

Weyman Stanley John

A Little Wizard



Stanley Weyman

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CHAPTER I.

PATTENHALL

When the agent of General Skippon, to whom the estate of Pattenhall by Ripon fell, as part of his reward after the battle of Naseby, went down to take possession, he found a little boy sitting on a heap of stones a few paces from the entrance gate. The old house (which has since been pulled down) lay a quarter of a mile from the road and somewhat in a hollow; but its many casements, blushing and sparkling in the glow of the evening sun, caught the rider's eye, and led him into the comfortable belief that he had reached his destination. He had come from Ripon, however, and the village lies on the farther side of the house from that town; consequently he had seen no one whom he could question, and he hailed the boy's presence with relief, checking his horse, and calling to him to know if this was Pattenhall.

The lad crouching on the stones, and nervously plucking the grass beside him, looked up at the four stern men sitting squarely in their saddles. But he did not answer. He might have been deaf.

"Come!" Agent Hoby said, repeating his question roughly. "You have got a tongue, my lad. Is this old squire Patten's?"

The boy shook his head mutely. He looked about twelve years old.

"Is it farther on?"

"Yes, farther on," the lad muttered, scarcely moving his lips.

"Where?"

Still keeping his eyes, which were large and brown, on his questioner, the boy pointed towards the tower of the church, a quarter of a mile away.

The agent stifled an exclamation, such as in other times would have been an oath. "Umph! I thought we were there!" he muttered. "However, it is but a step. Come up, mare."

The boy watched the four riders plod on along the road until the trees, which were in the full glory of their summer foliage, and almost met across the dusty way, hid them from his eyes. Then he rose, and shaking his fist with passionate vehemence in the direction in which they had gone, turned towards the gateway as if he would go up to the house. Before he had taken three steps, however, he changed his mind, and coming slowly back to the heap of stones, sat down in the same place and posture as before. The movement to retreat and the return were alike characteristic. In frame the boy was altogether childish, being puny and slight, and somewhat stunted; but his small face, browned by wind and sun, expressed both will and sensibility. As he sat waiting for the travellers to return, there was a sparkle, and not of tears only, in his eyes. His mouth took an ugly shape, and his small hand found and clutched one of the stones on which he sat.

Agent Hoby had never been more astonished in his life than when he returned hot and angry and found him still there. It was the last thing he had expected. "You little villain!" he cried, shortening his whip in his hand, and spurring his horse on to the strip of turf, which then, as now, bordered the road-"how dare you tell lies to the Commons' Commissioners?"

There was a slender gap in the wall behind the heap of stones, and the lad fell back into this, still clutching his missile in his hand. "I told no lies!" he said, looking defiantly at the angry man. "You asked me for Squire Patten, and I sent you to him-to the churchyard!"

One of the men behind Hoby chuckled grimly; and Hoby himself, who had ridden with Cromwell at Naseby, and looked the Robber Prince in the eyes, held his hand. "You little whelp!" he

said, half in anger and half in admiration. "It is easy to see what brood you come of! I have half a mind to lash your back for you! Be off to your mammy, and bid her whip you! My hand is too heavy."

With that, taking no further notice of the boy, he turned and rode in through the gate. The aspect of the house, the quality of the herbage, the size of the timber, the lack of stock, all claimed at once his agent's eye, and rendered it easy for him to forget the incident. He grumbled at the sagacity of the Roundhead troopers, who had lain a night at Pattenhall before Marston Moor, and swept it as bare as a board. He had a grunt of sympathy to spare for Squire Patten, who, sore wounded in the same fight, had ridden home to die three days later. He gave a thought even to young Patten, who had forfeited the last chance of saving his sequestered estate by breaking his parole, and again appearing in arms against the Parliament. But of the lad crawling slowly along the path behind him he thought nothing. And the boy, young as he was, felt this and resented it.

When the party presently reached the house, and the few servants who remained came out obsequiously to receive them, the boy felt his loneliness and sudden insignificance still more keenly. He saw stirrups held, and heard terms of honor passing; and he crept away to the hayloft to give vent to the tears he was too proud to shed in public. Safe in this refuge, he flung himself down on the hay and showed himself all child; now sobbing as if his heart was broken, and now clenching his little fists and beating the air in impotent passion.

