, ‘I have changed my mind. I cannot accept you, Mr. Derriman.’

‘That’s how you play with me!’ he exclaimed, stamping. “‘Yes,” one moment; “No,” the next. Come, you don’t know what you refuse. That old hall is my uncle’s own, and he has nobody else to leave it to. As soon as he’s dead I shall throw up farming and start as a squire. And now,’ he added with a bitter sneer, ‘what a fool you are to hang back from such a chance!’

‘Thank you, I don’t value it,’ said Anne.

‘Because you hate him who would make it yours?’

‘It may not lie in your power to do that.’

‘What — has the old fellow been telling you his affairs?’

‘No.’

‘Then why do you mistrust me? Now, after this will you open the door, and show that you treat me as a friend if you won’t accept me as a lover? I only want to sit and talk to you.’

Anne thought she would trust him; it seemed almost impossible that he could harm her. She retired from the window and went downstairs. When her hand was upon the bolt of the door, her mind misgave her. Instead of withdrawing it she remained in silence where she was, and he began again —

‘Are you going to unfasten it?’

Anne did not speak.

‘Now, dash my wig, I will get at you! You’ve tried me beyond endurance. One kiss would have been enough that day in the mead; now I’ll have forty, whether you will or no!’

He flung himself against the door; but as it was bolted, and had in addition a great wooden bar across it, this produced no effect. He was silent for a moment, and then the terrified girl heard him attempt the shuttered window. She ran upstairs and again scanned the down. The yellow gig still lay in the blazing sunshine, and the horse of Festus stood by the corner of the garden — nothing else was to be seen. At this moment there came to her ear the noise of a sword drawn from its scabbard; and, peeping over the window-sill, she saw her tormentor drive his sword between the joints of the shutters, in an attempt to rip them open. The sword snapped off in his hand. With an imprecation he pulled out the piece, and returned the two halves to the scabbard.

‘Ha! ha!’ he cried, catching sight of the top of her head. ‘‘Tis only a joke, you know; but I’ll get in all the same. All for a kiss! But never mind, we’ll do it yet!’ He spoke in an affectedly light tone, as if ashamed of his previous resentful temper; but she could see by the livid back of his neck that he was brimful of suppressed passion. ‘Only a jest, you know,’ he went on. ‘How are we going to do it now? Why, in this way. I go and get a ladder, and enter at the upper window where my love is. And there’s the ladder lying under that corn-rick in the first enclosed field. Back in two minutes, dear!’

He ran off, and was lost to her view.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ANNE DOES WONDERS

Anne fearfully surveyed her position. The upper windows of the cottage were of flimsiest lead-work, and to keep him out would be hopeless. She felt that not a moment was to be lost in getting away. Running downstairs she opened the door, and then it occurred to her terrified understanding that there would be no chance of escaping him by flight afoot across such an extensive down, since he might mount his horse and easily ride after her. The animal still remained tethered at the corner of the garden; if she could release him and frighten him away before Festus returned, there would not be quite such odds against her. She accordingly unhooked the horse by reaching over the bank, and then, pulling off her muslin neckerchief, flapped it in his eyes to startle him. But the gallant steed did not move or flinch; she tried again, and he seemed rather pleased than otherwise. At this moment she heard a cry from the cottage, and turning, beheld her adversary approaching round the corner of the building.

‘I thought I should tole out the mouse by that trick!’ cried Festus exultingly. Instead of going for a ladder, he had simply hidden himself at the back to tempt her down.

Poor Anne was now desperate. The bank on which she stood was level with the horse’s back, and the creature seemed quiet as a lamb. With a determination of which she was capable in emergencies, she seized the rein, flung herself upon the sheepskin, and held on by the mane. The amazed charger lifted his head, sniffed, wrenched his ears hither and thither, and started off at a frightful speed across the down.

‘O, my heart and limbs!’ said Festus under his breath, as, thoroughly alarmed, he gazed after her. ‘She on Champion! She’ll break her neck, and I shall be tried for manslaughter, and disgrace will be brought upon the name of Derriman!’

Champion continued to go at a stretch-gallop, but he did nothing worse. Had he plunged or reared, Derriman’s fears might have been verified, and Anne have come with deadly force to the ground. But the course was good, and in the horse’s speed lay a comparative security. She was scarcely shaken in her precarious half-horizontal position, though she was awed to see the grass, loose stones, and other objects pass her eyes like strokes whenever she opened them, which was only just for a second at intervals of half a minute; and to feel how wildly the stirrups swung, and that what struck her knee was the bucket of the carbine, and that it was a pistol-holster which hurt her arm.

They quickly cleared the down, and Anne became conscious that the course of the horse was homeward. As soon as the ground began to rise towards the outer belt of upland which lay between her and the coast, Champion, now panting and reeking with moisture, lessened his speed in sheer weariness, and proceeded at a rapid jolting trot. Anne felt that she could not hold on half so well; the gallop had been child’s play compared with this. They were in a lane, ascending to a ridge, and she made up her mind for a fall. Over the ridge rose an animated spot, higher and higher; it turned out to be the upper part of a man, and the man to be a soldier. Such was Anne’s attitude that she only got an occasional glimpse of him; and, though she feared that he might be a Frenchman, she feared the horse more than the enemy, as she had feared Festus more than the horse. Anne had energy enough left to cry, ‘Stop him; stop him!’ as the soldier drew near.

He, astonished at the sight of a military horse with a bundle of drapery across his back, had already placed himself in the middle of the lane, and he now held out his arms till his figure assumed the form of a Latin cross planted in the roadway. Champion drew near, swerved, and stood still almost suddenly, a check sufficient to send Anne slipping down his flank to the ground. The timely friend stepped forward and helped her to her feet, when she saw that he was John Loveday.

‘Are you hurt?’ he said hastily, having turned quite pale at seeing her fall.

‘O no; not a bit,’ said Anne, gathering herself up with forced briskness, to make light of the misadventure.

‘But how did you get in such a place?’

‘There, he’s gone!’ she exclaimed, instead of replying, as Champion swept round John Loveday and cantered off triumphantly in the direction of Oxwell, a performance which she followed with her eyes.

‘But how did you come upon his back, and whose horse is it?’

‘I will tell you.’

‘Well?’

‘I — cannot tell you.’

John looked steadily at her, saying nothing.

‘How did you come here?’ she asked. ‘Is it true that the French have not landed at all?’

‘Quite true; the alarm was groundless. I’ll tell you all about it. You look very tired. You had better sit down a few minutes. Let us sit on this bank.’

He helped her to the slope indicated, and continued, still as if his thoughts were more occupied with the mystery of her recent situation than with what he was saying: ‘We arrived at Budmouth Barracks this morning, and are to lie there all the summer. I could not write to tell father we were coming. It was not because of any rumour of the French, for we knew nothing of that till we met the people on the road, and the colonel said in a moment the news was false. Buonaparte is not even at Boulogne just now. I was anxious to know how you had borne the fright, so I hastened to Overcombe at once, as soon as I could get out of barracks.’

Anne, who had not been at all responsive to his discourse, now swayed heavily against him, and looking quickly down he found that she had silently fainted. To support her in his arms was of course the impulse of a moment. There was no water to be had, and he could think of nothing else but to hold her tenderly till she came round again. Certainly he desired nothing more.

Again he asked himself, what did it all mean?

He waited, looking down upon her tired eyelids, and at the row of lashes lying upon each cheek, whose natural roundness showed itself in singular perfection now that the customary pink had given place to a pale luminousness caught from the surrounding atmosphere. The dumpy ringlets about her forehead and behind her poll, which were usually as tight as springs, had been partially uncoiled by the wildness of her ride, and hung in split locks over her forehead and neck. John, who, during the long months of his absence, had lived only to meet her again, was in a state of ecstatic reverence, and bending down he gently kissed her.

Anne was just becoming conscious.

‘O, Mr. Derriman, never, never!’ she murmured, sweeping her face with her hand.

‘I thought he was at the bottom of it,’ said John.

Anne opened her eyes, and started back from him. ‘What is it?’ she said wildly.

‘You are ill, my dear Miss Garland,’ replied John in trembling anxiety, and taking her hand.

‘I am not ill, I am wearied out!’ she said. ‘Can’t we walk on? How far are we from Overcombe?’

‘About a mile. But tell me, somebody has been hurting you — frightening you. I know who it was; it was Derriman, and that was his horse. Now do you tell me all.’

Anne reflected. ‘Then if I tell you,’ she said, ‘will you discuss with me what I had better do, and not for the present let my mother and your father know? I don’t want to alarm them, and I must not let my affairs interrupt the business connection between the mill and the hall that has gone on for so many years.’

The trumpet-major promised, and Anne told the adventure. His brow reddened as she went on, and when she had done she said, ‘Now you are angry. Don’t do anything

dreadful, will you? Remember that this Festus will most likely succeed his uncle at Oxwell, in spite of present appearances, and if Bob succeeds at the mill there should be no enmity between them.'

'That's true. I won't tell Bob. Leave him to me. Where is Derriman now? On his way home, I suppose. When I have seen you into the house I will deal with him — quite quietly, so that he shall say nothing about it.'

'Yes, appeal to him, do! Perhaps he will be better then.'

They walked on together, Loveday seeming to experience much quiet bliss.

'I came to look for you,' he said, 'because of that dear, sweet letter you wrote.'

'Yes, I did write you a letter,' she admitted, with misgiving, now beginning to see her mistake. 'It was because I was sorry I had blamed you.'

'I am almost glad you did blame me,' said John cheerfully, 'since, if you had not, the letter would not have come. I have read it fifty times a day.'

This put Anne into an unhappy mood, and they proceeded without much further talk till the mill chimneys were visible below them. John then said that he would leave her to go in by herself.

'Ah, you are going back to get into some danger on my account?'

'I can't get into much danger with such a fellow as he, can I?'

 said John, smiling.

'Well, no,' she answered, with a sudden carelessness of tone. It was indispensable that he should be undeceived, and to begin the process by taking an affectedly light view of his personal risks was perhaps as good a way to do it as any. Where friendliness was construed as love, an assumed indifference was the necessary expression for friendliness.

So she let him go; and, bidding him hasten back as soon as he could, went down the hill, while John's feet retraced the upland.

The trumpet-major spent the whole afternoon and evening in that long and difficult search for Festus Derriman. Crossing the down at the end of the second hour he met Molly and Mrs. Loveday. The gig had been repaired, they had learnt the groundlessness of the alarm, and they would have been proceeding happily enough but for their anxiety about Anne. John told them shortly that she had got a lift home, and proceeded on his way.

The worthy object of his search had in the meantime been plodding homeward on foot, sulky at the loss of his charger, encumbered with his sword, belts, high boots, and uniform, and in his own discomfiture careless whether Anne Garland's life had been endangered or not.

At length Derriman reached a place where the road ran between high banks, one of which he mounted and paced along as a change from the hard trackway. Ahead of him he saw an old man sitting down, with eyes fixed on the dust of the road, as if resting and meditating at one and the same time. Being pretty sure that he recognized his uncle in that venerable figure, Festus came forward stealthily, till he was immediately above the old man's back. The latter was clothed in faded nankeen breeches, speckled stockings, a drab hat, and a coat which had once been light blue, but from exposure

as a scarecrow had assumed the complexion and fibre of a dried pudding-cloth. The farmer was, in fact, returning to the hall, which he had left in the morning some time later than his nephew, to seek an asylum in a hollow tree about two miles off. The tree was so situated as to command a view of the building, and Uncle Benjy had managed to clamber up inside this natural fortification high enough to watch his residence through a hole in the bark, till, gathering from the words of occasional passers-by that the alarm was at least premature, he had ventured into daylight again.

He was now engaged in abstractedly tracing a diagram in the dust with his walking-stick, and muttered words to himself aloud. Presently he arose and went on his way without turning round. Festus was curious enough to descend and look at the marks. They represented an oblong, with two semi-diagonals, and a little square in the middle. Upon the diagonals were the figures 20 and 17, and on each side of the parallelogram stood a letter signifying the point of the compass.

‘What crazy thing is running in his head now?’ said Festus to himself, with supercilious pity, recollecting that the farmer had been singing those very numbers earlier in the morning. Being able to make nothing of it, he lengthened his strides, and treading on tiptoe overtook his relative, saluting him by scratching his back like a hen. The startled old farmer danced round like a top, and gasping, said, as he perceived his nephew, ‘What, Festy! not thrown from your horse and killed, then, after all!’

‘No, nunc. What made ye think that?’

‘Champion passed me about an hour ago, when I was in hiding — poor timid soul of me, for I had nothing to lose by the French coming — and he looked awful with the stirrups dangling and the saddle empty. ‘Tis a gloomy sight, Festy, to see a horse cantering without a rider, and I thought you had been — feared you had been thrown off and killed as dead as a nit.’

‘Bless your dear old heart for being so anxious! And what pretty picture were you drawing just now with your walking-stick!’

‘O, that! That is only a way I have of amusing myself. It showed how the French might have advanced to the attack, you know. Such trifles fill the head of a weak old man like me.’

‘Or the place where something is hid away — money, for instance?’

‘Festy,’ said the farmer reproachfully, ‘you always know I use the old glove in the bedroom cupboard for any guinea or two I possess.’

‘Of course I do,’ said Festus ironically.

They had now reached a lonely inn about a mile and a half from the hall, and, the farmer not responding to his nephew’s kind invitation to come in and treat him, Festus entered alone. He was dusty, draggled, and weary, and he remained at the tavern long. The trumpet-major, in the meantime, having searched the roads in vain, heard in the course of the evening of the yeoman’s arrival at this place, and that he would probably be found there still. He accordingly approached the door, reaching it just as the dusk of evening changed to darkness.

There was no light in the passage, but John pushed on at hazard, inquired for Derriman, and was told that he would be found in the back parlour alone. When Loveday first entered the apartment he was unable to see anything, but following the guidance of a vigorous snoring, he came to the settle, upon which Festus lay asleep, his position being faintly signified by the shine of his buttons and other parts of his uniform. John laid his hand upon the reclining figure and shook him, and by degrees Derriman stopped his snore and sat up.

‘Who are you?’ he said, in the accents of a man who has been drinking hard. ‘Is it you, dear Anne? Let me kiss you; yes, I will.’

‘Shut your mouth, you pitiful blockhead; I’ll teach you genteeler manners than to persecute a young woman in that way!’ and taking Festus by the ear, he gave it a good pull. Festus broke out with an oath, and struck a vague blow in the air with his fist; whereupon the trumpet-major dealt him a box on the right ear, and a similar one on the left to artistically balance the first. Festus jumped up and used his fists wildly, but without any definite result.

‘Want to fight, do ye, eh?’ said John. ‘Nonsense! you can’t fight, you great baby, and never could. You are only fit to be smacked!’ and he dealt Festus a specimen of the same on the cheek with the palm of his hand.

‘No, sir, no! O, you are Loveday, the young man she’s going to be married to, I suppose? Dash me, I didn’t want to hurt her, sir.’

‘Yes, my name is Loveday; and you’ll know where to find me, since we can’t finish this to-night. Pistols or swords, whichever you like, my boy. Take that, and that, so that you may not forget to call upon me!’ and again he smacked the yeoman’s ears and cheeks. ‘Do you know what it is for, eh?’

‘No, Mr. Loveday, sir — yes, I mean, I do.’

‘What is it for, then? I shall keep smacking until you tell me. Gad! if you weren’t drunk, I’d half kill you here to-night.’

‘It is because I served her badly. Damned if I care! I’ll do it again, and be hanged to ‘ee! Where’s my horse Champion? Tell me that,’ and he hit at the trumpet-major.

John parried this attack, and taking him firmly by the collar, pushed him down into the seat, saying, ‘Here I hold ‘ee till you beg pardon for your doings to-day. Do you want any more of it, do you?’ And he shook the yeoman to a sort of jelly.

‘I do beg pardon — no, I don’t. I say this, that you shall not take such liberties with old Squire Derriman’s nephew, you dirty miller’s son, you flour-worm, you smut in the corn! I’ll call you out to-morrow morning, and have my revenge.’

‘Of course you will; that’s what I came for.’ And pushing him back into the corner of the settle, Loveday went out of the house, feeling considerable satisfaction at having got himself into the beginning of as nice a quarrel about Anne Garland as the most jealous lover could desire.

But of one feature in this curious adventure he had not the least notion — that Festus Derriman, misled by the darkness, the fumes of his potations, and the constant

sight of Anne and Bob together, never once supposed his assailant to be any other man than Bob, believing the trumpet-major miles away.

There was a moon during the early part of John's walk home, but when he had arrived within a mile of Overcombe the sky clouded over, and rain suddenly began to fall with some violence. Near him was a wooden granary on tall stone staddles, and perceiving that the rain was only a thunderstorm which would soon pass away, he ascended the steps and entered the doorway, where he stood watching the half-observed moon through the streaming rain. Presently, to his surprise, he beheld a female figure running forward with great rapidity, not towards the granary for shelter, but towards open ground. What could she be running for in that direction? The answer came in the appearance of his brother Bob from that quarter, seated on the back of his father's heavy horse. As soon as the woman met him, Bob dismounted and caught her in his arms. They stood locked together, the rain beating into their unconscious forms, and the horse looking on.

The trumpet-major fell back inside the granary, and threw himself on a heap of empty sacks which lay in the corner: he had recognized the woman to be Anne. Here he reclined in a stupor till he was aroused by the sound of voices under him, the voices of Anne and his brother, who, having at last discovered that they were getting wet, had taken shelter under the granary floor.

'I have been home,' said she. 'Mother and Molly have both got back long ago. We were all anxious about you, and I came out to look for you. O, Bob, I am so glad to see you again!'

John might have heard every word of the conversation, which was continued in the same strain for a long time; but he stopped his ears, and would not. Still they remained, and still was he determined that they should not see him. With the conserved hope of more than half a year dashed away in a moment, he could yet feel that the cruelty of a protest would be even greater than its inutility. It was absolutely by his own contrivance that the situation had been shaped. Bob, left to himself, would long ere this have been the husband of another woman.

The rain decreased, and the lovers went on. John looked after them as they strolled, aqua-tinted by the weak moon and mist. Bob had thrust one of his arms through the rein of the horse, and the other was round Anne's waist. When they were lost behind the declivity the trumpet-major came out, and walked homeward even more slowly than they. As he went on, his face put off its complexion of despair for one of serene resolve. For the first time in his dealings with friends he entered upon a course of counterfeiting, set his features to conceal his thought, and instructed his tongue to do likewise. He threw fictitiousness into his very gait, even now, when there was nobody to see him, and struck at stems of wild parsley with his regimental switch as he had used to do when soldiering was new to him, and life in general a charming experience.

Thus cloaking his sickly thought, he descended to the mill as the others had done before him, occasionally looking down upon the wet road to notice how close Anne's little tracks were to Bob's all the way along, and how precisely a curve in his course was

followed by a curve in hers. But after this he erected his head and walked so smartly up to the front door that his spurs rang through the court.

They had all reached home, but before any of them could speak he cried gaily, 'Ah, Bob, I have been thinking of you! By God, how are you, my boy? No French cut-throats after all, you see. Here we are, well and happy together again.'

'A good Providence has watched over us,' said Mrs. Loveday cheerfully. 'Yes, in all times and places we are in God's hand.'

'So we be, so we be!' said the miller, who still shone in all the fierceness of uniform. 'Well, now we'll ha'e a drop o' drink.'

'There's none,' said David, coming forward with a drawn face.

'What!' said the miller.

'Afore I went to church for a pike to defend my native country from Boney, I pulled out the spigots of all the barrels, maister; for, thinks I — damn him! — since we can't drink it ourselves, he shan't have it, nor none of his men.'

'But you shouldn't have done it till you was sure he'd come!' said the miller, aghast.

'Chok' it all, I was sure!' said David. 'I'd sooner see churches fall than good drink wasted; but how was I to know better?'

'Well, well; what with one thing and another this day will cost me a pretty penny!' said Loveday, bustling off to the cellar, which he found to be several inches deep in stagnant liquor. 'John, how can I welcome 'ee?' he continued hopelessly, on his return to the room. 'Only go and see what he's done!'

'I've ladled up a drap wi' a spoon, trumpet-major,' said David. "'Tisn't bad drinking, though it do taste a little of the floor, that's true.'

John said that he did not require anything at all; and then they all sat down to supper, and were very temperately gay with a drop of mild elder-wine which Mrs. Loveday found in the bottom of a jar. The trumpet-major, adhering to the part he meant to play, gave humorous accounts of his adventures since he had last sat there. He told them that the season was to be a very lively one — that the royal family was coming, as usual, and many other interesting things; so that when he left them to return to barracks few would have supposed the British army to contain a lighter-hearted man.

Anne was the only one who doubted the reality of this behaviour. When she had gone up to her bedroom she stood for some time looking at the wick of the candle as if it were a painful object, the expression of her face being shaped by the conviction that John's afternoon words when he helped her out of the way of Champion were not in accordance with his words to-night, and that the dimly-realised kiss during her faintness was no imaginary one. But in the blissful circumstances of having Bob at hand again she took optimist views, and persuaded herself that John would soon begin to see her in the light of a sister.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A DISSEMBLER

To cursory view, John Loveday seemed to accomplish this with amazing ease. Whenever he came from barracks to Overcombe, which was once or twice a week, he related news of all sorts to her and Bob with infinite zest, and made the time as happy a one as had ever been known at the mill, save for himself alone. He said nothing of Festus, except so far as to inform Anne that he had expected to see him and been disappointed. On the evening after the King's arrival at his seaside residence John appeared again, staying to supper and describing the royal entry, the many tasteful illuminations and transparencies which had been exhibited, the quantities of tallow candles burnt for that purpose, and the swarms of aristocracy who had followed the King thither.

When supper was over Bob went outside the house to shut the shutters, which had, as was often the case, been left open some time after lights were kindled within. John still sat at the table when his brother approached the window, though the others had risen and retired. Bob was struck by seeing through the pane how John's face had changed. Throughout the supper-time he had been talking to Anne in the gay tone habitual with him now, which gave greater strangeness to the gloom of his present appearance. He remained in thought for a moment, took a letter from his breast-pocket, opened it, and, with a tender smile at his weakness, kissed the writing before restoring it to its place. The letter was one that Anne had written to him at Exonbury.

Bob stood perplexed; and then a suspicion crossed his mind that John, from brotherly goodness, might be feigning a satisfaction with recent events which he did not feel. Bob now made a noise with the shutters, at which the trumpet-major rose and went out, Bob at once following him.

'Jack,' said the sailor ingenuously, 'I'm terribly sorry that I've done wrong.'

'How?' asked his brother.

'In courting our little Anne. Well, you see, John, she was in the same house with me, and somehow or other I made myself her beau. But I have been thinking that perhaps you had the first claim on her, and if so, Jack, I'll make way for 'ee. I — I don't care for her much, you know — not so very much, and can give her up very well. It is nothing serious between us at all. Yes, John, you try to get her; I can look elsewhere.' Bob never knew how much he loved Anne till he found himself making this speech of renunciation.

