

BARING-GOULD SABINE

**EVE**

Sabine Baring-Gould

**Eve**

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# Sabine Baring-Gould

## Eve / A Novel

### CHAPTER I. MORWELL

The river Tamar can be ascended by steamers as far as Morwell, one of the most picturesque points on that most beautiful river. There also, at a place called 'New Quay,' barges discharge their burdens of coal, bricks, &c., which thence are conveyed by carts throughout the neighbourhood. A new road, admirable as one of those of Napoleon's construction in France, gives access to this quay – a road constructed at the outlay of a Duke of Bedford, to whom belongs all the land that was once owned by the Abbey of Tavistock. This skilfully engineered road descends by zigzags from the elevated moorland on the Devon side of the Tamar, through dense woods of oak and fir, under crags of weathered rock wreathed with heather. From the summit of the moor this road runs due north, past mine shafts and 'ramps,' or rubble heaps thrown out of the mines, and meets other roads uniting from various points under the volcanic peak of Brent Tor, that rises in solitary dignity out of the vast moor to the height of twelve hundred feet, and is crowned by perhaps the tiniest church in England.

Seventy or eighty years ago no such roads existed. The vast upland was all heather and gorse, with tracks across it. An old quay had existed on the river, and the ruins remained of the buildings about it erected by the abbots of Tavistock; but quay and warehouses had fallen into decay, and no barges came so far up the river.

The crags on the Devon side of the Tamar rise many hundred feet in sheer precipices, broken by gulfs filled with oak coppice, heather, and dogwood.

In a hollow of the down, half a mile from the oak woods and crags, with an ancient yew and Spanish chestnut before it, stood, and stands still, Morwell House, the hunting-lodge of the abbots of Tavistock, built where a moor-well – a spring of clear water – gushed from amidst the golden gorse brakes, and after a short course ran down the steep side of the hill, and danced into the Tamar.

Seventy or eighty years ago this house was in a better and worse condition than at present: worse, in that it was sorely dilapidated; better, in that it had not suffered tasteless modern handling to convert it into a farm with labourers' cottages. Even forty years ago the old banquetting hall and the abbot's parlour were intact. Now all has been restored out of recognition, except the gatehouse that opens into the quadrangle. In the interior of this old hall, on the twenty-fourth of June, just eighty years ago, sat the tenant: a tall, gaunt man with dark hair. He was engaged cleaning his gun, and the atmosphere was foul with the odour exhaled by the piece that had been recently discharged, and was now being purified. The man was intent on his work, but neither the exertion he used, nor the warmth of a June afternoon, accounted for the drops that beaded his brow and dripped from his face.

Once – suddenly – he placed the muzzle of his gun against his right side under the rib, and with his foot touched the lock. A quiver ran over his face, and his dim eyes were raised to the ceiling. Then there came from near his feet a feeble sound of a babe giving token with its lips that it was dreaming of food. The man sighed, and looked down at a cradle that was before him. He placed the gun between his knees, and remained for a moment gazing at the child's crib, lost in a dream, with the evening sun shining through the large window and illumining his face. It was a long face with light blue eyes, in which lurked anguish mixed with cat-like treachery. The mouth was tremulous, and betrayed weakness.

Presently, recovering himself from his abstraction, he laid the gun across the cradle, from right to left, and it rested there as a bar sinister on a shield, black and ominous. His head sank in his

thin shaking hands, and he bowed over the cradle. His tears or sweat, or tears and sweat combined, dropped as a salt rain upon the sleeping child, that gave so slight token of its presence.

All at once the door opened, and a man stood in the yellow light, like a mediæval saint against a golden ground. He stood there a minute looking in, his eyes too dazzled to distinguish what was within, but he called in a hard, sharp tone, 'Eve! where is Eve?'

The man at the cradle started up, showing at the time how tall he was. He stood up as one bewildered, with his hands outspread, and looked blankly at the new comer.

The latter, whose eyes were becoming accustomed to the obscurity, after a moment's pause repeated his question, 'Eve! where is Eve?'

The tall man opened his mouth to speak, but no words came.

'Are you Ignatius Jordan?'

'I am,' he answered with an effort.

'And I am Ezekiel Babb. I am come for my daughter.'

Ignatius Jordan staggered back against the wall, and leaned against it with arms extended and with open palms. The window through which the sun streamed was ancient; it consisted of two lights with a transom, and the sun sent the shadow of mullion and transom as a black cross against the further wall. Ignatius stood unconsciously spreading his arms against this shadow like a ghastly Christ on his cross. The stranger noticed the likeness, and said in his harsh tones, 'Ignatius Jordan, thou hast crucified thyself.' Then again, as he took a seat unasked, 'Eve! where is Eve?'

The gentleman addressed answered with an effort, 'She is no longer here. She is gone.'

'What!' exclaimed Babb; 'no longer here? She was here last week. Where is she now?'

'She is gone,' said Jordan in a low tone.

'Gone! – her child is here. When will she return?'

'Return!' – with a sigh – 'never.'

'Cursed be the blood that flows in her veins!' shouted the new comer. 'Restless, effervescing, fevered, fantastic! It is none of it mine, it is all her mother's.' He sprang to his feet and paced the room furiously, with knitted brows and clenched fists. Jordan followed him with his eye. The man was some way past the middle of life. He was strongly and compactly built. He wore a long dark coat and waistcoat, breeches, and blue worsted stockings. His hair was grey; his protruding eyebrows met over the nose. They were black, and gave a sinister expression to his face. His profile was strongly accentuated, hawklike, greedy, cruel.

'I see it all,' he said, partly to himself; 'that cursed foreign blood would not suffer her to find rest even here, where there is prosperity. What is prosperity to her? What is comfort? Bah! all her lust is after tinsel and tawdry.' He raised his arm and clenched fist. 'A life accursed of God! Of old our forefathers, under the righteous Cromwell, rose up and swept all profanity out of the land, the jesters, and the carol singers, and theatrical performers, and pipers and tumblers. But they returned again to torment the elect. What saith the Scripture? Make no marriage with the heathen, else shall ye be unclean, ye and your children.'

He reseated himself. 'Ignatius Jordan,' he said, 'I was mad and wicked when I took her mother to wife; and a mad and wicked thing you did when you took the daughter. As I saw you just now – as I see you at present – standing with spread arms against the black shadow cross from the window, I thought it was a figure of what you chose for your lot when you took my Eve. I crucified myself when I married her mother, and now the iron enters your side.' He paused; he was pointing at Ignatius with out-thrust finger, and the shadow seemed to enter Ignatius against the wall. 'The blood that begins to flow will not cease to run till it has all run out.'

Again he paused. The arms of Jordan fell.

'So she has left you,' muttered the stranger, 'she has gone back to the world, to its pomps and vanities, its lusts, its lies, its laughter. Gone back to the players and dancers.'

Jordan nodded; he could not speak.

‘Dead to every call of duty,’ Babb continued with a scowl on his brow, ‘dead to everything but the cravings of a cankered heart; dead to the love of lawful gain; alive to wantonness, and music, and glitter. Sit down, and I will tell you the story of my folly, and you shall tell me the tale of yours.’ He looked imperiously at Jordan, who sank into his chair beside the cradle.

‘I will light my pipe.’ Ezekiel Babb struck a light with flint and steel. ‘We have made a like experience, I with the mother, you with the daughter. Why are you downcast? Rejoice if she has set you free. The mother never did that for me. Did you marry her?’

The pale man opened his mouth, and spread out, then clasped, his hands nervously, but said nothing.

‘I am not deaf that I should be addressed in signs,’ said Babb. ‘Did you marry my daughter?’

‘No.’

‘The face of heaven was turned on you,’ said Babb discontentedly, ‘and not on me. I committed myself, and could not break off the yoke. I married.’

The child in the cradle began to stir. Jordan rocked it with his foot.

‘I will tell you all,’ the visitor continued. ‘I was a young man when I first saw Eve – not your Eve, but her mother. I had gone into Totnes, and I stood by the cloth market at the gate to the church. It was the great fair-day. There were performers in the open space before the market. I had seen nothing like it before. What was performed I do not recall. I saw only her. I thought her richly, beautifully dressed. Her beauty shone forth above all. She had hair like chestnut, and brown eyes, a clear, thin skin, and was formed delicately as no girl of this country and stock. I knew she was of foreign blood. A carpet was laid in the market-place, and she danced on it to music. It was like a flame flickering, not a girl dancing. She looked at me out of her large eyes, and I loved her. It was witchcraft, the work of the devil. The fire went out of her eyes and burnt to my marrow; it ran in my veins. That was witchcraft, but I did not think it then. There should have been a heap of wood raised and fired, and she cast into the flames. But our lot is fallen in evil days. The word of the Lord is no longer precious, and the Lord has said, “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.” That was witchcraft. How else was it that I gave no thought to Tamsine Bovey, of Buncombe, till it was too late, though Buncombe joins my land, and so Buncombe was lost to me for ever? Quiet that child if you want to hear more. Hah! Your Eve has deserted you and her babe, but mine had not the good heart to leave me.’

The child in the cradle whimpered. The pale man lifted it out, got milk and fed it, with trembling hand, but tenderly, and it dozed off in his arms.

‘A girl?’ asked Babb. Jordan nodded.

‘Another Eve – a third Eve?’ Jordan nodded again. ‘Another generation of furious, fiery blood to work confusion, to breed desolation. When will the earth open her mouth and swallow it up, that it defile no more the habitations of Israel?’

Jordan drew the child to his heart, and pressed it so passionately that it woke and cried.

‘Still the child or I will leave the house,’ said Ezekiel Babb. ‘You would do well to throw a wet cloth over its mouth, and let it smother itself before it work woe on you and others. When it is quiet, I will proceed.’ He paused. When the cries ceased he went on: ‘I watched Eve as she danced. I could not leave the spot. Then a rope was fastened and stretched on high, and she was to walk that. A false step would have dashed her to the ground. I could not bear it. When her foot was on the ladder, I uttered a great cry and ran forward; I caught her, I would not let her go. I was young then.’ He remained silent, smoking, and looking frowningly before him. ‘I was not a converted man then. Afterwards, when the word of God was precious to me, and I saw that I might have had Tamsine Bovey, and Buncombe, then I was sorry and ashamed. But it was too late. The eyes of the unrighteous are sealed. I was a fool. I married that dancing girl.’

He was silent again, and looked moodily at his pipe.

‘I have let the fire die out,’ he said, and rekindled as before. ‘I cannot deny that she was a good wife. But what availed it me to have a woman in the house who could dance like a feather, and could

not make scald cream? What use to me a woman who brought the voice of a nightingale with her into the house, but no money? She knew nothing of the work of a household. She had bones like those of a pigeon, there was no strength in them. I had to hire women to do her work, and she was thriftless and thoughtless, so the money went out when it should have come in. Then she bore me a daughter, and the witchery was not off me, so I called her Eve – that is your Eve, and after that she gave me sons, and then’ – angrily – ‘then, when loo late, she died. Why did she not die half a year before Tamsine Bovey married Joseph Warmington? If she had, I might still have got Buncombe – now it is gone, gone for ever.’

He knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and put it into his pocket.

‘Eve was her mother’s darling; she was brought up like a heathen to love play and pleasure, not work and duty. The child sucked in her mother’s nature with her mother’s milk. When the mother died, Eve – your Eve – was a grown girl, and I suppose home became unendurable to her. One day some play actors passed through the place on their way from Exeter, and gave a performance in our village. I found that my daughter, against my command, went to see it. When she came home, I took her into the room where is my great Bible, and I beat her. Then she ran away, and I saw no more of her; whether she went after the play actors or not I never inquired.’

‘Did you not go in pursuit?’

‘Why should I? She would have run away again. Time passed, and the other day I chanced to come across a large party of strollers, when I was in Plymouth on business. Then I learned from the manager about my child, and so, for the first time, heard where she was. Now tell me how she came here.’

Ignatius Jordan raised himself in his chair, and swept back the hair that had fallen over his bowed face and hands.

‘It is passed and over,’ he said.

‘Let me hear all. I must know all,’ said Babb. ‘She is my daughter. Thanks be, that we are not called to task for the guilt of our children. The soul that sinneth it shall surely die. She had light and truth set before her on one side as surely as she had darkness and lies on the other, Ebal and Gerizim, and she went after Ebal. It was in her blood. She drew it of her mother. One vessel is for honour – such am I; another for dishonour – such are all the Eves from the first to the last, that in your arms. Vessels of wrath, ordained to be broken. Ah! you may cherish that little creature in your arms. You may strain it to your heart, you may wrap it round with love, but it is in vain that you seek to save it, to shelter it. It is wayward, wanton, wicked clay; ordained from eternity to be broken. I stood between the first Eve and the shattering that should have come to her. That is the cause of all my woes. Where is the second Eve? Broken in soul, broken maybe in body. There lies the third, ordained to be broken.’ He folded his arms, was silent a while, and then said: ‘Tell me your tale. How came my daughter to your house?’



## CHAPTER II. THE LITTLE MOTHER

‘Last Christmas twelvemonth,’ said Ignatius Jordan slowly, ‘I was on the moor – Morwell Down it is called. Night was falling. The place – where the road comes along over the down, from Beer Alston and Beer Ferris. I dare say you came along it, you took boat from Plymouth to Beer Ferris, and thence the way runs – the packmen travel it – to the north to Launceston. It was stormy weather, and the snow drove hard; the wind was so high that a man might hardly face it. I heard cries for help. I found a party of players who were on their way to Launceston, and were caught by the storm and darkness on the moor. They had a sick girl with them – ’ His voice broke down.

‘Eve?’ asked Ezekiel Babb.

Jordan nodded. After a pause he recovered himself and went on. ‘She could walk no further, and the party was distressed, not knowing whither to go or what to do. I invited them to come here. The house is large enough to hold a score of people. Next day I set them on their way forward, as they were pressed to be at Launceston for the Christmas holidays. But the girl was too ill to proceed, and I offered to let her remain here till she recovered. After a week had passed the actors sent here from Lannceston to learn how she was, and whether she could rejoin them, as they were going forward to Bodmin, but she was not sufficiently recovered. Then a month later, they sent again, but though she was better I would not let her go. After that we heard no more of the players. So she remained at Morwell, and I loved her, and she became my wife.’

‘You said that you did not marry her.’

‘No, not exactly. This is a place quite out of the world, a lost, unseen spot. I am a Catholic, and no priest comes this way. There is the ancient chapel here where the Abbot of Tavistock had mass in the old time. It is bare, but the altar remains, and though no priest ever comes here, the altar is a Catholic altar. Eve and I went into the old chapel and took hands before the altar, and I gave her a ring, and we swore to be true to each other’ – his voice shook, and then a sob broke from his breast. ‘We had no priest’s blessing on us, that is true. But Eve would never tell me what her name was, or whence she came. If we had gone to Tavistock or Brent Tor to be married by a Protestant minister, she would have been forced to tell her name and parentage, and that, she said, nothing would induce her to do. It mattered not, we thought. We lived here out of the world, and to me the vow was as sacred when made here as if confirmed before a minister of the established religion. We swore to be all in all to each other.’

He clasped his hands on his knees, and went on with bent head: ‘But the play-actors returned and were in Tavistock last week, and one of them came up here to see her, not openly, but in secret. She told me nothing, and he did not allow me to see him. She met him alone several times. This place is solitary and sad, and Eve of a lively nature. She tired of being here. She wearied of me.’

Babb laughed bitterly. ‘And now she is flown away with a play-actor. As she deserted her father, she deserts her husband and child, and the house that housed her. See you,’ he put out his hand and grasped the cradle: ‘Here lies vanity of vanities, the pomps of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, nestled in that crib, that self-same strain of leaping, headlong, wayward blood, that never will rest till poured out of the veins and rolled down into the ocean, and lost – lost – lost!’

Jordan sprang from his seat with a gasp and a stifled cry, and fell back against the wall.

Babb stooped over the cradle and plucked out the child. He held it in the sunlight streaming through the window, and looked hard at it. Then he danced it up and down with a scoffing laugh.

‘See, see!’ he cried; ‘see how the creature rejoices and throws forth its arms. Look at the shadow on the wall, as of a Salamander swaying in a flood of fire. Ha! Eve – blood! wanton blood! I will

crucify thee too!’ He raised the babe aloft against the black cross made by the shadow of the mullion and transom, as the child had thrown up its tiny arms.

‘See,’ he exclaimed, ‘the child hangs also!’

Ignatius Jordan seized the babe, snatched it away from the rude grasp of Babb, clasped it passionately to his breast, and covered it with kisses. Then he gently replaced it, crowing and smiling, in its cradle, and rocked it with his foot.