The solitude to which he was left showed that he had good cause for his grief. No one asked for him, no one sought him, who had lately been the most important person in the place. The loft grew dark, the windows changed to mere patches of grey in the midst of blackness. At any other time, and under any other circumstances, the child would have been afraid to remain there alone. But grief and indignation swallow up fear, and in the darkness he called on his dead father and mother, and felt them nearer than in the day. Young as he was, the child could remember a time when his absence for half an hour would have set the house by the ears, and started a dozen pairs of legs in search of him; when loving voices, silent now forever, would have cried his name through yard and paddock, and a score of servants, whom death and dearth had not yet scattered, would have rushed to gratify his smallest need.

No wonder that at the thought of those days, and of the loving care and gentle hands which had guarded him from hour to hour, the solitary child crouching in the hay and darkness cried long and passionately. He knew little of the quarrel between King and Commons, and nothing of Laud or Strafford, Pym or Hampden, Ship-money or the New Model. But he could suffer. He was old enough to remember and feel, and compare past things with present; and understanding that today his father's house was passing into the hands of strangers, he experienced all the terror and anguish which a sense of homelessness combined with helplessness can inflict. Lonely and neglected he had been for some time now; but he had felt his loneliness little (comparatively speaking) until to-day.

Agent Hoby had finished his supper. Stretching his legs before the empty hearth in the attitude of one who had done a day's work, he was in the act of admonishing Gridley the butler on his duty to his new master, when he became aware of a slight movement in the direction of the door. The panelled walls of the parlor in which he sat swallowed up the light, and the candles stood in his way. He had to raise one above his head and peer below it before he could make out anything. When he did, and the face of the lad he had seen by the gate grew as it were out of the panel, his first feeling was one of alarm. He started and muttered an exclamation, thinking that he saw amiss; and that either the October he had drunk was stronger than ordinary, or there was something uncanny in the house. When a second look, however, persuaded him that the boy was there in the flesh, he gave way to anger.

"Gridley!" he said, knitting his brows, "who is this, and how does he come to be here? Is he one of your brats, man?"

"One of mine?" the butler answered stupidly.

"Ay, one of yours! Or how comes he to be here?" the agent answered querulously, sitting forward with a hand on each arm of his chair, and frowning at the boy, who returned his gaze with interest.

The butler looked at the lad as if he were considering him in some new light, and hesitated before he answered. "It is the young master," he said at last.

"The young what?" the agent exclaimed, leaning still farther forward, and putting into the words as much surprise as possible.

"It is the young master," Gridley repeated sullenly. "And he is here in season, for I want to know what I am to do with him."

"Do you mean that he is a Patten?" Hoby muttered, staring at the lad as if he were bewitched.

"To be sure," Gridley answered, looking also at the boy.

"But your master had only one son? Those were my instructions."

"Two," said the butler. "Master Francis—"

"Who is with Duke Hamilton in Scotland, and if caught in arms in England will hang," rejoined the agent, sternly. "Well?"

"And this one."

Hoby glared at the boy as if he would eat him. To find that the estate, which he had considered free from embarrassing claims, was burdened with a child, annoyed him beyond measure. The warrants under which he acted overrode, of course, all rights and all privileges; in the eye of the law the boy before him had no more to do with the old house and the wide acres than the meanest peasant who had a hovel on the land. But the agent was a humane man, and in his way a just one; and though he had been well content to ignore the malignant young reprobate whom he had hitherto considered the only claimant, he was vexed to find there was another, more innocent and more helpless.

"He must have relations," he said at last, after rubbing his closely cropped head with an air of much perplexity. "He must go to them."

"He has none alive that I know of," the butler answered stolidly. He was a high-shouldered, fat-faced man, with sly eyes.

"There are no other Pattens?" quoth Hoby.

"Not so much as an old maid."

"Then he must go to his mother's people."

"She was Cornish," Gridley answered, with a slight grin. "Her family were out with Sir Ralph Hopton, and are now in Holland, I hear."

Repulsed on all sides, the agent rose from his chair. "Well, bring him to me in the morning," he said irritably, "and I will see what can be done. His matter can wait. For yourself, however, make up your mind, my man; go or stay as you please. But if you stay it can only be upon my conditions. You understand that?" he added with some asperity.