'O Bob, you are mistaken!' said the trumpet-major, who was not deceived. 'When I first saw her I admired her, and I admire her now, and like her. I like her so well that I shall be glad to see you marry her.'

'But,' replied Bob, with hesitation, 'I thought I saw you looking very sad, as if you were in love; I saw you take out a letter, in short. That's what it was disturbed me and made me come to you.'

'O, I see your mistake!' said John, laughing forcedly.

At this minute Mrs. Loveday and the miller, who were taking a twilight walk in the garden, strolled round near to where the brothers stood. She talked volubly on events in Budmouth, as most people did at this time. 'And they tell me that the theatre has been painted up afresh,' she was saying, 'and that the actors have come for the season, with the most lovely actresses that ever were seen.'

When they had passed by John continued, 'I am in love, Bob; but — not with Anne.'

'Ah! who is it then?' said the mate hopefully.

'One of the actresses at the theatre,' John replied, with a concoctive look at the vanishing forms of Mr. and Mrs. Loveday. 'She is a very lovely woman, you know. But we won't say anything more about it — it dashes a man so.'

'O, one of the actresses!' said Bob, with open mouth.

'But don't you say anything about it!' continued the trumpet-major heartily. 'I don't want it known.'

'No, no — I won't, of course. May I not know her name?'

'No, not now, Bob. I cannot tell 'ee,' John answered, and with truth, for Loveday did not know the name of any actress in the world.

When his brother had gone, Captain Bob hastened off in a state of great animation to Anne, whom he found on the top of a neighbouring hillock which the daylight had scarcely as yet deserted.

'You have been a long time coming, sir,' said she, in sprightly tones of reproach.

'Yes, dearest; and you'll be glad to hear why. I've found out the whole mystery — yes — why he's queer, and everything.'

Anne looked startled.

'He's up to the gunnel in love! We must try to help him on in it, or I fear he'll go melancholy-mad like.'

'We help him?' she asked faintly.

'He's lost his heart to one of the play-actresses at Budmouth, and I think she slights him.'

'O, I am so glad!' she exclaimed.

'Glad that his venture don't prosper?'

'O no; glad he's so sensible. How long is it since that alarm of the French?'

'Six weeks, honey. Why do you ask?'

'Men can forget in six weeks, can't they, Bob?'

The impression that John had really kissed her still remained.

'Well, some men might,' observed Bob judicially. 'I couldn't. Perhaps John might. I couldn't forget you in twenty times as long. Do you know, Anne, I half thought it was you John cared about; and it was a weight off my heart when he said he didn't.'

'Did he say he didn't?'

'Yes. He assured me himself that the only person in the hold of his heart was this lovely play-actress, and nobody else.'

'How I should like to see her!'

‘Yes. So should I.’

‘I would rather it had been one of our own neighbours’ girls, whose birth and breeding we know of; but still, if that is his taste, I hope it will end well for him. How very quick he has been! I certainly wish we could see her.’

‘I don’t know so much as her name. He is very close, and wouldn’t tell a thing about her.’

‘Couldn’t we get him to go to the theatre with us? and then we could watch him, and easily find out the right one. Then we would learn if she is a good young woman; and if she is, could we not ask her here, and so make it smoother for him? He has been very gay lately; that means budding love: and sometimes between his gaieties he has had melancholy moments; that means there’s difficulty.’

Bob thought her plan a good one, and resolved to put it in practice on the first available evening. Anne was very curious as to whether John did really cherish a new passion, the story having quite surprised her. Possibly it was true; six weeks had passed since John had shown a single symptom of the old attachment, and what could not that space of time effect in the heart of a soldier whose very profession it was to leave girls behind him?

After this John Loveday did not come to see them for nearly a month, a neglect which was set down by Bob as an additional proof that his brother’s affections were no longer exclusively centred in his old home. When at last he did arrive, and the theatre-going was mentioned to him, the flush of consciousness which Anne expected to see upon his face was unaccountably absent.

‘Yes, Bob; I should very well like to go to the theatre,’ he replied heartily. ‘Who is going besides?’

‘Only Anne,’ Bob told him, and then it seemed to occur to the trumpet-major that something had been expected of him. He rose and said privately to Bob with some confusion, ‘O yes, of course we’ll go. As I am connected with one of the — in short I can get you in for nothing, you know. At least let me manage everything.’

‘Yes, yes. I wonder you didn’t propose to take us before, Jack, and let us have a good look at her.’

‘I ought to have. You shall go on a King’s night. You won’t want me to point her out, Bob; I have my reasons at present for asking it?’

‘We’ll be content with guessing,’ said his brother.

When the gallant John was gone, Anne observed, ‘Bob, how he is changed! I watched him. He showed no feeling, even when you burst upon him suddenly with the subject nearest his heart.’

‘It must be because his suit don’t fay,’ said Captain Bob.

CHAPTER XXX.

AT THE THEATRE ROYAL

In two or three days a message arrived asking them to attend at the theatre on the coming evening, with the added request that they would dress in their gayest clothes, to do justice to the places taken. Accordingly, in the course of the afternoon they drove off, Bob having clothed himself in a splendid suit, recently purchased as an attempt to bring himself nearer to Anne's style when they appeared in public together. As finished off by this dashing and really fashionable attire, he was the perfection of a beau in the dog-days; pantaloons and boots of the newest make; yards and yards of muslin wound round his neck, forming a sort of asylum for the lower part of his face; two fancy waistcoats, and coat-buttons like circular shaving glasses. The absurd extreme of female fashion, which was to wear muslin dresses in January, was at this time equalled by that of the men, who wore clothes enough in August to melt them. Nobody would have guessed from Bob's presentation now that he had ever been aloft on a dark night in the Atlantic, or knew the hundred ingenuities that could be performed with a rope's end and a marline-spike as well as his mother tongue.

It was a day of days. Anne wore her celebrated celestial blue pelisse, her Leghorn hat, and her muslin dress with the waist under the arms; the latter being decorated with excellent Honiton lace bought of the woman who travelled from that place to Overcombe and its neighbourhood with a basketful of her own manufacture, and a cushion on which she worked by the wayside. John met the lovers at the inn outside the town, and after stabling the horse they entered the town together, the trumpet-major informing them that the watering-place had never been so full before, that the Court, the Prince of Wales, and everybody of consequence was there, and that an attic could scarcely be got for money. The King had gone for a cruise in his yacht, and they would be in time to see him land.

Then drums and fifes were heard, and in a minute or two they saw Sergeant Stanner advancing along the street with a firm countenance, fiery poll, and rigid staring eyes, in front of his recruiting-party. The sergeant's sword was drawn, and at intervals of two or three inches along its shining blade were impaled fluttering one-pound notes, to express the lavish bounty that was offered. He gave a stern, suppressed nod of friendship to our people, and passed by. Next they came up to a waggon, bowered over with leaves and flowers, so that the men inside could hardly be seen.

'Come to see the King, hip-hip hurrah!' cried a voice within, and turning they saw through the leaves the nose and face of Cripplestraw. The waggon contained all Derriman's workpeople.

'Is your master here?' said John.

'No, trumpet-major, sir. But young maister is coming to fetch us at nine o'clock, in case we should be too blind to drive home.'

'O! where is he now?'

'Never mind,' said Anne impatiently, at which the trumpet-major obediently moved on.

By the time they reached the pier it was six o'clock; the royal yacht was returning; a fact announced by the ships in the harbour firing a salute. The King came ashore

with his hat in his hand, and returned the salutations of the well-dressed crowd in his old indiscriminate fashion. While this cheering and waving of handkerchiefs was going on Anne stood between the two brothers, who protectingly joined their hands behind her back, as if she were a delicate piece of statuary that a push might damage. Soon the King had passed, and receiving the military salutes of the piquet, joined the Queen and princesses at Gloucester Lodge, the homely house of red brick in which he unostentatiously resided.

As there was yet some little time before the theatre would open, they strayed upon the velvet sands, and listened to the songs of the sailors, one of whom extemporized for the occasion: —

‘Portland Road the King aboard, the King aboard!

Portland Road the King aboard,

We weighed and sailed from Portland Road!’

When they had looked on awhile at the combats at single-stick which were in progress hard by, and seen the sum of five guineas handed over to the modest gentleman who had broken most heads, they returned to Gloucester Lodge, whence the King and other members of his family now reappeared, and drove, at a slow trot, round to the theatre in carriages drawn by the Hanoverian white horses that were so well known in the town at this date.

When Anne and Bob entered the theatre they found that John had taken excellent places, and concluded that he had got them for nothing through the influence of the lady of his choice. As a matter of fact he had paid full prices for those two seats, like any other outsider, and even then had a difficulty in getting them, it being a King’s night. When they were settled he himself retired to an obscure part of the pit, from which the stage was scarcely visible.

‘We can see beautifully,’ said Bob, in an aristocratic voice, as he took a delicate pinch of snuff, and drew out the magnificent pocket-handkerchief brought home from the East for such occasions. ‘But I am afraid poor John can’t see at all.’

‘But we can see him,’ replied Anne, ‘and notice by his face which of them it is he is so charmed with. The light of that corner candle falls right upon his cheek.’

By this time the King had appeared in his place, which was overhung by a canopy of crimson satin fringed with gold. About twenty places were occupied by the royal family and suite; and beyond them was a crowd of powdered and glittering personages of fashion, completely filling the centre of the little building; though the King so frequently patronized the local stage during these years that the crush was not inconvenient.

The curtain rose and the play began. To-night it was one of Colman’s, who at this time enjoyed great popularity, and Mr. Bannister supported the leading character. Anne, with her hand privately clasped in Bob’s, and looking as if she did not know it, partly watched the piece and partly the face of the impressionable John who had so soon transferred his affections elsewhere. She had not long to wait. When a certain one of the subordinate ladies of the comedy entered on the stage the trumpet-major in his corner not only looked conscious, but started and gazed with parted lips.

‘This must be the one,’ whispered Anne quickly. ‘See, he is agitated!’

She turned to Bob, but at the same moment his hand convulsively closed upon hers as he, too, strangely fixed his eyes upon the newly-entered lady.

‘What is it?’

Anne looked from one to the other without regarding the stage at all. Her answer came in the voice of the actress who now spoke for the first time. The accents were those of Miss Matilda Johnson.

One thought rushed into both their minds on the instant, and Bob was the first to utter it.

‘What — is she the woman of his choice after all?’

‘If so, it is a dreadful thing!’ murmured Anne.

But, as may be imagined, the unfortunate John was as much surprised by this rencounter as the other two. Until this moment he had been in utter ignorance of the theatrical company and all that pertained to it. Moreover, much as he knew of Miss Johnson, he was not aware that she had ever been trained in her youth as an actress, and that after lapsing into straits and difficulties for a couple of years she had been so fortunate as to again procure an engagement here.

The trumpet-major, though not prominently seated, had been seen by Matilda already, who had observed still more plainly her old betrothed and Anne in the other part of the house. John was not concerned on his own account at being face to face with her, but at the extraordinary suspicion that this conjuncture must revive in the minds of his best beloved friends. After some moments of pained reflection he tapped his knee.

‘Gad, I won’t explain; it shall go as it is!’ he said. ‘Let them think her mine. Better that than the truth, after all.’

Had personal prominence in the scene been at this moment proportioned to intentness of feeling, the whole audience, regal and otherwise, would have faded into an indistinct mist of background, leaving as the sole emergent and telling figures Bob and Anne at one point, the trumpet-major on the left hand, and Matilda at the opposite corner of the stage. But fortunately the deadlock of awkward suspense into which all four had fallen was terminated by an accident. A messenger entered the King’s box with despatches. There was an instant pause in the performance. The despatch-box being opened the King read for a few moments with great interest, the eyes of the whole house, including those of Anne Garland, being anxiously fixed upon his face; for terrible events fell as unexpectedly as thunderbolts at this critical time of our history. The King at length beckoned to Lord — -, who was immediately behind him, the play was again stopped, and the contents of the despatch were publicly communicated to the audience.

Sir Robert Calder, cruising off Finisterre, had come in sight of Villeneuve, and made the signal for action, which, though checked by the weather, had resulted in the capture of two Spanish line-of-battle ships, and the retreat of Villeneuve into Ferrol.

The news was received with truly national feeling, if noise might be taken as an index of patriotism. 'Rule Britannia' was called for and sung by the whole house. But the importance of the event was far from being recognized at this time; and Bob Loveday, as he sat there and heard it, had very little conception how it would bear upon his destiny.

This parenthetic excitement diverted for a few minutes the eyes of Bob and Anne from the trumpet-major; and when the play proceeded, and they looked back to his corner, he was gone.

'He's just slipped round to talk to her behind the scenes,' said Bob knowingly. 'Shall we go too, and tease him for a sly dog?'

'No, I would rather not.'

'Shall we go home, then?'

'Not unless her presence is too much for you?'

'O — not at all. We'll stay here. Ah, there she is again.'

They sat on, and listened to Matilda's speeches which she delivered with such delightful coolness that they soon began to considerably interest one of the party.

'Well, what a nerve the young woman has!' he said at last in tones of admiration, and gazing at Miss Johnson with all his might. 'After all, Jack's taste is not so bad. She's really deuced clever.'

'Bob, I'll go home if you wish to,' said Anne quickly.

'O no — let us see how she fleets herself off that bit of a scrape she's playing at now. Well, what a hand she is at it, to be sure!'

Anne said no more, but waited on, supremely uncomfortable, and almost tearful. She began to feel that she did not like life particularly well; it was too complicated: she saw nothing of the scene, and only longed to get away, and to get Bob away with her. At last the curtain fell on the final act, and then began the farce of 'No Song no Supper.' Matilda did not appear in this piece, and Anne again inquired if they should go home. This time Bob agreed, and taking her under his care with redoubled affection, to make up for the species of coma which had seized upon his heart for a time, he quietly accompanied her out of the house.

When they emerged upon the esplanade, the August moon was shining across the sea from the direction of St. Aldhelm's Head. Bob unconsciously loitered, and turned towards the pier. Reaching the end of the promenade they surveyed the quivering waters in silence for some time, until a long dark line shot from behind the promontory of the Nothe, and swept forward into the harbour.

'What boat is that?' said Anne.

'It seems to be some frigate lying in the Roads,' said Bob carelessly, as he brought Anne round with a gentle pressure of his arm and bent his steps towards the homeward end of the town.

Meanwhile, Miss Johnson, having finished her duties for that evening, rapidly changed her dress, and went out likewise. The prominent position which Anne and Captain Bob had occupied side by side in the theatre, left her no alternative but to

suppose that the situation was arranged by Bob as a species of defiance to herself; and her heart, such as it was, became proportionately embittered against him. In spite of the rise in her fortunes, Miss Johnson still remembered — and always would remember — her humiliating departure from Overcombe; and it had been to her even a more grievous thing that Bob had acquiesced in his brother's ruling than that John had determined it. At the time of setting out she was sustained by a firm faith that Bob would follow her, and nullify his brother's scheme; but though she waited Bob never came.

She passed along by the houses facing the sea, and scanned the shore, the footway, and the open road close to her, which, illuminated by the slanting moon to a great brightness, sparkled with minute facets of crystallized salts from the water sprinkled there during the day. The promenaders at the further edge appeared in dark profiles; and beyond them was the grey sea, parted into two masses by the tapering braid of moonlight across the waves.

Two forms crossed this line at a startling nearness to her; she marked them at once as Anne and Bob Loveday. They were walking slowly, and in the earnestness of their discourse were oblivious of the presence of any human beings save themselves. Matilda stood motionless till they had passed.

'How I love them!' she said, treading the initial step of her walk onwards with a vehemence that walking did not demand.

'So do I — especially one,' said a voice at her elbow; and a man wheeled round her, and looked in her face, which had been fully exposed to the moon.

'You — who are you?' she asked.

'Don't you remember, ma'am? We walked some way together towards Overcombe earlier in the summer.' Matilda looked more closely, and perceived that the speaker was Derriman, in plain clothes. He continued, 'You are one of the ladies of the theatre, I know. May I ask why you said in such a queer way that you loved that couple?'

'In a queer way?'

'Well, as if you hated them.'

'I don't mind your knowing that I have good reason to hate them. You do too, it seems?'

'That man,' said Festus savagely, 'came to me one night about that very woman; insulted me before I could put myself on my guard, and ran away before I could come up with him and avenge myself. The woman tricks me at every turn! I want to part 'em.'

'Then why don't you? There's a splendid opportunity. Do you see that soldier walking along? He's a marine; he looks into the gallery of the theatre every night: and he's in connection with the press-gang that came ashore just now from the frigate lying in Portland Roads. They are often here for men.'

'Yes. Our boatmen dread 'em.'

‘Well, we have only to tell him that Loveday is a seaman to be clear of him this very night.’

‘Done!’ said Festus. ‘Take my arm and come this way.’ They walked across to the footway. ‘Fine night, sergeant.’

‘It is, sir.’

‘Looking for hands, I suppose?’

‘It is not to be known, sir. We don’t begin till half past ten.’

‘It is a pity you don’t begin now. I could show ‘ee excellent game.’

‘What, that little nest of fellows at the “Old Rooms” in Cove Row? I have just heard of ‘em.’

‘No — come here.’ Festus, with Miss Johnson on his arm, led the sergeant quickly along the parade, and by the time they reached the Narrows the lovers, who walked but slowly, were visible in front of them. ‘There’s your man,’ he said.

‘That buck in pantaloons and half-boots — a looking like a squire?’

‘Twelve months ago he was mate of the brig Pewit; but his father has made money, and keeps him at home.’

‘Faith, now you tell of it, there’s a hint of sea legs about him. What’s the young beau’s name?’

‘Don’t tell!’ whispered Matilda, impulsively clutching Festus’s arm.

But Festus had already said, ‘Robert Loveday, son of the miller at Overcombe. You may find several likely fellows in that neighbourhood.’

The marine said that he would bear it in mind, and they left him.

‘I wish you had not told,’ said Matilda tearfully. ‘She’s the worst!’

‘Dash my eyes now; listen to that! Why, you chicken-hearted old stager, you was as well agreed as I. Come now; hasn’t he used you badly?’

Matilda’s acrimony returned. ‘I was down on my luck, or he wouldn’t have had the chance!’ she said.

‘Well, then, let things be.’

CHAPTER XXXI.

MIDNIGHT VISITORS

Miss Garland and Loveday walked leisurely to the inn and called for horse-and-gig. While the hostler was bringing it round, the landlord, who knew Bob and his family well, spoke to him quietly in the passage.

‘Is this then because you want to throw dust in the eyes of the Black Diamond chaps?’ (with an admiring glance at Bob’s costume).

‘The Black Diamond?’ said Bob; and Anne turned pale.

‘She hove in sight just after dark, and at nine o’clock a boat having more than a dozen marines on board, with cloaks on, rowed into harbour.’

Bob reflected. 'Then there'll be a press to-night; depend upon it,' he said.

'They won't know you, will they, Bob?' said Anne anxiously.

'They certainly won't know him for a seaman now,' remarked the landlord, laughing, and again surveying Bob up and down. 'But if I was you two, I should drive home-along straight and quiet; and be very busy in the mill all to-morrow, Mr. Loveday.'

They drove away; and when they had got onward out of the town, Anne strained her eyes wistfully towards Portland. Its dark contour, lying like a whale on the sea, was just perceptible in the gloom as the background to half-a-dozen ships' lights nearer at hand.

'They can't make you go, now you are a gentleman tradesman, can they?' she asked.

'If they want me they can have me, dearest. I have often said I ought to volunteer.'

'And not care about me at all?'

'It is just that that keeps me at home. I won't leave you if I can help it.'

'It cannot make such a vast difference to the country whether one man goes or stays! But if you want to go you had better, and not mind us at all!'

Bob put a period to her speech by a mark of affection to which history affords many parallels in every age. She said no more about the Black Diamond; but whenever they ascended a hill she turned her head to look at the lights in Portland Roads, and the grey expanse of intervening sea.

Though Captain Bob had stated that he did not wish to volunteer, and would not leave her if he could help it, the remark required some qualification. That Anne was charming and loving enough to chain him anywhere was true; but he had begun to find the mill-work terribly irksome at times. Often during the last month, when standing among the rumbling cogs in his new miller's suit, which ill became him, he had yawned, thought wistfully of the old pea-jacket, and the waters of the deep blue sea. His dread of displeasing his father by showing anything of this change of sentiment was great; yet he might have braved it but for knowing that his marriage with Anne, which he hoped might take place the next year, was dependent entirely upon his adherence to the mill business. Even were his father indifferent, Mrs. Loveday would never intrust her only daughter to the hands of a husband who would be away from home five-sixths of his time.

But though, apart from Anne, he was not averse to seafaring in itself, to be smuggled thither by the machinery of a press-gang was intolerable; and the process of seizing, stunning, pinioning, and carrying off unwilling hands was one which Bob as a man had always determined to hold out against to the utmost of his power. Hence, as they went towards home, he frequently listened for sounds behind him, but hearing none he assured his sweetheart that they were safe for that night at least. The mill was still going when they arrived, though old Mr. Loveday was not to be seen; he had retired as soon as he heard the horse's hoofs in the lane, leaving Bob to watch the grinding till three o'clock; when the elder would rise, and Bob withdraw to bed — a frequent arrangement between them since Bob had taken the place of grinder.

Having reached the privacy of her own room, Anne threw open the window, for she had not the slightest intention of going to bed just yet. The tale of the Black Diamond had disturbed her by a slow, insidious process that was worse than sudden fright. Her window looked into the court before the house, now wrapped in the shadow of the trees and the hill; and she leaned upon its sill listening intently. She could have heard any strange sound distinctly enough in one direction; but in the other all low noises were absorbed in the patter of the mill, and the rush of water down the race.

However, what she heard came from the hitherto silent side, and was intelligible in a moment as being the footsteps of men. She tried to think they were some late stragglers from Budmouth. Alas! no; the tramp was too regular for that of villagers. She hastily turned, extinguished the candle, and listened again. As they were on the main road there was, after all, every probability that the party would pass the bridge which gave access to the mill court without turning in upon it, or even noticing that such an entrance existed. In this again she was disappointed: they crossed into the front without a pause. The pulsations of her heart became a turmoil now, for why should these men, if they were the press-gang, and strangers to the locality, have supposed that a sailor was to be found here, the younger of the two millers Loveday being never seen now in any garb which could suggest that he was other than a miller pure, like his father? One of the men spoke.

‘I am not sure that we are in the right place,’ he said.

‘This is a mill, anyhow,’ said another.

‘There’s lots about here.’

‘Then come this way a moment with your light.’

Two of the group went towards the cart-house on the opposite side of the yard, and when they reached it a dark lantern was opened, the rays being directed upon the front of the miller’s waggon.