‘You fool!’ said Babb; ‘you love the strange blood in spite of its fickleness and falseness. I will tell you something further. When I heard from the players that Eve was here, at Morwell, I did not come on at once, because I had business that called me home. But a fortnight after I came over Dartmoor to Tavistock. I did not come, as you supposed, up the river to Beer Ferris and along the road over your down; no, I live at Buckfastleigh by Ashburton, right away to the east across Dartmoor. I came thence as far as Tavistock, and there I found the players once more, who had come up from Plymouth to make sport for the foolish and ungodly in Tavistock. They told me that they had heard you lived with my Eve, and had not married her, so I did not visit you, but waited about till I could speak with her alone, and I sent a message to her by one of the players that I was wanting a word with her. She came to me at the place I had appointed once – ay! and twice – and she feigned to grieve that she had left me, and acted her part well as if she loved me – her father. I urged her to leave you and come back to her duty and her God and to me, but she would promise nothing. Then I gave her a last chance. I told her I would meet her finally on that rocky platform that rises as a precipice above the river, last night, and there she should give me her answer.’

Ignatius Jordan’s agitation became greater, his lips turned livid, his eyes were wide and staring as though with horror, and he put up his hands as if warding off a threatened blow.

‘You – you met her on the Raven Rock?’

‘I met her there twice, and I was to have met her there again last night, when she was to have given me her final answer, what she would do – stay here, and be lost eternally, or come back with me to Salvation. But I was detained, and I could not keep the engagement, so I sent one of the players to inform her that I would come to-day instead. So I came on to-day, as appointed, and she was not there, not on the Raven Rock, as you call it, and I have arrived here, – but I am too late.’

Jordan clasped his hands over his eyes and moaned. The babe began to wail.

‘Still the wowl of that child!’ exclaimed Babb. ‘I tell you this as a last instance of her perfidy.’ He raised his voice above the cry of the child. ‘What think you was the reason she alleged why she would not return with me at once – why did she ask time to make up her mind? She told me that you were a Catholic, she told me of the empty, worthless vow before an old popish altar in a deserted chapel, and I knew her soul would be lost if she remained with you; you would drag her into idolatry. And I urged her, as she hoped to escape hell fire, to flee Morwell and not cast a look behind, desert you and the babe and all for the Zoar of Buckfastleigh. But she was a dissembler. She loved neither me nor you nor her child. She loved only idleness and levity, and the butterfly career of a player, and some old sweetheart among the play company. She has gone off with him. Now I wipe my hands of her altogether.’

Jordan swayed himself, sitting as one stunned, with an elbow on each knee and his head in the hollow of his hands.

‘Can you not still the brat?’ cried Ezekiel Babb, ‘now that the mother is gone, who will be the mother to it?’

‘I – I – I!’ the cry of an eager voice. Babb looked round, and saw a little girl of six, with grey eyes and dark hair, a quaint, premature woman, in an old, long, stiff frock. Her little arms were extended; ‘Baby-sister!’ she called, ‘don’t cry!’ She ran forward, and, kneeling by the cradle, began to caress and play with the infant.

‘Who is this?’ asked Ezekiel.

‘My Barbara,’ answered Ignatius in a low tone; ‘I was married before, and my wife died, leaving me this little one.’

The child, stooping over the cradle, lifted the babe carefully out. The infant crowed and made no resistance, for the arms that held it, though young, were strong. Then Barbara seated herself on a stool, and laid the infant on her lap, and chirped and snapped her fingers and laughed to it, and snuggled her face into the neck of the babe. The latter quivered with excitement, the tiny arms were held up, the little hands clutched in the child’s long hair and tore at it, and the feet kicked with delight. ‘Father! father!’ cried Barbara, ‘see little Eve; she is dancing and singing.’

‘Dancing and singing!’ echoed Ezekiel Babb, ‘that is all she ever will do. She comes dancing and singing into the world, and she will go dancing and singing out of it – and then – then,’ he brushed his hand through the air, as though drawing back a veil. The girl-nurse looked at the threatening old man with alarm.

‘Keep the creature quiet,’ he said impatiently; ‘I cannot sit here and see the ugly, evil sight. Dancing and singing! she begins like her mother, and her mother’s mother. Take her away, the sight of her stirs my bile.’

At a sign from the father Barbara rose, and carried the child out of the room, talking to it fondly, and a joyous chirp from the little one was the last sound that reached Babb’s ears as the door shut behind them.

‘Naught but evil has the foreign blood, the tossing fever-blood, brought me. First it came without a dower, and that was like original sin. Then it prevented me from marrying Tamsine Bovey and getting Buncombe. That was like sin of malice. Now Tamsine is dead and her husband, Joseph Warmington, wants to sell. I did not want Tamsine, but I wanted Buncombe; at one time I could not see how Buncombe was to be had without Tamsine. Now the property is to be sold, and it joins on to mine as if it belonged to it. What Heaven has joined together let not man put asunder. It was wicked witchcraft stood in the way of my getting my rightful own.’

‘How could it be your rightful own?’ asked Ignatius; ‘was Tamsine Bovey your kinswoman?’

‘No, she was not, but she ought to have been my wife, and so Buncombe have come to me. I seem as if I could see into the book of the Lord’s ordinance that so it was written. There’s some wonderful good soil in Buncombe. But the Devil allured me with his Eve, and I was bewitched by her beautiful eyes and little hands and feet. Cursed be the day that shut me out of Buncombe. Cursed be the strange blood that ran as a dividing river between Owlacombe and Buncombe, and cut asunder what Providence ordained to be one. I tell you,’ he went on fiercely, ‘that so long as all that land remains another’s and not mine, so long shall I feel only gall, and no pity nor love, for Eve, and all who have issued from her – for all who inherit her name and blood. I curse – ’ his voice rose to a roar, and his grey hair bristled like the fell of a wolf, ‘I curse them all with – ’

The pale man, Jordan, rushed at him and thrust his hand over his mouth.

‘Curse not,’ he said vehemently; then in a subdued tone, ‘Listen to reason, and you will feel pity and love for my little one who inherits the name and blood of your Eve. I have laid by money: I am in no want. It shall be the portion of my little Eve, and I will lend it you for seventeen years. This day, the 24th of June, seventeen years hence, you shall repay me the whole sum without interest. I am not a Jew to lend on usury. I shall want the money then for my Eve, as her dower. *She*’ – he held up his head for a moment – ‘*she* shall not be portionless. In the meantime take and use the money, and when you walk over the fields you have purchased with it, – bless the name.’

A flush came in the sallow face of Ezekiel Babb. He rose to his feet and held out his hand.

‘You will lend me the money, two thousand pounds?’

‘I will lend you fifteen hundred.’

‘I will swear to repay the sum in seventeen years. You shall have a mortgage.’

‘On this day.’

‘This 24th day of June, so help me God.’

A ray of orange light, smiting through the window, was falling high up the wall. The hands of the men met in the beam, and the reflection was cast on their faces, – on the dark hard face of Ezekiel, on the white quivering face of Ignatius.

‘And you bless,’ said the latter, ‘you bless the name of Eve, and the blood that follows it.’

‘I bless. Peace be to the restless blood.’

## CHAPTER III. THE WHISH-HUNT

On a wild and blustering evening, seventeen years after the events related in the two preceding chapters, two girls were out, in spite of the fierce wind and gathering darkness, in a little gig that accommodated only two, the body perched on very large and elastic springs. At every jolt of the wheels the body bounced and swayed in a manner likely to trouble a bad sailor. But the girls were used to the motion of the vehicle, and to the badness of the road. They drove a very sober cob, who went at his leisure, picking his way, seeing ruts in spite of the darkness.

The moor stretched in unbroken desolation far away on all sides but one, where it dropped to the gorge of the Tamar, but the presence of this dividing valley could only be guessed, not perceived by the crescent moon. The distant Cornish moorland range of Hingston and the dome of Kit Hill seemed to belong to the tract over which the girls were driving. These girls were Barbara and Eve Jordan. They had been out on a visit to some neighbours, if those can be called neighbours who lived at a distance of five miles, and were divided from Morwell by a range of desolate moor. They had spent the day with their friends, and were returning home later than they had intended.

‘I do not know what father would say to our being abroad so late, and in the dark, unattended,’ said Eve, ‘were he at home. It is well he is away.’

‘He would rebuke me, not you,’ said Barbara.

‘Of course he would; you are the elder, and responsible.’

‘But I yielded to your persuasion.’

‘Yes, I like to enjoy myself when I may. It is vastly dull at Morwell, Tell me, Bab, did I look well in my figured dress?’

‘Charming, darling; you always are that.’

‘You are a sweet sister,’ said Eve, and she put her arm round Barbara, who was driving.

Mr. Jordan, their father, was tenant of the Duke of Bedford. The Jordans were the oldest tenants on the estate which had come to the Russells on the sequestration of the abbey. The Jordans had been tenants under the abbot, and they remained on after the change of religion and owners, without abandoning their religion or losing their position. The Jordans were not accounted squires, but were reckoned as gentry. They held Morwell on long leases of ninety-nine years, regularly renewed when the leases lapsed. They regarded Morwell House almost as their freehold; it was bound up with all their family traditions and associations.

As a vast tract of country round belonged to the duke, it was void of landed gentry residing on their estates, and the only families of education and birth in the district were those of the parsons, but the difference in religion formed a barrier against intimacy with these. Mr. Jordan, moreover, was living under a cloud. It was well-known throughout the country that he had not been married to Eve’s mother, and this had caused a cessation of visits to Morwell. Moreover, since the disappearance of Eve’s mother, Mr. Jordan had become morose, reserved, and so peculiar in his manner, that it was doubted whether he were in his right mind.

Like many a small country squire, he farmed the estate himself. At one time he had been accounted an active farmer, and was credited with having made a great deal of money, but for the last seventeen years he had neglected agriculture a good deal, to devote himself to mineralogical researches. He was convinced that the rocks were full of veins of metal – silver, lead, and copper, and he occupied himself in searching for the metals in the wood, and on the moor, sinking pits, breaking stones, washing and melting what he found. He believed that he would come on some vein of almost pure silver or copper, which would make his fortune. Bitten with this craze, he neglected his farm,

which would have gone to ruin had not his eldest daughter, Barbara, taken the management into her own hands.

Mr. Jordan was quite right in believing that he lived on rocks rich with metal: the whole land is now honeycombed with shafts and adits: but he made the mistake in thinking that he could gather a fortune out of the rocks unassisted, armed only with his own hammer, drawing only out of his own purse. His knowledge of chemistry and mineralogy was not merely elementary, but incorrect; he read old books of science mixed up with the fantastic alchemical notions of the middle ages, believed in the sympathies of the planets with metals, and in the virtues of the divining rod.

‘Does a blue or a rose ribbon suit my hair best, Bab?’ asked Eve. ‘You see my hair is chestnut, and I doubt me if pink suits the colour so well as forget-me-not.’

‘Every ribbon of every hue agrees with Eve,’ said Barbara.

‘You are a darling.’ The younger girl made an attempt to kiss her sister, in return for the compliment.

‘Be careful,’ said Barbara, ‘you will upset the gig.’

‘But I love you so much when you are kind.’

‘Am not I always kind to you, dear?’

‘O yes, but sometimes much kinder than at others.’

‘That is, when I flatter you.’

‘O if you call it flattery – ’ said Eve, pouting.

‘No – it is plain truth, my dearest.’

‘Bab,’ broke forth the younger suddenly, ‘do you not think Bradstone a charming house? It is not so dull as ours.’

‘And the Cloberrys – you like them?’

‘Yes, dear, very much.’

‘Do you believe that story about Oliver Cloberry, the page?’

‘What story?’

‘That which Grace Cloberry told me.’

‘I was not with you in the lanes when you were talking together. I do not know it.’

‘Then I will tell you. Listen, Bab, and shiver.’

‘I am shivering in the cold wind already.’

‘Shiver more shiveringly still. I am going to curdle your blood.’

‘Go on with the story, but do not squeeze up against me so close, or I shall be pushed out of the gig.’

‘But, Bab, I am frightened to tell the tale.’

‘Then do not tell it.’

‘I want to frighten you.’

‘You are very considerate.’

‘We share all things, Bab, even our terrors. I am a loving sister. Once I gave you the measles. I was too selfish to keep it all to myself. Are you ready? Grace told me that Oliver Cloberry, the eldest son, was page boy to John Copplestone, of Warleigh, in Queen Elizabeth’s reign, you know – wicked Queen Bess, who put so many Catholics to death. Squire Copplestone was his godfather, but he did not like the boy, though he was his godchild and page. The reason was this: he was much attached to Joan Hill, who refused him and married Squire Cloberry, of Bradstone, instead. The lady tried to keep friendly with her old admirer, and asked him to stand godfather to her first boy, and then take him as his page; but Copplestone was a man who long bore a grudge, and the boy grew up the image of his father, and so – Copplestone hated him. One day, when Copplestone was going out hunting, he called for his stirrup cup, and young Cloberry ran and brought it to him. But as the squire raised the wine to his lips he saw a spider in it; and in a rage he dashed the cup and the contents in the face of the boy. He hit Oliver Cloberry on the brow, and when the boy staggered to his feet, he muttered

something. Copplestone heard him, and called to him to speak out, if he were not a coward. Then the lad exclaimed, "Mother did well to throw you over for my father." Some who stood by laughed, and Copplestone flared up; the boy, afraid at what he had said, turned to go, then Copplestone threw his hunting dagger at him, and it struck him in the back, entered his heart, and he fell dead. Do you believe this story, Bab?"

'There is some truth in it, I know. Prince, in his "Worthies," says that Copplestone only escaped losing his head for the murder by the surrender of thirteen manors.'

'That is not all,' Eve continued; 'now comes the creepy part of the story. Grace Cloberry told me that every stormy night the Whish Hounds run over the downs, breathing fire, pursuing Copplestone, from Warleigh to Bradstone, and that the murdered boy is mounted behind Copplestone, and stabs him in the back all along the way. Do you believe this?'

'Most assuredly not.'

'Why should you not, Bab? Don't you think that a man like Copplestone would be unable to rest in his grave? Would not that be a terrible purgatory for him to be hunted night after night? Grace told me that old Squire Cloberry rides and blows his horn to egg-on the Whish Hounds, and Copplestone has a black horse, and he strikes spurs into its sides when the boy stabs him in the back, and screams with pain. When the Judgment Day comes, then only will his rides be over. I am sure I believe it all, Bab. It is so horrible.'

'It is altogether false, a foolish superstition.'

'Look there, do you see, Bab, we are at the white stone with the cross cut in it that my father put up where he first saw my mother. Is it not strange that no one knows whence my mother came? You remember her just a little. Whither did my mother go?'

'I do not know, Eve.'

'There, again, Bab. You who sneer and toss your chin when I speak of anything out of the ordinary, must admit this to be passing wonderful. My mother came, no one knows whence; she went, no one knows whither. After that, is it hard to believe in the Whish Hounds, and Black Copplestone?'

'The things are not to be compared.'

'Your mother was buried at Buckland, and I have seen her grave. You know that her body is there, and that her soul is in heaven. But as for mine, I do not even know whether she had a human soul.'

'Eve! What do you mean?'

'I have read and heard tell of such things. She may have been a wood-spirit, an elf-maid. Whoever she was, whatever she was, my father loved her. He loves her still. I can see that. He seems to me to have her ever in his thoughts.'

'Yes,' said Barbara sadly, 'he never visits my mother's grave; I alone care for the flowers there.'

'I can look into his heart,' said Eve. 'He loves me so dearly because he loved my mother dearer still.'

Barbara made no remark to this.

Then Eve, in her changeful mood, went back to the former topic of conversation.

'Think, think, Bab! of Black Copplestone riding nightly over these wastes on his black mare, with her tail streaming behind, and the little page standing on the crupper, stabbing, stabbing, stabbing; and the Whish Hounds behind, giving tongue, and Squire Cloberry in the rear urging them on with his horn. O Bab! I am sure father believes in this, I should die of fear were Copplestone hunted by dogs to pass this way. Hold! Hark!' she almost screamed.

The wind was behind them; they heard a call, then the tramp of horses' feet.

Barbara even was for the moment startled, and drew the gig aside, off the road upon the common. A black cloud had rolled over the sickle of the moon, and obscured its feeble light. Eve could neither move nor speak. She quaked at Barbara's side like an aspen.