Gridley assented with a corresponding smack of sullenness in his tone, and taking the hint, bore off the boy to bed. Soon the few lights, which still shone in the great house that had so quietly changed masters, died out one by one; until all lay black and silent, except one small room, low-ceiled, musty, and dark-panelled, which lay to the right of the hall, but a step or two below its level. This room was the butler's pantry and sleeping-chamber. The plate which had once glittered on its shelves, the silver flagons and Sheffield cups, the spice bowls and sugar-basins, were gone, devoted these five years past to the melting-pot and the Royal cause. The club and blunderbuss which should have guarded them remained, however, in their slings beside the bed; along with some show of dingy pewter and dingier blackjacks, and as many empty bottles as served at once to litter the gloomy little dungeon and prove that the old squire's cellar was not yet empty.

In the midst of this disorder, and in no way incommoded by the close atmosphere of the room, which reeked of beer and stale liquors, the butler sat thinking far into the night. On the table beside him, which had been cleared to make room for it, lay an open Bible; but as he never consulted its

pages or even looked towards it, we may assume that it lay there rather for show than use, and possibly had been arranged for the express purpose of catching the eye of Master Hobby should he push his inquiries as far as this apartment.

Heedless or forgetful of it, Gridley now sat staring into vacancy, with a dark expression on his face. Now and again he bit his finger-nails as if some problem of more than ordinary importance occupied his thoughts. His aspect too was changed in sympathy with the dark hours of the night. Fear and anticipation, greed and cunning, peered from behind the mask of sly composure which he had worn in the parlor. He had now the air of a man who would and dare not, and then again who would not shrink at risks. At last he rose with his mind made up, and creeping to the door secured it. With a stealthy glance round, he next extinguished the light, plunging the room into darkness. After that he was still to be heard shuffling about for some time, but of his actions or the business on which he was bent nothing could be known for certain. Only once a rich ringing sound as of metal on metal surprised the silence, and hanging on the air-for an eternity as it seemed to his alarmed ear-died reluctantly in the hollows of the pewter flagons on the shelf. It was nothing, it was the merest tinkle, it could scarcely have awakened the suspicions of the most critical listener. But the man who made the sound and heard the sound was a coward with an evil conscience; and for a full minute after the last echo had whispered itself away, he crouched on the floor, with the cold dew on his brow and his hand shaking. After that, silence.

Little Jack Patten, awaking suddenly as the first glimmer of dawn entered his room, found the butler standing by his side. The boy would have cried out, not knowing him in the half light, but Gridley muttered his name, and enjoining silence with a finger on his lip, sat down on the pallet by the lad's side.

"What is it?" Jack said, sitting up. The man's cautious and apprehensive air, no less than the gloom which still filled the room and rendered objects indistinct, scared him.

"Hush!" the butler answered in a low voice, "and listen to me, Jack. I have been thinking about you. You know this house is not yours any longer. It will be shut up, and there will be none but Roundheaded soldiers here, and the man below will be master. You don't want to stay here and eat his bread?"

The boy shook his head. But, even as he shook it, the tears rose to his eyes. For where was he to go? Yesterday's events, his friendlessness and helplessness, recurred to his mind in a rush of bitter memories.

"Would you like to come away with me?" Gridley muttered, keenly watching the effect of his words.

Jack peered at him doubtfully. The butler had not been so kind to him of late as to give this proposal an air of complete naturalness. The manner and the tone of it were strange even in the child's judgment. "Where are you going?" he asked cautiously.

"To my home," said the butler, licking his lips, as if they were dry.

"It is on the moors, is it not?"

The butler nodded. "Above Pateley?"

"It is many a mile above Pateley-up, up, up; ay, miles above it."

The child's eyes glistened at that. The moors were his fairyland. He had passed many and many a happy hour in dreaming of the marvellous things which lay beyond the purple hills to westward; the rugged broken line behind which the sun went down each day in a glory of crimson or orange. That line, he knew, was the beginning of the moors. The blue distance beyond it he had peopled with his own visions of giants and dwarfs, and witches and warlocks, and added besides all the tales which passed current in Pattenhall and the low country of doings *in t' moors*. He knew the moor people kept to themselves and were wild and savage, inhabiting hills a mile high and valleys miles in depth; and he longed to visit them and see these things for himself. His eyes dried quickly as he listened to

Gridley, and eagerly asked, "Above Pateley?" which was the boundary of his known world, "miles and miles above Pateley, Gridley?"

"Ay, up Skipton way."

"Is that in the heart of the moors, Gridley?"

"There is no other heart," the butler answered gruffly, "unless, maybe, it is Settle. And it is Settle side of Skipton."

"Are you going now?" the lad said impulsively, standing up straight in his bed, with his brown eyes staring and his fair cheeks glowing with anticipation and excitement.