“‘Loveday and Son, Overcombe Mill,’” continued the man, reading from the waggon. “‘Son,” you see, is lately painted in. That’s our man.’

He moved to turn off the light, but before he had done so it flashed over the forms of the speakers, and revealed a sergeant, a naval officer, and a file of marines.

Anne waited to see no more. When Bob stayed up to grind, as he was doing to-night, he often sat in his room instead of remaining all the time in the mill; and this room was an isolated chamber over the bakehouse, which could not be reached without going downstairs and ascending the step-ladder that served for his staircase. Anne descended in the dark, clambered up the ladder, and saw that light strayed through the chink below the door. His window faced towards the garden, and hence the light could not as yet have been seen by the press-gang.

‘Bob, dear Bob!’ she said, through the keyhole. ‘Put out your light, and run out of the back-door!’

‘Why?’ said Bob, leisurely knocking the ashes from the pipe he had been smoking.

‘The press-gang!’

‘They have come? By God! who can have blown upon me? All right, dearest. I’m game.’

Anne, scarcely knowing what she did, descended the ladder and ran to the back-door, hastily unbolting it to save Bob’s time, and gently opening it in readiness for him. She had no sooner done this than she felt hands laid upon her shoulder from without, and a voice exclaiming, ‘That’s how we doos it — quite an obleeing young man!’

Though the hands held her rather roughly, Anne did not mind for herself, and turning she cried desperately, in tones intended to reach Bob’s ears: ‘They are at the back-door; try the front!’

But inexperienced Miss Garland little knew the shrewd habits of the gentlemen she had to deal with, who, well used to this sort of pastime, had already posted themselves at every outlet from the premises.

‘Bring the lantern,’ shouted the fellow who held her. ‘Why — ’tis a girl! I half thought so — Here is a way in,’ he continued to his comrades, hastening to the foot of the ladder which led to Bob’s room.

‘What d’ye want?’ said Bob, quietly opening the door, and showing himself still radiant in the full dress that he had worn with such effect at the Theatre Royal, which he had been about to change for his mill suit when Anne gave the alarm.

‘This gentleman can’t be the right one,’ observed a marine, rather impressed by Bob’s appearance.

‘Yes, yes; that’s the man,’ said the sergeant. ‘Now take it quietly, my young cock-o’-wax. You look as if you meant to, and ’tis wise of ye.’

‘Where are you going to take me?’ said Bob.

‘Only aboard the Black Diamond. If you choose to take the bounty and come voluntarily, you’ll be allowed to go ashore whenever your ship’s in port. If you don’t, and we’ve got to pinion ye, you will not have your liberty at all. As you must come, willy-nilly, you’ll do the first if you’ve any brains whatever.’

Bob’s temper began to rise. ‘Don’t you talk so large, about your pinioning, my man. When I’ve settled — ’

‘Now or never, young blow-hard,’ interrupted his informant.

‘Come, what jabber is this going on?’ said the lieutenant, stepping forward. ‘Bring your man.’

One of the marines set foot on the ladder, but at the same moment a shoe from Bob’s hand hit the lantern with well-aimed directness, knocking it clean out of the grasp of the man who held it. In spite of the darkness they began to scramble up the ladder. Bob thereupon shut the door, which being but of slight construction, was as he knew only a momentary defence. But it gained him time enough to open the window, gather up his legs upon the sill, and spring across into the apple-tree growing without. He alighted without much hurt beyond a few scratches from the boughs, a shower of falling apples testifying to the force of his leap.

‘Here he is!’ shouted several below who had seen Bob’s figure flying like a raven’s across the sky.

There was stillness for a moment in the tree. Then the fugitive made haste to climb out upon a low-hanging branch towards the garden, at which the men beneath all rushed in that direction to catch him as he dropped, saying, ‘You may as well come down, old boy. ‘Twas a spry jump, and we give ye credit for ‘t.’

The latter movement of Loveday had been a mere feint. Partly hidden by the leaves he glided back to the other part of the tree, from whence it was easy to jump upon a thatch-covered out-house. This intention they did not appear to suspect, which gave him the opportunity of sliding down the slope and entering the back door of the mill.

‘He’s here, he’s here!’ the men exclaimed, running back from the tree.

By this time they had obtained another light, and pursued him closely along the back quarters of the mill. Bob had entered the lower room, seized hold of the chain by which the flour-sacks were hoisted from story to story by connection with the mill-wheel, and pulled the rope that hung alongside for the purpose of throwing it into gear. The foremost pursuers arrived just in time to see Captain Bob’s legs and shoe-buckles vanishing through the trap-door in the joists overhead, his person having been whirled up by the machinery like any bag of flour, and the trap falling to behind him.

‘He’s gone up by the hoist!’ said the sergeant, running up the ladder in the corner to the next floor, and elevating the light just in time to see Bob’s suspended figure ascending in the same way through the same sort of trap into the second floor. The second trap also fell together behind him, and he was lost to view as before.

It was more difficult to follow now; there was only a flimsy little ladder, and the men ascended cautiously. When they stepped out upon the loft it was empty.

‘He must ha’ let go here,’ said one of the marines, who knew more about mills than the others. ‘If he had held fast a moment longer, he would have been dashed against that beam.’

They looked up. The hook by which Bob had held on had ascended to the roof, and was winding round the cylinder. Nothing was visible elsewhere but boarded divisions like the stalls of a stable, on each side of the stage they stood upon, these compartments being more or less heaped up with wheat and barley in the grain.

‘Perhaps he’s buried himself in the corn.’

The whole crew jumped into the corn-bins, and stirred about their yellow contents; but neither arm, leg, nor coat-tail was uncovered. They removed sacks, peeped among the rafters of the roof, but to no purpose. The lieutenant began to fume at the loss of time.

‘What cursed fools to let the man go! Why, look here, what’s this?’ He had opened the door by which sacks were taken in from waggons without, and dangling from the cat-head projecting above it was the rope used in lifting them. ‘There’s the way he went down,’ the officer continued. ‘The man’s gone.’

Amidst mumblings and curses the gang descended the pair of ladders and came into the open air; but Captain Bob was nowhere to be seen. When they reached the front door of the house the miller was standing on the threshold, half dressed.

‘Your son is a clever fellow, miller,’ said the lieutenant; ‘but it would have been much better for him if he had come quiet.’

‘That’s a matter of opinion,’ said Loveday.

‘I have no doubt that he’s in the house.’

‘He may be; and he may not.’

‘Do you know where he is?’

‘I do not; and if I did I shouldn’t tell.’

‘Naturally.’

‘I heard steps beating up the road, sir,’ said the sergeant.

They turned from the door, and leaving four of the marines to keep watch round the house, the remainder of the party marched into the lane as far as where the other road branched off. While they were pausing to decide which course to take, one of the soldiers held up the light. A black object was discernible upon the ground before them, and they found it to be a hat — the hat of Bob Loveday.

‘We are on the track,’ cried the sergeant, deciding for this direction.

They tore on rapidly, and the footsteps previously heard became audible again, increasing in clearness, which told that they gained upon the fugitive, who in another five minutes stopped and turned. The rays of the candle fell upon Anne.

‘What do you want?’ she said, showing her frightened face.

They made no reply, but wheeled round and left her. She sank down on the bank to rest, having done all she could. It was she who had taken down Bob’s hat from a nail, and dropped it at the turning with the view of misleading them till he should have got clear off.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DELIVERANCE

But Anne Garland was too anxious to remain long away from the centre of operations. When she got back she found that the press-gang were standing in the court discussing their next move.

‘Waste no more time here,’ the lieutenant said. ‘Two more villages to visit to-night, and the nearest three miles off. There’s nobody else in this place, and we can’t come back again.’

When they were moving away, one of the private marines, who had kept his eye on Anne, and noticed her distress, contrived to say in a whisper as he passed her, ‘We are coming back again as soon as it begins to get light; that’s only said to deceive ‘ee. Keep your young man out of the way.’

They went as they had come; and the little household then met together, Mrs. Loveday having by this time dressed herself and come down. A long and anxious discussion followed.

‘Somebody must have told upon the chap,’ Loveday remarked. ‘How should they have found him out else, now he’s been home from sea this twelvemonth?’

Anne then mentioned what the friendly marine had told her; and fearing lest Bob was in the house, and would be discovered there when daylight came, they searched and called for him everywhere.

‘What clothes has he got on?’ said the miller.

‘His lovely new suit,’ said his wife. ‘I warrant it is quite spoiled!’

‘He’s got no hat,’ said Anne.

‘Well,’ said Loveday, ‘you two go and lie down now and I’ll bide up; and as soon as he comes in, which he’ll do most likely in the course of the night, I’ll let him know that they are coming again.’

Anne and Mrs. Loveday went to their bedrooms, and the miller entered the mill as if he were simply staying up to grind. But he continually left the flour-shoot to go outside and walk round; each time he could see no living being near the spot. Anne meanwhile had lain down dressed upon her bed, the window still open, her ears intent upon the sound of footsteps and dreading the reappearance of daylight and the gang’s return. Three or four times during the night she descended to the mill to inquire of her stepfather if Bob had shown himself; but the answer was always in the negative.

At length the curtains of her bed began to reveal their pattern, the brass handles of the drawers gleamed forth, and day dawned. While the light was yet no more than a suffusion of pallor, she arose, put on her hat, and determined to explore the surrounding premises before the men arrived. Emerging into the raw loneliness of the daybreak, she went upon the bridge and looked up and down the road. It was as she had left it, empty, and the solitude was rendered yet more insistent by the silence of the mill-wheel, which was now stopped, the miller having given up expecting Bob and retired to bed about three o’clock. The footprints of the marines still remained in the dust on the bridge, all the heel-marks towards the house, showing that the party had not as yet returned.

While she lingered she heard a slight noise in the other direction, and, turning, saw a woman approaching. The woman came up quickly, and, to her amazement, Anne recognized Matilda. Her walk was convulsive, face pale, almost haggard, and the cold light of the morning invested it with all the ghostliness of death. She had plainly walked all the way from Budmouth, for her shoes were covered with dust.

‘Has the press-gang been here?’ she gasped. ‘If not they are coming!’

‘They have been.’

‘And got him — I am too late!’

‘No; they are coming back again. Why did you — ’

‘I came to try to save him. Can we save him? Where is he?’

Anne looked the woman in the face, and it was impossible to doubt that she was in earnest.

‘I don’t know,’ she answered. ‘I am trying to find him before they come.’

‘Will you not let me help you?’ cried the repentant Matilda.

Without either objecting or assenting Anne turned and led the way to the back part of the homestead.

Matilda, too, had suffered that night. From the moment of parting with Festus Derriman a sentiment of revulsion from the act to which she had been a party set in and increased, till at length it reached an intensity of remorse which she could not passively bear. She had risen before day and hastened thitherward to know the worst, and if possible hinder consequences that she had been the first to set in train.

After going hither and thither in the adjoining field, Anne entered the garden. The walks were bathed in grey dew, and as she passed observantly along them it appeared as if they had been brushed by some foot at a much earlier hour. At the end of the garden, bushes of broom, laurel, and yew formed a constantly encroaching shrubbery, that had come there almost by chance, and was never trimmed. Behind these bushes was a garden-seat, and upon it lay Bob sound asleep.

The ends of his hair were clotted with damp, and there was a foggy film upon the mirror-like buttons of his coat, and upon the buckles of his shoes. His bunch of new gold seals was dimmed by the same insidious dampness; his shirt-frill and muslin neckcloth were limp as seaweed. It was plain that he had been there a long time. Anne shook him, but he did not awake, his breathing being slow and stertorous.

‘Bob, wake; ‘tis your own Anne!’ she said, with innocent earnestness; and then, fearfully turning her head, she saw that Matilda was close behind her.

‘You needn’t mind me,’ said Matilda bitterly. ‘I am on your side now. Shake him again.’

Anne shook him again, but he slept on. Then she noticed that his forehead bore the mark of a heavy wound.

‘I fancy I hear something!’ said her companion, starting forward and endeavouring to wake Bob herself. ‘He is stunned, or drugged!’ she said; ‘there is no rousing him.’

Anne raised her head and listened. From the direction of the eastern road came the sound of a steady tramp. ‘They are coming back!’ she said, clasping her hands. ‘They will take him, ill as he is! He won’t open his eyes — no, it is no use! O, what shall we do?’

Matilda did not reply, but running to the end of the seat on which Bob lay, tried its weight in her arms.

‘It is not too heavy,’ she said. ‘You take that end, and I’ll take this. We’ll carry him away to some place of hiding.’

Anne instantly seized the other end, and they proceeded with their burden at a slow pace to the lower garden-gate, which they reached as the tread of the press-gang resounded over the bridge that gave access to the mill court, now hidden from view by the hedge and the trees of the garden.

‘We will go down inside this field,’ said Anne faintly.

‘No!’ said the other; ‘they will see our foot-tracks in the dew. We must go into the road.’

‘It is the very road they will come down when they leave the mill.’

‘It cannot be helped; it is neck or nothing with us now.’

So they emerged upon the road, and staggered along without speaking, occasionally resting for a moment to ease their arms; then shaking him to arouse him, and finding it useless, seizing the seat again. When they had gone about two hundred yards Matilda betrayed signs of exhaustion, and she asked, ‘Is there no shelter near?’

‘When we get to that little field of corn,’ said Anne.

‘It is so very far. Surely there is some place near?’

She pointed to a few scrubby bushes overhanging a little stream, which passed under the road near this point.

‘They are not thick enough,’ said Anne.

‘Let us take him under the bridge,’ said Matilda. ‘I can go no further.’

Entering the opening by which cattle descended to drink, they waded into the weedy water, which here rose a few inches above their ankles. To ascend the stream, stoop under the arch, and reach the centre of the roadway, was the work of a few minutes.

‘If they look under the arch we are lost,’ murmured Anne.

‘There is no parapet to the bridge, and they may pass over without heeding.’

They waited, their heads almost in contact with the reeking arch, and their feet encircled by the stream, which was at its summer lowness now. For some minutes they could hear nothing but the babble of the water over their ankles, and round the legs of the seat on which Bob slumbered, the sounds being reflected in a musical tinkle from the hollow sides of the arch. Anne’s anxiety now was lest he should not continue sleeping till the search was over, but start up with his habitual imprudence, and scorning such means of safety, rush out into their arms.

A quarter of an hour dragged by, and then indications reached their ears that the re-examination of the mill had begun and ended. The well-known tramp drew nearer, and reverberated through the ground over their heads, where its volume signified to the listeners that the party had been largely augmented by pressed men since the night preceding. The gang passed the arch, and the noise regularly diminished, as if no man among them had thought of looking aside for a moment.

Matilda broke the silence. ‘I wonder if they have left a watch behind?’ she said doubtfully.

‘I will go and see,’ said Anne. ‘Wait till I return.’

‘No; I can do no more. When you come back I shall be gone. I ask one thing of you. If all goes well with you and him, and he marries you — don’t be alarmed; my plans lie elsewhere — when you are his wife tell him who helped to carry him away. But don’t mention my name to the rest of your family, either now or at any time.’

Anne regarded the speaker for a moment, and promised; after which she waded out from the archway.

Matilda stood looking at Bob for a moment, as if preparing to go, till moved by some impulse she bent and lightly kissed him once.

‘How can you!’ cried Anne reproachfully. When leaving the mouth of the arch she had bent back and seen the act.

Matilda flushed. ‘You jealous baby!’ she said scornfully.

Anne hesitated for a moment, then went out from the water, and hastened towards the mill.

She entered by the garden, and, seeing no one, advanced and peeped in at the window. Her mother and Mr. Loveday were sitting within as usual.

‘Are they all gone?’ said Anne softly.

‘Yes. They did not trouble us much, beyond going into every room, and searching about the garden, where they saw steps. They have been lucky to-night; they have caught fifteen or twenty men at places further on; so the loss of Bob was no hurt to their feelings. I wonder where in the world the poor fellow is!’

‘I will show you,’ said Anne. And explaining in a few words what had happened, she was promptly followed by David and Loveday along the road. She lifted her dress and entered the arch with some anxiety on account of Matilda; but the actress was gone, and Bob lay on the seat as she had left him.

Bob was brought out, and water thrown upon his face; but though he moved he did not rouse himself until some time after he had been borne into the house. Here he opened his eyes, and saw them standing round, and gathered a little consciousness.

‘You are all right, my boy!’ said his father. ‘What hev happened to ye? Where did ye get that terrible blow?’

‘Ah — I can mind now,’ murmured Bob, with a stupefied gaze around. ‘I fell in slipping down the topsail halyard — the rope, that is, was too short — and I fell upon my head. And then I went away. When I came back I thought I wouldn’t disturb ye: so I lay down out there, to sleep out the watch; but the pain in my head was so great that I couldn’t get to sleep; so I picked some of the poppy-heads in the border, which I once heard was a good thing for sending folks to sleep when they are in pain. So I munched up all I could find, and dropped off quite nicely.’

‘I wondered who had picked ‘em!’ said Molly. ‘I noticed they were gone.’

‘Why, you might never have woke again!’ said Mrs. Loveday, holding up her hands. ‘How is your head now?’

‘I hardly know,’ replied the young man, putting his hand to his forehead and beginning to doze again. ‘Where be those fellows that boarded us? With this — smooth water and — fine breeze we ought to get away from ‘em. Haul in — the larboard braces, and — bring her to the wind.’

‘You are at home, dear Bob,’ said Anne, bending over him, ‘and the men are gone.’

‘Come along upstairs: th’ beest hardly awake now,’ said his father and Bob was assisted to bed.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A DISCOVERY TURNS THE SCALE

In four-and-twenty hours Bob had recovered. But though physically himself again, he was not at all sure of his position as a patriot. He had that practical knowledge of seamanship of which the country stood much in need, and it was humiliating to find that impressment seemed to be necessary to teach him to use it for her advantage. Many neighbouring young men, less fortunate than himself, had been pressed and taken; and their absence seemed a reproach to him. He went away by himself into the mill-roof, and, surrounded by the corn-heaps, gave vent to self-condemnation.

‘Certainly, I am no man to lie here so long for the pleasure of sighting that young girl forty times a day, and letting her sight me — bless her eyes! — till I must needs want a press-gang to teach me what I’ve forgot. And is it then all over with me as a British sailor? We’ll see.’

When he was thrown under the influence of Anne’s eyes again, which were more tantalisingly beautiful than ever just now (so it seemed to him), his intention of offering his services to the Government would wax weaker, and he would put off his final decision till the next day. Anne saw these fluctuations of his mind between love and patriotism, and being terrified by what she had heard of sea-fights, used the utmost art of which she was capable to seduce him from his forming purpose. She came to him in the mill, wearing the very prettiest of her morning jackets — the one that only just passed the waist, and was laced so tastefully round the collar and bosom. Then she would appear in her new hat, with a bouquet of primroses on one side; and on the following Sunday she walked before him in lemon-coloured boots, so that her feet looked like a pair of yellow-hammers flitting under her dress.

But dress was the least of the means she adopted for chaining him down. She talked more tenderly than ever; asked him to begin small undertakings in the garden on her account; she sang about the house, that the place might seem cheerful when he came in. This singing for a purpose required great effort on her part, leaving her afterwards very sad. When Bob asked her what was the matter, she would say, ‘Nothing; only I am thinking how you will grieve your father, and cross his purposes, if you carry out your unkind notion of going to sea, and forsaking your place in the mill.’

‘Yes,’ Bob would say uneasily. ‘It will trouble him, I know.’

Being also quite aware how it would trouble her, he would again postpone, and thus another week passed away.

All this time John had not come once to the mill. It appeared as if Miss Johnson absorbed all his time and thoughts. Bob was often seen chuckling over the circumstance. ‘A sly rascal!’ he said. ‘Pretending on the day she came to be married that she was not good enough for me, when it was only that he wanted her for himself. How he could have persuaded her to go away is beyond me to say!’

Anne could not contest this belief of her lover’s, and remained silent; but there had more than once occurred to her mind a doubt of its probability. Yet she had only

abandoned her opinion that John had schemed for Matilda, to embrace the opposite error; that, finding he had wronged the young lady, he had pitied and grown to love her.

‘And yet Jack, when he was a boy, was the simplest fellow alive,’ resumed Bob. ‘By George, though, I should have been hot against him for such a trick, if in losing her I hadn’t found a better! But she’ll never come down to him in the world: she has high notions now. I am afraid he’s doomed to sigh in vain!’

Though Bob regretted this possibility, the feeling was not reciprocated by Anne. It was true that she knew nothing of Matilda’s temporary treachery, and that she disbelieved the story of her lack of virtue; but she did not like the woman. ‘Perhaps it will not matter if he is doomed to sigh in vain,’ she said. ‘But I owe him no ill-will. I have profited by his doings, incomprehensible as they are.’ And she bent her fair eyes on Bob and smiled.

Bob looked dubious. ‘He thinks he has affronted me, now I have seen through him, and that I shall be against meeting him. But, of course, I am not so touchy. I can stand a practical joke, as can any man who has been afloat. I’ll call and see him, and tell him so.’

Before he started, Bob bethought him of something which would still further prove to the misapprehending John that he was entirely forgiven. He went to his room, and took from his chest a packet containing a lock of Miss Johnson’s hair, which she had given him during their brief acquaintance, and which till now he had quite forgotten. When, at starting, he wished Anne goodbye, it was accompanied by such a beaming face, that she knew he was full of an idea, and asked what it might be that pleased him so.

‘Why, this,’ he said, smacking his breast-pocket. ‘A lock of hair that Matilda gave me.’

Anne sank back with parted lips.

‘I am going to give it to Jack — he’ll jump for joy to get it! And it will show him how willing I am to give her up to him, fine piece as she is.’

‘Will you see her to-day, Bob?’ Anne asked with an uncertain smile.

‘O no — unless it is by accident.’

On reaching the outskirts of the town he went straight to the barracks, and was lucky enough to find John in his room, at the left-hand corner of the quadrangle. John was glad to see him; but to Bob’s surprise he showed no immediate contrition, and thus afforded no room for the brotherly speech of forgiveness which Bob had been going to deliver. As the trumpet-major did not open the subject, Bob felt it desirable to begin himself.

‘I have brought ye something that you will value, Jack,’ he said, as they sat at the window, overlooking the large square barrack-yard. ‘I have got no further use for it, and you should have had it before if it had entered my head.’

‘Thank you, Bob; what is it?’ said John, looking absently at an awkward squad of young men who were drilling in the enclosure.

‘Tis a young woman’s lock of hair.’

‘Ah!’ said John, quite recovering from his abstraction, and slightly flushing. Could Bob and Anne have quarrelled? Bob drew the paper from his pocket, and opened it.

‘Black!’ said John.

‘Yes — black enough.’

‘Whose?’

‘Why, Matilda’s.’

‘O, Matilda’s!’

‘Whose did you think then?’

Instead of replying, the trumpet-major’s face became as red as sunset, and he turned to the window to hide his confusion.