In another moment dark figures of men and horses were visible, advancing at full gallop along the road. The dull cob the sisters were driving plunged, backed, and was filled with panic. Then the moon shone out, and a faint, ghastly light fell on the road, and they could see the black figures sweeping along. There were two horses, one some way ahead of the other, and two riders, the first with slouched hat. But what was that crouched on the crupper, clinging to the first rider?

As he swept past, Eve distinguished the imp-like form of a boy. That wholly unnerved her. She uttered a piercing shriek, and clasped her hands over her eyes.

The first horse had passed, the second was abreast of the girls when that cry rang out. The horse plunged, and in a moment horse and rider crashed down, and appeared to dissolve into the ground.



## CHAPTER IV. EVE'S RING

Some moments elapsed before Barbara recovered her surprise, then she spoke a word of encouragement to Eve, who was in an ecstasy of terror, and tried to disengage herself from her arms, and master the frightened horse sufficiently to allow her to descend. A thorn tree tortured by the winds stood solitary at a little distance, at a mound which indicated the presence of a former embankment. Barbara brought the cob and gig to it, there descended, and fastened the horse to the tree. Then she helped her sister out of the vehicle.

'Do not be alarmed, Eve. There is nothing here supernatural to dismay you, only a pair of farmers who have been drinking, and one has tumbled off his horse. We must see that he has not broken his neck.' But Eve clung to her in frantic terror, and would not allow her to disengage herself. In the meantime, by the sickle moon, now sailing clear of the clouds, they could see that the first rider had reined in his horse and turned.

'Jasper!' he called, 'what is the matter?'

No answer came. He rode back to the spot where the second horse had fallen, and dismounted.

'What has happened?' screamed the boy. 'I must get down also.'

The man who had dismounted pointed to the white stone and said, 'Hold the horse and stay there till you are wanted. I must see what cursed mischance has befallen Jasper.'

Eve was somewhat reassured at the sound of human voices, and she allowed Barbara to release herself, and advance into the road.

'Who are you?' asked the horseman.

'Only a girl. Can I help? Is the man hurt?'

'Hurt, of course. He hasn't fallen into a feather bed, or – by good luck – into a furze brake.'

The horse that had fallen struggled to rise.

'Out of the way,' said the man, 'I must see that the brute does not trample on him.' He helped the horse to his feet; the animal was much shaken and trembled.

'Hold the bridle, girl.' Barbara obeyed. Then the man went to his fallen comrade and spoke to him, but received no answer. He raised his arms, and tried if any bones were broken, then he put his hand to the heart. 'Give the boy the bridle, and come here, you girl. Help me to loosen his neck-cloth. Is there water near?'

'None; we are at the highest point of the moor.'

'Damn it! There is water everywhere in over-abundance in this country, except where it is wanted.'

'He is alive,' said Barbara, kneeling and raising the head of the prostrate, insensible man. 'He is stunned, but he breathes.'

'Jasper!' shouted the man who was unhurt, 'for God's sake, wake up. You know I can't remain here all night.'

No response.

'This is desperate. I must press forward. Fatalities always occur when most inconvenient. I was born to ill-luck. No help, no refuge near.'

'I am by as help; my home not far distant,' said Barbara, 'for a refuge.'

'O yes —you! What sort of help is that? Your house! I can't diverge five miles out of my road for that.'

'We live not half an hour from this point.'

'O yes – half an hour multiplied by ten. You women don't know how to calculate distances, or give a decent direction.'

‘The blood is flowing from his head,’ said Barbara: ‘it is cut. He has fallen on a stone.’

‘What the devil is to be done? I cannot stay.’

‘Sir,’ said Barbara, ‘of course you stay by your comrade. Do you think to leave him half dead at night to the custody of two girls, strangers, on a moor?’

‘You don’t understand,’ answered the man; ‘I cannot and I will not stay.’ He put his hand to his head. ‘How far to your home?’

‘I have told you, half-an-hour.’

‘Honour bright – no more?’

‘I said, half-an-hour.’

‘Good God, Watt! always a fool?’ He turned sharply towards the lad who was seated on the stone. The boy had unslung a violin from his back, taken it from its case, had placed it under his chin, and drawn the bow across the strings.

‘Have done, Watt! Let go the horses, have you? What a fate it is for a man to be cumbered with helpless, useless companions.’

‘Jasper’s horse is lame,’ answered the boy, ‘so I have tied the two together, the sound and the cripple, and neither can get away.’

‘Like me with Jasper. Damnation – but I must go! I dare not stay.’

The boy swung his bow in the moonlight, and above the raging of the wind rang out the squeal of the instrument. Eve looked at him, scared. He seemed some goblin perched on the stone, trying with his magic fiddle to work a spell on all who heard its tones. The boy satisfied himself that his violin was in order, and then put it once more in its case, and cast it over his back.

‘How is Jasper?’ he shouted; but the man gave him no answer.

‘Half-an-hour! Half an eternity to me,’ growled the man. ‘However, one is doomed to sacrifice self for others. I will take him to your house and leave him there. Who live at your house? Are there many men there?’

‘There is only old Christopher Davy at the lodge, but he is ill with rheumatics. My father is away.’ Barbara regretted having said this the moment the words escaped her.

The stranger looked about him uneasily, then up at the moon. ‘I can’t spare more than half-an-hour.’

Then Barbara said undauntedly, ‘No man, under any circumstances, can desert a fellow in distress, leaving him, perhaps, to die. You must lift him into our gig, and we will convey him to Morwell. Then go your way if you will. My sister and I will take charge of him, and do our best for him till you can return.’

‘Return!’ muttered the man scornfully. ‘Christian cast his burden before the cross. He didn’t return to pick it up again.’

Barbara waxed wroth.

‘If the accident had happened to you, would your friend have excused himself and deserted you?’

‘Oh!’ exclaimed the man carelessly, ‘of course *he* would not.’

‘Yet you are eager to leave him.’

‘You do not understand. The cases are widely different.’ He went to the horses. ‘Halloo!’ he exclaimed as he now noticed Eve. ‘Another girl springing out of the turf! Am I among pixies? Turn your face more to the light. On my oath, and I am a judge, you are a beauty!’ Then he tried the horse that had fallen; it halted. ‘The brute is fit for dogs’ meat only,’ he said. ‘Let the fox-hounds eat him. Is that your gig? We can never lift my brother –’

‘Is he your brother?’

‘We can never pull him up into that conveyance. No, we must get him astride my horse; you hold him on one side, I on the other, and so we shall get on. Come here, Watt, and lend a hand; you help also, Beauty, and see what you can do.’

With difficulty the insensible man was raised into the saddle. He seemed to gather some slight consciousness when mounted, for he muttered something about pushing on.

‘You go round on the further side of the horse,’ said the man imperiously to Barbara. ‘You seem strong in the arm, possibly stronger than I am. Beauty! lead the horse.’

‘The boy can do that,’ said Barbara.

‘He don’t know the way,’ answered the man. ‘Let him come on with your old rattletrap. Upon my word, if Beauty were to throw a bridle over my head, I would be content to follow her through the world.’

Thus they went on; the violence, of the gale had somewhat abated, but it produced a roar among the heather and gorse of the moor like that of the sea. Eve, as commanded, went before, holding the bridle. Her movements were easy, her form was graceful. She tripped lightly along with elastic step, unlike the firm tread of her sister. But then Eve was only leading, and Barbara was sustaining.

For some distance no one spoke. It was not easy to speak so as to be heard, without raising the voice; and now the way led towards the oaks and beeches and pines about Morwell, and the roar among the branches was fiercer, louder than that among the bushes of furze.

Presently the man cried imperiously ‘Halt!’ and stepping forward caught the bit and roughly arrested the horse. ‘I am certain we are followed.’

‘What if we are?’ asked Barbara.

‘What if we are!’ echoed the man. ‘Why, everything to me.’ He put his hands against the injured man; Barbara was sure he meant to thrust him out of the saddle, leap into it himself, and make off. She said, ‘We are followed by the boy with our gig.’

Then he laughed. ‘Ah! I forgot that. When a man has money about him and no firearms, he is nervous in such a blast-blown desert as this, where girls who may be decoys pop out of every furze bush.’

‘Lead on, Eve,’ said Barbara, affronted at his insolence. She was unable to resist the impulse to say, across the horse, ‘You are not ashamed to let two girls see that you are a coward.’

The man struck his arm across the crupper of the horse, caught her bonnet-string and tore it away.

‘I will beat your brains out against the saddle if you insult me.’

‘A coward is always cruel,’ answered Barbara; as she said this she stood off, lest he should strike again, but he took no notice of her last words, perhaps had not caught them. She said no more, deeming it unwise to provoke such a man.

Presently, turning his head, he asked, ‘Did you call that girl – Eve?’

‘Yes; she is my sister.’

‘That is odd,’ remarked the man. ‘Eve! Eve!’

‘Did you call me?’ asked the young girl who was leading.

‘I was repeating your name, sweet as your face.’

‘Go on, Eve,’ said Barbara.

The path descended, and became rough with stones.

‘He is moving,’ said Barbara. ‘He said something.’

‘Martin!’ spoke the injured man.

‘I am at your side, Jasper.’

‘I am hurt – where am I?’

‘I cannot tell you; heaven knows. In some God-forgotten waste.’

‘Do not leave me!’

‘Never, Jasper.’

‘You promise me?’

‘With all my heart.’

‘I must trust you, Martin, – trust you.’

Then he said no more, and sank back into half-consciousness.

‘How much farther?’ asked the man who walked. ‘I call this a cursed long half-hour. To women time is nought; but every moment to me is of consequence. I must push on.’

‘You have just promised not to desert your friend, your brother.’

‘It pacified him, and sent him to sleep again.’

‘It was a promise.’

‘You promise a child the moon when it cries, but it never gets it. How much farther?’

‘We are at Morwell.’

They issued from the lane, and were before the old gatehouse of Morwell; a light shone through the window over the entrance door.

‘Old Davy is up there, ill. He cannot come down. The gate is open; we will go in,’ said Barbara.

‘I am glad we are here,’ said the man called Martin; ‘now we must bestir ourselves.’

Thoughtlessly he struck the horse with his whip, and the beast started, nearly precipitating the rider to the ground. The man on it groaned. The injured man was lifted down.

‘Eve!’ said Barbara, ‘run in and tell Jane to come out, and see that a bed be got ready at once, in the lower room.’

Presently out came a buxom womanservant, and with her assistance the man was taken off the horse and carried indoors.

A bedroom was on the ground-floor opening out of the hall. Into this Eve led the way with a light, and the patient was laid on a bed hastily made ready for his reception. His coat was removed, and Barbara examined the head.

‘Here is a gash to the bone,’ she said, ‘and much blood is flowing from it. Jane, come with me, and we will get what is necessary.’

Martin was left alone in the room with Eve and the man called Jasper. Martin moved, so that the light fell over her; and he stood contemplating her with wonder and admiration. She was marvellously beautiful, slender, not tall, and perfectly proportioned. Her hair was of the richest auburn, full of gloss and warmth. She had the exquisite complexion that so often accompanies hair of this colour. Her eyes were large and blue. The pure oval face was set on a delicate neck, round which hung a kerchief, which she now untied and cast aside.

‘How lovely you are!’ said Martin. A rich blush overspread her cheek and throat, and tinged her little ears. Her eyes fell. His look was bold.

Then, almost unconscious of what he was doing, as an act of homage, Martin removed his slouched hat, and for the first time Eve saw what he was like, when she timidly raised her eyes. With surprise she saw a young face. The man with the imperious manner was not much above twenty, and was remarkably handsome. He had dark hair, a pale skin, very large, soft dark eyes, velvety, enclosed within dark lashes. His nose was regular, the nostrils delicately arched and chiselled. His lip was fringed with a young moustache. There was a remarkable refinement and tenderness in the face. Eve could hardly withdraw her wondering eyes from him. Such a face she had never seen, never even dreamed of as possible. Here was a type of masculine beauty that transcended all her imaginings. She had met very few young men, and those she did meet were somewhat uncouth, addicted to the stable and the kennel, and redolent of both, more at home following the hounds or shooting than associating with ladies. There was so much of innocent admiration in the gaze of simple Eve that Martin was flattered, and smiled.

‘Beauty!’ he said, ‘who would have dreamed to have stumbled on the likes of you on the moor? Nay, rather let me bless my stars that I have been vouchsafed the privilege of meeting and speaking with a real fairy. It is said that you must never encounter a fairy without taking of her a reminiscence, to be a charm through life.’

Suddenly he put his hand to her throat. She had a delicate blue riband about it, disclosed when she cast aside her kerchief. He put his finger between the riband and her throat, and pulled.

‘You are strangling me!’ exclaimed Eve, shrinking away, alarmed at his boldness.

‘I care not,’ he replied, ‘this I will have.’

He wrenched at and broke the riband, and then drew it from her neck. As he did so a gold ring fell on the floor. He stooped, picked it up, and put it on his little finger.

‘Look,’ said he with a laugh, ‘my hand is so small, my fingers so slim – I can wear this ring.’

‘Give it me back! Let me have it! You must not take it!’ Eve was greatly agitated and alarmed. ‘I may not part with it. It was my mother’s.’

Then, with the same daring insolence with which he had taken the ring, he caught the girl to him, and kissed her.

## CHAPTER V. THE LIMPING HORSE

Eve drew herself away with a cry of anger and alarm, and with sparkling eyes and flushed cheeks. At that moment her sister returned with Jane, and immediately Martin reassumed his hat with broad brim. Barbara did not notice the excitement of Eve; she had not observed the incident, because she entered a moment too late to do so, and no suspicion that the stranger would presume to take such a liberty crossed her mind.

Eve stood back behind the door, with hands on her bosom to control its furious beating, and with head depressed to conceal the heightened colour.

Barbara and the maid stooped over the unconscious man, and whilst Martin held a light, they dressed and bandaged his head.

Presently his eyes opened, a flicker of intelligence passed through them, they rested on Martin; a smile for a moment kindled the face, and the lips moved.

‘He wants to speak to you,’ said Barbara, noticing the direction of the eyes, and the expression that came into them.

‘What do you want, Jasper?’ asked Martin, putting his hand on that of the other.

The candlelight fell on the two hands, and Barbara noticed the contrast. That of Martin was delicate as the hand of a woman, narrow, with taper fingers, and white; that of Jasper was strong, darkened by exposure.

‘Will you be so good as to undress him,’ said Barbara, ‘and put him to bed? My sister will assist me in the kitchen. Jane, if you desire help, is at your service.’

‘Yes, go,’ said Martin, ‘but return speedily, as I cannot stay many minutes.’

Then the girls left the room.

‘I do not want you,’ he said roughly to the serving woman. ‘Take yourself off; when I need you I will call. No prying at the door.’ He went after her, thrust Jane forth and shut the door behind her. Then he returned to Jasper, removed his clothes, somewhat ungently, with hasty hands. When his waistcoat was off, Martin felt in the inner breast-pocket, and drew from it a pocket-book. He opened it, and transferred the contents to his own purse, then replaced the book and proceeded with the undressing.

When Jasper was divested of his clothes, and laid at his ease in the bed, his head propped on pillows, Martin went to the door and called the girls. He was greatly agitated, Barbara observed it. His lower lip trembled. Eve hung back in the kitchen, she could not return.

Martin said in eager tones, ‘I have done for him all I can, now I am in haste to be off.’

‘But,’ remonstrated Barbara, ‘he is your brother.’

‘My brother!’ laughed Martin. ‘He is no relation of mine. He is naught to me and I am naught to him.’

‘You called him your brother.’

‘That was tantamount to comrade. All sons of Adam are brothers, at least in misfortune. I do not even know the fellow’s name.’

‘Why,’ said Barbara, ‘this is very strange. You call him Jasper, and he named you Martin.’

‘Ah!’ said the man hesitatingly, ‘we are chance travellers, riding along the same road. He asked my name and I gave it him – my surname. I am a Mr. Martin – he mistook me; and in exchange he gave me his Christian name. That is how I knew it. If anyone asks about this event, you can say that Mr. Martin passed this way and halted awhile at your house, on his road to Tavistock.’

‘You are going to Tavistock?’

‘Yes, that is my destination.’

‘In that case I will not seek to detain you. Call up Doctor Crooke and send him here.’

‘I will do so. You furnish me with an additional motive for haste to depart.’

‘Go,’ said Barbara. ‘God grant the poor man may not die.’

‘Die! pshaw! die!’ exclaimed Martin. ‘Men aren’t such brittle ware as that pretty sister of yours. A fall from a horse don’t kill a man. If it did, fox-hunting would not be such a popular sport. Tomorrow, or the day after, Mr. Jasper What’s-his-name will be on his feet again. Hush! What do I hear?’