"This very minute."

"I'll come with you! You will let me dress, Gridley?"

"Ay, dress quickly. We must be away before any one is awake."

"I'll be quick!" Jack answered.

He was too young to see anything strange in the hurry and secrecy of such a departure. The troubles of the times had made him familiar with abrupt comings and goings. He trembled, it is true, as he stole down the dark staircase on tiptoe and clinging to the butler's hand; but it was with excitement, not fear. He felt no surprise at finding one of the great plough-horses standing saddled in its stall; nor did the size of the wallets which he saw behind the saddle arouse any doubt or suspicion in his mind. Gridley's haste to be gone, the trembling which seized the butler as they crossed the farmyard, the frequent glances he cast behind him until the road was fairly gained, seemed to the boy natural enough. All Jack knew was that he was leaving his enemies behind him. They had killed his father and exiled his brother. Naturally he feared and hated them. He was too young to understand that he stood in no peril himself, but that on the contrary his proper disposal had caused Master Hoby the loss of at least an hour's sleep.

Before it was fairly light the fugitives were already a mile away. The boy rode behind Gridley, clinging to a strap passed round the latter's waist; and the two jogged along comfortably enough as far as the body was concerned, though it was evident that Gridley's anxiety was little if at all allayed. They shunned the highway, and went by hedge paths and bridle-roads, which avoided houses and villages. When the sun rose the two were already five or six miles from Pattenhall, in a country new to the lad, though sufficiently like his own to whet his curiosity instead of satisfying it.

"How far are we from the moors, Gridley?" he asked as often as he dared, for the butler's temper seemed uncertain. "Shall we be there to breakfast?"

"Ay, we'll be there to breakfast," was the usual answer.

And presently, to the boy's delight, the country began to trend upwards, the path grew steeper. The coppices and hedgerows, the clumps of elms and oaks and beeches, which had hidden the higher prospects from his eyes, and almost persuaded him that he was making no progress, began to grow more sparse; until at last they failed altogether, and he saw before him a rising slope of marsh and moorland, swelling here and there into rocky ridges, between which the sycamores and ashes grew in stunted bunches. Above he raised his eyes to a heaven wider and more open than that to which he was accustomed; while lark beyond lark, soaring each higher than the other, seemed striving which should celebrate most fitly the balmy air and warm sunshine which flooded all.

"Are these the moors, Gridley?" the boy asked with delight.

"These, the moors?" the man answered, with the first smile he had allowed himself that morning. "You wait a bit, and you'll see!"

His tone was not encouraging, but as he hastened to give the lad his breakfast and a drink of beer, Jack passed over the change of manner, and rocking himself from side to side, as far as the strap would let him, went merrily upwards, munching as he rode. Over Pateley Bridge and Pateley moors they went, and upwards still to Bewerley Fell, whence they saw the Riding stretched like a picture behind them. Jack fancied, but that was, impossible, that he could see the chimneys and the great oak at Pattenhall. Leaving Bewerley they skirted Hebdon Moor on the north side, rising here

so high that Jack could see nothing on either hand but horrid crags, and ridges of grey limestone and vast slopes of grey rock. Here, too, there was little turf and no heather, but only stone-crop and saxifrages, with cruel quagmires and bogs in the hollows. The very sky seemed changed. It grew dark and overcast, and clouds and mist gathered round the travellers, hiding the path, yet disclosing from time to time the huge brow of Ingleborough or the flat head of Penighent. The wind moaned across the grey steeps, and a small rain began to fall and quickly wet them to the skin.

The boy shuddered. "Are these the moors?" he asked.

"Ay, these are the moors!" his companion answered grimly. "And moorland weather. Yon's the High Moors and Malham Tarn. Your eyes are young. Do you see a grey spot in the nook to the right, yonder, two miles away! That is Little Howe, and we are bound for it."

"Who lives there?" Jack answered, as he looked drearily over the desolate upland.

"My brother," the butler answered, with a touch of ferocity in his tone. "Simon Gridley, he is called, and you will know him soon enough."

CHAPTER II. MALHAM HIGH MOORS

Still nearly an hour elapsed before the tired horse stopped at the door of the small grey dwelling which Gridley had pointed out. The house, a rough farmstead of four rooms, stood high in a nook of the moor, facing Ingleborough. A few yew-trees filled the narrowing dell behind it with black shadow; a low wall of loose stones which joined one ridge to another formed a fold before it. The clatter of hoofs, as the horse climbed the rocky slope leading to the house, brought out a man and woman, who, leaning on this wall, watched the couple approach.

