

Trevena John

Furze the Cruel



John Trevena
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Trevena J.

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INTRODUCTORY ABOUT RAINDROPS

The river of Tavy is a great mountain-carver. From its mud-holes of Cranmere to the walls of Tavistock it is a hewer of rocks. Thenceforth it becomes a gardener, raising flowers and herbs; it becomes idyllic. It goes into Arcadia. And at last it floats ships of war.

There is a story in Hebrew literature of a king called Solomon, a man reputed wise, although a fool with women, who desired to build a temple to his God. There was a tradition which forbade the use of hammer or chisel in the erection of a place of worship, because, according to the Mischna, "Iron is used to shorten life, the altar to prolong it." The stones were not to be hewn. The temple was to be built noiselessly. The narrative suggests that Solomon had the stones cut and shaped at some distance from the building site, which was a decidedly Jesuitical way of solving the problem. Myth suggests that the king sought the aid of Asmodeus, chief of the devils, who told him where he could discover a worm which would split the toughest rock. The introduction of the devil to assist in the building of the temple was no doubt of Persian origin, since Persian thought influenced Hebrew literature just as Grecian thought was later to influence that of Rome. The idea of noiseless building, of an altar created by supernatural powers, of burrowing for minerals and metals without tools, is common to the literature of every country. It is one of the stock tales of folk-lore found everywhere. In one place it is a worm which shatters the mountains; in another a black stone; and in another a herb, such as the innocent forget-me-not, and the various saxifrages of the cottage garden. All the stories agree upon three points: the name of the rock-shatterer signifies irresistible force; it is invariably a small and insignificant object; and it is brought to mankind by a bird. That bird is the cloud; and the worm, pebble, or herb, which shatters mountains is the raindrop.

This is the story of the river Tavy, its tors and cleave, just as the pixy grandmother told it to the little round-eyed ones on a stormy night, when the black-winged raven-cloud was bringing the rain over Great Kneeset, and the whist hounds were yip-yip-yipping upon the "deads" —

"It all happened a long time ago, my impets, a very long time ago, and perhaps I shan't be telling you the story quite right. They say the dates are cut upon the Scorhill Rocks. I couldn't make them out the last time I was there, but then my eyes are getting feeble. You know the Scorhill Rocks, my dears? They are just by the Wallabrook, and near our big dancing stone which the silly mortals call a tolmen. You remember how we danced there on All Hallows E'en. What a beautiful night it was, sure 'nuff! And then you went and pinched the farm maids in their beds, and made them dream of their lovers, mischievous young toads! Well, I don't blame ye, my dears. I liked a bit of a gambol when I was a winikin bit of a pisky maid myself.

"This old Dartymore was a gurt big solid mountain of granite in those days, my pretties. You can't imagine what it was like then, and I can't either. There was no grass on it, and there were no nice vuzzy-bushes to dance round, and no golden blossoms to play with, and no fern to see-saw on, and no pink heather to go to sleep in – and worse and worse, my dears, there wasn't a single pixy in those days either."

"Oh, what a funny old Dartymore!" cried the little round-eyed ones.

"It wasn't an old Dartymore, my pets. It was a brand-new one. There were no bullocks or ponies. There were no bogs and no will-o'-the-wisps. There were no stone remains for stupid mortals to go dafty over, for as you and I know well enough most of 'em are no more stone remains than any other

rocks, but are just as the wind and rain made them. There was not a single mortal in those days either, and none of the triumphs of their civilisation, such as workhouses, prisons, and lunatic asylums. There was just the sun and the gurt grey mountain, and right upon the top of the mountain was a little bit of jelly shivering and shaking in the wind."

"But how did it get there?" cried the little round-eyed ones.

"Oh, my loves, you mustn't ask such silly questions. I don't know. Nobody can know. It was there, and we can't say any more. Perhaps there was a little bit of this jelly on the top of every mountain in the world. I can't tell you anything about that. But this little bit on the top of Dartmore was alive. It was alive, and it could feel the wind and the sun, and it would have kicked if it had got any legs to kick with. You will find it all written on the Scorhill Rocks. I couldn't find it, but it must be there, because they say it is. Well, this little bit of jelly shivered away for a long time, and then one day it began to rain. That was a wonderful thing in those days, though we don't think anything of it now. The little bit of jelly didn't like the rain. If it had been a pixy it would have crawled under a toadstool. If it had been a mortal it would have put up its umbrella. But toadstools and umbrellas hadn't been invented. So the poor thing shivered and got wet, because it was a very heavy shower. They say it lasted for several thousand years. While it rained the little bit of jelly was thinking. At last it said to the rain, 'Where do *yew* come from?' But the rain only replied that it hadn't the least idea.