His cheek turned pale, but Barbara did not see it; he kept his face studiously away from the light.

‘Your horse which you hitched up outside neighed, that is all.’

‘That is a great deal. It would not neigh at nothing.’

He went out. Barbara told the maid to stay by the sick man, and went after Martin. She thought that in all probability the boy had arrived driving the gig.

Martin stood irresolute in the doorway. The horse that had borne the injured man had been brought into the courtyard, and hitched up at the hall door. Martin looked across the quadrangle. The moon was shining into it. A yellow glimmer came from the sick porter’s window over the great gate. The large gate was arched, a laden waggon might pass under it. It was unprovided with doors. Through it the moonlight could be seen on the paved ground in front of the old lodge.

A sound of horse-hoofs was audible approaching slowly, uncertainly, on the stony ground; but no wheels.

‘What can the boy have done with our gig?’ asked Barbara.

‘Will you be quiet?’ exclaimed Martin angrily.

‘I protest – you are trembling,’ she said.

‘May not a man shiver when he is cold?’ answered the man.

She saw him shrink back into the shadow of the entrance as something appeared in the moonlight outside the gatehouse, indistinctly seen, moving strangely.

Again the horse neighed.

They saw the figure come on haltingly out of the light into the blackness of the shadow of the gate, pass through, and emerge into the moonlight of the court.

Then both saw that the lame horse that had been deserted on the moor had followed, limping and slowly, as it was in pain, after the other horse. Barbara went at once to the poor beast, saying, ‘I will put you in a stall,’ but in another moment she returned with a bundle in her hand.

‘What have you there?’ asked Martin, who was mounting his horse, pointing with his whip to what she carried.

‘I found this strapped to the saddle.’

‘Give it to me.’

‘It does not belong to you. It belongs to the other – to Jasper.’

‘Let me look through the bundle; perhaps by that means we may discover his name.’

‘I will examine it when you are gone. I will not detain you; ride on for the doctor.’

‘I insist on having that bundle,’ said Martin. ‘Give it me, or I will strike you.’ He raised his whip.

‘Only a coward would strike a woman. I will not give you the bundle. It is not yours. As you said, this man Jasper is naught to you, nor you to him.’

‘I will have it,’ he said with a curse, and stooped from the saddle to wrench it from her hands. Barbara was too quick for him; she stepped back into the doorway and slammed the door upon him, and bolted it.

He uttered an ugly oath, then turned and rode through the courtyard. ‘After all,’ he said, ‘what does it matter? We were fools not to be rid of it before.’

As he passed out of the gatehouse, he saw Eve in the moonlight, approaching timidly.

‘You must give me back my ring!’ she pleaded; ‘you have no right to keep it.’

‘Must I, Beauty? Where is the compulsion?’

‘Indeed, indeed you must.’

‘Then I will – but not now; at some day in the future, when we meet again.’

‘O give it me now! It belonged to my mother, and she is dead.’

‘Come! What will you give me for it? Another kiss?’

Then from close by burst a peal of impish laughter, and the boy bounded out of the shadow of a yew tree into the moonlight.

‘Halloo, Martin! always hanging over a pretty face, detained by it when you should be galloping. I’ve upset the gig and broken it; give me my place again on the crupper.’

He ran, leaped, and in an instant was behind Martin. The horse bounded away, and Eve heard the clatter of the hoofs as it galloped up the lane to the moor.



## CHAPTER VI. A BUNDLE OF CLOTHES

Barbara Jordan sat by the sick man with her knitting on her lap, and her eyes fixed on his face. He was asleep, and the sun would have shone full on him had she not drawn a red curtain across the window, which subdued the light, and diffused a warm glow over the bed. He was breathing calmly; danger was over.

On the morning after the eventful night, Mr. Jordan had returned to Morwell, and had been told what had happened – at least, the major part – and had seen the sick man. He, Jasper, was then still unconscious. The doctor from Tavistock had not arrived. The family awaited him all day, and Barbara at last suspected that Martin had not taken the trouble to deliver her message. She did not like to send again, expecting him hourly. Then a doubt rose in her mind whether Doctor Crooke might not have refused to come. Her father had made some slighting remarks about him in company lately. It was possible that these had been repeated and the doctor had taken umbrage.

The day passed, and as he did not arrive, and as the sick man remained unconscious, on the second morning Barbara sent a foot messenger to Beer Alston, where was a certain Mr. James Coyshe, surgeon, a young man, reputed to be able, not long settled there. The gig was broken, and the cob in trying to escape from the upset vehicle had cut himself about the legs, and was unfit for a journey. The Jordans had but one carriage horse. The gig lay wrecked in the lane; the boy had driven it against a gate-post of granite, and smashed the axle and the splashboard and a wheel.

Coyshe arrived; he was a tall young man, with hair cut very short, very large light whiskers, prominent eyes, and big protruding ears.

‘He is suffering from congestion of the brain,’ said the surgeon; ‘if he does not awake to-morrow, order his grave to be dug.’

‘Can you do nothing for him?’ asked Miss Jordan.

‘Nothing better than leave him in your hands,’ said Coyshe with a bow.

This was all that had passed between Barbara and the doctor. Now the third day was gone, and the man’s brain had recovered from the pressure on it.

As Barbara knitted, she stole many a glance at Jasper’s face; presently, finding that she had dropped stitches and made false counts, she laid her knitting in her lap, and watched the sleeper with undivided attention and with a face full of perplexity, as though trying to read the answer to a question which puzzled her, and not finding the answer where she sought it, or finding it different from what she anticipated.

In appearance Barbara was very different from her sister. Her face was round, her complexion olive, her eyes very dark. She was strongly built, without grace of form, a sound, hearty girl, hale to her heart’s core. She was not beautiful, her features were without chiselling, but her abundant hair, her dark eyes, and the sensible, honest expression of her face redeemed it from plainness. She had practical common sense; Eve had beauty. Barbara was content with the distribution; perfectly satisfied to believe herself destitute of personal charms, and ready to excuse every act of thoughtlessness committed by her sister. Barbara rose from her seat, laid aside the knitting, and went to a carved oak box that stood against the wall, ornamented with the figure of a man in trunk hose, with a pair of eagles’ heads in the place of a human face. She raised the lid and looked in. There lay, neatly folded, the contents of Jasper’s bundle, a coarse grey and yellow suit – a suit so peculiar in cut and colour that there was no mistaking whence it had come, and what he was who had worn it. Barbara shut the chest and returned to her place, and her look was troubled. Her eyes were again fixed on the sleeper. His face was noble. It was pale from loss of blood. The hair was black, the eyes were closed, but the lashes were long and dark. His nose was aquiline without being over-strongly characterised, his lips were

thin and well moulded. The face, even in sleep, bore an expression of gravity, dignity, and integrity. Barbara found it hard to associate such a face with crime, and yet how else could she account for that convict garb she had found rolled up and strapped to his saddle, and which she had laid in the trunk?

Prisoners escaped now and again from the great jail on Dartmoor. This was one of them. As she sat watching him, puzzling her mind over this, his eyes opened, and he smiled. The smile was remarkably sweet. His eyes were large, dark and soft, and from being sunken through sickness, appeared to fill his face. Barbara rose hastily, and, going to the fireplace, brought from it some beef-tea that had been warming at the small fire. She put it to his lips; he thanked her, sighed, and lay back. She said not a word, but resumed her knitting.

From this moment their positions were reversed. It was now she who was watched by him. When she looked up, she encountered his dark eyes. She coloured a little, and impatiently turned her chair on one side, so as to conceal her face. A couple of minutes after, sensible in every nerve that she was being observed, unable to keep her eyes away, spell-drawn, she glanced at him again. He was still watching her. Then she moved to her former position, bit her lip, frowned, and said, 'Are you in want of anything?'

He shook his head.

'You are sufficiently yourself to remain alone for a few minutes,' she said, stood up, and left the room. She had the management of the house, and, indeed, of the farm on her hands; her usual assistant in setting the labourers their work, old Christopher Davy, was ill with rheumatism. This affair had happened at an untoward moment, but is it not always so? A full hour had elapsed before Miss Jordan returned. Then she saw that the convalescent's eyes were closed. He was probably again asleep, and sleep was the best thing for him. She reseated herself by his bedside, and resumed her knitting. A moment after she was again aware that his eyes were on her. She had herself watched him so intently whilst he was asleep that a smile came involuntarily to her lips. She was being repaid in her own coin. The smile encouraged him to speak.

'How long have I been here?'

'Four days.'

'Have I been very ill?'

'Yes, insensible, sometimes rambling.'

'What made me ill? What ails my head?' He put his hand to the bandages.

'You have had a fall from your horse.'

He did not speak for a moment or two. His thoughts moved slowly. After a while he asked, 'Where did I fall?'

'On the moor – Morwell Down.'

'I can remember nothing. When was it?'

'Four days ago.'

'Yes – you have told me so. I forgot. My head is not clear, there is singing and spinning in it. To-day is – ?'

'To-day is Monday.'

'What day was that – four days ago?'

'Thursday.'

'Yes, Thursday. I cannot think to reckon backwards. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. I can go on, but not backward. It pains me. I can recall Thursday.' He sighed and turned his head to the wall. 'Thursday night – yes. I remember no more.'

After a while he turned his head round to Barbara and asked, 'Where am I now?'

'At Morwell House.'

He asked no more questions for a quarter of an hour. He was taking in and turning over the information he had received. He lay on his back and closed his eyes. His face was very pale, like marble, but not like marble in this, that across it travelled changes of expression that stirred the

muscles. Do what she would Barbara could not keep her eyes off him. The horrible mystery about the man, the lie given to her thoughts of him by his face, forced her to observe him.

Presently he opened his eyes, and met hers; she recoiled as if smitten with a guilty feeling at her heart.

‘You have always been with me whilst I was unconscious and rambling,’ he said earnestly.

‘I have been a great deal with you, but not always. The maid, Jane, and an old woman who comes in occasionally to char, have shared with me the task. You have not been neglected.’

‘I know well when you have been by me – and when you have been away. Sometimes I have felt as if I lay on a bank with wild thyme under me –’

‘That is because we put thyme with our linen,’ said the practical Barbara.

He did not notice the explanation, but went on, ‘And the sun shone on my face, but a pleasant air fanned me. At other times all was dark and hot and miserable.’

‘That was according to the stages of your illness.’

‘No, I think I was content when you were in the room, and distressed when you were away. Some persons exert a mesmeric power of soothing.’

‘Sick men get strange fancies,’ said Barbara.

He rose on his elbow, and held out his hand.

‘I know that I owe my life to you, young lady. Allow me to thank you. My life is of no value to any but myself. I have not hitherto regarded it much. Now I shall esteem it, as saved by you. I thank you. May I touch your hand?’

He took her fingers and put them to his lips.

‘This hand is firm and strong,’ he said, ‘but gentle as the wing of a dove.’

She coldly withdrew her fingers.

‘Enough of thanks,’ she said bluntly. ‘I did but my duty.’

‘Was there –’ he hesitated – ‘anyone with me when I was found, or was I alone?’

‘There were two – a man and a boy.’

His face became troubled. He began a question, then let it die in his mouth, began another, but could not bring it to an end.

‘And they – where are they?’ he asked at length.

‘That one called Martin brought you here.’

‘He did!’ exclaimed Jasper, eagerly.

‘That is – he assisted in bringing you here.’ Barbara was so precise and scrupulous about truth, that she felt herself obliged to modify her first assertion. ‘Then, when he saw you safe in our hands, he left you.’

‘Did he – did he say anything about me?’

‘Once – but that I suppose was by a slip, he called you brother. Afterwards he asserted that you were nothing to him, nor he to you.’

Jasper’s face was moved with painful emotions, but it soon cleared, and he said, ‘Yes, I am nothing to him – nothing. He is gone. He did well. I was, as he said – and he spoke the truth – nothing to him.’

Then, hastily, to turn the subject, ‘Excuse me. Where am I now? And, young lady, if you will not think it rude of me to inquire, who are you to whom I owe my poor life?’

‘This, as I have already said, is Morwell, and I am the daughter of the gentleman who resides in it, Mr. Ignatius Jordan.’

He fell back on the bed, a deadly greyness came over his face, he raised his hands: ‘My God! my God! this is most wonderful. Thy ways are past finding out.’

‘What is wonderful?’ asked Barbara.

He did not answer, but partially raised himself again in bed.

‘Where are my clothes?’ he asked.

‘Which clothes?’ inquired Barbara, and her voice was hard, and her expression became stern. She hesitated for a moment, then went to the chest and drew forth the suit that had been rolled up on the pommel of the saddle; also that which he had worn when he met with the accident. She held one in each hand, and returned to the bed.

‘Which?’ she asked gravely, fixing her eyes on him.

He looked from one to the other, and his pale face turned a chalky white. Then he said in a low tremulous tone, ‘I want my waistcoat.’

She gave it him. He felt eagerly about it, drew the pocket-book from the breast-pocket, opened it and fell back.

‘Gone!’ he moaned, ‘gone!’

The garment dropped from his fingers upon the floor, his eyes became glassy and fixed, and scarlet spots of colour formed in his cheeks.

After this he became feverish, and tossed in his bed, put his hand to his brow, plucked at the bandages, asked for water, and his pulse quickened.

Towards evening he seemed conscious that his senses were slipping beyond control. He called repeatedly for the young lady, and Jane, who attended him then, was obliged to fetch Barbara.

The sun was setting when she came into the room. She despatched Jane about some task that had to be done, and, coming to the side of the bed, said in a constrained voice, ‘Yes, what do you require? I am here.’

He lifted himself. His eyes were glowing with fever; he put out his hand and clasped her wrist; his hand was burning. His lips quivered; his face was full of a fiery eagerness.

‘I entreat you! you are so good, so kind! You have surprised a secret. I beseech you let no one else into it – no one have a suspicion of it. I am hot. I am in a fever. I am afraid what I may say when others are by me. I would go on my knees to you could I rise. I pray you, I pray you – ’ he put his hands together, ‘do not leave me if I become delirious. It is a hard thing to ask. I have no claim on you; but I fear. I would have none but you know what I say, and I may say strange things if my mind becomes deranged with fever. You feel my hand, is it not like a red-hot-coal? You know that I am likely to wander. Stay by me – in pity – in mercy – for the love of God – for the love of God!’

His hand, a fiery hand, grasped her wrist convulsively. She stood by his bed, greatly moved, much stung with self-reproach. It was cruel of her to act as she had done, to show him that convict suit, and let him see that she knew his vileness. It was heartless, wicked of her, when the poor fellow was just returned to consciousness, to cast him back into his misery and shame by the sight of that degrading garment.

Spots of colour came into her cheeks almost as deep as those which burnt in the sick man’s face.

‘I should have considered he was ill, that he was under my charge,’ she said, and laid her left hand on his to intimate that she sought to disengage her wrist from his grasp.

At the touch his eyes, less wild, looked pleadingly at her.

‘Yes, Mr. Jasper,’ she said, ‘I – ’

‘Why do you call me Mr. Jasper?’

‘That other man gave you the name.’

‘Yes, my name is Jasper. And yours?’

‘Barbara. I am Miss Barbara Jordan.’

‘Will you promise what I asked?’

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘I will stay by you all night, and whatever passes your lips shall never pass mine.’

He smiled, and gave a sigh of relief.

‘How good you are! How good! Barbara Jordan.’

He did not call her Miss, and she felt slightly piqued. He, a convict, to speak of her thus! But she pacified her wounded pride with the consideration that his mind was disturbed by fever.

## CHAPTER VII. A NIGHT-WATCH

Barbara had passed her word to remain all night with the sick man, should he prove delirious; she was scrupulously conscientious, and in spite of her father's remonstrance and assurance that old Betty Westlake could look after the fellow well enough, she remained in the sick room after the rest had gone to bed.

That Jasper was fevered was indubitable; he was hot and restless, tossing his head from side to side on the pillow, and it was not safe to leave him, lest he should disarrange his bandage, lest, in an access of fever, he should leap from his bed and do himself an injury.

After everyone had retired the house became very still. Barbara poked and made up the fire. It must not become too large, as the nights were not cold, and it must not be allowed to go out.

Jasper did not speak, but he opened his eyes occasionally, and looked at his nurse with a strange light in his eyes that alarmed her. What if he were to become frantic? What – worse – were he to die? He was only half conscious, he did not seem to know who she was. His lips twitched and moved, but no voice came. Then he clasped both hands over his brow, and moaned, and plucked at the bandages. 'You must not do that,' said Barbara Jordan, rising from her chair and going beside him. He glared at her from his burning eyes without intelligence. Then she laid her cool hand on his strapped brow, and he let his arms fall, and lay still, and the twitching of his mouth ceased. The pressure of her hand eased, soothed him. Directly she withdrew her hand he began to murmur and move, and cry out, 'O Martin! Martin!'