The aspect of the man was stern, dry, and austere; in a word, at one with the harsh and rugged scene in which he lived. His gloomy eyes and square jaw seemed signs of a character resolute, narrow, bigoted, and it might be cruel. At first sight the woman appeared a helpmeet well suited to him. Her narrow forehead and thin lips, her pinched nose and small blue eyes, seemed the reproduction in a feminine mould of his more massive features. Despite this, she constantly produced upon strangers a less favorable impression than he did; and though this impression was rarely understood, it lingered long and faded slowly if at all.

The aspect of the two as they stood side by side was so forbidding, that the child, faint with fatigue and disappointment, had hard work to repress his tears. Nor was the uneasiness confined to him only, for the butler's voice, when he raised it to greet his kinsfolk, sounded unnatural. His words tumbled over one another, and he alighted with a fussiness which betrayed itself.

On the other side the most absolute composure existed; so that presently the man's fulsome words died on his lips. "Why, brother," he stammered, with something of a whine, "you are glad to see me?"

"It may be, and again it may not be," the other answered grimly.

"How so?" Gridley asked, changing countenance.

"Have you turned your back on the flesh-pots for good?" was the severe response. "Have you come out of Egypt and away from its abominations? For I will have no malignants here, nor those who eat their bread and grow fat on their vices? If you have left the tents of Kedar, then you are welcome here. But if not, pass on."

"I have left Pattenhall, if that is what you mean," the younger brother answered sullenly.

"And its service?"

"Ay, and its service."

"Who is the lad you have with you?" Simon Gridley asked keenly.

"He is a Patten," the butler answered reluctantly; "but he has neither house nor land, nor more in the world than the clothes he stands up in."

The answer took both the man and the woman by surprise. They stood gazing as with one accord at the boy, who, with his lips trembling, changed feet and shifted his eyes from one stern face to another.

"I have heard something of that," the elder Gridley said, with a stern smile.

"He comes of a bad brood."

"Nevertheless, you will not refuse him shelter," his brother answered. "He is a child, and I have nowhere else to take him."

"Why take him at all?" the Puritan snarled fiercely. "What have you to do with the children of transgression? Have you not sins enough of your own to answer for?"

The butler did not reply, and for a moment the boy's fate seemed to hang in the balance. Then the woman spoke. "Bring him in," she said harshly and suddenly. "It may be that he is a brand snatched from the burning."

She spoke with authority, and her words seemed to be accepted as a final decision. Gridley pulled the child sharply by the arm, and, himself wearing a somewhat hangdog expression, led him across the fold and through the doorway, the others following. The scene outside, the leaden sky and grey moor and falling rain, had reduced the boy to the depth of misery; the interior to which he was introduced did little to comfort him. The hearth was fireless, the stone floor bare and unstrewn. A couple of great chests, a chair and two stools, formed, with a table, a spinning-wheel, and a rude loom, the only furniture. The rafters displayed none of the plenty which Jack was accustomed to see in kitchens, for neither fitch nor puddings adorned them, but in the window-seat a gaunt elderly man with a long grey beard sat reading a large Bible. He looked up dreamily when the party entered, but said nothing, the rapt expression of his face seeming to show that he was virtually unconscious of their presence.

"Luke is the same as ever?" the butler said in a low voice to his sister-in-law.

"He has his visions, if that is what you mean," she answered tartly. "Same as he ever had, and clearer of late. Set the child there. You are hungry, I dare say. Well, you'll have to wait. In an hour it will be supper-time, and in an hour you will have your supper. But you will get no Pattenhall dainties here."

The elder Gridley went to the loom and began to work, while his brother, repressing a sigh of discontent, sat down and gazed at the hearth, regretting already the step he had taken. Mistress Gridley looked fixedly and with compressed lips at the boy, who sat in the cold chimney corner, too much terrified to cry. The only sounds which broke the dreary stillness of the house were the rattling of the loom and the murmur of Luke Gridley's voice, as his tongue followed the mechanical movement of his finger.

Such was their reception; the child, hungry and fear-stricken, thought with a bursting heart of the home he had left, of the friends and the very dogs of Pattenhall, its trees and sunshine, and warm kitchen. The grim silence of the room, the woman's cruel eyes, the bareness and greyness, seemed to crush him with an iron hand, so that it was only by an effort, almost beyond his years, that he repressed a scream of passionate revolt.