Bob was silent, and then he, too, looked into the court. At length he arose, walked to his brother, and laid his hand upon his shoulder. ‘Jack,’ he said, in an altered voice, ‘you are a good fellow. Now I see it all.’

‘O no — that’s nothing,’ said John hastily.

‘You’ve been pretending that you care for this woman that I mightn’t blame myself for heaving you out from the other — which is what I’ve done without knowing it.’

‘What does it matter?’

‘But it does matter! I’ve been making you unhappy all these weeks and weeks through my thoughtlessness. They seemed to think at home, you know, John, that you had grown not to care for her; or I wouldn’t have done it for all the world!’

‘You stick to her, Bob, and never mind me. She belongs to you. She loves you. I have no claim upon her, and she thinks nothing about me.’

‘She likes you, John, thoroughly well; so does everybody; and if I hadn’t come home, putting my foot in it — That coming home of mine has been a regular blight upon the family! I ought never to have stayed. The sea is my home, and why couldn’t I bide there?’

The trumpet-major drew Bob’s discourse off the subject as soon as he could, and Bob, after some unconsidered replies and remarks, seemed willing to avoid it for the present. He did not ask John to accompany him home, as he had intended; and on leaving the barracks turned southward and entered the town to wander about till he could decide what to do.

It was the 3rd of September, but the King’s watering-place still retained its summer aspect. The royal bathing-machine had been drawn out just as Bob reached Gloucester Buildings, and he waited a minute, in the lack of other distraction, to look on. Immediately that the King’s machine had entered the water a group of florid men with fiddles, violoncellos, a trombone, and a drum, came forward, packed themselves into another machine that was in waiting, and were drawn out into the waves in the King’s rear. All that was to be heard for a few minutes were the slow pulsations of the sea; and then a deafening noise burst from the interior of the second machine with power enough to split the boards asunder; it was the condensed mass of musicians inside, striking up the strains of ‘God save the King,’ as his Majesty’s head rose from the water. Bob took

off his hat and waited till the end of the performance, which, intended as a pleasant surprise to George III. by the loyal burghers, was possibly in the watery circumstances tolerated rather than desired by that dripping monarch.

Loveday then passed on to the harbour, where he remained awhile, looking at the busy scene of loading and unloading craft and swabbing the decks of yachts; at the boats and barges rubbing against the quay wall, and at the houses of the merchants, some ancient structures of solid stone, others green-shuttered with heavy wooden bow-windows which appeared as if about to drop into the harbour by their own weight. All these things he gazed upon, and thought of one thing — that he had caused great misery to his brother John.

The town clock struck, and Bob retraced his steps till he again approached the Esplanade and Gloucester Lodge, where the morning sun blazed in upon the house fronts, and not a spot of shade seemed to be attainable. A huzzaing attracted his attention, and he observed that a number of people had gathered before the King's residence, where a brown curricle had stopped, out of which stepped a hale man in the prime of life, wearing a blue uniform, gilt epaulettes, cocked hat, and sword, who crossed the pavement and went in. Bob went up and joined the group. 'What's going on?' he said.

'Captain Hardy,' replied a bystander.

'What of him?'

'Just gone in — waiting to see the King.'

'But the captain is in the West Indies?'

'No. The fleet is come home; they can't find the French anywhere.'

'Will they go and look for them again?' asked Bob.

'O yes. Nelson is determined to find 'em. As soon as he's refitted he'll put to sea again. Ah, here's the King coming in.'

Bob was so interested in what he had just heard that he scarcely noticed the arrival of the King, and a body of attendant gentlemen. He went on thinking of his new knowledge; Captain Hardy was come. He was doubtless staying with his family at their small manor-house at Pos'ham, a few miles from Overcombe, where he usually spent the intervals between his different cruises.

Loveday returned to the mill without further delay; and shortly explaining that John was very well, and would come soon, went on to talk of the arrival of Nelson's captain.

'And is he come at last?' said the miller, throwing his thoughts years backward. 'Well can I mind when he first left home to go on board the Helena as midshipman!'

'That's not much to remember. I can remember it too,' said Mrs. Loveday.

'Tis more than twenty years ago anyhow. And more than that, I can mind when he was born; I was a lad, serving my 'prenticeship at the time. He has been in this house often and often when 'a was young. When he came home after his first voyage he stayed about here a long time, and used to look in at the mill whenever he went past. "What will you be next, sir?" said mother to him one day as he stood with his

back to the doorpost. "A lieutenant, Dame Loveday," says he. "And what next?" says she. "A commander." "And next?" "Next, post-captain." "And then?" "Then it will be almost time to die." I'd warrant that he'd mind it to this very day if you were to ask him.'

Bob heard all this with a manner of preoccupation, and soon retired to the mill. Thence he went to his room by the back passage, and taking his old seafaring garments from a dark closet in the wall conveyed them to the loft at the top of the mill, where he occupied the remaining spare moments of the day in brushing the mildew from their folds, and hanging each article by the window to get aired. In the evening he returned to the loft, and dressing himself in the old salt suit, went out of the house unobserved by anybody, and ascended the road towards Captain Hardy's native village and present temporary home.

The shadeless downs were now brown with the droughts of the passing summer, and few living things met his view, the natural rotundity of the elevation being only occasionally disturbed by the presence of a barrow, a thorn-bush, or a piece of dry wall which remained from some attempted enclosure. By the time that he reached the village it was dark, and the larger stars had begun to shine when he walked up to the door of the old-fashioned house which was the family residence of this branch of the South-Wessex Hardys.

'Will the captain allow me to wait on him to-night?' inquired Loveday, explaining who and what he was.

The servant went away for a few minutes, and then told Bob that he might see the captain in the morning.

'If that's the case, I'll come again,' replied Bob, quite cheerful that failure was not absolute.

He had left the door but a few steps when he was called back and asked if he had walked all the way from Overcombe Mill on purpose.

Loveday replied modestly that he had done so.

'Then will you come in?' He followed the speaker into a small study or office, and in a minute or two Captain Hardy entered.

The captain at this time was a bachelor of thirty-five, rather stout in build, with light eyes, bushy eyebrows, a square broad face, plenty of chin, and a mouth whose corners played between humour and grimness. He surveyed Loveday from top to toe.

'Robert Loveday, sir, son of the miller at Overcombe,' said Bob, making a low bow.

'Ah! I remember your father, Loveday,' the gallant seaman replied. 'Well, what do you want to say to me?' Seeing that Bob found it rather difficult to begin, he leant leisurely against the mantelpiece, and went on, 'Is your father well and hearty? I have not seen him for many, many years.'

'Quite well, thank 'ee.'

'You used to have a brother in the army, I think? What was his name — John? A very fine fellow, if I recollect.'

'Yes, cap'n; he's there still.'

‘And you are in the merchant-service?’

‘Late first mate of the brig Pewit.’

‘How is it you’re not on board a man-of-war?’

‘Ay, sir, that’s the thing I’ve come about,’ said Bob, recovering confidence. ‘I should have been, but ‘tis womankind has hampered me. I’ve waited and waited on at home because of a young woman — lady, I might have said, for she’s sprung from a higher class of society than I. Her father was a landscape painter — maybe you’ve heard of him, sir? The name is Garland.’

‘He painted that view of our village here,’ said Captain Hardy, looking towards a dark little picture in the corner of the room.

Bob looked, and went on, as if to the picture, ‘Well, sir, I have found that — However, the press-gang came a week or two ago, and didn’t get hold of me. I didn’t care to go aboard as a pressed man.’

‘There has been a severe impressment. It is of course a disagreeable necessity, but it can’t be helped.’

‘Since then, sir, something has happened that makes me wish they had found me, and I have come to-night to ask if I could enter on board your ship the Victory.’

The captain shook his head severely, and presently observed: ‘I am glad to find that you think of entering the service, Loveday; smart men are badly wanted. But it will not be in your power to choose your ship.’

‘Well, well, sir; then I must take my chance elsewhere,’ said Bob, his face indicating the disappointment he would not fully express. ‘‘Twas only that I felt I would much rather serve under you than anybody else, my father and all of us being known to ye, Captain Hardy, and our families belonging to the same parts.’

Captain Hardy took Bob’s altitude more carefully. ‘Are you a good practical seaman?’ he asked musingly.

‘Ay, sir; I believe I am.’

‘Active? Fond of skylarking?’

‘Well, I don’t know about the last. I think I can say I am active enough. I could walk the yard-arm, if required, cross from mast to mast by the stays, and do what most fellows do who call themselves spry.’

The captain then put some questions about the details of navigation, which Loveday, having luckily been used to square rigs, answered satisfactorily. ‘As to reefing topsails,’ he added, ‘if I don’t do it like a flash of lightning, I can do it so that they will stand blowing weather. The Pewit was not a dull vessel, and when we were convoyed home from Lisbon, she could keep well in sight of the frigate scudding at a distance, by putting on full sail. We had enough hands aboard to reef topsails man-o’-war fashion, which is a rare thing in these days, sir, now that able seamen are so scarce on trading craft. And I hear that men from square-rigged vessels are liked much the best in the navy, as being more ready for use? So that I shouldn’t be altogether so raw,’ said Bob earnestly, ‘if I could enter on your ship, sir. Still, if I can’t, I can’t.’

‘I might ask for you, Loveday,’ said the captain thoughtfully, ‘and so get you there that way. In short, I think I may say I will ask for you. So consider it settled.’

‘My thanks to you, sir,’ said Loveday.

‘You are aware that the Victory is a smart ship, and that cleanliness and order are, of necessity, more strictly insisted upon there than in some others?’

‘Sir, I quite see it.’

‘Well, I hope you will do your duty as well on a line-of-battle ship as you did when mate of the brig, for it is a duty that may be serious.’

Bob replied that it should be his one endeavour; and receiving a few instructions for getting on board the guard-ship, and being conveyed to Portsmouth, he turned to go away.

‘You’ll have a stiff walk before you fetch Overcombe Mill this dark night, Loveday,’ concluded the captain, peering out of the window. ‘I’ll send you in a glass of grog to help ‘ee on your way.’

The captain then left Bob to himself, and when he had drunk the grog that was brought in he started homeward, with a heart not exactly light, but large with a patriotic cheerfulness, which had not diminished when, after walking so fast in his excitement as to be beaded with perspiration, he entered his father’s door.

They were all sitting up for him, and at his approach anxiously raised their sleepy eyes, for it was nearly eleven o’clock.

‘There; I knew he’d not be much longer!’ cried Anne, jumping up and laughing, in her relief. ‘They have been thinking you were very strange and silent to-day, Bob; you were not, were you?’

‘What’s the matter, Bob?’ said the miller; for Bob’s countenance was sublimed by his recent interview, like that of a priest just come from the penetralia of the temple.

‘He’s in his mate’s clothes, just as when he came home!’ observed Mrs. Loveday.

They all saw now that he had something to tell. ‘I am going away,’ he said when he had sat down. ‘I am going to enter on board a man-of-war, and perhaps it will be the Victory.’

‘Going?’ said Anne faintly.

‘Now, don’t you mind it, there’s a dear,’ he went on solemnly, taking her hand in his own. ‘And you, father, don’t you begin to take it to heart’ (the miller was looking grave). ‘The press-gang has been here, and though I showed them that I was a free man, I am going to show everybody that I can do my duty.’

Neither of the other three answered, Anne and the miller having their eyes bent upon the ground, and the former trying to repress her tears.

‘Now don’t you grieve, either of you,’ he continued; ‘nor vex yourselves that this has happened. Please not to be angry with me, father, for deserting you and the mill, where you want me, for I must go. For these three years we and the rest of the country have been in fear of the enemy; trade has been hindered; poor folk made hungry; and many rich folk made poor. There must be a deliverance, and it must be done by sea. I have seen Captain Hardy, and I shall serve under him if so be I can.’

‘Captain Hardy?’

‘Yes. I have been to his house at Pos’ham, where he’s staying with his sisters; walked there and back, and I wouldn’t have missed it for fifty guineas. I hardly thought he would see me; but he did see me. And he hasn’t forgot you.’

Bob then opened his tale in order, relating graphically the conversation to which he had been a party, and they listened with breathless attention.

‘Well, if you must go, you must,’ said the miller with emotion; ‘but I think it somewhat hard that, of my two sons, neither one of ‘em can be got to stay and help me in my business as I get old.’

‘Don’t trouble and vex about it,’ said Mrs. Loveday soothingly. ‘They are both instruments in the hands of Providence, chosen to chastise that Corsican ogre, and do what they can for the country in these trying years.’

‘That’s just the shape of it, Mrs. Loveday,’ said Bob.

‘And he’ll come back soon,’ she continued, turning to Anne. ‘And then he’ll tell us all he has seen, and the glory that he’s won, and how he has helped to sweep that scourge Buonaparty off the earth.’

‘When be you going, Bob?’ his father inquired.

‘To-morrow, if I can. I shall call at the barracks and tell John as I go by. When I get to Portsmouth — ’

A burst of sobs in quick succession interrupted his words; they came from Anne, who till that moment had been sitting as before with her hand in that of Bob, and apparently quite calm. Mrs. Loveday jumped up, but before she could say anything to soothe the agitated girl she had calmed herself with the same singular suddenness that had marked her giving way. ‘I don’t mind Bob’s going,’ she said. ‘I think he ought to go. Don’t suppose, Bob, that I want you to stay!’

After this she left the apartment, and went into the little side room where she and her mother usually worked. In a few moments Bob followed her. When he came back he was in a very sad and emotional mood. Anybody could see that there had been a parting of profound anguish to both.

‘She is not coming back to-night,’ he said.

‘You will see her to-morrow before you go?’ said her mother.

‘I may or I may not,’ he replied. ‘Father and Mrs. Loveday, do you go to bed now. I have got to look over my things and get ready; and it will take me some little time. If you should hear noises you will know it is only myself moving about.’

When Bob was left alone he suddenly became brisk, and set himself to overhaul his clothes and other possessions in a business-like manner. By the time that his chest was packed, such things as he meant to leave at home folded into cupboards, and what was useless destroyed, it was past two o’clock. Then he went to bed, so softly that only the creak of one weak stair revealed his passage upward. At the moment that he passed Anne’s chamber-door her mother was bending over her as she lay in bed, and saying to her, ‘Won’t you see him in the morning?’

‘No, no,’ said Anne. ‘I would rather not see him! I have said that I may. But I shall not. I cannot see him again!’

When the family got up next day Bob had vanished. It was his way to disappear like this, to avoid affecting scenes at parting. By the time that they had sat down to a gloomy breakfast, Bob was in the boat of a Budmouth waterman, who pulled him alongside the guardship in the roads, where he laid hold of the man-rope, mounted, and disappeared from external view. In the course of the day the ship moved off, set her royals, and made sail for Portsmouth, with five hundred new hands for the service on board, consisting partly of pressed men and partly of volunteers, among the latter being Robert Loveday.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A SPECK ON THE SEA

In parting from John, who accompanied him to the quay, Bob had said: ‘Now, Jack, these be my last words to you: I give her up. I go away on purpose, and I shall be away a long time. If in that time she should list over towards ye ever so little, mind you take her. You have more right to her than I. You chose her when my mind was elsewhere, and you best deserve her; for I have never known you forget one woman, while I’ve forgot a dozen. Take her then, if she will come, and God bless both of ye.’

Another person besides John saw Bob go. That was Derriman, who was standing by a bollard a little further up the quay. He did not repress his satisfaction at the sight. John looked towards him with an open gaze of contempt; for the cuffs administered to the yeoman at the inn had not, so far as the trumpet-major was aware, produced any desire to avenge that insult, John being, of course, quite ignorant that Festus had erroneously retaliated upon Bob, in his peculiar though scarcely soldierly way. Finding that he did not even now approach him, John went on his way, and thought over his intention of preserving intact the love between Anne and his brother.

He was surprised when he next went to the mill to find how glad they all were to see him. From the moment of Bob’s return to the bosom of the deep Anne had had no existence on land; people might have looked at her human body and said she had flitted thence. The sea and all that belonged to the sea was her daily thought and her nightly dream. She had the whole two-and-thirty winds under her eye, each passing gale that ushered in returning autumn being mentally registered; and she acquired a precise knowledge of the direction in which Portsmouth, Brest, Ferrol, Cadiz, and other such likely places lay. Instead of saying her own familiar prayers at night she substituted, with some confusion of thought, the Forms of Prayer to be used at sea. John at once noticed her lorn, abstracted looks, pitied her, — how much he pitied her! — and asked when they were alone if there was anything he could do.

‘There are two things,’ she said, with almost childish eagerness in her tired eyes.

‘They shall be done.’

‘The first is to find out if Captain Hardy has gone back to his ship; and the other is — O if you will do it, John! — to get me newspapers whenever possible.’

After this duologue John was absent for a space of three hours, and they thought he had gone back to barracks. He entered, however, at the end of that time, took off his forage-cap, and wiped his forehead.

‘You look tired, John,’ said his father.

‘O no.’ He went through the house till he had found Anne Garland.

‘I have only done one of those things,’ he said to her.

‘What, already! I didn’t hope for or mean to-day.’

‘Captain Hardy is gone from Pos’ham. He left some days ago. We shall soon hear that the fleet has sailed.’

‘You have been all the way to Pos’ham on purpose? How good of you!’

‘Well, I was anxious to know myself when Bob is likely to leave. I expect now that we shall soon hear from him.’

Two days later he came again. He brought a newspaper, and what was better, a letter for Anne, franked by the first lieutenant of the Victory.

‘Then he’s aboard her,’ said Anne, as she eagerly took the letter.

It was short, but as much as she could expect in the circumstances, and informed them that the captain had been as good as his word, and had gratified Bob’s earnest wish to serve under him. The ship, with Admiral Lord Nelson on board, and accompanied by the frigate Euryalus, was to sail in two days for Plymouth, where they would be joined by others, and thence proceed to the coast of Spain.

Anne lay awake that night thinking of the Victory, and of those who floated in her. To the best of Anne’s calculation that ship of war would, during the next twenty-four hours, pass within a few miles of where she herself then lay. Next to seeing Bob, the thing that would give her more pleasure than any other in the world was to see the vessel that contained him — his floating city, his sole dependence in battle and storm — upon whose safety from winds and enemies hung all her hope.

The morrow was market-day at the seaport, and in this she saw her opportunity. A carrier went from Overcombe at six o’clock thither, and having to do a little shopping for herself she gave it as a reason for her intended day’s absence, and took a place in the van. When she reached the town it was still early morning, but the borough was already in the zenith of its daily bustle and show. The King was always out-of-doors by six o’clock, and such cock-crow hours at Gloucester Lodge produced an equally forward stir among the population. She alighted, and passed down the esplanade, as fully thronged by persons of fashion at this time of mist and level sunlight as a watering-place in the present day is at four in the afternoon. Dashing bucks and beaux in cocked hats, black feathers, ruffles, and frills, stared at her as she hurried along; the beach was swarming with bathing women, wearing waistbands that bore the national refrain, ‘God save the King,’ in gilt letters; the shops were all open, and Sergeant Stanner, with his sword-stuck bank-notes and heroic gaze, was beating up at two guineas and a crown, the crown to drink his Majesty’s health.

She soon finished her shopping, and then, crossing over into the old town, pursued her way along the coast-road to Portland. At the end of an hour she had been rowed across the Fleet (which then lacked the convenience of a bridge), and reached the base of Portland Hill. The steep incline before her was dotted with houses, showing the pleasant peculiarity of one man's doorstep being behind his neighbour's chimney, and slabs of stone as the common material for walls, roof, floor, pig-sty, stable-manger, door-scraper, and garden-stile. Anne gained the summit, and followed along the central track over the huge lump of freestone which forms the peninsula, the wide sea prospect extending as she went on. Weary with her journey, she approached the extreme southerly peak of rock, and gazed from the cliff at Portland Bill, or Beal, as it was in those days more correctly called.

The wild, herbless, weather-worn promontory was quite a solitude, and, saving the one old lighthouse about fifty yards up the slope, scarce a mark was visible to show that humanity had ever been near the spot. Anne found herself a seat on a stone, and swept with her eyes the tremulous expanse of water around her that seemed to utter a ceaseless unintelligible incantation. Out of the three hundred and sixty degrees of her complete horizon two hundred and fifty were covered by waves, the coup d'oeil including the area of troubled waters known as the Race, where two seas met to effect the destruction of such vessels as could not be mastered by one. She counted the craft within her view: there were five; no, there were only four; no, there were seven, some of the specks having resolved themselves into two. They were all small coasters, and kept well within sight of land.

Anne sank into a reverie. Then she heard a slight noise on her left hand, and turning beheld an old sailor, who had approached with a glass. He was levelling it over the sea in a direction to the south-east, and somewhat removed from that in which her own eyes had been wandering. Anne moved a few steps thitherward, so as to unclose to her view a deeper sweep on that side, and by this discovered a ship of far larger size than any which had yet dotted the main before her. Its sails were for the most part new and clean, and in comparison with its rapid progress before the wind the small brigs and ketches seemed standing still. Upon this striking object the old man's glass was bent.

'What do you see, sailor?' she asked.

'Almost nothing,' he answered. 'My sight is so gone off lately that things, one and all, be but a November mist to me. And yet I fain would see to-day. I am looking for the Victory.'

'Why,' she said quickly.

'I have a son aboard her. He's one of three from these parts. There's the captain, there's my son Ned, and there's young Loveday of Overcombe — he that lately joined.'

'Shall I look for you?' said Anne, after a pause.

'Certainly, mis'ess, if so be you please.'

Anne took the glass, and he supported it by his arm. 'It is a large ship,' she said, 'with three masts, three rows of guns along the side, and all her sails set.'

‘I guessed as much.’

‘There is a little flag in front — over her bowsprit.’

‘The jack.’

‘And there’s a large one flying at her stern.’

‘The ensign.’

‘And a white one on her fore-topmast.’

‘That’s the admiral’s flag, the flag of my Lord Nelson. What is her figure-head, my dear?’

‘A coat-of-arms, supported on this side by a sailor.’

Her companion nodded with satisfaction. ‘On the other side of that figure-head is a marine.’

‘She is twisting round in a curious way, and her sails sink in like old cheeks, and she shivers like a leaf upon a tree.’

‘She is in stays, for the larboard tack. I can see what she’s been doing. She’s been re’ching close in to avoid the flood tide, as the wind is to the sou’-west, and she’s bound down; but as soon as the ebb made, d’ye see, they made sail to the west’ard. Captain Hardy may be depended upon for that; he knows every current about here, being a native.’

‘And now I can see the other side; it is a soldier where a sailor was before. You are sure it is the Victory?’

‘I am sure.’

After this a frigate came into view — the Euryalus — sailing in the same direction. Anne sat down, and her eyes never left the ships. ‘Tell me more about the Victory,’ she said.