Then he put forth his hand and opened it wide, and closed it again, in a wild, restless, unmeaning manner. Next he waved it excitedly, as if in vehement conversation or earnest protest. Barbara spoke to him, but he did not hear her. She urged him to lie quiet and not excite himself, but her words, if they entered his ear, conveyed no message to the brain. He snatched at his bandage.

'You shall not do that,' she said, and caught his hand, and held it down firmly on the coverlet. Then, at once, he was quiet. He continued turning his head on the pillow, but he did not stir his arm. When she attempted to withdraw her hand he would not suffer her. Once, when almost by main force, she plucked her hand away, he became excited and tried to rise in his bed. In terror, to pacify him, she gave him her hand again. She moved her chair close to the bed, where she could sit facing him, and let him hold her left hand with his left. He was quiet at once. It seemed to her that her cool, calmly flowing blood poured its healing influence through her hand up his arm to his tossing, troubled head. Thus she was obliged to sit all night, hand in hand with the man she was constrained to pity, but whom, for his guilt, she loathed.

He became cooler, his pulse beat less fiercely, his hand was less burning and dry. She saw him pass from vexing dreams into placid sleep. She was unable to knit, to do any work all night. She could do nothing other than sit, hour after hour, with her eyes on his face, trying to unravel the riddle, to reconcile that noble countenance with an evil life. And when she could not solve it, she closed her eyes and prayed, and her prayer was concerned, like her thoughts, with the man who lay in fever and pain, and who clasped her so resolutely. Towards dawn his eyes opened, and there was no more vacancy and fire in them. Then she went to the little casement and opened it. The fresh, sweet air of early morning rushed in, and with the air came the song of awakening thrushes, the spiral twitter of the lark. One fading star was still shining in a sky that was laying aside its sables.

She went back to the bedside and said gently, 'You are better.'

'Thank you,' he answered. 'I have given you much trouble.'

She shook her head, she did not speak. Something rose in her throat. She had extinguished the lamp. In the grey dawn the face on the bed looked death-like, and a gush of tenderness, of pity for the

patient, filled Barbara's heart. She brought a basin and a sponge, and, leaning over him, washed his face. He thanked her with his sweet smile, a smile that told of pain. It affected Barbara strangely. She drew a long breath. She could not speak. If she had attempted to do so she would have sobbed; for she was tired with her continued watching. To be a nurse to the weak, whether to a babe or a wounded man, brings out all the sweet springs in a woman's soul; and poor Barbara, against her judgment, felt that every gentle vein in her heart was oozing with pity, love, solicitude, mercy, faith and hope. What eyes that Jasper had! so gentle, soft, and truthful. Could treachery, cruelty, dishonesty lurk beneath them?

A question trembled on Barbara's lips. She longed to ask him something about himself, to know the truth, to have that horrible enigma solved. She leaned her hand on the back of the chair, and put the other to her lips.

'What is it?' he asked suddenly.

She started. He had read her thoughts. Her eyes met his, and, as they met, her eyes answered and said, 'Yes, there is a certain matter. I cannot rest till I know.'

'I am sure,' he said, 'there is something you wish to say, but are afraid lest you should excite me.' She was silent.

'I am better now; the wind blows cool over me, and the morning light refreshes me. Do not be afraid. Speak.'

She hesitated.

'Speak,' he said. 'I am fully conscious and self-possessed now.'

'Yes,' she said slowly. 'It is right that I should know for certain what you are.' She halted. She shrank from the question. He remained waiting. Then she asked with a trembling voice, 'Is that convict garment yours?'

He turned away his face sharply.

She waited for the answer. He did not reply. His breast heaved and his whole body shook, the very bed quivered with suppressed emotion.

'Do not be afraid,' she said, in measured tones. 'I will not betray you. I have nursed you and fed you, and bathed your head. No, never! never! whatever your crime may have been, will I betray you. No one in the house suspects. No eyes but mine have seen that garment. Do not mistrust me; not by word or look will I divulge the secret, but I must know all.'

Still he did not reply. His face was turned away, but she saw the working of the muscles of his cheek-bone, and the throb of the great vein in his temple. Barbara felt a flutter of compunction in her heart. She had again overagitated this unhappy man when he was not in a condition to bear it. She knew she had acted precipitately, unfairly, but the suspense had become to her unendurable.

'I have done wrong to ask the question,' she said.

'No,' he answered, and looked at her. His large eyes, sunken and lustrous with sickness, met hers, and he saw that tears were trembling on her lids.

'No,' he said, 'you did right to ask;' then paused. 'The garment – the prison garment is mine.'

A catch in Barbara's breath; she turned her head hastily and walked towards the door. Near the door stood the oak chest carved with the eagle-headed man. She stooped, threw it open, caught up the convict clothes, rolled them together, and ran up into the attic, where she secreted them in a place none but herself would be likely to look into.

A moment after she reappeared, composed.

'A packman came this way with his wares yesterday,' said Miss Jordan gravely. 'Amongst other news he brought was this, that a convict had recently broken out from the prison at Prince's Town on Dartmoor, and was thought to have escaped off the moor.' He listened and made no answer, but sighed heavily. 'You are safe here,' she said; 'your secret remains here' – she touched her breast. 'My father, my sister, none of the maids suspect anything. Never let us allude to this matter again, and I hope that as soon as you are sufficiently recovered you will go your way.'

The door opened gently and Eve appeared, fresh and lovely as a May blossom.

‘Bab, dear sister,’ said the young girl, ‘let me sit by him now. You must have a nap. You take everything upon you – you are tired. Why, Barbara, surely you have been crying?’

‘I – crying!’ exclaimed the elder angrily. ‘What have I had to make me cry? No; I am tired, and my eyes burn.’

‘Then close them and sleep for a couple of hours.’

Barbara left the room and shut the door behind her. In the early morning none of the servants could be spared to sit with the sick man.

Eve went to the table and arranged a bunch of oxlips, dripping with dew, in a glass of water.

‘How sweet they are!’ she said, smiling. ‘Smell them, they will do you good. These are of the old monks’ planting; they grow in abundance in the orchard, but nowhere else. The oxlips and the orchis suit together perfectly. If the oxlip had been a little more yellow and the orchis a little more purple, they would have made an ill-assorted posy.’

Jasper looked at the flowers, then at her.

‘Are you her sister?’

‘What, Barbara’s sister?’

‘Yes, her name is Barbara.’

‘Of course I am.’

He looked at Eve. He could trace in her no likeness to her sister. Involuntarily he said, ‘You are very beautiful.’

She coloured – with pleasure. Twice within a few days the same compliment had been paid her.

‘What is your name, young lady?’

‘My name is Eve.’

‘Eve!’ repeated Jasper. ‘How strange!’

Twice also, within a few days, had this remark been passed on her name.

‘Why should it be strange?’

‘Because that was also the name of my mother and of my sister.’

‘Is your mother alive?’

He shook his head.

‘And your sister?’

‘I do not know. I remember her only faintly, and my father never speaks of her.’ Then he changed the subject. ‘You are very unlike Miss Barbara. I should not have supposed you were sisters.’

‘We are half-sisters. We had not the same mother.’

He was exhausted with speaking, and turned towards the wall. Eve seated herself in the chair vacated by Barbara. She occupied her fingers with making a cowslip ball, and when it was made she tossed it. Then, as he moved, she feared that she disturbed him, so she put the ball on the table, from which, however, it rolled off.

Jasper turned as she was groping for it.

‘Do I trouble you?’ she said. ‘Honour bright, I will sit quiet.’

How beautiful she looked with her chestnut hair; how delicate and pearly was her lovely neck; what sweet eyes were hers, blue as a heaven full of sunshine!

‘Have you sat much with me, Miss Eve, whilst I have been ill?’

‘Not much; my sister would not suffer me. I am such a fidget that she thought I might irritate you; such a giddy-pate that I might forget your draughts and compresses. Barbara is one of those people who do all things themselves, and rely on no one else.’

‘I must have given Miss Barbara much trouble. How good she has been!’

‘Oh, Barbara is good to everyone! She can’t help it. Some people are born good-tempered and practical, and others are born pretty and poetical; some to be good needlewomen, others to wear smart clothes.’

‘Tell me, Miss Eve, did anyone come near me when I met with my accident?’

‘Your friend Martin and Barbara brought you here.’

‘And when I was here who had to do with my clothes?’

‘Martin undressed you whilst my sister and I got ready what was necessary for you.’

‘And my clothes – who touched them?’

‘After your friend Martin, only Barbara; she folded them and put them away. Why do you ask?’

Jasper sighed and put his hand to his head. Silence ensued for some time; had not he held his hand to the wound Eve would have supposed he was asleep. Now, all at once, Eve saw the cowslip ball; it was under the table, and with the point of her little foot she could touch it and roll it to her. So she played with the ball, rolling it with her feet, but so lightly that she made no noise.

All at once he looked round at her. Startled, she kicked the cowslip ball away. He turned his head away again.

About five minutes later she was on tiptoe, stealing across the room to where the ball had rolled. She picked it up and laid it on the pillow near Jasper’s face. He opened his eyes. They had been closed.

‘I thought,’ explained Eve, ‘that the scent of the flowers might do you good. They are somewhat bruised and so smell the stronger.’

He half nodded and closed his eyes again.

Presently she plucked timidly at the sheet. As he paid no attention she plucked again. He looked at her. The bright face, like an opening wild rose, was bending over him.

‘Will it disturb you greatly if I ask you a question?’

He shook his head.

‘Who was that young man whom you called Martin?’

He looked earnestly into her eyes, and the colour mounted under the transparent skin of her throat, cheeks, and brow.

‘Eve,’ he said gravely, ‘have you ever been ill – cut, wounded’ – he put out his hand and lightly indicated her heart – ‘there?’

She shook her pretty head with a smile.

‘Then think and ask no more about Martin. He came to you out of darkness, he went from you into darkness. Put him utterly and for ever out of your thoughts as you value your happiness.’



## CHAPTER VIII.

### BAB

As Jasper recovered, he saw less of the sisters. June had come, and with it lovely weather, and with the lovely weather the haysel. The air was sweet about the house with the fragrance of hay, and the soft summer breath wafted the pollen and fine strands on its wings into the court and in at the windows of the old house. Hay harvest was a busy time, especially for Barbara Jordan. She engaged extra hands, and saw that cake was baked and beer brewed for the harvesters. Mr. Jordan had become, as years passed, more abstracted from the cares of the farm, and more steeped in his fantastic semi-scientific pursuits. As his eldest daughter put her strong shoulder to the wheel of business, Mr. Jordan edged his from under it and left the whole pressure upon her. Consequently Barbara was very much engaged. All that was necessary to be done for the convalescent was done, quietly and considerately; but Jasper was left considerably to himself. Neither Barbara nor Eve had the leisure, even if they had the inclination, to sit in his room and entertain him with conversation. Eve brought Jasper fresh flowers every morning, and by snatches sang to him. The little parlour opened out of the room he occupied, and in it was her harpsichord, an old instrument, without much tone, but it served to accompany her clear fresh voice. In the evening she and Barbara sang duets. The elder sister had a good alto voice that contrasted well with the warble of her sister's soprano.

Mr. Jordan came periodically into the sick room, and saluted his guest in a shy, reserved manner, asked how he progressed, made some common remark about the weather, fidgeted with the backs of the chairs or the brim of his hat, and went away. He was a timid man with strangers, a man who lived in his own thoughts, a man with a frightened, far-off look in his eyes. He was ungainly in his movements, through nervousness. He made no friends, he had acquaintances only.

His peculiar circumstances, the connection with Eve's mother, his natural reserve, had kept him apart from the gentlefolks around. His reserve had deepened of late, and his shyness had become painful to himself and to those with whom he spoke.

As Eve grew up, and her beauty was observed, the neighbours pitied the two girls, condemned through no fault of their own to a life of social exclusion. Of Barbara everyone spoke well, as an excellent manager and thrifty housekeeper, kind of heart, in all things reliable. Of Eve everyone spoke as a beauty. Some little informal conclaves had been held in the neighbourhood, and one good lady had said to the Cloberrys, 'If you will call, so will I.' So the Cloberrys of Bradstone, as a leading county family, had taken the initiative and called. As the Cloberry family coach drove up to the gate of Morwell, Mr. Jordan was all but caught, but he had the presence of mind to slip behind a laurel bush, that concealed his body, whilst exposing his legs. There he remained motionless, believing himself unseen, till the carriage drove away. After the Cloberrys had called, other visitors arrived, and the girls received invitations to tea, which they gladly accepted. Mr. Jordan sent his card by his daughters; he would make no calls in person, and the neighbours were relieved not to see him. That affair of seventeen years ago was not forgiven.

Mr. Jordan was well pleased that his daughters should go into society, or rather that his daughter Eve should be received and admired. With Barbara he had not much in common, only the daily cares of the estate, and these worried him. To Eve, and to her alone, he opened out, and spoke of things that lived within, in his mind, to her alone did he exhibit tenderness. Barbara was shut out from his heart; she felt the exclusion, but did not resent the preference shown to Eve. That was natural, it was Eve's due, for Eve was so beautiful, so bright, so perfect a little fairy. But, though Barbara did not grudge her young sister the love that was given to her, she felt an ache in her heart, and a regret that the father's love was not so full that it could embrace and envelop both.

One day, when the afternoon sun was streaming into the hall, Barbara crossed it, and came to the convalescent's room.

'Come,' she said, 'my father and I think you had better sit outside the house; we are carrying the hay, and it may amuse you to watch the waggon. The sweet air will do you good. You must be weary of confinement in this little room.'

'How can I be weary where I am so kindly treated! – where all speaks to me of rest and peace and culture!' Jasper was dressed, and was sitting in an armchair reading, or pretending to read, a book.

'Can you rise, Mr. Jasper?' she asked.

He tried to leave the chair, but he was still very weak, so she assisted him.

'And now,' she said kindly, 'walk, sir!'

She watched his steps. His face was pale, and the pallor was the more observable from the darkness of his hair. 'I think,' said he, forcing a smile, 'I must beg a little support.'

She went without hesitation to his side, and he put his arm in hers. He had not only lost much blood, but had been bruised and severely shaken, and was not certain of his steps. Barbara was afraid, in crossing the hall, lest he should fall on the stone floor. She disengaged his hand, put her arm about his waist, bade him lean on her shoulder. How strong she seemed!

'Can you get on now?' she asked, looking up. His deep eyes met her.

'I could get on for ever thus,' he answered.

She flushed scarlet.

'I dislike such speeches,' she said; and disengaged herself from him. Whilst her arm was about him her hand had felt the beating of his heart.

She conducted him to a bench in the garden near a bed of stocks, where the bees were busy.

'How beautiful the world looks when one has not seen it for many days!' he said.

'Yes, there is a good shear of hay, saved in splendid order.'

'When a child is born into the world there is always a gathering, and a festival to greet it. I am born anew into the beautiful world to-day. I am on the threshold of a new life, and you have nursed me into it. Am I too presumptuous if I ask you to sit here a very little while, and welcome me into it? That will be a festival indeed.'

She smiled good-humouredly, and took her place on the bench. Jasper puzzled her daily more and more. What was he? What was the temptation that had led him away? Was his repentance thorough? Barbara prayed for him daily, with the excuse to her conscience that it was always well to pray for the conversion of a sinner, and that she was bound to pray for the man whom Providence had cast broken and helpless at her feet. The Good Samaritan prayed, doubtless, for the man who fell among thieves. She was interested in her patient. Her patient he was, as she was the only person in the house to provide and order whatever was done in it. Her patient, Eve and her father called him. Her patient he was, somehow her own heart told her he was; bound to her doubly by the solicitude with which she had nursed him, by the secret of his life which she had surprised.

He puzzled her. He puzzled her more and more daily. There was a gentleness and refinement in his manner and speech that showed her he was not a man of low class, that if he were not a gentleman by birth he was one in mind and culture. There was a grave religiousness about him, moreover, that could not be assumed, and did not comport with a criminal.

Who was he, and what had he done? How far had he sinned, or been sinned against? Barbara's mind was fretted with these ever-recurring questions. Teased with the enigma, she could not divert her thoughts for long from it – it formed the background to all that occupied her during the day. She considered the dairy, but when the butter was weighed, went back in mind to the riddle. She was withdrawn again by the demands of the cook for groceries from her store closet; when the closet door was shut she was again thinking of the puzzle. She had to calculate the amount of cake required for the harvesters, and went on from the calculations of currants and sugar to the balancing of probabilities in the case of Jasper.