"'What are ye doing?' went on the bit of jelly; and the rain answered, 'Making the world ready for you to live in.' The piece of jelly thought about that for a million years, and then it said to the wind – the rain had stopped, and it was the First Fine Day – 'Someone must have made me and put me here. I want to speak to that Someone. Can't you tell me what to do?'

"'Ask again in a million years,' said the wind.

"'I think I'll go for a walk,' said the piece of jelly. You see, my dears, it was getting tired of sitting still, and besides, it had discovered little bits of things called legs. They had grown while it had been thinking. So it got up, and stretched itself, and perhaps it yawned, and then it went for a long walk. I don't know how long it lasted, for they thought nothing of a few thousand years then; but at last it got back to the top of Dartmore, and found everything changed. The big mountain had been shattered and hewn into cleaves and tors. There were rivers and bogs; grass and fern; vuzzy-bushes and golden blooms. In every part, my dears, the mountain had been carved into tors and cut into gorges; but there were still no pixies, and no mortals. Then the piece of jelly went and looked at itself in the water, and was very much astonished at what it saw. It was a piece of jelly no longer, but a little hairy thing, with long legs and a tail, and a couple of eyes and a big mouth."

"Was it the same piece of jelly? What a long time it lived!" cried the little round-eyed ones. They didn't believe a word of the story, and they were going to say so presently.

"Well, my pretties, it was, and it wasn't. You see, little bits of it kept breaking off all those years, and they had become hairy creatures with long legs and a tail. Part of the original piece of jelly was in them all, for that was what is called the origin of life, which is a thing you don't understand anything about, and you mustn't worry your heads about it until you grow up. The little hairy creature stood beside the Tavy, and scratched its ear with its foot just like a dog. A million years later it used its hand because it couldn't get its foot high enough, and the wise men said that was a sign of civilisation. It was raining and blowing, and presently a drop of rain trickled down the nose of the little hairy creature and made it sneeze.

"'Go away,' said the little hairy creature. 'I wun't have ye tickling my nose.' You see, my dears, it knew the Devonshire dialect, which is a proof that it is the oldest dialect in the world.

"'Let me bide. I be fair mazed,' said the Devonshire raindrop. 'I've been drap-drapping on this old Dartmore for years and years.'

"'You bain't no use. You'm only a drop o' rainwater,' said the little hairy thing.

"That's all. Only a drop o' rain-water,' came the answer. 'This gurt big mountain has been worn away by drops o' rain-water. These tors were made by drops o' rainwater. These masses of granite have been split by drops o' rain-water. The river is nought but drops o' rain-water."

"'You'm a liar,' said the little hairy thing. You see, my dears, it couldn't believe the raindrop."

The little round-eyed ones didn't believe it either. They were afraid to say so because Grandmother might have smacked them. Besides, they knew they would not have to go to bed in the pink heather until she had finished her story. So they listened quietly, and pinched one another, while Grandmother went on —

"It was a long time afterwards. There were bullocks and ponies and plenty of pixies, and the little hairy thing had become what is called a primitive man. Tavy Cleave was very much the same as it is now, and Ger Tor was big and rugged, and Cranmere was full of river-heads. The primitive man had a primitive wife, and there were little creatures with them who were primitive children. They lived among the rocks and didn't worry about clothes. But there was one man who was not quite so primitive as the others, and therefore he was unpopular. He used to wander by himself and think. You will find it all upon the Scorhill Rocks, my dears. One evening he was beside the Tavy, which was known in those days as the Little Water, and a memory stirred in him, and he thought to himself: I was here once, and I asked a question of the wind; and the wind said: 'Ask again in a million years.' Someone must have made me and put me here. I want to speak to that Someone. Then the Little Water shouted; and it seemed to say: 'I have worn away the mountain of granite. I have shattered the rocks. Look at me, primitive man! I have given you a dwelling-place. I was made by the raindrops. The cloud brought the raindrops. And the wind brought you, primitive man. That Someone sent you and the wind together. You want to speak to that Someone. You must seek that Someone in a certain place. Look around you, primitive man!'

"So he looked, my dears, and saw what the Little Water had done during those millions of years. On the top of every little mountain it had carved out a tor. They were rough heaps of rock, shapeless, and yet suggesting a shape. They were not buildings, and yet they suggested a building. The primitive man went up on the highest tor, and spoke to that Someone. But, my pretties, I'm afraid you can't understand all this."