‘She is the best sailer in the service, and she carries a hundred guns. The heaviest be on the lower deck, the next size on the middle deck, the next on the main and upper decks. My son Ned’s place is on the lower deck, because he’s short, and they put the short men below.’

Bob, though not tall, was not likely to be specially selected for shortness. She pictured him on the upper deck, in his snow-white trousers and jacket of navy blue, looking perhaps towards the very point of land where she then was.

The great silent ship, with her population of blue-jackets, marines, officers, captain, and the admiral who was not to return alive, passed like a phantom the meridian of the Bill. Sometimes her aspect was that of a large white bat, sometimes that of a grey one. In the course of time the watching girl saw that the ship had passed her nearest point; the breadth of her sails diminished by foreshortening, till she assumed the form of an egg on end. After this something seemed to twinkle, and Anne, who had previously withdrawn from the old sailor, went back to him, and looked again through the glass. The twinkling was the light falling upon the cabin windows of the ship’s stern. She explained it to the old man.

‘Then we see now what the enemy have seen but once. That was in seventy-nine, when she sighted the French and Spanish fleet off Scilly, and she retreated because she feared a landing. Well, ‘tis a brave ship and she carries brave men!’

Anne’s tender bosom heaved, but she said nothing, and again became absorbed in contemplation.

The Victory was fast dropping away. She was on the horizon, and soon appeared hull down. That seemed to be like the beginning of a greater end than her present vanishing. Anne Garland could not stay by the sailor any longer, and went about a stone’s-throw off, where she was hidden by the inequality of the cliff from his view. The vessel was now exactly end on, and stood out in the direction of the Start, her width having contracted to the proportion of a feather. She sat down again, and mechanically took out some biscuits that she had brought, foreseeing that her waiting might be long. But she could not eat one of them; eating seemed to jar with the mental tenseness of the moment; and her undeviating gaze continued to follow the lessened ship with the fidelity of a balanced needle to a magnetic stone, all else in her being motionless.

The courses of the Victory were absorbed into the main, then her topsails went, and then her top-gallants. She was now no more than a dead fly’s wing on a sheet of spider’s web; and even this fragment diminished. Anne could hardly bear to see the end, and yet she resolved not to flinch. The admiral’s flag sank behind the watery line, and in a minute the very truck of the last topmast stole away. The Victory was gone.

Anne’s lip quivered as she murmured, without removing her wet eyes from the vacant and solemn horizon, “‘They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters — ’”

“‘These see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep,’” was returned by a man’s voice from behind her.

Looking round quickly, she saw a soldier standing there; and the grave eyes of John Loveday bent on her.

‘‘Tis what I was thinking,’ she said, trying to be composed.

‘You were saying it,’ he answered gently.

‘Was I? — I did not know it. . . . How came you here?’ she presently added.

‘I have been behind you a good while; but you never turned round.’

‘I was deeply occupied,’ she said in an undertone.

‘Yes — I too came to see him pass. I heard this morning that Lord Nelson had embarked, and I knew at once that they would sail immediately. The Victory and Euryalus are to join the rest of the fleet at Plymouth. There was a great crowd of people assembled to see the admiral off; they cheered him and the ship as she dropped down. He took his coffin on board with him, they say.’

‘His coffin!’ said Anne, turning deadly pale. ‘Something terrible, then, is meant by that! O, why would Bob go in that ship? doomed to destruction from the very beginning like this!’

‘It was his determination to sail under Captain Hardy, and under no one else,’ said John. ‘There may be hot work; but we must hope for the best.’ And observing how

wretched she looked, he added, 'But won't you let me help you back? If you can walk as far as Hope Cove it will be enough. A lerret is going from there across the bay homeward to the harbour in the course of an hour; it belongs to a man I know, and they can take one passenger, I am sure.'

She turned her back upon the Channel, and by his help soon reached the place indicated. The boat was lying there as he had said. She found it to belong to the old man who had been with her at the Bill, and was in charge of his two younger sons. The trumpet-major helped her into it over the slippery blocks of stone, one of the young men spread his jacket for her to sit on, and as soon as they pulled from shore John climbed up the blue-grey cliff, and disappeared over the top, to return to the mainland by road.

Anne was in the town by three o'clock. The trip in the stern of the lerret had quite refreshed her, with the help of the biscuits, which she had at last been able to eat. The van from the port to Overcombe did not start till four o'clock, and feeling no further interest in the gaieties of the place, she strolled on past the King's house to the outskirts, her mind settling down again upon the possibly sad fate of the Victory when she found herself alone. She did not hurry on; and finding that even now there wanted another half-hour to the carrier's time, she turned into a little lane to escape the inspection of the numerous passers-by. Here all was quite lonely and still, and she sat down under a willow-tree, absently regarding the landscape, which had begun to put on the rich tones of declining summer, but which to her was as hollow and faded as a theatre by day. She could hold out no longer; burying her face in her hands, she wept without restraint.

Some yards behind her was a little spring of water, having a stone margin round it to prevent the cattle from treading in the sides and filling it up with dirt. While she wept, two elderly gentlemen entered unperceived upon the scene, and walked on to the spring's brink. Here they paused and looked in, afterwards moving round it, and then stooping as if to smell or taste its waters. The spring was, in fact, a sulphurous one, then recently discovered by a physician who lived in the neighbourhood; and it was beginning to attract some attention, having by common report contributed to effect such wonderful cures as almost passed belief. After a considerable discussion, apparently on how the pool might be improved for better use, one of the two elderly gentlemen turned away, leaving the other still probing the spring with his cane. The first stranger, who wore a blue coat with gilt buttons, came on in the direction of Anne Garland, and seeing her sad posture went quickly up to her, and said abruptly, 'What is the matter?'

Anne, who in her grief had observed nothing of the gentlemen's presence, withdrew her handkerchief from her eyes and started to her feet. She instantly recognised her interrogator as the King.

'What, what, crying?' his Majesty inquired kindly. 'How is this!'

'I — have seen a dear friend go away, sir,' she faltered, with downcast eyes.

‘Ah — partings are sad — very sad — for us all. You must hope your friend will return soon. Where is he or she gone?’

‘I don’t know, your Majesty.’

‘Don’t know — how is that?’

‘He is a sailor on board the Victory.’

‘Then he has reason to be proud,’ said the King with interest. ‘He is your brother?’

Anne tried to explain what he was, but could not, and blushed with painful heat.

‘Well, well, well; what is his name?’

In spite of Anne’s confusion and low spirits, her womanly shrewdness told her at once that no harm could be done by revealing Bob’s name; and she answered, ‘His name is Robert Loveday, sir.’

‘Loveday — a good name. I shall not forget it. Now dry your cheeks, and don’t cry any more. Loveday — Robert Loveday.’

Anne curtseyed, the King smiled good-humouredly, and turned to rejoin his companion, who was afterwards heard to be Dr. — —, the physician in attendance at Gloucester Lodge. This gentleman had in the meantime filled a small phial with the medicinal water, which he carefully placed in his pocket; and on the King coming up they retired together and disappeared. Thereupon Anne, now thoroughly aroused, followed the same way with a gingerly tread, just in time to see them get into a carriage which was in waiting at the turning of the lane.

She quite forgot the carrier, and everything else in connection with riding home. Flying along the road rapidly and unconsciously, when she awoke to a sense of her whereabouts she was so near to Overcombe as to make the carrier not worth waiting for. She had been borne up in this hasty spurt at the end of a weary day by visions of Bob promoted to the rank of admiral, or something equally wonderful, by the King’s special command, the chief result of the promotion being, in her arrangement of the piece, that he would stay at home and go to sea no more. But she was not a girl who indulged in extravagant fancies long, and before she reached home she thought that the King had probably forgotten her by that time, and her troubles, and her lover’s name.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A SAILOR ENTERS

The remaining fortnight of the month of September passed away, with a general decline from the summer’s excitements. The royal family left the watering-place the first week in October, the German Legion with their artillery about the same time. The dragoons still remained at the barracks just out of the town, and John Loveday brought to Anne every newspaper that he could lay hands on, especially such as contained any fragment of shipping news. This threw them much together; and at these times John

was often awkward and confused, on account of the unwonted stress of concealing his great love for her.

Her interests had grandly developed from the limits of Overcombe and the town life hard by, to an extensiveness truly European. During the whole month of October, however, not a single grain of information reached her, or anybody else, concerning Nelson and his blockading squadron off Cadiz. There were the customary bad jokes about Buonaparte, especially when it was found that the whole French army had turned its back upon Boulogne and set out for the Rhine. Then came accounts of his march through Germany and into Austria; but not a word about the Victory.

At the beginning of autumn John brought news which fearfully depressed her. The Austrian General Mack had capitulated with his whole army. Then were revived the old misgivings as to invasion. 'Instead of having to cope with him weary with waiting, we shall have to encounter This Man fresh from the fields of victory,' ran the newspaper article.

But the week which had led off with such a dreary piping was to end in another key. On the very day when Mack's army was piling arms at the feet of its conqueror, a blow had been struck by Bob Loveday and his comrades which eternally shattered the enemy's force by sea. Four days after the receipt of the Austrian news Corporal Tullidge ran into the miller's house to inform him that on the previous Monday, at eleven in the morning, the Pickle schooner, Lieutenant Lapenotiere, had arrived at Falmouth with despatches from the fleet; that the stage-coaches on the highway through Wessex to London were chalked with the words 'Great Victory!' 'Glorious Triumph!' and so on; and that all the country people were wild to know particulars.

On Friday afternoon John arrived with authentic news of the battle off Cape Trafalgar, and the death of Nelson. Captain Hardy was alive, though his escape had been narrow enough, his shoe-buckle having been carried away by a shot. It was feared that the Victory had been the scene of the heaviest slaughter among all the ships engaged, but as yet no returns of killed and wounded had been issued, beyond a rough list of the numbers in some of the ships.

The suspense of the little household in Overcombe Mill was great in the extreme. John came thither daily for more than a week; but no further particulars reached England till the end of that time, and then only the meagre intelligence that there had been a gale immediately after the battle, and that many of the prizes had been lost. Anne said little to all these things, and preserved a superstratum of calmness on her countenance; but some inner voice seemed to whisper to her that Bob was no more. Miller Loveday drove to Pos'ham several times to learn if the Captain's sisters had received any more definite tidings than these flying reports; but that family had heard nothing which could in any way relieve the miller's anxiety. When at last, at the end of November, there appeared a final and revised list of killed and wounded as issued by Admiral Collingwood, it was a useless sheet to the Lovedays. To their great pain it contained no names but those of officers, the friends of ordinary seamen and marines being in those good old days left to discover their losses as best they might.

Anne's conviction of her loss increased with the darkening of the early winter time. Bob was not a cautious man who would avoid needless exposure, and a hundred and fifty of the Victory's crew had been disabled or slain. Anybody who had looked into her room at this time would have seen that her favourite reading was the office for the Burial of the Dead at Sea, beginning 'We therefore commit his body to the deep.' In these first days of December several of the victorious fleet came into port; but not the Victory. Many supposed that that noble ship, disabled by the battle, had gone to the bottom in the subsequent tempestuous weather; and the belief was persevered in till it was told in the town and port that she had been seen passing up the Channel. Two days later the Victory arrived at Portsmouth.

Then letters from survivors began to appear in the public prints which John so regularly brought to Anne; but though he watched the mails with unceasing vigilance there was never a letter from Bob. It sometimes crossed John's mind that his brother might still be alive and well, and that in his wish to abide by his expressed intention of giving up Anne and home life he was deliberately lax in writing. If so, Bob was carrying out the idea too thoughtlessly by half, as could be seen by watching the effects of suspense upon the fair face of the victim, and the anxiety of the rest of the family.

It was a clear day in December. The first slight snow of the season had been sifted over the earth, and one side of the apple-tree branches in the miller's garden was touched with white, though a few leaves were still lingering on the tops of the younger trees. A short sailor of the Royal Navy, who was not Bob, nor anything like him, crossed the mill court and came to the door. The miller hastened out and brought him into the room, where John, Mrs. Loveday, and Anne Garland were all present.

'I'm from aboard the Victory,' said the sailor. 'My name's Jim Cornick. And your lad is alive and well.'

They breathed rather than spoke their thankfulness and relief, the miller's eyes being moist as he turned aside to calm himself; while Anne, having first jumped up wildly from her seat, sank back again under the almost insupportable joy that trembled through her limbs to her utmost finger.

'I've come from Spithead to Pos'ham,' the sailor continued, 'and now I am going on to father at Budmouth.'

'Ah! — I know your father,' cried the trumpet-major, 'old James Cornick.'

It was the man who had brought Anne in his lerret from Portland Bill.

'And Bob hasn't got a scratch?' said the miller.

'Not a scratch,' said Cornick.

Loveday then bustled off to draw the visitor something to drink. Anne Garland, with a glowing blush on her face, had gone to the back part of the room, where she was the very embodiment of sweet content as she slightly swayed herself without speaking. A little tide of happiness seemed to ebb and flow through her in listening to the sailor's words, moving her figure with it. The seaman and John went on conversing.

‘Bob had a good deal to do with barricading the hawse-holes afore we were in action, and the Adm’l and Cap’n both were very much pleased at how ‘twas done. When the Adm’l went up the quarter-deck ladder, Cap’n Hardy said a word or two to Bob, but what it was I don’t know, for I was quartered at a gun some ways off. However, Bob saw the Adm’l stagger when ‘a was wounded, and was one of the men who carried him to the cockpit. After that he and some other lads jumped aboard the French ship, and I believe they was in her when she struck her flag. What ‘a did next I can’t say, for the wind had dropped, and the smoke was like a cloud. But ‘a got a good deal talked about; and they say there’s promotion in store for’n.’

At this point in the story Jim Cornick stopped to drink, and a low unconscious humming came from Anne in her distant corner; the faint melody continued more or less when the conversation between the sailor and the Lovedays was renewed.

‘We heard afore that the Victory was near knocked to pieces,’ said the miller.

‘Knocked to pieces? You’d say so if so be you could see her! Gad, her sides be battered like an old penny piece; the shot be still sticking in her wales, and her sails be like so many clap-nets: we have run all the way home under jury topmasts; and as for her decks, you may swab wi’ hot water, and you may swab wi’ cold, but there’s the blood-stains, and there they’ll bide. . . . The Cap’n had a narrow escape, like many o’ the rest — a shot shaved his ankle like a razor. You should have seen that man’s face in the het o’ battle, his features were as if they’d been cast in steel.’

‘We rather expected a letter from Bob before this.’

‘Well,’ said Jim Cornick, with a smile of toleration, ‘you must make allowances. The truth o’t is, he’s engaged just now at Portsmouth, like a good many of the rest from our ship. . . . ‘Tis a very nice young woman that he’s a courting of, and I make no doubt that she’ll be an excellent wife for him.’

‘Ah!’ said Mrs. Loveday, in a warning tone.

‘Courting — wife?’ said the miller.

They instinctively looked towards Anne. Anne had started as if shaken by an invisible hand, and a thick mist of doubt seemed to obscure the intelligence of her eyes. This was but for two or three moments. Very pale, she arose and went right up to the seaman. John gently tried to intercept her, but she passed him by.

‘Do you speak of Robert Loveday as courting a wife?’ she asked, without the least betrayal of emotion.

‘I didn’t see you, miss,’ replied Cornick, turning. ‘Yes, your brother hev’ his eye on a wife, and he deserves one. I hope you don’t mind?’

‘Not in the least,’ she said, with a stage laugh. ‘I am interested, naturally. And what is she?’

‘A very nice young master-baker’s daughter, honey. A very wise choice of the young man’s.’

‘Is she fair or dark?’

‘Her hair is rather light.’

‘I like light hair; and her name?’

‘Her name is Caroline. But can it be that my story hurts ye? If so — ’

‘Yes, yes,’ said John, interposing anxiously. ‘We don’t care for more just at this moment.’

‘We do care for more!’ said Anne vehemently. ‘Tell it all, sailor. That is a very pretty name, Caroline. When are they going to be married?’

‘I don’t know as how the day is settled,’ answered Jim, even now scarcely conscious of the devastation he was causing in one fair breast. ‘But from the rate the courting is scudding along at, I should say it won’t be long first.’

‘If you see him when you go back, give him my best wishes,’ she lightly said, as she moved away. ‘And,’ she added, with solemn bitterness, ‘say that I am glad to hear he is making such good use of the first days of his escape from the Valley of the Shadow of Death!’ She went away, expressing indifference by audibly singing in the distance —

‘Shall we go dance the round, the round, the round,
Shall we go dance the round?’

‘Your sister is lively at the news,’ observed Jim Cornick.

‘Yes,’ murmured John gloomily, as he gnawed his lower lip and kept his eyes fixed on the fire.

‘Well,’ continued the man from the Victory, ‘I won’t say that your brother’s intended ha’n’t got some ballast, which is very lucky for’n, as he might have picked up with a girl without a single copper nail. To be sure there was a time we had when we got into port! It was open house for us all!’ And after mentally regarding the scene for a few seconds Jim emptied his cup and rose to go.

The miller was saying some last words to him outside the house, Anne’s voice had hardly ceased singing upstairs, John was standing by the fireplace, and Mrs. Loveday was crossing the room to join her daughter, whose manner had given her some uneasiness, when a noise came from above the ceiling, as of some heavy body falling. Mrs. Loveday rushed to the staircase, saying, ‘Ah, I feared something!’ and she was followed by John.

When they entered Anne’s room, which they both did almost at one moment, they found her lying insensible upon the floor. The trumpet-major, his lips tightly closed, lifted her in his arms, and laid her upon the bed; after which he went back to the door to give room to her mother, who was bending over the girl with some hartshorn.

Presently Mrs. Loveday looked up and said to him, ‘She is only in a faint, John, and her colour is coming back. Now leave her to me; I will be downstairs in a few minutes, and tell you how she is.’

John left the room. When he gained the lower apartment his father was standing by the chimney-piece, the sailor having gone. The trumpet-major went up to the fire, and, grasping the edge of the high chimney-shelf, stood silent.

‘Did I hear a noise when I went out?’ asked the elder, in a tone of misgiving.

‘Yes, you did,’ said John. ‘It was she, but her mother says she is better now. Father,’ he added impetuously, ‘Bob is a worthless blockhead! If there had been any good in him he would have been drowned years ago!’

‘John, John — not too fast,’ said the miller. ‘That’s a hard thing to say of your brother, and you ought to be ashamed of it.’

‘Well, he tries me more than I can bear. Good God! what can a man be made of to go on as he does? Why didn’t he come home; or if he couldn’t get leave why didn’t he write? ‘Tis scandalous of him to serve a woman like that!’

‘Gently, gently. The chap hev done his duty as a sailor; and though there might have been something between him and Anne, her mother, in talking it over with me, has said many times that she couldn’t think of their marrying till Bob had settled down in business with me. Folks that gain victories must have a little liberty allowed ‘em. Look at the Admiral himself, for that matter.’

John continued looking at the red coals, till hearing Mrs. Loveday’s foot on the staircase, he went to meet her.

‘She is better,’ said Mrs. Loveday; ‘but she won’t come down again to-day.’

Could John have heard what the poor girl was moaning to herself at that moment as she lay writhing on the bed, he would have doubted her mother’s assurance. ‘If he had been dead I could have borne it, but this I cannot bear!’

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DERRIMAN SEES CHANCES

Meanwhile Sailor Cornick had gone on his way as far as the forking roads, where he met Festus Derriman on foot. The latter, attracted by the seaman’s dress, and by seeing him come from the mill, at once accosted him. Jim, with the greatest readiness, fell into conversation, and told the same story as that he had related at the mill.

‘Bob Loveday going to be married?’ repeated Festus.

‘You all seem struck of a heap wi’ that.’

‘No; I never heard news that pleased me more.’

When Cornick was gone, Festus, instead of passing straight on, halted on the little bridge and meditated. Bob, being now interested elsewhere, would probably not resent the siege of Anne’s heart by another; there could, at any rate, be no further possibility of that looming duel which had troubled the yeoman’s mind ever since his horse-play on Anne at the house on the down. To march into the mill and propose to Mrs. Loveday for Anne before John’s interest could revive in her was, to this hero’s thinking, excellent discretion.

The day had already begun to darken when he entered, and the cheerful fire shone red upon the floor and walls. Mrs. Loveday received him alone, and asked him to take a seat by the chimney-corner, a little of the old hankering for him as a son-in-law having permanently remained with her.

‘Your servant, Mrs. Loveday,’ he said, ‘and I will tell you at once what I come for. You will say that I take time by the forelock when I inform you that it is to push on

my long-wished-for alliance wi' your daughter, as I believe she is now a free woman again.'

'Thank you, Mr. Derriman,' said the mother placably. 'But she is ill at present. I'll mention it to her when she is better.'

'Ask her to alter her cruel, cruel resolves against me, on the score of — of my consuming passion for her. In short,' continued Festus, dropping his parlour language in his warmth, 'I'll tell thee what, Dame Loveday, I want the maid, and must have her.'

Mrs. Loveday replied that that was very plain speaking.

'Well, 'tis. But Bob has given her up. He never meant to marry her. I'll tell you, Mrs. Loveday, what I have never told a soul before. I was standing upon Budmouth Quay on that very day in last September that Bob set sail, and I heard him say to his brother John that he gave your daughter up.'

'Then it was very unmannerly of him to trifle with her so,' said Mrs. Loveday warmly. 'Who did he give her up to?'

Festus replied with hesitation, 'He gave her up to John.'

'To John? How could he give her up to a man already over head and ears in love with that actress woman?'

'O? You surprise me. Which actress is it?'

'That Miss Johnson. Anne tells me that he loves her hopelessly.'

Festus arose. Miss Johnson seemed suddenly to acquire high value as a sweetheart at this announcement. He had himself felt a nameless attractiveness in her, and John had done likewise. John crossed his path in all possible ways.

Before the yeoman had replied somebody opened the door, and the firelight shone upon the uniform of the person they discussed. Festus nodded on recognizing him, wished Mrs. Loveday good evening, and went out precipitately.

'So Bob told you he meant to break off with my Anne when he went away?' Mrs. Loveday remarked to the trumpet-major. 'I wish I had known of it before.'

John appeared disturbed at the sudden charge. He murmured that he could not deny it, and then hastily turned from her and followed Derriman, whom he saw before him on the bridge.

'Derriman!' he shouted.

Festus started and looked round. 'Well, trumpet-major,' he said blandly.

'When will you have sense enough to mind your own business, and not come here telling things you have heard by sneaking behind people's backs?' demanded John hotly. 'If you can't learn in any other way, I shall have to pull your ears again, as I did the other day!'

'You pull my ears? How can you tell that lie, when you know 'twas somebody else pulled 'em?'

'O no, no. I pulled your ears, and thrashed you in a mild way.'

'You'll swear to it? Surely 'twas another man?'

‘It was in the parlour at the public-house; you were almost in the dark.’ And John added a few details as to the particular blows, which amounted to proof itself.