She had avoided seeing him of late more than was necessary, she had resolved not to go near him, and let the maid Jane attend to his requirements, aided by Christopher Davy's boy, who cleaned the boots and knives, and ran errands, and weeded the paths, and was made generally useful. Yet for all her resolve she did not keep it: she discovered that some little matter had been neglected, which forced her to enter the room.

When she was there she was impatient to be out of it again, and she hardly spoke to Jasper, was short, busy, and away in a moment.

'It does not do to leave the servants to themselves,' soliloquised Barbara. 'They half do whatever they are set at. The sick man would not like to complain. I must see to everything myself.'

Now she complied with his request to sit beside him, but was at once filled with restlessness. She could not speak to him on the one subject that tormented her. She had herself forbidden mention of it.

She looked askance at Jasper, who was not speaking. He had his hat off, on his lap; his eyes were moist, his lips were moving. She was confident he was praying. He turned in a moment, recovered his head, and said with his sweet smile, 'God is good. I have already thanked you. I have thanked him now.'

Was this hypocrisy? Barbara could not believe it.

She said, 'If you have no objection, may we know your name? I have been asked by my father and others. I mean,' she hesitated, 'a name by which you would care to be called.'

'You shall have my real name,' he said, slightly colouring.

'For myself to know, or to tell others?'

'As you will, Miss Jordan. My name is Babb.'

'Babb!' echoed Barbara. She thought to herself that it was a name as ugly as it was unusual. At that moment Eve appeared, glowing with life, a wreath of wild roses wound about her hat.

'Bab! Bab dear!' she cried, referring to her sister.

Barbara turned crimson, and sprang from her seat.

'The last cartload is going to start,' said Eve eagerly, 'and the men say that I am the Queen and must sit on the top; but I want half-a-crown, Bab dear, to pay my footing up the ladder to the top of the load.'

Barbara drew her sister away. 'Eve! never call me by that ridiculous pet-name again. When we were children it did not matter. Now I do not wish it.'

'Why not?' asked the wondering girl. 'How hot you are looking, and yet you have been sitting still!'

'I do not wish it, Eve. You will make me very angry, and I shall feel hurt if you do it again. Bab – think, darling, the name is positively revolting, I assure you. I hate it. If you have any love for me in your heart, any regard for my feelings, you will not call me by it again. Bab – !'

## CHAPTER IX. THE POCKET-BOOK

Jasper drew in full draughts of the delicious air, leaning back on the bench, himself in shade, watching the trees, hearing the hum of the bees, and the voices of the harvesters, pleasant and soft in the distance, as if the golden sun had subdued all the harshness in the tones of the rough voices. Then the waggon drew nigh; the garden was above the level of the farmyard, terraced so that Jasper could not see the cart and horses, or the men, but he saw the great load of grey-green hay move by, with Eve and Barbara seated on it, the former not only crowned with roses, but holding a pole with a bunch of roses and a flutter of ribands at the top. Eve's golden hair had fallen loose and was about her shoulders. She was in an ecstasy of gaiety. As the load travelled along before the garden, both Eve and her sister saw the sick man on his bench. He seemed so thin, white, and feeble in the midst of a fresh and vigorous nature that Barbara's heart grew soft, and she had to bite her lip to control its quiver. Eve waved her staff topped with flowers and streamers, stood up in the hay and curtsied to him, with a merry laugh, and then dropped back into the hay, having lost her balance through the jolting of the wheels. Jasper brightened, and, removing his hat, returned the salute with comic majesty. Then, as Eve and Barbara disappeared, he fell back against the wall, and his eyes rested on the fluttering leaves of a white poplar, and some white butterflies that might have been leaves reft from the trees, flickering and pursuing each other in the soft air. The swallows that lived in a colony of inverted clay domes under the eaves were darting about, uttering shrill cries, the expression of exuberant joy of life. Jasper sank into a summer dream.

He was roused from his reverie by a man coming between him and the pretty garden picture that filled his eyes. He recognised the surgeon, Mr. – or as the country people called him, Doctor – Coyshe. The young medical man had no objection to being thus entitled, but he very emphatically protested against his name being converted into Quash, or even Squash. Coyshe is a very respectable and ancient Devonshire family name, but it is a name that lends itself readily to phonetic degradation, and the young surgeon had to do daily battle to preserve it from being vulgarised. 'Good afternoon, patient!' said he cheerily; 'doing well, thanks to my treatment.'

Jasper made a suitable reply.

'Ah! I dare say you pull a face at seeing me now, thinking I am paying visits for the sake of my fee, when need for my attendance is past. That, let me tell you, is the way of some doctors; it is, however, not mine. Lord love you, I knew a case of a man who sent for a doctor because his wife was ill, and was forced to smother her under pillows to cut short the attendance and bring the bill within the compass of his means. Bless your stars, my man, that you fell into my hands, not into those of old Crooke.'

'I am assured,' said Jasper, 'that I am fallen into the best possible hands.'

'Who assured you of that?' asked Coyshe sharply; 'Miss Eve or the other?'

'I am assured by my own experience of your skill.'

'Ah! an ordinary practitioner would have trepanned you; the whole run of them, myself and myself only excepted, have an itch in their fingers for the saw and the scalpel. There is far too much bleeding, cupping, and calomel used in the profession now – but what are we to say? The people love to have it so, to see blood and have a squeal for their money. I've had before now to administer a bread pill and give it a Greek name.'

Mr. Jordan from his study, the girls from the stackyard (or moway, as it is locally called), saw or heard the surgeon. He was loud in his talk and made himself heard. They came to him into the garden. Eve, with her natural coquetry, retained the crown of roses and her sceptre.

‘You see,’ said Mr. Coyshe, rubbing his hands, ‘I have done wonders. This would have been a dead man but for me. Now, sir, look at me,’ he said to Jasper; ‘you owe me a life.’

‘I know very well to whom I owe my life,’ answered Jasper, and glanced at Barbara. ‘To my last hour I shall not forget the obligation.’

‘And do you know *why* he owes me his life?’ asked the surgeon of Mr. Jordan. ‘Because I let nature alone, and kept old Crooke away. I can tell you the usual practice. The doctor comes and shrugs his shoulders and takes snuff. When he sees a proper impression made, he says, “However; we will do our best, only we don’t work miracles.” He sprinkles his victim with snuff, as if about to embalm the body. If the man dies, the reason is clear. Crooke was not sent for in time. If he recovers, Crooke has wrought a miracle. That is not my way, as you all know.’ He looked about him complacently.

‘What will you take, Mr. Coyshe?’ asked Barbara; ‘some of our haysel ale, or claret? And will you come indoors for refreshment?’

‘Indoors! O dear me, no!’ said the young doctor; ‘I keep out of the atmosphere impregnated with four or five centuries of dirt as much as I can. If I had my way I would burn down every house with all its contents every ten years, and so we might get rid of half the diseases which ravage the world. I wouldn’t live in your old ramshackle Morwell if I were paid ten guineas a day. The atmosphere must be poisoned, charged with particles of dust many centuries old. Under every cupboard, ay, and on top of it, is fluff, and every stir of a gown, every tread of a foot, sets it floating, and the currents bring it to your lungs or pores. What is that dust made up of? Who can tell? The scrapings of old monks, the scum of Protestant reformers, the detritus of any number of Jordans for ages, some of whom have had measles, some scarlet-fever, some small-pox. No, thank you. I’ll have my claret in the garden. I can tell you without looking what goes to make up the air in that pestilent old box; the dog has carried old bones behind the cupboard, the cat has been set a saucer of milk under the chest, which has been forgotten and gone sour. An old stocking which one of the ladies was mending was thrust under a sofa cushion, when the front door bell rang, and she had to receive callers – and that also was forgotten.’

Miss Jordan waxed red and indignant. ‘Mr. Coyshe,’ she said, ‘I cannot hear you say this, it is not true. Our house is perfectly sweet and clean; there is neither a store of old bones, nor a half-darned stocking, nor any of the other abominations you mentioned about it.’

‘Your eyes have not seen the world through a microscope. Mine have,’ answered the unabashed surgeon. ‘When a ray of sunlight enters your rooms, you can see the whole course of the ray.’

‘Yes.’

‘Very well, that is because the air is dirty. If it were clean you would be unable to see it. No, thank you. I will have my claret in the garden; perhaps you would not mind having it sent out to me. The air out of doors is pure compared to that of a house.’

A little table, wine, glasses and cake were sent out. Barbara and Eve did not reappear.

Mr. Jordan had a great respect for the young doctor. His self-assurance, his pedantry, his boasting, imposed on the timid and half-cultured mind of the old man. He hoped to get information from the surgeon about tests for metals, to interest him in his pursuits without letting him into his secrets; he therefore overcame his shyness sufficiently to appear and converse when Mr. Coyshe arrived.

‘What a very beautiful daughter you have got!’ said Coyshe; ‘one that is only to be seen in pictures. A man despairs of beholding such loveliness in actual life, and see, here, at the limit of the world, the vision flashes on one! Not much like you, Squire, not much like her sister; looks as if she belonged to another breed.’

Jasper Babb looked round startled at the audacity and rudeness of the surgeon. Mr. Jordan was not offended; he seemed indeed flattered. He was very proud of Eve.

‘You are right. My eldest daughter has almost nothing in common with her younger sister – only a half-sister.’

‘Really,’ said Coyshe, ‘it makes me shiver for the future of that fairy being. I take it for granted she will be yoked to some county booby of a squire, a Bob Acres. Good Lord! what a prospect! A jewel of gold in a swine’s snout, as Solomon says.’

‘Eve shall never marry one unworthy of her,’ said Ignatius Jordan vehemently. She will be under no constraint. She will be able to afford to shape her future according to her fancy. She will be comfortably off.’

‘Comfortably off fifty years ago means pinched now, and pinched now means screwed flat fifty years hence. Everything is becoming costly. Living is a luxury only for the well-to-do. The rest merely exist under sufferance.’

‘Miss Eve will not be pinched,’ answered Mr. Jordan, unconscious that he was being drawn out by the surgeon. ‘Seventeen years ago I lent fifteen hundred pounds, which is to be returned to me on Midsummer Day. To that I can add about five hundred; I have saved something since – not much, for somehow the estate has not answered as it did of old.’

‘You have two daughters.’

‘Oh, yes, there is Barbara,’ said Jordan in a tone of indifference. ‘Of course she will have something, but then – she can always manage for herself – with the other it is different.’

‘Are you ill?’ asked Coyshe, suddenly, observing that Jasper had turned very pale, and dark under the eyes. ‘Is the air too strong for you?’

‘No, let me remain here. The sun does me good.’

Mr. Jordan was rather glad of this opportunity of publishing the fortune he was going to give his younger daughter. He wished it to be known in the neighbourhood, that Eve might be esteemed and sought by suitable young men. He often said to himself that he could die content were Eve in a position where she would be happy and admired.

‘When did Miss Eve’s mother die?’ asked Coyshe abruptly. Mr. Jordan started.

‘Did I say she was dead? Did I mention her?’

Coyshe mused, put his hand through his hair and ruffled it up; then folded his arms and threw out his legs.

‘Now tell me, squire, are you sure of your money?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘That money you say you lent seventeen years ago. What are your securities?’

‘The best. The word of an honourable man.’

‘The word!’ Mr. Coyshe whistled. ‘Words! What are words?’

‘He offered me a mortgage, but it never came,’ said Mr. Jordan. ‘Indeed, I never applied for it. I had his word.’

‘If you see the shine of that money again, you are lucky.’ Then looking at Jasper: ‘My patient is upset again – I thought the air was too strong for him. He must be carried in. He is going into a fit.’

Jasper was leaning back against the wall, with distended eyes, and hands and teeth clenched as with a spasm.

‘No,’ said Jasper faintly, ‘I am not in a fit.’

‘You looked much as if going into an attack of lock-jaw.’

At that moment Barbara came out, and at once noticed the condition of the convalescent.

‘Here,’ said she, ‘lean on me as you did coming out. This has been too much for you. Will you help me, Doctor Coyshe?’

‘Thank you,’ said Jasper. ‘If Miss Jordan will suffer me to rest on her arm, I will return to my room.’

When he was back in his armchair and the little room he had occupied, Barbara looked earnestly in his face and said, ‘What has troubled you? I am sure something has.’

‘I am very unhappy,’ he answered, ‘but you must ask me no questions.’

Miss Jordan went in quest of her sister. 'Eve,' she said, 'our poor patient is exhausted. Sit in the parlour and play and sing, and give a look into his room now and then. I am busy.'

The slight disturbance had not altered the bent of Mr. Jordan's thoughts. When Mr. Coyshe rejoined him, which he did the moment he saw Jasper safe in his room, Mr. Jordan said, 'I cannot believe that I ran any risk with the money. The man to whom I lent it is honourable. Besides, I have his note of hand acknowledging the debt; not that I would use it against him.'

'A man's word,' said Coyshe, 'is like india-rubber that can be made into any shape he likes. A word is made up of letters, and he will hold to the letters and permute their order to suit his own convenience, not yours. A man will stick to his word only so long as his word will stick to him. It depends entirely on which side it is licked. Hark! Is that Miss Eve singing? What a voice! Why, if she were trained and on the stage –'

Mr. Jordan stood up, agitated and angry.

'I beg your pardon,' said Coyshe. 'Does the suggestion offend you? I merely threw it out in the event of the money lent not turning up.'

Just then his eyes fell on something that lay under the seat. 'What is that? Have you dropped a pocket-book?'

A rough large leather pocket-book that was to which he pointed. Mr. Jordan stooped and took it up. He examined it attentively and uttered an exclamation of surprise.

'Well,' said the surgeon mockingly, 'is the money come, dropped from the clouds at your feet?'

'No,' answered Mr. Jordan, under his breath, 'but this is most extraordinary, most mysterious! How comes this case here? It is the very same which I handed over, filled with notes, to that man seventeen years ago! See! there are my initials on it; there on the shield is my crest. How comes it here?'

'The question, my dear sir, is not how comes it here? but what does it contain?'

'Nothing.'

The surgeon put his hands in his pockets, screwed up his lips for a whistle, and said, 'I foretold this, I am always right.'

'The money is not due till Midsummer-day.'

'Nor will come till the Greek kalends. Poor Miss Eve!'

## CHAPTER X.

### BARBARA'S PETITION

Midsummer-day was come. Mr. Jordan was in suspense and agitation. His pale face was more livid and drawn than usual. The fears inspired by the surgeon had taken hold of him.

Before the birth of Eve he had been an energetic man, eager to get all he could out of the estate, but for seventeen years an unaccountable sadness had hung over him, damping his ardour; his thoughts had been carried away from his land, whither no one knew, though the results were obvious enough.

With Barbara he had little in common. She was eminently practical. He was always in a dream. She was never on an easy footing with her father, she tried to understand him and failed, she feared that his brain was partially disturbed. Perhaps her efforts to make him out annoyed him; at any rate he was cold towards her, without being intentionally unkind. An ever-present restraint was upon both in each other's presence.

At first, after the disappearance of Eve's mother, things had gone on upon the old lines. Christopher Davy had superintended the farm labours, but as he aged and failed, and Barbara grew to see the necessity for supervision, she took the management of the farm as well as of the house upon herself. She saw that the men dawdled over their work, and that the condition of the estate was going back. The coppices had not been shredded in winter and the oak was grown into a tangle. The rearing for bark in spring was done unsystematically. The hedges became ragged, the ploughs out of order, the thistles were not cut periodically and prevented from seeding. There were not men sufficient to do the work that had to be done. She had not the time to attend to the men as well as the maids, to the farmyard as well as the house. She had made up her mind that a proper bailiff must be secured, with authority to employ as many labourers as the estate required. Barbara was convinced that her father, with his lost, dreamy head, was incapable of managing their property, even if he had the desire. Now that the trusty old Davy was ill, and breaking up, she had none to advise her.

She was roused to anger on Midsummer-day by discovering that the hayrick had never been thatched, and that it had been exposed to the rain which had fallen heavily, so that half of it had to be taken down because soaked, lest it should catch fire or blacken. This was the result of the carelessness of the men. She determined to speak to her father at once. She had good reason for doing so.

She found him in his study arranging his specimens of mundic and peacock copper.

'Has anyone come, asking for me?' he said, looking up with fluttering face from his work.

'No one, father.'