Nor did he suffer alone. The butler, despite the care with which he hid his feelings, was little more at home in his company. He had no longer anything in common with his kinsfolk. In his heart he cringed before their rugged natures as a guilty dog crouches before its master. But he had thoughts of his own and a purpose to serve; and this enabled him to put a good face on the matter, or at least to endure with a wry smile.

The scanty meal of cheese and oatmeal eaten, and Luke's long extemporaneous prayer brought to an end, the strangers were taken to one of the two upper rooms. In five minutes the tired child was asleep; not so his companion. Gridley, fatigued as he was, lay and watched the last glimmer of daylight die away, and then, when all the house was dark and quiet, he sat up and listened. His wallets lay on the floor beside him. He rose and crawled to them, and for a long time crouched on the boards by them, thinking. He wanted a hiding-place-before morning he must have a hiding-place; but the scanty furniture of the room afforded none. This he had not anticipated, and the perplexity into which it threw him was so largely mingled with fear, that he fancied the loud beating of his heart must attract attention even through the walls. After some minutes of misery he made up his mind, and rising from the floor crept to the door and opened it. All was so still in the house that he took fresh courage. He went back to his wallets, and drawing something from them stole on tiptoe down the stairs, each creaking board-and there were many-throwing him into a cold perspiration. When a coward gives himself to wickedness, he pays dearly for his fancy.

The staircase opened directly into the kitchen, where he stood awhile listening on the hearth. Luke, the preacher, slept in the back-room, and the door seemed to be ajar. Gridley felt his way through the darkness to it and softly closed it. Then he peered round him. Where could he hide what he had to hide? Memory, conjuring up the objects round him, suggested one place after another, but

in each case he foresaw the possibility of accident. The linen-chest? Mistress Gridley might take it into her head to inspect her store of linen. The under-part of the sink? She might be about to clean it. The dresser was out of the question. He decided at last on the oatmeal chest, and groping his way to it found it, to his delight, unlocked and half full. The objects he had to hide were small; he ran little risk, he thought, if he buried them near the bottom of the meal.

After pausing again to listen and assure himself that he was not watched, he plunged his treasure deep in the soft meal. Then with trembling hands he drew the stuff over it, jealously smoothing and patting the surface in his fear lest daylight should disclose some signs of what he had been about. This done, and as he believed, effectually, he heaved a sigh of relief, and laid his hand on the lid of the chest to close it. At that moment a thin ray of light pierced the darkness in which he stood, and falling across the floor of the kitchen, chilled him to the heart.

Even in his panic he had sufficient presence of mind to close the lid softly, but the act detained him so long that he had no chance of moving away from the chest; and there Mistress Gridley found him when she entered, with her rushlight shaded, and her small eyes gleaming triumphantly behind it.

"Ho! ho!" she said, in a whisper; "I have caught a rat, have I?"

"I was hungry," he stammered, recoiling before her, "and came down to see if there was any porridge left."

"You lie!" she answered contemptuously, pointing to his hands as she spoke. They were covered with oatmeal. "I know you of old. You have been hiding something. Let me see what it is."

For a moment, despair giving him courage, he raised his hand as if he would have done her some injury; but the woman's eyes cowed him. "Hold the light, fool!" she said. "Let me see what you have got here."

She rummaged an instant in the meal, and presently, with an abrupt exclamation, drew out something which glittered as she held it up. It was a small gold cup. As she turned it to and fro, and the light which trembled in the man's craven hands played quiveringly on the burnished surface of the metal, her eyes glistened with avarice. She drew a long breath. "It is gold!" she muttered wonderingly.

The wretched Gridley murmured that it was.

Glancing at him askance, and still clutching the cup as if she feared he might snatch it from her, she plunged her other hand into the meal, and drew out in quick succession a flagon and a small plate of the same precious metal. Such success, as one came forth after the other, almost frightened her. She gazed at the spoils with all her greedy soul in her eyes. She had never handled such things before, and scarcely ever seen them, but with intuitive avarice she knew their value, and loved them, and clutched them to her breast. "You stole them!" she hissed. "They are from some church. Tell me the truth."

"They have been hidden at the Hall-since before the Squire's death," he stammered.