‘Then I heartily ask your pardon for saying ‘twas a lie!’ cried Festus, advancing with extended hand and a genial smile. ‘Sure, if I had known ‘twas you, I wouldn’t have insulted you by denying it.’

‘That was why you didn’t challenge me, then?’

‘That was it! I wouldn’t for the world have hurt your nice sense of honour by letting ‘ee go unchallenged, if I had known! And now, you see, unfortunately I can’t mend the mistake. So long a time has passed since it happened that the heat of my temper is gone off. I couldn’t oblige ‘ee, try how I might, for I am not a man, trumpet-major, that can butcher in cold blood — no, not I, nor you neither, from what I know of ‘ee. So, willy-nilly, we must fain let it pass, eh?’

‘We must, I suppose,’ said John, smiling grimly. ‘Who did you think I was, then, that night when I boxed you all round?’

‘No, don’t press me,’ replied the yeoman. ‘I can’t reveal; it would be disgracing myself to show how very wide of the truth the mockery of wine was able to lead my senses. We will let it be buried in eternal mixens of forgetfulness.’

‘As you wish,’ said the trumpet-major loftily. ‘But if you ever should think you knew it was me, why, you know where to find me?’ And Loveday walked away.

The instant that he was gone Festus shook his fist at the evening star, which happened to lie in the same direction as that taken by the dragoon.

‘Now for my revenge! Duels? Lifelong disgrace to me if ever I fight with a man of blood below my own! There are other remedies for upper-class souls! . . . Matilda — that’s my way.’

Festus strode along till he reached the Hall, where Cripplestraw appeared gazing at him from under the arch of the porter’s lodge. Derriman dashed open the entrance-hurdle with such violence that the whole row of them fell flat in the mud.

‘Mercy, Maister Festus!’ said Cripplestraw. “‘Surely,” I says to myself when I see ye a-coming, “surely Maister Festus is fuming like that because there’s no chance of the enemy coming this year after all.”“

‘Cr-r-ripplestraw! I have been wounded to the heart,’ replied Derriman, with a lurid brow.

‘And the man yet lives, and you wants yer horse-pistols instantly? Certainly, Maister F — -’

‘No, Cripplestraw, not my pistols, but my new-cut clothes, my heavy gold seals, my silver-topped cane, and my buckles that cost more money than he ever saw! Yes, I must tell somebody, and I’ll tell you, because there’s no other fool near. He loves her heart and soul. He’s poor; she’s tip-top genteel, and not rich. I am rich, by comparison. I’ll court the pretty play-actress, and win her before his eyes.’

‘Play-actress, Maister Derriman?’

‘Yes. I saw her this very day, met her by accident, and spoke to her. She’s still in the town — perhaps because of him. I can meet her at any hour of the day — But

I don't mean to marry her; not I. I will court her for my pastime, and to annoy him. It will be all the more death to him that I don't want her. Then perhaps he will say to me, "You have taken my one ewe lamb" — meaning that I am the king, and he's the poor man, as in the church verse; and he'll beg for mercy when 'tis too late — unless, meanwhile, I shall have tired of my new toy. Saddle the horse, Cripplestraw, to-morrow at ten.'

Full of this resolve to scourge John Loveday to the quick through his passion for Miss Johnson, Festus came out booted and spurred at the time appointed, and set off on his morning ride.

Miss Johnson's theatrical engagement having long ago terminated, she would have left the Royal watering-place with the rest of the visitors had not matrimonial hopes detained her there. These had nothing whatever to do with John Loveday, as may be imagined, but with a stout, staid boat-builder in Cove Row by the quay, who had shown much interest in her impersonations. Unfortunately this substantial man had not been quite so attentive since the end of the season as his previous manner led her to expect; and it was a great pleasure to the lady to see Mr. Derriman leaning over the harbour bridge with his eyes fixed upon her as she came towards it after a stroll past her elderly wooer's house.

'Od take it, ma'am, you didn't tell me when I saw you last that the tooting man with the blue jacket and lace was yours devoted?' began Festus.

'Who do you mean?' In Matilda's ever-changing emotional interests, John Loveday was a stale and unprofitable personality.

'Why, that trumpet-major man.'

'O! What of him?'

'Come; he loves you, and you know it, ma'am.'

She knew, at any rate, how to take the current when it served. So she glanced at Festus, folded her lips meaningly, and nodded.

'I've come to cut him out.'

She shook her head, it being unsafe to speak till she knew a little more of the subject.

'What!' said Festus, reddening, 'do you mean to say that you think of him seriously — you, who might look so much higher?'

'Constant dropping will wear away a stone; and you should only hear his pleading! His handsome face is impressive, and his manners are — O, so genteel! I am not rich; I am, in short, a poor lady of decayed family, who has nothing to boast of but my blood and ancestors, and they won't find a body in food and clothing! — I hold the world but as the world, Derrimania — a stage where every man must play a part, and mine a sad one!' She dropped her eyes thoughtfully and sighed.

'We will talk of this,' said Festus, much affected. 'Let us walk to the Look-out.'

She made no objection, and said, as they turned that way, 'Mr. Derriman, a long time ago I found something belonging to you; but I have never yet remembered to

return it.' And she drew from her bosom the paper which Anne had dropped in the meadow when eluding the grasp of Festus on that summer day.

'Zounds, I smell fresh meat!' cried Festus when he had looked it over. "'Tis in my uncle's writing, and 'tis what I heard him singing on the day the French didn't come, and afterwards saw him marking in the road. 'Tis something he's got hid away. Give me the paper, there's a dear; 'tis worth sterling gold!'

'Halves, then?' said Matilda tenderly.

'Gad, yes — anything!' replied Festus, blazing into a smile, for she had looked up in her best new manner at the possibility that he might be worth the winning. They went up the steps to the summit of the cliff, and dwindled over it against the sky.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

REACTION

There was no letter from Bob, though December had passed, and the new year was two weeks old. His movements were, however, pretty accurately registered in the papers, which John still brought, but which Anne no longer read. During the second week in December the *Victory* sailed for Sheerness, and on the 9th of the following January the public funeral of Lord Nelson took place in St. Paul's.

Then there came a meagre line addressed to the family in general. Bob's new Portsmouth attachment was not mentioned, but he told them he had been one of the eight-and-forty seamen who walked two-and-two in the funeral procession, and that Captain Hardy had borne the banner of emblems on the same occasion. The crew was soon to be paid off at Chatham, when he thought of returning to Portsmouth for a few days to see a valued friend. After that he should come home.

But the spring advanced without bringing him, and John watched Anne Garland's desolation with augmenting desire to do something towards consoling her. The old feelings, so religiously held in check, were stimulated to rebelliousness, though they did not show themselves in any direct manner as yet.

The miller, in the meantime, who seldom interfered in such matters, was observed to look meaningly at Anne and the trumpet-major from day to day; and by-and-by he spoke privately to John.

His words were short and to the point: Anne was very melancholy; she had thought too much of Bob. Now 'twas plain that they had lost him for many years to come. Well; he had always felt that of the two he would rather John married her. Now John might settle down there, and succeed where Bob had failed. 'So if you could get her, my sonny, to think less of him and more of thyself, it would be a good thing for all.'

An inward excitement had risen in John; but he suppressed it and said firmly —
'Fairness to Bob before everything!'

'He hev forgot her, and there's an end on't.'

'She's not forgot him.'

‘Well, well; think it over.’

This discourse was the cause of his penning a letter to his brother. He begged for a distinct statement whether, as John at first supposed, Bob’s verbal renunciation of Anne on the quay had been only a momentary ebullition of friendship, which it would be cruel to take literally; or whether, as seemed now, it had passed from a hasty resolve to a standing purpose, persevered in for his own pleasure, with not a care for the result on poor Anne.

John waited anxiously for the answer, but no answer came; and the silence seemed even more significant than a letter of assurance could have been of his absolution from further support to a claim which Bob himself had so clearly renounced. Thus it happened that paternal pressure, brotherly indifference, and his own released impulse operated in one delightful direction, and the trumpet-major once more approached Anne as in the old time.

But it was not till she had been left to herself for a full five months, and the blue-bells and ragged-robins of the following year were again making themselves common to the rambling eye, that he directly addressed her. She was tying up a group of tall flowering plants in the garden: she knew that he was behind her, but she did not turn. She had subsided into a placid dignity which enabled her when watched to perform any little action with seeming composure — very different from the flutter of her inexperienced days.

‘Are you never going to turn round?’ he at length asked good-humouredly.

She then did turn, and looked at him for a moment without speaking; a certain suspicion looming in her eyes, as if suggested by his perceptible want of ease.

‘How like summer it is getting to feel, is it not?’ she said.

John admitted that it was getting to feel like summer: and, bending his gaze upon her with an earnestness which no longer left any doubt of his subject, went on to ask

‘Have you ever in these last weeks thought of how it used to be between us?’

She replied quickly, ‘O, John, you shouldn’t begin that again. I am almost another woman now!’

‘Well, that’s all the more reason why I should, isn’t it?’

Anne looked thoughtfully to the other end of the garden, faintly shaking her head; ‘I don’t quite see it like that,’ she returned.

‘You feel yourself quite free, don’t you?’

‘Quite free!’ she said instantly, and with proud distinctness; her eyes fell, and she repeated more slowly, ‘Quite free.’ Then her thoughts seemed to fly from herself to him. ‘But you are not?’

‘I am not?’

‘Miss Johnson!’

‘O — that woman! You know as well as I that was all make-up, and that I never for a moment thought of her.’

‘I had an idea you were acting; but I wasn’t sure.’

‘Well, that’s nothing now. Anne, I want to relieve your life; to cheer you in some way; to make some amends for my brother’s bad conduct. If you cannot love me, liking will be well enough. I have thought over every side of it so many times — for months have I been thinking it over — and I am at last sure that I do right to put it to you in this way. That I don’t wrong Bob I am quite convinced. As far as he is concerned we be both free. Had I not been sure of that I would never have spoken. Father wants me to take on the mill, and it will please him if you can give me one little hope; it will make the house go on altogether better if you can think o’ me.’

‘You are generous and good, John,’ she said, as a big round tear bowled helter-skelter down her face and hat-strings.

‘I am not that; I fear I am quite the opposite,’ he said, without looking at her. ‘It would be all gain to me — But you have not answered my question.’

She lifted her eyes. ‘John, I cannot!’ she said, with a cheerless smile. ‘Positively I cannot. Will you make me a promise?’

‘What is it?’

‘I want you to promise first — Yes, it is dreadfully unreasonable,’ she added, in a mild distress. ‘But do promise!’

John by this time seemed to have a feeling that it was all up with him for the present. ‘I promise,’ he said listlessly.

‘It is that you won’t speak to me about this for ever so long,’ she returned, with emphatic kindness.

‘Very good,’ he replied; ‘very good. Dear Anne, you don’t think I have been unmanly or unfair in starting this anew?’

Anne looked into his face without a smile. ‘You have been perfectly natural,’ she murmured. ‘And so I think have I.’

John, mournfully: ‘You will not avoid me for this, or be afraid of me? I will not break my word. I will not worry you any more.’

‘Thank you, John. You need not have said worry; it isn’t that.’

‘Well, I am very blind and stupid. I have been hurting your heart all the time without knowing it. It is my fate, I suppose. Men who love women the very best always blunder and give more pain than those who love them less.’

Anne laid one of her hands on the other as she softly replied, looking down at them, ‘No one loves me as well as you, John; nobody in the world is so worthy to be loved; and yet I cannot anyhow love you rightly.’ And lifting her eyes, ‘But I do so feel for you that I will try as hard as I can to think about you.’

‘Well, that is something,’ he said, smiling. ‘You say I must not speak about it again for ever so long; how long?’

‘Now that’s not fair,’ Anne retorted, going down the garden, and leaving him alone.

About a week passed. Then one afternoon the miller walked up to Anne indoors, a weighty topic being expressed in his tread.

‘I was so glad, my honey,’ he began, with a knowing smile, ‘to see that from the mill-window last week.’ He flung a nod in the direction of the garden.

Anne innocently inquired what it could be.

‘Jack and you in the garden together,’ he continued laying his hand gently on her shoulder and stroking it. ‘It would so please me, my dear little girl, if you could get to like him better than that weathercock, Master Bob.’

Anne shook her head; not in forcible negation, but to imply a kind of neutrality.

‘Can’t you? Come now,’ said the miller.

She threw back her head with a little laugh of grievance. ‘How you all beset me!’ she expostulated. ‘It makes me feel very wicked in not obeying you, and being faithful — faithful to — ’ But she could not trust that side of the subject to words. ‘Why would it please you so much?’ she asked.

‘John is as steady and staunch a fellow as ever blowed a trumpet. I’ve always thought you might do better with him than with Bob. Now I’ve a plan for taking him into the mill, and letting him have a comfortable time o’t after his long knocking about; but so much depends upon you that I must bide a bit till I see what your pleasure is about the poor fellow. Mind, my dear, I don’t want to force ye; I only just ask ye.’

Anne meditatively regarded the miller from under her shady eyelids, the fingers of one hand playing a silent tattoo on her bosom. ‘I don’t know what to say to you,’ she answered brusquely, and went away.

But these discourses were not without their effect upon the extremely conscientious mind of Anne. They were, moreover, much helped by an incident which took place one evening in the autumn of this year, when John came to tea. Anne was sitting on a low stool in front of the fire, her hands clasped across her knee. John Loveday had just seated himself on a chair close behind her, and Mrs. Loveday was in the act of filling the teapot from the kettle which hung in the chimney exactly above Anne. The kettle slipped forward suddenly, whereupon John jumped from the chair and put his own two hands over Anne’s just in time to shield them, and the precious knee she clasped, from the jet of scalding water which had directed itself upon that point. The accidental overflow was instantly checked by Mrs. Loveday; but what had come was received by the devoted trumpet-major on the back of his hands.

Anne, who had hardly been aware that he was behind her, started up like a person awakened from a trance. ‘What have you done to yourself, poor John, to keep it off me!’ she cried, looking at his hands.

John reddened emotionally at her words, ‘It is a bit of a scald, that’s all,’ he replied, drawing a finger across the back of one hand, and bringing off the skin by the touch.

‘You are scalded painfully, and I not at all!’ She gazed into his kind face as she had never gazed there before, and when Mrs. Loveday came back with oil and other liniments for the wound Anne would let nobody dress it but herself. It seemed as if her coyness had all gone, and when she had done all that lay in her power she still sat by him. At his departure she said what she had never said to him in her life before: ‘Come again soon!’

In short, that impulsive act of devotion, the last of a series of the same tenor, had been the added drop which finally turned the wheel. John's character deeply impressed her. His determined steadfastness to his lode star won her admiration, the more especially as that star was herself. She began to wonder more and more how she could have so persistently held out against his advances before Bob came home to renew girlish memories which had by that time got considerably weakened. Could she not, after all, please the miller, and try to listen to John? By so doing she would make a worthy man happy, the only sacrifice being at worst that of her unworthy self, whose future was no longer valuable. 'As for Bob, the woman is to be pitied who loves him,' she reflected indignantly, and persuaded herself that, whoever the woman might be, she was not Anne Garland.

After this there was something of recklessness and something of pleasantry in the young girl's manner of making herself an example of the triumph of pride and common sense over memory and sentiment. Her attitude had been epitomized in her defiant singing at the time she learnt that Bob was not leal and true. John, as was inevitable, came again almost immediately, drawn thither by the sun of her first smile on him, and the words which had accompanied it. And now instead of going off to her little pursuits upstairs, downstairs, across the room, in the corner, or to any place except where he happened to be, as had been her custom hitherto, she remained seated near him, returning interesting answers to his general remarks, and at every opportunity letting him know that at last he had found favour in her eyes.

The day was fine, and they went out of doors, where Anne endeavoured to seat herself on the sloping stone of the window-sill.

'How good you have become lately,' said John, standing over her and smiling in the sunlight which blazed against the wall. 'I fancy you have stayed at home this afternoon on my account.'

'Perhaps I have,' she said gaily —

"Do whatever we may for him, dame, we cannot do too much!

For he's one that has guarded our land."

'And he has done more than that: he has saved me from a dreadful scalding. The back of your hand will not be well for a long time, John, will it?'

He held out his hand to regard its condition, and the next natural thing was to take hers. There was a glow upon his face when he did it: his star was at last on a fair way towards the zenith after its long and weary declination. The least penetrating eye could have perceived that Anne had resolved to let him woo, possibly in her temerity to let him win. Whatever silent sorrow might be locked up in her, it was by this time thrust a long way down from the light.

'I want you to go somewhere with me if you will,' he said, still holding her hand.

'Yes? Where is it?'

He pointed to a distant hill-side which, hitherto green, had within the last few days begun to show scratches of white on its face. 'Up there,' he said.

'I see little figures of men moving about. What are they doing?'

‘Cutting out a huge picture of the king on horseback in the earth of the hill. The king’s head is to be as big as our mill-pond and his body as big as this garden; he and the horse will cover more than an acre. When shall we go?’

‘Whenever you please,’ said she.

‘John!’ cried Mrs. Loveday from the front door. ‘Here’s a friend come for you.’

John went round, and found his trusty lieutenant, Trumpeter Buck, waiting for him. A letter had come to the barracks for John in his absence, and the trumpeter, who was going for a walk, had brought it along with him. Buck then entered the mill to discuss, if possible, a mug of last year’s mead with the miller; and John proceeded to read his letter, Anne being still round the corner where he had left her. When he had read a few words he turned as pale as a sheet, but he did not move, and perused the writing to the end.

Afterwards he laid his elbow against the wall, and put his palm to his head, thinking with painful intentness. Then he took himself vigorously in hand, as it were, and gradually became natural again. When he parted from Anne to go home with Buck she noticed nothing different in him.

In barracks that evening he read the letter again. It was from Bob; and the agitating contents were these: —

‘Dear John, — I have drifted off from writing till the present time because I have not been clear about my feelings; but I have discovered them at last, and can say beyond doubt that I mean to be faithful to my dearest Anne after all. The fact is, John, I’ve got into a bit of a scrape, and I’ve a secret to tell you about it (which must go no further on any account). On landing last autumn I fell in with a young woman, and we got rather warm as folks do; in short, we liked one another well enough for a while. But I have got into shoal water with her, and have found her to be a terrible take-in. Nothing in her at all — no sense, no niceness, all tantrums and empty noise, John, though she seemed monstrous clever at first. So my heart comes back to its old anchorage. I hope my return to faithfulness will make no difference to you. But as you showed by your looks at our parting that you should not accept my offer to give her up — made in too much haste, as I have since found — I feel that you won’t mind that I have returned to the path of honour. I dare not write to Anne as yet, and please do not let her know a word about the other young woman, or there will be the devil to pay. I shall come home and make all things right, please God. In the meantime I should take it as a kindness, John, if you would keep a brotherly eye upon Anne, and guide her mind back to me. I shall die of sorrow if anybody sets her against me, for my hopes are getting bound up in her again quite strong. Hoping you are jovial, as times go, I am, — Your affectionate brother,

Robert.’

When the cold daylight fell upon John’s face, as he dressed himself next morning, the incipient yesterday’s wrinkle in his forehead had become permanently graven there. He had resolved, for the sake of that only brother whom he had nursed as a baby, instructed as a child, and protected and loved always, to pause in his procedure for

the present, and at least do nothing to hinder Bob's restoration to favour, if a genuine, even though temporarily smothered, love for Anne should still hold possession of him. But having arranged to take her to see the excavated figure of the king, he started for Overcombe during the day, as if nothing had occurred to check the smooth course of his love.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A DELICATE SITUATION

'I am ready to go,' said Anne, as soon as he arrived.

He paused as if taken aback by her readiness, and replied with much uncertainty, 'Would it — wouldn't it be better to put it off till there is less sun?'

The very slightest symptom of surprise arose in her as she rejoined, 'But the weather may change; or had we better not go at all?'

'O no! — it was only a thought. We will start at once.'

And along the vale they went, John keeping himself about a yard from her right hand. When the third field had been crossed they came upon half-a-dozen little boys at play.

'Why don't he clasp her to his side, like a man?' said the biggest and rudest boy.

'Why don't he clasp her to his side, like a man?' echoed all the rude smaller boys in a chorus.

The trumpet-major turned, and, after some running, succeeded in smacking two of them with his switch, returning to Anne breathless. 'I am ashamed they should have insulted you so,' he said, blushing for her.

'They said no harm, poor boys,' she replied reproachfully.

Poor John was dumb with perception. The gentle hint upon which he would have eagerly spoken only one short day ago was now like fire to his wound.

They presently came to some stepping-stones across a brook. John crossed first without turning his head, and Anne, just lifting the skirt of her dress, crossed behind him. When they had reached the other side a village girl and a young shepherd approached the brink to cross. Anne stopped and watched them. The shepherd took a hand of the young girl in each of his own, and walked backward over the stones, facing her, and keeping her upright by his grasp, both of them laughing as they went.

'What are you staying for, Miss Garland?' asked John.

'I was only thinking how happy they are,' she said quietly; and withdrawing her eyes from the tender pair, she turned and followed him, not knowing that the seeming sound of a passing bumble-bee was a suppressed groan from John.

When they reached the hill they found forty navvies at work removing the dark sod so as to lay bare the chalk beneath. The equestrian figure that their shovels were forming was scarcely intelligible to John and Anne now they were close, and after pacing from the horse's head down his breast to his hoof, back by way of the king's

bridle-arm, past the bridge of his nose, and into his cocked-hat, Anne said that she had had enough of it, and stepped out of the chalk clearing upon the grass. The trumpet-major had remained all the time in a melancholy attitude within the rowel of his Majesty's right spur.

'My shoes are caked with chalk,' she said as they walked downwards again; and she drew back her dress to look at them. 'How can I get some of it cleared off?'

'If you was to wipe them in the long grass there,' said John, pointing to a spot where the blades were rank and dense, 'some of it would come off.' Having said this, he walked on with religious firmness.

Anne raked her little feet on the right side, on the left side, over the toe, and behind the heel; but the tenacious chalk held its own. Panting with her exertion, she gave it up, and at length overtook him.

'I hope it is right now?' he said, looking gingerly over his shoulder.

'No, indeed!' said she. 'I wanted some assistance — some one to steady me. It is so hard to stand on one foot and wipe the other without support. I was in danger of toppling over, and so gave it up.'

'Merciful stars, what an opportunity!' thought the poor fellow while she waited for him to offer help. But his lips remained closed, and she went on with a pouting smile —

'You seem in such a hurry! Why are you in such a hurry? After all the fine things you have said about — about caring so much for me, and all that, you won't stop for anything!'

It was too much for John. 'Upon my heart and life, my dea — ' he began. Here Bob's letter crackled warningly in his waistcoat pocket as he laid his hand asseveratingly upon his breast, and he became suddenly scaled up to dumbness and gloom as before.