'You startled me, Barbara, coming on me stealthily from behind. What do you want with me? You see I am engaged, and you know I hate to be disturbed.'

'I have something I wish to speak about.'

'Well, well, say it and go.' His shaking hands resumed their work.

'It is the old story, dear papa. I want you to engage a steward. It is impossible for us to go on longer in the way we have. You know how I am kept on the run from morning to night. I have to look after all your helpless men, as well as my own helpless maids. When I am in the field, there is mischief done in the kitchen; when I am in the house, the men are smoking and idling on the farm. Eve cannot help me in seeing to domestic matters, she has not the experience. Everything devolves on me. I do not grudge doing my utmost, but I have not the time for everything, and I am not ubiquitous.'

'No,' said Mr. Jordan, 'Eve cannot undertake any sort of work. That is an understood thing.'

'I know it is. If I ask her to be sure and recollect something, she is certain with the best intentions to forget; she is a dear beautiful butterfly, not fit to be harnessed. Her brains are thistledown, her bones cherry stalks.'

'Yes, do not crush her spirits with uncongenial work.'



‘I do not want to. I know as well as yourself that I must rely on her for nothing. But the result is that I am overtasked. Now – will you credit it? The beautiful hay that was like green tea is spoiled. Those stupid men did not thatch it. They said they had no reed, and waited to comb some till the rain set in. When it did pour, they were all in the barn talking and making reed, but at the same time the water was drenching and spoiling the hay. Oh, papa, I feel disposed to cry!’

‘I will speak to them about it,’ said Mr. Jordan, with a sigh, not occasioned by the injury to his hay, but because he was disturbed over his specimens.

‘My dear papa,’ said the energetic Barbara, ‘I do not wish you to be troubled about these tiresome matters. You are growing old, daily older, and your strength is not gaining. You have other pursuits. You are not heartily interested in the farm. I see your hand tremble when you hold your fork at dinner; you are becoming thinner every day. I would spare you trouble. It is really necessary, I must have it – you must engage a bailiff. I shall break down, and that will be the end, or we shall all go to ruin. The woods are running to waste. There are trees lying about literally rotting. They ought to be sent away to the Devonport dockyard where they could be sold. Last spring, when you let the rending, the barbers shaved a whole copse wood, as if shaving a man’s chin, instead of leaving the better sticks standing.’

‘We have enough to live on.’

‘We must do our duty to the land on which we live. I cannot endure to see waste anywhere. I have only one head, one pair of eyes, and one pair of hands. I cannot think of, see to, and do everything. I lie awake night after night considering what has to be done, and the day is too short for me to do all I have determined on in the night. Whilst that poor gentleman has been ill, I have had to think of him in addition to everything else; so some duties have been neglected. That is how, I suppose, the doctor came to guess there was a stocking half-darned under the sofa cushion. Eve was mending it, she tired and put it away, and of course forgot it. I generally look about for Eve’s leavings, and tidy her scraps when she has gone to bed, but I have been too busy. I am vexed about that stocking. How those protruding eyes of the doctor managed to see it I cannot think. He was, however, wrong about the saucer of sour milk.’

Mr. Jordan continued nervously sorting his minerals into little white card boxes.

‘Well, papa, are you going to do anything?’

‘Do – do – what?’

‘Engage a bailiff. I am sure we shall gain money by working the estate better. The bailiff will pay his cost, and something over.’

‘You are very eager for money,’ said Mr. Jordan sulkily; ‘are you thinking of getting married, and anxious to have a dower?’

Barbara coloured deeply, hurt and offended.

‘This is unkind of you, papa; I am thinking of Eve. I think only of her. You ought to know that’ – the tears came into her eyes. ‘Of course Eve will marry some day;’ then she laughed, ‘no one will ever come for me.’

‘To be sure,’ said Mr. Jordan.

‘I have been thinking, papa, that Eve ought to be sent to some very nice lady, or to some very select school, where she might have proper finishing. All she has learnt has been from me, and I have had so much to do, and I have been so unable to be severe with Eve – that – that – I don’t think she has learned much except music, to which she takes instinctively as a South Sea islander to water.’

‘I cannot be parted from Eve. It would rob my sky of its sun. What would this house be with only you – I mean without Eve to brighten it?’

‘If you will think the matter over, father, you will see that it ought to be. We must consider Eve, and not ourselves. I would not have her, dear heart, anywhere but in the very best school, – hardly a school, a place where only three or four young ladies are taken, and they of the best families. That will cost money, so we must put our shoulders to the wheel, and push the old coach on.’ She laid her

hands on the back of her father's chair and leaned over his shoulder. She had been standing behind him. Did she hope he would kiss her? If so, her hope was vain.

'Do, dear papa, engage an honest, superior sort of man to look after the farm. I will promise to make a great deal of money with my dairy, if he will see to the cows in the fields. Try the experiment, and, trust me, it will answer.'

'All in good time.'

'No, papa, do not put this off. There is another reason why I speak. Christopher Davy is bedridden. You are sometimes absent, then we girls are left alone in this great house, all day, and occasionally nights as well. You know there was no one here on that night when the accident happened. There were two men in this house, one, indeed, insensible. We know nothing of them, who they were, and what they were about. How can you tell that bad characters may not come here? It is thought that you have saved money, and it is known that Morwell is unprotected. You, papa, are so frail, and with your shaking hand a gun would not be dangerous.'

He started from his chair and upset his specimens.

'Do not speak like that,' he said, trembling.

'There, I have disturbed you even by alluding to it. If you were to level a gun, and had your finger –'

He put his hand, a cold, quivering hand, on her lips: 'For God's sake – silence!' he said.

She obeyed. She knew how odd her father was, yet his agitation now was so great that it surprised her. It made her more resolute to carry her point.

'Papa, you are expecting to have about two thousand pounds in the house. Will it be safe? You have told the doctor, and that man, our patient, heard you. Excuse my saying it, but I think it was not well to mention it before a perfect stranger. You may have told others. Mr. Coyshe is a chatterbox, he may have talked about it throughout the neighbourhood – the fact may be known to everyone, that to-day you are expecting to have a large sum of money brought you. Well – who is to guard it? Are there no needy and unscrupulous men in the county who would rob the house, and maybe silence an old man and two girls who stood in their way to a couple of thousand pounds?'

'The sum is large. It must be hidden away,' said Mr. Jordan, uneasily. 'I had not considered the danger' – he paused – 'if it be paid –'

'If, papa? I thought you were sure of it.'

'Yes, quite sure; only Mr. Coyshe disturbed me by suggesting doubts.'

'Oh, the doctor!' exclaimed Barbara, shrugging her shoulders.

'Well, the doctor,' repeated Mr. Jordan, captiously. 'He is a very able man. Why do you turn up your nose at him? He can see through a stone wall, and under a cushion to where a stocking is hidden, and under a cupboard to where a saucer of sour milk is thrust away; and he can see into the human body through the flesh and behind the bones, and can tell you where every nerve and vein is, and what is wrong with each. When things are wrong, then it is like stockings and saucers where they ought not to be in a house.'

'He was wrong about the saucer of sour milk, utterly wrong,' persisted Barbara.

'I hope and trust the surgeon was wrong in his forecast about the money – but my heart fails me –'

'He was wrong about the saucer,' said the girl encouragingly.

'But he was right about the stocking,' said her father dispiritedly.

## CHAPTER XI. GRANTED!

As the sun declined, Mr. Jordan became uneasy. He could not remain in his study. He could not rest anywhere. The money had not been returned. He had taken out of his strong box Ezekiel Babb's acknowledgment and promise of payment, but he knew that it was so much waste-paper to him. He could not or would not proceed against the borrower. Had he not wronged him cruelly by living with his daughter as if she were his wife, without having been legally married to her? Could he take legal proceedings for the recovery of his money, and so bring all the ugly story to light and publish it to the world? He had let Mr. Babb have the money to pacify him, and make some amends for the wrong he had done. No! If Mr. Babb did not voluntarily return the money, Ignatius Jordan foresaw that it was lost to him, lost to Eve, and poor Eve's future was unprovided for. The estate must go to Barbara, that is, the reversion in the tenure of it; the ready money he had intended for Eve. Mr. Jordan felt a bitterness rise in his heart against Barbara, whose future was assured, whilst that of Eve was not. He would have liked to leave Morwell to his younger daughter, but he was not sure that the Duke would approve of this, and he was quite sure that Eve was incompetent to manage a farm and dairy.

At the time of which we treat, it was usual for every squire to farm a portion of his own estate, his manor house was backed with extensive outbuildings for cattle, and his wife and daughters were not above superintending the dairy. Indeed, an ancestress of the author took farm after farm into her own hands as the leases fell in, and at last farmed the entire parish. She died in 1795. The Jordans were not squires, but perpetual tenants under the Dukes of Bedford, and had been received by the country gentry on an equal footing, till Mr. Jordan compromised his character by his union with Eve's mother. The estate of Morwell was a large one for one man to farm; if the Duke had exacted a large rent, of late years Mr. Jordan would have fallen into arrears, but the Duke had not raised his rent at the last renewal. The Dukes were the most indulgent of landlords.

Mr. Jordan came into the hall. It was the same as it had been seventeen years before; the same old clock was there, ticking in the same tone, the same scanty furniture of a few chairs, the same slate floor. Only the cradle was no longer to be seen. The red light smote into the room just as it had seventeen years before. There against the wall it painted a black cross as it had done seventeen years ago.

Ignatius Jordan looked up over the great fireplace. Above it hung the musket he had been cleaning when Ezekiel Babb entered. It had not been taken down and used since that day. Seventeen years! It was an age. The little babe that had lain in the cradle was now a beautiful marriageable maiden. Time had made its mark upon himself. His back was more bent, his hand more shaky, his walk less steady; a careful, thrifty man had been converted into an abstracted, half-crazed dreamer. Seventeen years of gnawing care and ceaseless sorrow! How had he been able to bear it? Only by the staying wings of love, of love for his little Eve – for *her* child. Without his Eve, *her* child, long ago he would have sunk and been swallowed up, the clouds of derangement of intellect would have descended on his brain, or his bodily health would have given way.

Seventeen years ago, on Midsummer-day, there had stood on the little folding oak table under the window a tumbler full of china roses, which were drooping, and had shed their leaves over the polished, almost black, table top. They had been picked some days before by his wife. Now, in the same place stood a glass, and in it were roses from the same tree, not drooping, but fresh and glistening, placed that morning there by *her* daughter. His eye sought the clock. At five o'clock, seventeen years ago, Ezekiel Babb had come into that hall through that doorway, and had borrowed his money. The clock told that the time was ten minutes to five. If Mr. Babb did not appear to the hour,

he would abandon the expectation of seeing him. He must make a journey to Buckfastleigh over the moor, a long day's journey, and seek the defaulter, and know the reason why the loan was not repaid.

He thought of the pocket-book on the gravel. How came it there? Who could have brought it? Mr. Jordan was too fully impressed with belief in the supernatural not to suppose it was dropped at his feet as a warning that his money was gone.

Mr. Jordan's eyes were fixed on the clock. The works began to whirr. Then followed the strokes. One – two – three – four – Five.

At the last stroke the door of Jasper's sickroom opened, and the convalescent slowly entered the hall and confronted his host.

The last week had wrought wonders in the man. He had rapidly recovered flesh and vigour after his wounds were healed.

As he entered, and his eyes met those of Mr. Jordan, the latter felt that a messenger from Ezekiel Babb stood before him, and that his money was not forthcoming.

'Well, sir?' he said.

'I am Jasper, the eldest son of Ezekiel Babb, of Owlacombe in Buckfastleigh,' he said. 'My father borrowed money of you this day seventeen years ago, and solemnly swore on this day to repay it.'

'Well?'

'It is not well. I have not got the money.'

A moan of disappointment broke from the heart of Ignatius Jordan, then a spasm of rage, such as might seize on a madman, transformed his face; his eye blazed, and he sprang to his feet and ran towards Jasper. The latter, keeping his eye on him, said firmly, 'Listen to me, Mr. Jordan. Pray sit down again, and I will explain to you why my father has not sent the money.'

Mr. Jordan hesitated. His face quivered. With his raised hand he would have struck Jasper, but the composure of the latter awed him. The paroxysm passed, and he sank into his chair, and gave way to depression.

'My father is a man of honour. He gave you his word, and he intended to keep it. He borrowed of you a large sum, and he laid it out in the purchase of some land. He has been fairly prosperous. He saved money enough to repay the debt, and perhaps more. As the time drew nigh for repayment he took the sum required from the bank in notes, and locked them in his bureau. Others knew of this. My father was not discreet: he talked about the repayment, he resented having to make it, complained that he would be reduced to great straits without it.'

'The money was not his, but mine.'

'I know that,' said Jasper, sorrowfully. 'But my father has always been what is termed a close man, has thought much of money, and cannot bear to part with it. I do not say that this justifies, but it explains, his dissatisfaction. He is an old man, and becoming feeble, and clings through force of habit to his money.'

'Go on; nothing can justify him.'

'Others knew of his money. One day he was at Totnes, at a great cloth fair. He did not return till the following day. During his absence his bureau was broken open, and the money stolen.'

'Was the thief not caught? Was the money not recovered?' asked Mr. Jordan, trembling with excitement.

'The money was in part recovered.'

'Where is it?'

'Listen to what follows. You asked if the – the person who took the money was caught. He was.'

'Is he in prison?'

'The person who took the money was caught, tried, and sent to jail. When taken, some of the money was found about him; he had not spent it all. What remained I was bringing you.'

'Give it me.'

'I have not got it.'

‘You have not got it?’

‘No, I have lost it.’

Again did Mr. Jordan start up in a fit of rage. He ground his teeth, and the sweat broke out in drops on his brow.

‘I had the money with me when the accident happened, and I was thrown from my horse, and became unconscious. It was lost or taken then.’

‘Who was your companion? He must have robbed you.’

‘I charge no one. I alone am to blame. The money was entrusted to my keeping.’

‘Why did your father give you the money before the appointed day?’

‘When my father recovered part of the money, he would no longer keep it in his possession, lest he should again lose it; so he bade me take it to you at once.’

‘You have spent the money, you have spent it yourself!’ cried Mr. Jordan wildly.

‘If I had done this, should I have come to you to-day with this confession? I had the money in the pocket-book in notes. The notes were abstracted from the book. As I was so long insensible, it was too late to stop them at the bank. Whoever took them had time to change them all.’

‘Cursed be the day I lent the money,’ moaned Ignatius Jordan. ‘The empty, worthless case returns, the precious contents are gone. What is the shell without the kernel? My Eve, my Eve!’ He clasped his hands over his brow.

‘And now once more hearken to me,’ pursued Jasper. ‘My father cannot immediately find the money that he owes you. He does not know of this second loss. I have not communicated with him since I met with my accident. The blame attaches to me. I must do what I can to make amends for my carelessness. I put myself into your hands. To repay you now, my father would have to sell the land he bought. I do not think he could be persuaded to do this, though, perhaps, you might be able to force him to it. However, as you say the money is for your daughter, will you allow it to lie where it is for a while? I will undertake, should it come to me after my father’s death, to sell it or transfer it, so as to make up to Miss Eve at the rate of five per cent. on the loan. I will do more. If you will consent to this, I will stay here and work for you. I have been trained in the country, and know about a farm. I will act as your foreman, overlooker, or bailiff. I will put my hand to anything. Reckon what my wage would be. Reckon at the end of a year whether I have not earned my wage and much more. If you like, I will work for you as long as my father lives; I will serve you now faithfully as no hired bailiff would serve you. My presence here will be a guarantee to you that I will be true to my undertaking to repay the whole sum with interest. I can see that this estate needs an active man on it; and you, sir, are too advanced in age, and too much given up to scientific pursuits, to cope with what is required.’

Those words, ‘scientific pursuits,’ softened Mr. Jordan. Jasper spoke in good faith; he had no idea how worthless those pursuits were, how little true science entered into them. He knew that Mr. Jordan made mineralogical studies, and he supposed they were well directed.

‘Order me to do what you will,’ said Jasper, ‘and I will do it, and will double your gains in the year.’

‘I accept,’ said Ignatius Jordan. ‘There is no help for it. I must accept or be plundered of all.’

‘You accept! let us join hands on the bargain.’

It was strange; as once before, seventeen years ago, hands had met in the golden gleam of sun that shot through the window, ratifying a contract, so was it now. The hands clasped in the sunbeam, and the reflected light from their illuminated hands smote up into the faces of the two men, both pale, one with years and care, the other with sickness.