She held them out again and looked lovingly at them. When she turned to him again, it was to wave him off. "Go!" she said fiercely, "they are not yours. I shall take them. I shall give them to-"

"Your husband?" he retorted desperately, moved to boldness and action by the imminence of the danger. "Your husband? He would call them the accursed thing, and grind them to powder and strew them on Malham Tarn. What would you gain by that?"

She scowled at him, knowing that what he said was true; and so they stood a moment gazing breathlessly at one another. Before he spoke again their eyes had made an unholy compact. "Let them remain here, and do you play fair," he said slowly, "and I will give you the large one."

"I might take all," she muttered jealously.

"No," he snarled, showing his teeth; "I should tell him."

Her eyes fell at that, so that it scarcely needed the slight shiver which passed over her to assure him that he had touched the right chord. Smooth and hypocritical, and, like all hypocrites, afraid of some one, she feared above all things her husband's stern and pitiless code; knowing that no offence

could seem more heinous or less pardonable in his eyes than this dallying with the accursed thing, this sin of Achan.

So the compact was made. The larger vessel was hidden at one end of the meal-tub, the two smaller vessels at the other end. Each accomplice showed the same reluctance to trust the other, the same unwillingness to take leave of the spoil; but at last the chest was closed, and the two prepared to retire. Then a thought seemed to strike Mistress Gridley. "Why have you brought that brat here?" she whispered, as they prepared to mount the stairs. "Don't talk to me of gratitude, man! Tell me the truth."

He shifted his feet, and would have fenced with her, but she knew him, and he gave way. "Times may change," he said. "The land and the house may come back. Then it will be well to know where the lad is."

"Umph!" she said. "I see."

Perhaps her knowledge of the butler's plan prevented her being actively cruel to the child. On the other hand, neither she nor any one gave him a word or look of kindness. He had no place among them. Luke was wrapt in visions. Simon was too sternly self-contained, too completely under the mastery of his cold and ascetic faith, to give thought or word to the boy.

The other two had the meal chest to guard and each other to watch.

He was left to feel the full influence of the grey moorland life. The dismal stillness of the house, the lengthy prayers and repellent faces, drove him out of doors; the silence and solitude of the fells, which even in sunshine, when the peewits screamed and flew in circles, and the sky was blue above, were dreary and lonesome, scared him back to the house. Once a week the family went four miles to a meeting-house, where Luke Gridley and a Bradford weaver preached by turns. But this was the only break in his life, if a break it could be called. In Simon's creed boyhood and youth held no place.

Rumors of trouble and war, moreover, diverted from the child some of the attention which the elder people might otherwise have paid him. Sir Marmaduke Langdale's riders, scouting in front of the army which Duke Hamilton had raised in Scotland, were reported to be no farther off than Appleby. Any day they might descend on Settle, or a handful of them pass the farmstead, and levy contributions in the old high-handed Royalist fashion. Simon and Luke, wearing grimmer faces than usual, cleaned their pikes, and got out the old buff-coats which had lain by since Naseby, and held long conferences with their friends at Settle. The boy, aimless and without companions, acquired a habit of wandering in and out during these preparations, and more than once his pale face and dwarfish form appearing suddenly in their midst gave Luke Gridley, who was apt to weave what he saw into the unsubstantial texture of his dreams, a start beyond the ordinary.

"Who is that child?" he said one day, looking after him with a troubled face. "There used to be no child here."

"The child?" Simon exclaimed, glancing at him impatiently. "What has the child to do with us? Let it be."

"Let it be?" said the other, softly. "Ay, for a season. For a season. Yet remember that it is written, 'A child shall discover the matter.'"

"Tush!" Simon answered angrily. "This is folly. Isn't it written also, resist the devil, and he will fly from you!"

"Ay, the devil-and his angels," Luke repeated gently.

Simon shrugged his shoulders. Nevertheless he too, when he next met the lad wandering aimlessly about, looked at him with new eyes. Though he was subject to no active delusions himself, he had a strong and superstitious respect for his brother's fantasies. He began to watch the boy about, and surprising him one day in a solitary place in the act of forming patterns on the turf with stones, noted with a feeling of dread that these took the shape of a circle and a triangle, with other cabalistic figures as odd as they were unfamiliar. He would not at another time have given such a trifle a second thought. But we see things through the glasses of our own prepossessions. The morose and rugged

fanatic, who feared no odds, and whom no persecution could bend, looked askance at the child playing unconsciously before him, looked dubiously at the grey moor strewn with monoliths, and finally with a shiver turned and walked homewards.

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