When they reached home Anne sank upon a stool outside the door, fatigued with her excursion. Her first act was to try to pull off her shoe — it was a difficult matter; but John stood beating with his switch the leaves of the creeper on the wall.

'Mother — David — Molly, or somebody — do come and help me pull off these dirty shoes!' she cried aloud at last. 'Nobody helps me in anything!'

'I am very sorry,' said John, coming towards her with incredible slowness and an air of unutterable depression.

'O, I can do without you. David is best,' she returned, as the old man approached and removed the obnoxious shoes in a trice.

Anne was amazed at this sudden change from devotion to crass indifference. On entering her room she flew to the glass, almost expecting to learn that some extraordinary change had come over her pretty countenance, rendering her intolerable for evermore. But it was, if anything, fresher than usual, on account of the exercise. 'Well!' she said retrospectively. For the first time since their acquaintance she had this week encouraged him; and for the first time he had shown that encouragement was useless. 'But perhaps he does not clearly understand,' she added serenely.

When he next came it was, to her surprise, to bring her newspapers, now for some time discontinued. As soon as she saw them she said, 'I do not care for newspapers.'

'The shipping news is very full and long to-day, though the print is rather small.'

'I take no further interest in the shipping news,' she replied with cold dignity.

She was sitting by the window, inside the table, and hence when, in spite of her negations, he deliberately unfolded the paper and began to read about the Royal Navy she could hardly rise and go away. With a stoical mien he read on to the end of the report, bringing out the name of Bob's ship with tremendous force.

'No,' she said at last, 'I'll hear no more! Let me read to you.'

The trumpet-major sat down. Anne turned to the military news, delivering every detail with much apparent enthusiasm. 'That's the subject I like!' she said fervently.

'But — but Bob is in the navy now, and will most likely rise to be an officer. And then —'

'What is there like the army?' she interrupted. 'There is no smartness about sailors. They waddle like ducks, and they only fight stupid battles that no one can form any idea of. There is no science nor stratagem in sea-fights — nothing more than what you see when two rams run their heads together in a field to knock each other down. But in military battles there is such art, and such splendour, and the men are so smart, particularly the horse-soldiers. O, I shall never forget what gallant men you all seemed when you came and pitched your tents on the downs! I like the cavalry better than anything I know; and the dragoons the best of the cavalry — and the trumpeters the best of the dragoons!'

'O, if it had but come a little sooner!' moaned John within him. He replied as soon as he could regain self-command, 'I am glad Bob is in the navy at last — he is so much more fitted for that than the merchant-service — so brave by nature, ready for any daring deed. I have heard ever so much more about his doings on board the Victory. Captain Hardy took special notice that when he —'

'I don't want to know anything more about it,' said Anne impatiently; 'of course sailors fight; there's nothing else to do in a ship, since you can't run away! You may as well fight and be killed as be killed not fighting.'

'Still it is his character to be careless of himself where the honour of his country is concerned,' John pleaded. 'If you had only known him as a boy you would own it. He would always risk his own life to save anybody else's. Once when a cottage was afire up the lane he rushed in for a baby, although he was only a boy himself, and he had the narrowest escape. We have got his hat now with the hole burnt in it. Shall I get it and show it to you?'

'No — I don't wish it. It has nothing to do with me.' But as he persisted in his course towards the door, she added, 'Ah! you are leaving because I am in your way. You want to be alone while you read the paper — I will go at once. I did not see that I was interrupting you.' And she rose as if to retreat.

'No, no! I would rather be interrupted by you than — O, Miss Garland, excuse me! I'll just speak to father in the mill, now I am here.'

It is scarcely necessary to state that Anne (whose unquestionable gentility amid somewhat homely surroundings has been many times insisted on in the course of this history) was usually the reverse of a woman with a coming-on disposition; but, whether from pique at his manner, or from wilful adherence to a course rashly resolved on, or from coquettish maliciousness in reaction from long depression, or from any other thing, — so it was that she would not let him go.

‘Trumpet-major,’ she said, recalling him.

‘Yes?’ he replied timidly.

‘The bow of my cap-ribbon has come untied, has it not?’ She turned and fixed her bewitching glance upon him.

The bow was just over her forehead, or, more precisely, at the point where the organ of comparison merges in that of benevolence, according to the phrenological theory of Gall. John, thus brought to, endeavoured to look at the bow in a skimming, duck-and-drake fashion, so as to avoid dipping his own glance as far as to the plane of his interrogator’s eyes. ‘It is untied,’ he said, drawing back a little.

She came nearer, and asked, ‘Will you tie it for me, please?’

As there was no help for it, he nerved himself and assented. As her head only reached to his fourth button she necessarily looked up for his convenience, and John began fumbling at the bow. Try as he would it was impossible to touch the ribbon without getting his finger tips mixed with the curls of her forehead.

‘Your hand shakes — ah! you have been walking fast,’ she said.

‘Yes — yes.’

‘Have you almost done it?’ She inquiringly directed her gaze upward through his fingers.

‘No — not yet,’ he faltered in a warm sweat of emotion, his heart going like a flail.

‘Then be quick, please.’

‘Yes, I will, Miss Garland! B-B-Bob is a very good fel — ’

‘Not that man’s name to me!’ she interrupted.

John was silent instantly, and nothing was to be heard but the rustling of the ribbon; till his hands once more blundered among the curls, and then touched her forehead.

‘O good God!’ ejaculated the trumpet-major in a whisper, turning away hastily to the corner-cupboard, and resting his face upon his hand.

‘What’s the matter, John?’ said she.

‘I can’t do it!’

‘What?’

‘Tie your cap-ribbon.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because you are so — Because I am clumsy, and never could tie a bow.’

‘You are clumsy indeed,’ answered Anne, and went away.

After this she felt injured, for it seemed to show that he rated her happiness as of meaner value than Bob’s; since he had persisted in his idea of giving Bob another chance when she had implied that it was her wish to do otherwise. Could Miss Johnson

have anything to do with his firmness? An opportunity of testing him in this direction occurred some days later. She had been up the village, and met John at the mill-door.

‘Have you heard the news? Matilda Johnson is going to be married to young Derri-man.’

Anne stood with her back to the sun, and as he faced her, his features were searchingly exhibited. There was no change whatever in them, unless it were that a certain light of interest kindled by her question turned to complete and blank indifference. ‘Well, as times go, it is not a bad match for her,’ he said, with a phlegm which was hardly that of a lover.

John on his part was beginning to find these temptations almost more than he could bear. But being quartered so near to his father’s house it was unnatural not to visit him, especially when at any moment the regiment might be ordered abroad, and a separation of years ensue; and as long as he went there he could not help seeing her.

The year changed from green to gold, and from gold to grey, but little change came over the house of Loveday. During the last twelve months Bob had been occasionally heard of as upholding his country’s honour in Denmark, the West Indies, Gibraltar, Malta, and other places about the globe, till the family received a short letter stating that he had arrived again at Portsmouth. At Portsmouth Bob seemed disposed to remain, for though some time elapsed without further intelligence, the gallant seaman never appeared at Overcombe. Then on a sudden John learnt that Bob’s long-talked-of promotion for signal services rendered was to be an accomplished fact. The trumpet-major at once walked off to Overcombe, and reached the village in the early afternoon. Not one of the family was in the house at the moment, and John strolled onwards over the hill towards Casterbridge, without much thought of direction till, lifting his eyes, he beheld Anne Garland wandering about with a little basket upon her arm.

At first John blushed with delight at the sweet vision; but, recalled by his conscience, the blush of delight was at once mangled and slain. He looked for a means of retreat. But the field was open, and a soldier was a conspicuous object: there was no escaping her.

‘It was kind of you to come,’ she said, with an inviting smile.

‘It was quite by accident,’ he answered, with an indifferent laugh. ‘I thought you was at home.’

Anne blushed and said nothing, and they rambled on together. In the middle of the field rose a fragment of stone wall in the form of a gable, known as Faringdon Ruin; and when they had reached it John paused and politely asked her if she were not a little tired with walking so far. No particular reply was returned by the young lady, but they both stopped, and Anne seated herself on a stone, which had fallen from the ruin to the ground.

‘A church once stood here,’ observed John in a matter-of-fact tone.

‘Yes, I have often shaped it out in my mind,’ she returned. ‘Here where I sit must have been the altar.’

‘True; this standing bit of wall was the chancel end.’

Anne had been adding up her little studies of the trumpet-major's character, and was surprised to find how the brightness of that character increased in her eyes with each examination. A kindly and gentle sensation was again aroused in her. Here was a neglected heroic man, who, loving her to distraction, deliberately doomed himself to pensive shade to avoid even the appearance of standing in a brother's way.

'If the altar stood here, hundreds of people have been made man and wife just there, in past times,' she said, with calm deliberateness, throwing a little stone on a spot about a yard westward.

John annihilated another tender burst and replied, 'Yes, this field used to be a village. My grandfather could call to mind when there were houses here. But the squire pulled 'em down, because poor folk were an eyesore to him.'

'Do you know, John, what you once asked me to do?' she continued, not accepting the digression, and turning her eyes upon him.

'In what sort of way?'

'In the matter of my future life, and yours.'

'I am afraid I don't.'

'John Loveday!'

He turned his back upon her for a moment, that she might not see his face. 'Ah — I do remember,' he said at last, in a dry, small, repressed voice.

'Well — need I say more? Isn't it sufficient?'

'It would be sufficient,' answered the unhappy man. 'But — '

She looked up with a reproachful smile, and shook her head. 'That summer,' she went on, 'you asked me ten times if you asked me once. I am older now; much more of a woman, you know; and my opinion is changed about some people; especially about one.'

'O Anne, Anne!' he burst out as, racked between honour and desire, he snatched up her hand. The next moment it fell heavily to her lap. He had absolutely relinquished it half-way to his lips.

'I have been thinking lately,' he said, with preternaturally sudden calmness, 'that men of the military profession ought not to m — ought to be like St. Paul, I mean.'

'Fie, John; pretending religion!' she said sternly. 'It isn't that at all. It's Bob!'

'Yes!' cried the miserable trumpet-major. 'I have had a letter from him to-day.' He pulled out a sheet of paper from his breast. 'That's it! He's promoted — he's a lieutenant, and appointed to a sloop that only cruises on our own coast, so that he'll be at home on leave half his time — he'll be a gentleman some day, and worthy of you!'

He threw the letter into her lap, and drew back to the other side of the gable-wall. Anne jumped up from her seat, flung away the letter without looking at it, and went hastily on. John did not attempt to overtake her. Picking up the letter, he followed in her wake at a distance of a hundred yards.

But, though Anne had withdrawn from his presence thus precipitately, she never thought more highly of him in her life than she did five minutes afterwards, when the

excitement of the moment had passed. She saw it all quite clearly; and his self-sacrifice impressed her so much that the effect was just the reverse of what he had been aiming to produce. The more he pleaded for Bob, the more her perverse generosity pleaded for John. To-day the crisis had come — with what results she had not foreseen.

As soon as the trumpet-major reached the nearest pen-and-ink he flung himself into a seat and wrote wildly to Bob: —

‘Dear Robert, — I write these few lines to let you know that if you want Anne Garland you must come at once — you must come instantly, and post-haste — or she will be gone! Somebody else wants her, and she wants him! It is your last chance, in the opinion of —

‘Your faithful brother and well-wisher,

‘John.

‘P.S. — Glad to hear of your promotion. Tell me the day and I’ll meet the coach.’

CHAPTER XXXIX.

BOB LOVEDAY STRUTS UP AND DOWN

One night, about a week later, two men were walking in the dark along the turnpike road towards Overcombe, one of them with a bag in his hand.

‘Now,’ said the taller of the two, the squareness of whose shoulders signified that he wore epaulettes, ‘now you must do the best you can for yourself, Bob. I have done all I can; but th’ast thy work cut out, I can tell thee.’

‘I wouldn’t have run such a risk for the world,’ said the other, in a tone of ingenuous contrition. ‘But thou’st see, Jack, I didn’t think there was any danger, knowing you was taking care of her, and keeping my place warm for me. I didn’t hurry myself, that’s true; but, thinks I, if I get this promotion I am promised I shall naturally have leave, and then I’ll go and see ‘em all. Gad, I shouldn’t have been here now but for your letter!’

‘You little think what risks you’ve run,’ said his brother. ‘However, try to make up for lost time.’

‘All right. And whatever you do, Jack, don’t say a word about this other girl. Hang the girl! — I was a great fool, I know; still, it is over now, and I am come to my senses. I suppose Anne never caught a capful of wind from that quarter?’

‘She knows all about it,’ said John seriously.

‘Knows? By George, then, I’m ruined!’ said Bob, standing stock-still in the road as if he meant to remain there all night.

‘That’s what I meant by saying it would be a hard battle for ‘ee,’ returned John, with the same quietness as before.

Bob sighed and moved on. ‘I don’t deserve that woman!’ he cried passionately, thumping his three upper ribs with his fist.

‘I’ve thought as much myself,’ observed John, with a dryness which was almost bitter. ‘But it depends on how thou’st behave in future.’

‘John,’ said Bob, taking his brother’s hand, ‘I’ll be a new man. I solemnly swear by that eternal milestone staring at me there that I’ll never look at another woman with the thought of marrying her whilst that darling is free — no, not if she be a mermaid of light! It’s a lucky thing that I’m slipped in on the quarterdeck! it may help me with her — hey?’

‘It may with her mother; I don’t think it will make much difference with Anne. Still, it is a good thing; and I hope that some day you’ll command a big ship.’

Bob shook his head. ‘Officers are scarce; but I’m afraid my luck won’t carry me so far as that.’

‘Did she ever tell you that she mentioned your name to the King?’

The seaman stood still again. ‘Never!’ he said. ‘How did such a thing as that happen, in Heaven’s name?’

John described in detail, and they walked on, lost in conjecture.

As soon as they entered the house the returned officer of the navy was welcomed with acclamation by his father and David, with mild approval by Mrs. Loveday, and by Anne not at all — that discreet maiden having carefully retired to her own room some time earlier in the evening. Bob did not dare to ask for her in any positive manner; he just inquired about her health, and that was all.

‘Why, what’s the matter with thy face, my son?’ said the miller, staring. ‘David, show a light here.’ And a candle was thrust against Bob’s cheek, where there appeared a jagged streak like the geological remains of a lobster.

‘O — that’s where that rascally Frenchman’s grenade busted and hit me from the Redoubtable, you know, as I told ‘ee in my letter.’

‘Not a word!’

‘What, didn’t I tell ‘ee? Ah, no; I meant to, but I forgot it.’

‘And here’s a sort of dint in yer forehead too; what do that mean, my dear boy?’ said the miller, putting his finger in a chasm in Bob’s skull.

‘That was done in the Indies. Yes, that was rather a troublesome chop — a cutlass did it. I should have told ‘ee, but I found ‘twould make my letter so long that I put it off, and put it off; and at last thought it wasn’t worth while.’

John soon rose to take his departure.

‘It’s all up with me and her, you see,’ said Bob to him outside the door. ‘She’s not even going to see me.’

‘Wait a little,’ said the trumpet-major. It was easy enough on the night of the arrival, in the midst of excitement, when blood was warm, for Anne to be resolute in her avoidance of Bob Loveday. But in the morning determination is apt to grow invertebrate; rules of pugnacity are less easily acted up to, and a feeling of live and let live takes possession of the gentle soul. Anne had not meant even to sit down to the same breakfast-table with Bob; but when the rest were assembled, and had got some way through the substantial repast which was served at this hour in the miller’s house,

Anne entered. She came silently as a phantom, her eyes cast down, her cheeks pale. It was a good long walk from the door to the table, and Bob made a full inspection of her as she came up to a chair at the remotest corner, in the direct rays of the morning light, where she dumbly sat herself down.

It was altogether different from how she had expected. Here was she, who had done nothing, feeling all the embarrassment; and Bob, who had done the wrong, feeling apparently quite at ease.

‘You’ll speak to Bob, won’t you, honey?’ said the miller after a silence. To meet Bob like this after an absence seemed irregular in his eyes.

‘If he wish me to,’ she replied, so addressing the miller that no part, scrap, or outlying beam whatever of her glance passed near the subject of her remark.

‘He’s a lieutenant, you know, dear,’ said her mother on the same side; ‘and he’s been dreadfully wounded.’

‘Oh?’ said Anne, turning a little towards the false one; at which Bob felt it to be time for him to put in a spoke for himself.

‘I am glad to see you,’ he said contritely; ‘and how do you do?’

‘Very well, thank you.’

He extended his hand. She allowed him to take hers, but only to the extent of a niggardly inch or so. At the same moment she glanced up at him, when their eyes met, and hers were again withdrawn.

The hitch between the two younger members of the household tended to make the breakfast a dull one. Bob was so depressed by her unforgiving manner that he could not throw that sparkle into his stories which their substance naturally required; and when the meal was over, and they went about their different businesses, the pair resembled the two Dromios in seldom or never being, thanks to Anne’s subtle contrivances, both in the same room at the same time.

This kind of performance repeated itself during several days. At last, after dogging her hither and thither, leaning with a wrinkled forehead against doorposts, taking an oblique view into the room where she happened to be, picking up worsted balls and getting no thanks, placing a splinter from the Victory, several bullets from the Redoubtable, a strip of the flag, and other interesting relics, carefully labelled, upon her table, and hearing no more about them than if they had been pebbles from the nearest brook, he hit upon a new plan. To avoid him she frequently sat upstairs in a window overlooking the garden. Lieutenant Loveday carefully dressed himself in a new uniform, which he had caused to be sent some days before, to dazzle admiring friends, but which he had never as yet put on in public or mentioned to a soul. When arrayed he entered the sunny garden, and there walked slowly up and down as he had seen Nelson and Captain Hardy do on the quarter-deck; but keeping his right shoulder, on which his one epaulette was fixed, as much towards Anne’s window as possible.

But she made no sign, though there was not the least question that she saw him. At the end of half-an-hour he went in, took off his clothes, and gave himself up to doubt and the best tobacco.

He repeated the programme on the next afternoon, and on the next, never saying a word within doors about his doings or his notice.

Meanwhile the results in Anne's chamber were not uninteresting. She had been looking out on the first day, and was duly amazed to see a naval officer in full uniform promenading in the path. Finding it to be Bob, she left the window with a sense that the scene was not for her; then, from mere curiosity, peeped out from behind the curtain. Well, he was a pretty spectacle, she admitted, relieved as his figure was by a dense mass of sunny, close-trimmed hedge, over which nasturtiums climbed in wild luxuriance; and if she could care for him one bit, which she couldn't, his form would have been a delightful study, surpassing in interest even its splendour on the memorable day of their visit to the town theatre. She called her mother; Mrs. Loveday came promptly.

'O, it is nothing,' said Anne indifferently; 'only that Bob has got his uniform.'

Mrs. Loveday peeped out, and raised her hands with delight. 'And he has not said a word to us about it! What a lovely epaulette! I must call his father.'

'No, indeed. As I take no interest in him I shall not let people come into my room to admire him.'

'Well, you called me,' said her mother.

'It was because I thought you liked fine clothes. It is what I don't care for.'

Notwithstanding this assertion she again looked out at Bob the next afternoon when his footsteps rustled on the gravel, and studied his appearance under all the varying angles of the sunlight, as if fine clothes and uniforms were not altogether a matter of indifference. He certainly was a splendid, gentlemanly, and gallant sailor from end to end of him; but then, what were a dashing presentment, a naval rank, and telling scars, if a man was fickle-hearted? However, she peeped on till the fourth day, and then she did not peep. The window was open, she looked right out, and Bob knew that he had got a rise to his bait at last. He touched his hat to her, keeping his right shoulder forwards, and said, 'Good-day, Miss Garland,' with a smile.

Anne replied, 'Good-day,' with funereal seriousness; and the acquaintance thus revived led to the interchange of a few words at supper-time, at which Mrs. Loveday nodded with satisfaction. But Anne took especial care that he should never meet her alone, and to insure this her ingenuity was in constant exercise. There were so many nooks and windings on the miller's rambling premises that she could never be sure he would not turn up within a foot of her, particularly as his thin shoes were almost noiseless.

One fine afternoon she accompanied Molly in search of elderberries for making the family wine which was drunk by Mrs. Loveday, Anne, and anybody who could not stand the rougher and stronger liquors provided by the miller. After walking rather a long distance over the down they came to a grassy hollow, where elder-bushes in knots of twos and threes rose from an uneven bank and hung their heads towards the south, black and heavy with bunches of fruit. The charm of fruit-gathering to girls is enhanced in the case of elderberries by the inoffensive softness of the leaves,

boughs, and bark, which makes getting into the branches easy and pleasant to the most indifferent climbers. Anne and Molly had soon gathered a basketful, and sending the servant home with it, Anne remained in the bush picking and throwing down bunch by bunch upon the grass. She was so absorbed in her occupation of pulling the twigs towards her, and the rustling of their leaves so filled her ears, that it was a great surprise when, on turning her head, she perceived a similar movement to her own among the boughs of the adjoining bush.

At first she thought they were disturbed by being partly in contact with the boughs of her bush; but in a moment Robert Loveday's face peered from them, at a distance of about a yard from her own. Anne uttered a little indignant 'Well!' recovered herself, and went on plucking. Bob thereupon went on plucking likewise.

'I am picking elderberries for your mother,' said the lieutenant at last, humbly.

'So I see.'

'And I happen to have come to the next bush to yours.'

'So I see; but not the reason why.'

Anne was now in the westernmost branches of the bush, and Bob had leant across into the eastern branches of his. In gathering he swayed towards her, back again, forward again.

'I beg pardon,' he said, when a further swing than usual had taken him almost in contact with her.

'Then why do you do it?'

'The wind rocks the bough, and the bough rocks me.' She expressed by a look her opinion of this statement in the face of the gentlest breeze; and Bob pursued: 'I am afraid the berries will stain your pretty hands.'

'I wear gloves.'

'Ah, that's a plan I should never have thought of. Can I help you?'

'Not at all.'

'You are offended: that's what that means.'

'No,' she said.

'Then will you shake hands?'

Anne hesitated; then slowly stretched out her hand, which he took at once. 'That will do,' she said, finding that he did not relinquish it immediately. But as he still held it, she pulled, the effect of which was to draw Bob's swaying person, bough and all, towards her, and herself towards him.

'I am afraid to let go your hand,' said that officer, 'for if I do your spar will fly back, and you will be thrown upon the deck with great violence.'

'I wish you to let me go!'

He accordingly did, and she flew back, but did not by any means fall.

'It reminds me of the times when I used to be aloft clinging to a yard not much bigger than this tree-stem, in the mid-Atlantic, and thinking about you. I could see you in my fancy as plain as I see you now.'

'Me, or some other woman!' retorted Anne haughtily.

‘No!’ declared Bob, shaking the bush for emphasis, ‘I’ll protest that I did not think of anybody but you all the time we were dropping down channel, all the time we were off Cadiz, all the time through battles and bombardments. I seemed to see you in the smoke, and, thinks I, if I go to Davy’s locker, what will she do?’