Mr. Jordan withdrew his hand, clasped both palms over his face and wept. ‘Thus it comes,’ he said. ‘The shadow is on me and on my child. One sorrow follows another.’

At that moment Barbara and Eve entered from the court.

‘Eve! Eve!’ cried the father excitedly, ‘come to me, my angel! my ill-treated child! my martyr!’ He caught her to his heart, put his face on her shoulder, and sobbed. ‘My darling, you have had your money stolen, the money put away for you when you were in the cradle.’

‘Who has stolen it, papa?’ asked Barbara.

‘Look there!’ he cried; ‘Jasper Babb was bringing me the money, and when he fell from his horse, it was stolen.’

Neither Barbara nor Eve spoke.

‘Now,’ continued Mr. Jordan, ‘he has offered himself as my hind to look after the farm for me, and promises, if I give him time –’

‘Father, you have refused!’ interrupted Barbara.

‘On the contrary, I have accepted.’

‘It cannot, it must not be!’ exclaimed Barbara vehemently. ‘Father, you do not know what you have done.’

‘This is strange language to be addressed by a child to a father,’ said Mr. Jordan in a tone of irritation. ‘Was there ever so unreasonable a girl before? This morning you pressed me to engage a bailiff, and now that Mr. Jasper Babb has volunteered, and I have accepted him, you turn round and won’t have him.’

‘No,’ she said, with quick-drawn breath, ‘I will not. Take anyone but him. I entreat you, papa. If you have any regard for my opinion, let him go. For pity’s sake do not allow him to remain here!’

‘I have accepted him,’ said her father coldly. ‘Pray what weighty reasons have you got to induce me to alter my resolve?’

Miss Jordan stood thinking; the colour mounted to her forehead, then her brows contracted. ‘I have none to give,’ she said in a low tone, greatly confused, with her eyes on the ground. Then, in a moment, she recovered her self-possession and looked Jasper full in the face, but without speaking, steadily, sternly. In fact, her heart was beating so fast, and her breath coming so quick, that she could not speak. ‘Mr. Jasper,’ she said at length, controlling her emotions by a strong effort of will, ‘I entreat you – go.’

He was silent.

‘I have nursed you; I have given my nights and days to you. You confessed that I had saved your life. If you have any gratitude in your heart, if you have any respect for the house that has sheltered you – go!’

‘Barbara,’ said her father, ‘you are a perverse girl. He shall not go. I insist on his fulfilling his engagement. If he leaves I shall take legal proceedings against his father to recover the money.’

‘Do that rather than retain him.’

‘Miss Jordan,’ said Jasper, slowly, and with sadness in his voice, ‘it is true that you have saved my life. Your kind hand drew me from the brink of the grave whither I was descending. I thank you with all my heart, but I cannot go from my engagement to your father. Through my fault the money was lost, and I must make what amends I may for my negligence.’

‘Go back to your father.’

‘That I cannot do.’

She considered with her hand over her lips to hide her agitation. ‘No,’ she said, ‘I understand that. Of course you cannot go back to your native place and to your home; but you need not stay here.’ Then suddenly, in a burst of passion, she extended her hands to her father, ‘Papa!’ – then to the young man, ‘Mr. Jasper! – Papa, send him away! Mr. Jasper, do not remain!’

The young man was hardly less agitated than herself. He took a couple of steps towards the door.

‘Stuff and fiddlesticks!’ shouted Mr. Jordan. ‘He shall not go. I forbid him.’

Jasper turned. ‘Miss Barbara,’ he said, humbly, ‘you are labouring under a mistake which I must not explain. Forgive me. I stay.’

She looked at him with moody anger, and muttered, 'Knowing what you do – that I am not blind – that you should dare to settle here under this *honourable* roof. It is unjust! it is ungrateful! it is wicked! God help us! I have done what I could.'

## CHAPTER XII. CALLED AWAY

Jasper was installed in Morwell as bailiff in spite of the remonstrances of Barbara. He was given a room near the gatehouse, and was attended by Mrs. Davy, but he came for his dinner to the table of the Jordans. Barbara had done what she could to prevent his becoming an inmate of the house. She might not tell her father her real reasons for objecting to the arrangement.

She was rendered more uneasy a day or two after by receiving news that an aunt, a sister of her mother, who lived beyond Dartmoor, was dying, and she was summoned to receive her last sigh. She must leave Morwell, leave her father and sister in the house with a man whom she thoroughly mistrusted. Her only comfort was that Jasper was not sufficiently strong and well to be dangerous. What was he? Was there any truth in that story he had told her father? She could not believe it, because it would not fit in with what she already knew. What place had the convict's garb in that tale? She turned the narrative about in her mind, and rejected it. She was inclined to disbelieve in Jasper being the son of old Mr. Babb. He had assumed the name and invented the story to deceive her father, and form an excuse for remaining in the house.

She hardly spoke to Jasper when they met. She was cold and haughty, she did not look at him; and he made no advances to gain her goodwill.

When she received the summons to her aunt's deathbed, knowing that she must go, she asked where Mr. Babb was, and, hearing that he was in the barn, went thither with the letter in her hand.

He had been examining the horse-turned winnowing machine, which was out of order. As she came to the door he looked up and removed his hat, making a formal salute. The day was hot; he had been taking the machine to pieces, and was warm, so he had removed his coat. He at once drew it on his back again.

Barbara had a curt, almost rough, manner at times. She was vexed now, and angry with him, so she spoke shortly, 'I am summoned to Ashburton. That is close to Buckfastleigh, where, you say, you lived, to make my father believe it is your home.'

'Yes, Miss Jordan, that is true.'

'You have not written to your home since you have been with us. At least – 'she hesitated, and slightly coloured – 'you have sent no letter by our boy. Perhaps you were afraid to have it known where you are. No doubt you were right. It is essential to you that your presence here should not be known to anyone but your father. A letter might be opened, or let lie about, and so your whereabouts be discovered. Supposing your story to be true, that is how I account for your silence. If it be false – '

'It is not false, Miss Jordan.'

'I am going to Ashburton, I will assure myself of it there. If it be false I shall break my promise to you, and tell my father everything. I give you fair warning. If it be true – '

'It is true, dear young lady.'

'Do not be afraid of my disclosing your secret, and putting you in peril.'

'I am sure you cannot do that,' he said, with a smile that was sad. 'If you go to Buckfastleigh, Miss Jordan, I shall venture to send word by you to my father where I am, that the money is lost, and what I have undertaken.'

Barbara tossed her head, and flashed an indignant glance at him out of her brown eyes.

'I cannot, I will not be a porter of lies.'

'What lies?'

'You did not lose the money. Why deceive me? I know your object in lurking here, in the most out-of-the-way nook of England you could find. You think that here you are safe from pursuit. You



made up the story to impose on my father, and induce him to engage you. O, you are very honourable! discharging a debt! – I hate crime, but I hate falsehood even more.’

‘You are mistaken, Miss Jordan. The story is true.’

‘You have told the whole honest truth?’

‘I do not profess to have told the whole truth. What I have told has been true, though I have not told all.’

‘A pinch of truth is often more false than a bushel of lies. It deceives, the other does not.’

‘It is true that I lost the money confided to me. If you are going to Ashburton, I ask you, as a matter of kindness – I know how kind you can be, alas, and I know also how cruel – to see my father.’

She laughed haughtily. ‘This is a fine proposition. The servant sends the mistress to do his dirty work. I thank you for the honour.’ She turned angrily away.

‘Miss Barbara,’ said Jasper, ‘you are indeed cruel.’

‘Am I cruel?’ She turned and faced him again, with a threatening brow. ‘I have reason to be just. Cruel I am not.’

‘You were all gentleness at one time, when I was ill. Now – ’

‘I will not dispute with you. Do you expect to be fed with a spoon still? When you were ill I treated you as a patient, not more kindly than I would have treated my deadliest enemy. I acted as duty prompted. There was no one else to take care of you, that was my motive – my only motive.’

‘When I think of your kindness then, I wish I were sick again.’

‘A mean and wicked wish. Tired already, I suppose, of doing *honest* work.’

‘Miss Barbara,’ he said, ‘pray let me speak.’

‘Cruel,’ – she recurred to what he had said before, without listening to his entreaty, ‘It is you who are cruel coming here – you, with the ugly stain on your life, coming here to hide it in this innocent household. Would it not be cruel in a man with the plague poison in him to steal into a home of harmless women and children, and give them all the pestilence? Had I suspected that you intended making Morwell your retreat and skulking den, I would never have passed my promise to keep silence. I would have taken the hateful evidence of what you are in my hand, and gone to the first constable and bid him arrest you in your bed.’

‘No,’ said Jasper, ‘you would not have done it. I know you better than you know yourself. Are you lost to all humanity? Surely you feel pity in your gentle bosom, notwithstanding your bitter words.’

‘No,’ she answered, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, ‘no, I have pity only for myself, because I was weak enough to take pains to save your worthless life.’

‘Miss Jordan,’ he said, looking sorrowfully at her – and her eyes fell – ‘surely I have a right to ask some pity of you. Have you considered what the temptations must be that beset a young man who has been roughly handled at home, maltreated by his father, reared without love – a young man with a soul bounding with hopes, ambition, love of life, with a heart for pleasure, all which are beaten back and trampled down by the man who ought to direct them? Can you not understand how a lad who has been thwarted in every way, without a mother to soothe him in trouble, and encourage him in good, driven desperate by a father’s harshness, may break away and transgress? Consider the case of one who has been taught that everything beautiful – laughter, delight in music, in art, in nature, a merry gambol, a joyous warble – is sinful; is it not likely that the outlines of right and wrong would be so blurred in his conscience, that he might lapse into crime without criminal intent?’

‘Are you speaking of yourself, or are you excusing another?’

‘I am putting a case.’

Barbara sighed involuntarily. Her own father had been unsympathetic. He had never been actually severe, he had been indifferent.

‘I can see that there were temptations to one so situated to leave his home,’ she answered, ‘but this is not a case of truancy, but of crime.’

‘You judge without knowing the circumstances.’

‘Then tell me all, that I may form a more equitable judgment.’

‘I cannot do that now. You shall be told – later.’

‘Then I must judge by what I know – ’

‘By what you guess,’ he said, correcting her.

‘As you will.’ Her eyes were on the ground. A white spar was there. She turned it over with her foot, and turned it again.

She hesitated what to say.

‘Should you favour me so far as to visit my father,’ said Jasper, ‘I beg of you one thing most earnestly. Do not mention the name of my companion – Martin.’

‘Why not?’

‘He may suspect him of having robbed me. My father is an energetic, resolute man. He might pursue him, and I alone am to blame. I lost the money.’

‘Who was that Martin?’

‘He told you – that I was nothing to him.’

‘Then why do you seek to screen him?’

‘Can I say that he took the money? If my father gets him arrested – I shall be found.’

Barbara laughed bitterly.

‘Of course, the innocent must not be brought into suspicion because he has ridden an hour alongside of the guilty. No! I will say nothing of Martin.’

She was still turning over the piece of spar with her foot. It sparkled in the sun.

‘How are you going to Ashburton, Miss Jordan?’

‘I ride, and little John Ostler rides with me, conveying my portmanteau.’

Then she trifled with the spar again. There was some peacock copper on it that glistened with all the colours of the rainbow. Abruptly, at length, she turned away and went indoors.

Next morning early she came in her habit to the gate where the boy who was to accompany her held the horses. She had not seen Jasper that morning, but she knew where he was. He had gone along the lane toward the common to set the men to repair fences and hedges, as the cattle that strayed on the waste-land had broken into the wheat field.

She rode along the lane in meditative mood. She saw Jasper awaiting her on the down, near an old quarry, the rubble heap from which was now blazing with gorse in full bloom. She drew rein, and said, ‘I am going to Ashburton. I will take your message, not because you asked me, but because I doubt the truth of your story.’

‘Very well, Miss Jordan,’ he said respectfully; ‘I thank you, whatever your motive may be.’

‘I expect and desire no thanks,’ she answered, and whipped her horse, that started forward.

‘I wish you a favourable journey,’ he said. ‘Good-bye.’

She did not turn her head or respond. She was very angry with him. She stooped over her pommel and buckled the strap of the little pocket in the leather for her kerchief. But, before she had ridden far, an intervening gorse bush forced her to bend her horse aside, and then she looked back, without appearing to look, looked back out of her eye-corners. Jasper stood where she had left him, with his hat in his hand.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### MR. BABB AT HOME

A lovely July day in the fresh air of Dartmoor, that seems to sparkle as it enters the lungs: fresh, but given a sharpness of salt: pure, but tinged with the sweetness of heather bloom and the honey of gorse. Human spirits bound in this air. The scenery of Dartmoor, if bare of trees, is wildly picturesque with granite masses and bold mountain peaks. Barbara could not shake off the anxiety that enveloped her spirits like the haze of a valley till she rose up a long ascent of three miles from the wooded valley of the Tavy to the bald, rock-strewn expanse of Dartmoor. She rode on, attended by her little groom, till she reached Prince's Town, the highest point attained by the road, where, in a desolate plain of bog, but little below the crests of some of the granite tors, stands a prison surrounded by a few mean houses. From Prince's Town Barbara would have a rough moor-path, not a good road, before her; and, as the horses were exhausted with their long climb, she halted at the little inn, and ordered some dinner for herself, and required that the boy and the horses should be attended to.

Whilst ham and eggs – nothing else was procurable – were being fried, Barbara walked along the road to the prison, and looked at the gloomy, rugged gate built of untrimmed granite blocks. The unbroken desolation swept to the very walls of the prison.<sup>1</sup> At that height the wind moans among the rocks and rushes mournfully; the air is never still. The landlady of the inn came to her.

'That is the jail,' she said. 'There was a prisoner broke out not long ago, and he has not yet been caught. How he managed it none can tell. Where he now is no one knows. He may be still wandering on the moor. Every road from it is watched. Perhaps he may give himself up, finding escape impossible. If not, he will die of hunger among the rocks.'

'What was the crime for which he was here?' asked Barbara; but she spoke with an effort.

'He was a bad man; it was no ordinary wickedness he committed. He robbed his own father.'

'His own father!' echoed Barbara, starting.

'Yes, he robbed him of nigh on two thousand pounds. The father acted sharp, and had him caught before he had spent all the money. The assizes were next week, so it was quick work; and here he was for a few days, and then – he got away.'

'Robbed his own father!' murmured Barbara, and now she thought she saw more clearly than before into a matter that looked blacker the more she saw.

'There's a man in yonder who set fire to his house to get the insurance. Folks say his house was but a rummagy old place. 'Tis a pity. Now, if he had got away it would not have mattered; but, a rascal who did not respect his own father! – not that I hold with a man prosecuting his own son. That was hard. Still, if one was to escape, I don't see why the Lord blessed the undertaking of the man who robbed his father, and turned His face away from him who only fired his house to get the insurance.'

The air ceased to sparkle as Miss Jordan rode the second stage of her journey: the sun was less bright, the fragrance of the gorse less sweet. She did not speak to her young groom the whole way, but rode silently, with compressed lips and moody brow. The case was worse than she had anticipated. Jasper had robbed his father, and all that story of his coming as a messenger from Mr. Babb with the money was false.

One evening, unattended, Barbara Jordan rode to Buckfastleigh, asked for the house of Mr. Babb, and dismounted at the door. The house was a plain, ugly, square modern erection, almost an insult to the beauty of the surroundings. The drive from the entrance gate was grass-grown. There was a stucco porch. The door was painted drab, and the paint was blistered, and had flaked off. The house also was mottled. It had been painted over plaster and cement, and the paint had curled and come

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<sup>1</sup> The author has allowed himself a slight anachronism. The prison was not a convict establishment at the period of this tale.

off in patches. The whole place had an uncared-for look. There were no flower beds, no creepers against the walls; the rain-shoots to the roof were choked, and the overflowing water had covered the walls where it reached with slime, black and green. At the back of the house was a factory, worked by a water-wheel, for cloth, and a gravel well-trodden path led from the back door of the house to the factory.

Barbara had descended from her cob to open the gate into the drive; and she walked up to the front door, leading her horse. There she rang the bell, but had doubts whether the wire were sound. She waited a long time, and no one responded. She tried the bell again, and then rapped with the handle of her whip against the door.

Then she saw a face appear at a side window, observe her and withdraw. A moment after, a shuffling tread sounded in the hall, chains and bolts were undone, the door was cautiously opened, and in it stood an old man with white hair, and black beady eyes.

‘What do you want? Who are you?’ he asked.

‘Am I speaking to Mr. Babb?’

‘Yes, you are.’

‘May I have a few words with you in private?’

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