‘You didn’t think that when you landed after Trafalgar.’

‘Well, now,’ said the lieutenant in a reasoning tone; ‘that was a curious thing. You’ll hardly believe it, maybe; but when a man is away from the woman he loves best in the port — world, I mean — he can have a sort of temporary feeling for another without disturbing the old one, which flows along under the same as ever.’

‘I can’t believe it, and won’t,’ said Anne firmly.

Molly now appeared with the empty basket, and when it had been filled from the heap on the grass, Anne went home with her, bidding Loveday a frigid adieu.

The same evening, when Bob was absent, the miller proposed that they should all three go to an upper window of the house, to get a distant view of some rockets and illuminations which were to be exhibited in the town and harbour in honour of the King, who had returned this year as usual. They accordingly went upstairs to an empty attic, placed chairs against the window, and put out the light; Anne sitting in the middle, her mother close by, and the miller behind, smoking. No sign of any pyrotechnic display was visible over the port as yet, and Mrs. Loveday passed the time by talking to the miller, who replied in monosyllables. While this was going on Anne fancied that she heard some one approach, and presently felt sure that Bob was drawing near her in the surrounding darkness; but as the other two had noticed nothing she said not a word.

All at once the swarthy expanse of southward sky was broken by the blaze of several rockets simultaneously ascending from different ships in the roads. At the very same moment a warm mysterious hand slipped round her own, and gave it a gentle squeeze.

‘O dear!’ said Anne, with a sudden start away.

‘How nervous you are, child, to be startled by fireworks so far off,’ said Mrs. Loveday.

‘I never saw rockets before,’ murmured Anne, recovering from her surprise.

Mrs. Loveday presently spoke again. ‘I wonder what has become of Bob?’

Anne did not reply, being much exercised in trying to get her hand away from the one that imprisoned it; and whatever the miller thought he kept to himself, because it disturbed his smoking to speak.

Another batch of rockets went up. ‘O I never!’ said Anne, in a half-suppressed tone, springing in her chair. A second hand had with the rise of the rockets leapt round her waist.

‘Poor girl, you certainly must have change of scene at this rate,’ said Mrs. Loveday.

‘I suppose I must,’ murmured the dutiful daughter.

For some minutes nothing further occurred to disturb Anne’s serenity. Then a slow, quiet ‘a-hem’ came from the obscurity of the apartment.

‘What, Bob? How long have you been there?’ inquired Mrs. Loveday.

‘Not long,’ said the lieutenant coolly. ‘I heard you were all here, and crept up quietly, not to disturb ye.’

‘Why don’t you wear heels to your shoes like Christian people, and not creep about so like a cat?’

‘Well, it keeps your floors clean to go slip-shod.’

‘That’s true.’

Meanwhile Anne was gently but firmly trying to pull Bob’s arm from her waist, her distressful difficulty being that in freeing her waist she enslaved her hand, and in getting her hand free she enslaved her waist. Finding the struggle a futile one, owing to the invisibility of her antagonist, and her wish to keep its nature secret from the other two, she arose, and saying that she did not care to see any more, felt her way downstairs. Bob followed, leaving Loveday and his wife to themselves.

‘Dear Anne,’ he began, when he had got down, and saw her in the candle-light of the large room. But she adroitly passed out at the other door, at which he took a candle and followed her to the small room. ‘Dear Anne, do let me speak,’ he repeated, as soon as the rays revealed her figure. But she passed into the bakehouse before he could say more; whereupon he perseveringly did the same. Looking round for her here he perceived her at the end of the room, where there were no means of exit whatever.

‘Dear Anne,’ he began again, setting down the candle, ‘you must try to forgive me; really you must. I love you the best of anybody in the wide, wide world. Try to forgive me; come!’ And he imploringly took her hand.

Anne’s bosom began to surge and fall like a small tide, her eyes remaining fixed upon the floor; till, when Loveday ventured to draw her slightly towards him, she burst out crying. ‘I don’t like you, Bob; I don’t!’ she suddenly exclaimed between her sobs. ‘I did once, but I don’t now — I can’t, I can’t; you have been very cruel to me!’ She violently turned away, weeping.

‘I have, I have been terribly bad, I know,’ answered Bob, conscience-stricken by her grief. ‘But — if you could only forgive me — I promise that I’ll never do anything to grieve ‘ee again. Do you forgive me, Anne?’

Anne’s only reply was crying and shaking her head.

‘Let’s make it up. Come, say we have made it up, dear.’

She withdrew her hand, and still keeping her eyes buried in her handkerchief, said ‘No.’

‘Very well, then!’ exclaimed Bob, with sudden determination. ‘Now I know my doom! And whatever you hear of as happening to me, mind this, you cruel girl, that it is all your causing!’ Saying this he strode with a hasty tread across the room into the passage and out at the door, slamming it loudly behind him.

Anne suddenly looked up from her handkerchief, and stared with round wet eyes and parted lips at the door by which he had gone. Having remained with suspended breath in this attitude for a few seconds she turned round, bent her head upon the table, and burst out weeping anew with thrice the violence of the former time. It really seemed now as if her grief would overwhelm her, all the emotions which had been suppressed, bottled up, and concealed since Bob’s return having made themselves a sluice at last.

But such things have their end; and left to herself in the large, vacant, old apartment, she grew quieter, and at last calm. At length she took the candle and ascended to her bedroom, where she bathed her eyes and looked in the glass to see if she had made herself a dreadful object. It was not so bad as she had expected, and she went downstairs again.

Nobody was there, and, sitting down, she wondered what Bob had really meant by his words. It was too dreadful to think that he intended to go straight away to sea without seeing her again, and frightened at what she had done she waited anxiously for his return.

CHAPTER XL.

A CALL ON BUSINESS

Her suspense was interrupted by a very gentle tapping at the door, and then the rustle of a hand over its surface, as if searching for the latch in the dark. The door opened a few inches, and the alabaster face of Uncle Benjy appeared in the slit.

‘O, Squire Derriman, you frighten me!’

‘All alone?’ he asked in a whisper.

‘My mother and Mr. Loveday are somewhere about the house.’

‘That will do,’ he said, coming forward. ‘I be wherrited out of my life, and I have thought of you again — you yourself, dear Anne, and not the miller. If you will only take this and lock it up for a few days till I can find another good place for it — if you only would!’ And he breathlessly deposited the tin box on the table.

‘What, obliged to dig it up from the cellar?’

‘Ay; my nephew hath a scent of the place — how, I don’t know! but he and a young woman he’s met with are searching everywhere. I worked like a wire-drawer to get it up and away while they were scraping in the next cellar. Now where could ye put it, dear? ‘Tis only a few documents, and my will, and such like, you know. Poor soul o’ me, I’m worn out with running and fright!’

‘I’ll put it here till I can think of a better place,’ said Anne, lifting the box. ‘Dear me, how heavy it is!’

‘Yes, yes,’ said Uncle Benjy hastily; ‘the box is iron, you see. However, take care of it, because I am going to make it worth your while. Ah, you are a good girl, Anne. I wish you was mine!’

Anne looked at Uncle Benjy. She had known for some time that she possessed all the affection he had to bestow.

‘Why do you wish that?’ she said simply.

‘Now don’t ye argue with me. Where d’ye put the coffer?’

‘Here,’ said Anne, going to the window-seat, which rose as a flap, disclosing a boxed receptacle beneath, as in many old houses.

“Tis very well for the present,’ he said dubiously, and they dropped the coffer in, Anne locking down the seat, and giving him the key. ‘Now I don’t want ye to be on my side for nothing,’ he went on. ‘I never did now, did I? This is for you.’ He handed her a little packet of paper, which Anne turned over and looked at curiously. ‘I always meant to do it,’ continued Uncle Benjy, gazing at the packet as it lay in her hand, and sighing. ‘Come, open it, my dear; I always meant to do it!’

She opened it and found twenty new guineas snugly packed within.

‘Yes, they are for you. I always meant to do it!’ he said, sighing again.

‘But you owe me nothing!’ returned Anne, holding them out.

‘Don’t say it!’ cried Uncle Benjy, covering his eyes. ‘Put ‘em away. . . . Well, if you don’t want ‘em — But put ‘em away, dear Anne; they are for you, because you have kept my counsel. Good-night t’ye. Yes, they are for you.’

He went a few steps, and turning back added anxiously, ‘You won’t spend ‘em in clothes, or waste ‘em in fairings, or ornaments of any kind, my dear girl?’

‘I will not,’ said Anne. ‘I wish you would have them.’

‘No, no,’ said Uncle Benjy, rushing off to escape their shine. But he had got no further than the passage when he returned again.

‘And you won’t lend ‘em to anybody, or put ‘em into the bank — for no bank is safe in these troublous times? . . . If I was you I’d keep them exactly as they be, and not spend ‘em on any account. Shall I lock them into my box for ye?’

‘Certainly,’ said she; and the farmer rapidly unlocked the window-bench, opened the box, and locked them in.

“Tis much the best plan,’ he said with great satisfaction as he returned the keys to his pocket. ‘There they will always be safe, you see, and you won’t be exposed to temptation.’

When the old man had been gone a few minutes, the miller and his wife came in, quite unconscious of all that had passed. Anne’s anxiety about Bob was again uppermost now, and she spoke but meagrely of old Derriman’s visit, and nothing of what he had left. She would fain have asked them if they knew where Bob was, but that she did not wish to inform them of the rupture. She was forced to admit to herself that she had somewhat tried his patience, and that impulsive men had been known to do dark things with themselves at such times.

They sat down to supper, the clock ticked rapidly on, and at length the miller said, ‘Bob is later than usual. Where can he be?’

As they both looked at her, she could no longer keep the secret.

‘It is my fault,’ she cried; ‘I have driven him away! What shall I do?’

The nature of the quarrel was at once guessed, and her two elders said no more. Anne rose and went to the front door, where she listened for every sound with a palpitating heart. Then she went in; then she went out: and on one occasion she heard the miller say, ‘I wonder what hath passed between Bob and Anne. I hope the chap will come home.’

Just about this time light footsteps were heard without, and Bob bounced into the passage. Anne, who stood back in the dark while he passed, followed him into the room, where her mother and the miller were on the point of retiring to bed, candle in hand.

‘I have kept ye up, I fear,’ began Bob cheerily, and apparently without the faintest recollection of his tragic exit from the house. ‘But the truth on’t is, I met with Fess Derriman at the “Duke of York” as I went from here, and there we have been playing Put ever since, not noticing how the time was going. I haven’t had a good chat with the fellow for years and years, and really he is an out and out good comrade — a regular hearty! Poor fellow, he’s been very badly used. I never heard the rights of the story till now; but it seems that old uncle of his treats him shamefully. He has been hiding away his money, so that poor Fess might not have a farthing, till at last the young man has turned, like any other worm, and is now determined to ferret out what he has done with it. The poor young chap hadn’t a farthing of ready money till I lent him a couple of guineas — a thing I never did more willingly in my life. But the man was very honourable. “No; no,” says he, “don’t let me deprive ye.” He’s going to marry, and what may you think he is going to do it for?’

‘For love, I hope,’ said Anne’s mother.

‘For money, I suppose, since he’s so short,’ said the miller.

‘No,’ said Bob, ‘for spite. He has been badly served — deuced badly served — by a woman. I never heard of a more heartless case in my life. The poor chap wouldn’t mention names, but it seems this young woman has trifled with him in all manner of cruel ways — pushed him into the river, tried to steal his horse when he was called out to defend his country — in short, served him rascally. So I gave him the two guineas and said, “Now let’s drink to the hussy’s downfall!”’

‘O!’ said Anne, having approached behind him.

Bob turned and saw her, and at the same moment Mr. and Mrs. Loveday discreetly retired by the other door.

‘Is it peace?’ he asked tenderly.

‘O yes,’ she anxiously replied. ‘I — didn’t mean to make you think I had no heart.’ At this Bob inclined his countenance towards hers. ‘No,’ she said, smiling through two incipient tears as she drew back. ‘You are to show good behaviour for six months, and you must promise not to frighten me again by running off when I — show you how badly you have served me.’

‘I am yours obedient — in anything,’ cried Bob. ‘But am I pardoned?’

Youth is foolish; and does a woman often let her reasoning in favour of the worthier stand in the way of her perverse desire for the less worthy at such times as these? She murmured some soft words, ending with ‘Do you repent?’

It would be superfluous to transcribe Bob’s answer.

Footsteps were heard without.

‘O begad; I forgot!’ said Bob. ‘He’s waiting out there for a light.’

‘Who?’

‘My friend Derriman.’

‘But, Bob, I have to explain.’

But Festus had by this time entered the lobby, and Anne, with a hasty ‘Get rid of him at once!’ vanished upstairs.

Here she waited and waited, but Festus did not seem inclined to depart; and at last, foreboding some collision of interests from Bob’s new friendship for this man, she crept into a storeroom which was over the apartment into which Loveday and Festus had gone. By looking through a knot-hole in the floor it was easy to command a view of the room beneath, this being unceiled, with moulded beams and rafters.

Festus had sat down on the hollow window-bench, and was continuing the statement of his wrongs. ‘If he only knew what he was sitting upon,’ she thought apprehensively, ‘how easily he could tear up the flap, lock and all, with his strong arm, and seize upon poor Uncle Benjy’s possessions!’ But he did not appear to know, unless he were acting, which was just possible. After a while he rose, and going to the table lifted the candle to light his pipe. At the moment when the flame began diving into the bowl the door noiselessly opened and a figure slipped across the room to the window-bench, hastily unlocked it, withdrew the box, and beat a retreat. Anne in a moment recognized the ghostly intruder as Festus Derriman’s uncle. Before he could get out of the room Festus set down the candle and turned.

‘What — Uncle Benjy — haw, haw! Here at this time of night?’

Uncle Benjy’s eyes grew paralyzed, and his mouth opened and shut like a frog’s in a drought, the action producing no sound.

‘What have we got here — a tin box — the box of boxes? Why, I’ll carry it for ‘ee, uncle! — I am going home.’

‘N-no-no, thanky, Festus: it is n-n-not heavy at all, thanky,’ gasped the squireen.

‘O but I must,’ said Festus, pulling at the box.

‘Don’t let him have it, Bob!’ screamed the excited Anne through the hole in the floor.

‘No, don’t let him!’ cried the uncle. ‘‘Tis a plot — there’s a woman at the window waiting to help him!’

Anne’s eyes flew to the window, and she saw Matilda’s face pressed against the pane.

Bob, though he did not know whence Anne’s command proceeded obeyed with alacrity, pulled the box from the two relatives, and placed it on the table beside him.

‘Now, look here, hearties; what’s the meaning o’ this?’ he said.

‘He’s trying to rob me of all I possess!’ cried the old man. ‘My heart-strings seem as if they were going crack, crack, crack!’

At this instant the miller in his shirt-sleeves entered the room, having got thus far in his undressing when he heard the noise. Bob and Festus turned to him to explain; and when the latter had had his say Bob added, ‘Well, all I know is that this box’ — here he stretched out his hand to lay it upon the lid for emphasis. But as nothing but

thin air met his fingers where the box had been, he turned, and found that the box was gone, Uncle Benjy having vanished also.

Festus, with an imprecation, hastened to the door, but though the night was not dark Farmer Derriman and his burden were nowhere to be seen. On the bridge Festus joined a shadowy female form, and they went along the road together, followed for some distance by Bob, lest they should meet with and harm the old man. But the precaution was unnecessary: nowhere on the road was there any sign of Farmer Derriman, or of the box that belonged to him. When Bob re-entered the house Anne and Mrs. Loveday had joined the miller downstairs, and then for the first time he learnt who had been the heroine of Festus's lamentable story, with many other particulars of that yeoman's history which he had never before known. Bob swore that he would not speak to the traitor again, and the family retired.

The escape of old Mr. Derriman from the annoyances of his nephew not only held good for that night, but for next day, and for ever. Just after dawn on the following morning a labouring man, who was going to his work, saw the old farmer and landowner leaning over a rail in a mead near his house, apparently engaged in contemplating the water of a brook before him. Drawing near, the man spoke, but Uncle Benjy did not reply. His head was hanging strangely, his body being supported in its erect position entirely by the rail that passed under each arm. On after-examination it was found that Uncle Benjy's poor withered heart had cracked and stopped its beating from damages inflicted on it by the excitements of his life, and of the previous night in particular. The unconscious carcass was little more than a light empty husk, dry and fleshless as that of a dead heron found on a moor in January.

But the tin box was not discovered with or near him. It was searched for all the week, and all the month. The mill-pond was dragged, quarries were examined, woods were threaded, rewards were offered; but in vain.

At length one day in the spring, when the mill-house was about to be cleaned throughout, the chimney-board of Anne's bedroom, concealing a yawning fire-place, had to be taken down. In the chasm behind it stood the missing deed-box of Farmer Derriman.

Many were the conjectures as to how it had got there. Then Anne remembered that on going to bed on the night of the collision between Festus and his uncle in the room below, she had seen mud on the carpet of her room, and the miller remembered that he had seen footprints on the back staircase. The solution of the mystery seemed to be that the late Uncle Benjy, instead of running off from the house with his box, had doubled on getting out of the front door, entered at the back, deposited his box in Anne's chamber where it was found, and then leisurely pursued his way home at the heels of Festus, intending to tell Anne of his trick the next day — an intention that was for ever frustrated by the stroke of death.

Mr. Derriman's solicitor was a Casterbridge man, and Anne placed the box in his hands. Uncle Benjy's will was discovered within; and by this testament Anne's queer old friend appointed her sole executrix of his said will, and, more than that, gave and

bequeathed to the same young lady all his real and personal estate, with the solitary exception of five small freehold houses in a back street in Budmouth, which were devised to his nephew Festus, as a sufficient property to maintain him decently, without affording any margin for extravagances. Oxwell Hall, with its muddy quadrangle, archways, mullioned windows, cracked battlements, and weed-grown garden, passed with the rest into the hands of Anne.

CHAPTER XLI.

JOHN MARCHES INTO THE NIGHT

During this exciting time John Loveday seldom or never appeared at the mill. With the recall of Bob, in which he had been sole agent, his mission seemed to be complete.

One mid-day, before Anne had made any change in her manner of living on account of her unexpected acquisition, Lieutenant Bob came in rather suddenly. He had been to Budmouth, and announced to the arrested senses of the family that the — th Dragoons were ordered to join Sir Arthur Wellesley in the Peninsula.

These tidings produced a great impression on the household. John had been so long in the neighbourhood, either at camp or in barracks, that they had almost forgotten the possibility of his being sent away; and they now began to reflect upon the singular infrequency of his calls since his brother's return. There was not much time, however, for reflection, if they wished to make the most of John's farewell visit, which was to be paid the same evening, the departure of the regiment being fixed for next day. A hurried valedictory supper was prepared during the afternoon, and shortly afterwards John arrived.

He seemed to be more thoughtful and a trifle paler than of old, but beyond these traces, which might have been due to the natural wear and tear of time, he showed no signs of gloom. On his way through the town that morning a curious little incident had occurred to him. He was walking past one of the churches when a wedding-party came forth, the bride and bridegroom being Matilda and Festus Derriman. At sight of the trumpet-major the yeoman had glared triumphantly; Matilda, on her part, had winked at him slyly, as much as to say — . But what she meant heaven knows: the trumpet-major did not trouble himself to think, and passed on without returning the mark of confidence with which she had favoured him.

Soon after John's arrival at the mill several of his friends dropped in for the same purpose of bidding adieu. They were mostly the men who had been entertained there on the occasion of the regiment's advent on the down, when Anne and her mother were coaxed in to grace the party by their superior presence; and their well-trained, gallant manners were such as to make them interesting visitors now as at all times. For it was a period when romance had not so greatly faded out of military life as it has done in these days of short service, heterogeneous mixing, and transient campaigns; when the esprit de corps was strong, and long experience stamped noteworthy professional

characteristics even on rank and file; while the miller's visitors had the additional advantage of being picked men.

They could not stay so long to-night as on that earlier and more cheerful occasion, and the final adieus were spoken at an early hour. It was no mere playing at departure, as when they had gone to Exonbury barracks, and there was a warm and prolonged shaking of hands all round.

'You'll wish the poor fellows good-bye?' said Bob to Anne, who had not come forward for that purpose like the rest. 'They are going away, and would like to have your good word.'

She then shyly advanced, and every man felt that he must make some pretty speech as he shook her by the hand.

'Good-bye! May you remember us as long as it makes ye happy, and forget us as soon as it makes ye sad,' said Sergeant Brett.

'Good-night! Health, wealth, and long life to ye!' said Sergeant-major Wills, taking her hand from Brett.

'I trust to meet ye again as the wife of a worthy man,' said Trumpeter Buck.

'We'll drink your health throughout the campaign, and so good-bye t'ye,' said Saddler-sergeant Jones, raising her hand to his lips.

Three others followed with similar remarks, to each of which Anne blushing replied as well as she could, wishing them a prosperous voyage, easy conquest, and a speedy return.

But, alas, for that! Battles and skirmishes, advances and retreats, fevers and fatigues, told hard on Anne's gallant friends in the coming time. Of the seven upon whom these wishes were bestowed, five, including the trumpet-major, were dead men within the few following years, and their bones left to moulder in the land of their campaigns.

John lingered behind. When the others were outside, expressing a final farewell to his father, Bob, and Mrs. Loveday, he came to Anne, who remained within.

'But I thought you were going to look in again before leaving?' she said gently.

'No; I find I cannot. Good-bye!'

'John,' said Anne, holding his right hand in both hers, 'I must tell you something. You were wise in not taking me at my word that day. I was greatly mistaken about myself. Gratitude is not love, though I wanted to make it so for the time. You don't call me thoughtless for what I did?'

'My dear Anne,' cried John, with more gaiety than truthfulness, 'don't let yourself be troubled! What happens is for the best. Soldiers love here to-day and there to-morrow. Who knows that you won't hear of my attentions to some Spanish maid before a month is gone by? 'Tis the way of us, you know; a soldier's heart is not worth a week's purchase — ha, ha! Goodbye, good-bye!'

Anne felt the expediency of his manner, received the affectation as real, and smiled her reply, not knowing that the adieu was for evermore. Then with a tear in his eye he went out of the door, where he bade farewell to the miller, Mrs. Loveday, and Bob, who said at parting, 'It's all right, Jack, my dear fellow. After a coaxing that would have

been enough to win three ordinary Englishwomen, five French, and ten Mulotters, she has to-day agreed to bestow her hand upon me at the end of six months. Good-bye, Jack, good-bye!

The candle held by his father shed its waving light upon John's face and uniform as with a farewell smile he turned on the doorstone, backed by the black night; and in another moment he had plunged into the darkness, the ring of his smart step dying away upon the bridge as he joined his companions-in-arms, and went off to blow his trumpet till silenced for ever upon one of the bloody battle-fields of Spain.

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