The little round-eyed ones were yawning dreadfully. Grandmother was getting wearisome in her old age. They thought they would rather be in bed.

"The primitive man made himself a hut-circle. You see, my dears, the Little Water had taught him. He had become what is called imitative. When he made his hut-circle he just copied the tors. Later on he copied them on a larger scale and built castles. And then the time came when another man stood beside the Tavy and asked: 'I have had dreams of treasure in the earth. How can I get at that treasure?'

"Then the Little Water shouted back: 'Look at me. I have worn away the rocks. I have uncovered the metals. Work in the ground as I have done.'

"So the man imitated the river again and worked in the ground, until he found tin and copper; and the river went on roaring just as it does now. You see, my children, there would have been no river if there had been no raindrops; and without the river no tors and cleaves, no vuzzy-bushes and golden blossoms, no ferns or pink heather, no buildings, no mortals, and no pixies. Dartmore would have remained a cold grey mountain of granite, and the piece of jelly would never have become a primitive man if it hadn't rained."

"But what is the rain doing now?" cried the little round-eyed ones.

"Just the same, my pretties. Making the river flow on and on. And the river is making the cleave deeper, and Ger Tor higher, just as it has always been doing. Only it works so slowly that we don't notice any change. Now you must run away to bed, for it is quite late, and you are gaping like young chickens. Come and kiss your old granny, my dearies, and trot away and have your dew-baths. And when you are tucked up in the pink heather don't be afraid of the black cloud and the raindrops,

for they won't harm little pisky boys and maids if they're good. They are too busy wearing away the granite, and cutting the cleaves deeper, and making the mountains higher and our dear old Tavyland stronger and fresher. There, that's all for to-night, my impets. I'll tell ye another story to-morrow."

"Funny old thing, G'an'mother," whispered the little round-eyed ones, while they washed their pink toes in the dew. "She'm old and dafty."

That's the story of river Tavy and its cleave; not all of it by any means, but the pixy grandmother did not know any more. Nobody knows all of it, except that Someone who sent the wind, which swept up the cloud, which brought the rain, which wetted the piece of jelly, which shivered on the top of the big grey mountain of Dartmoor.

The pixy grandmother was right about the primitive man who wanted so much to know things. She was right when she said that the river taught him. He looked about him and he imitated. The river had made him models and he copied them. The tor to which he ascended to speak to that Someone was the first temple and the first altar – made without noise, a temple of unhewn stone, an altar of whole stones over which no man had lifted up any iron. It was the earliest form of religion; a better and purer form than any existing now. It was the beginning of folk-lore. It was the first and best of mysteries: the savage, the hill-top, and the wind; the cloud and the sun; the rain-built temple; the rain-shaped altar. It was the unpolluted dwelling-place which Hebrew literature tried to realise and failed; which philosophers and theocrats have tried to realise and failed; which men are always trying to realise and must always fail, because it is the beginning of things, the awakening of the soul, the birth of the mind, the first cry of the new-born. It is the first of all stories, therefore it cannot die; but the condition can never come again. The story of the rain-shattered rocks must live for ever; but only in the dimly-lighted realm of folk-lore.

Thus, in a sense, Peter and Mary, and the other folk to be described in these pages, are the children of the river, the grandchildren of the cloud and the rain. Ages have passed since the cloud first settled upon Dartmoor and the rain descended. Pandora's box has been opened since then, and all the heavenly gifts, which were to prove the ruin of mortals, escaped from it long ago, except hope left struggling in the hinge. What have the ignorant, passionate, selfish creatures in common with the freshness and purity of the wind and rain? Not much perhaps. It is a change from the summit of Ger Tor, with its wind and rain-hewn altar, to Exeter Cathedral, with its wind instrument and iron-cut sculpture – a change for the worse. It is a change from the primitive man, with his cry to the river, to Mary and Peter, and those who defile their neighbours' daughters, and drink to excess. A change for the worse? Who shall tell? Men cast back to primitive manners. The world was young when the properties of the fruit of the vine were discovered; and we all know the name of the oldest profession upon earth.

The river of Tavy flows on and on, dashing its rain sea-ward. Go upon the spectral mount of Ger Tor. Let it be night and early spring. Let there be full moonlight also. Hear the water roaring: "I have worn away the mountain of granite. I have shattered the rocks. Look at me, civilised man. I have made you a dwelling-place, but you will not have it. You swarm in your cities like bees in a rotten tree. Come back to the wind and the rain. They will cool your passions. They will heal your diseases. Come back to Nature, civilised man."

CHAPTER I

ABOUT THE TAVY FAMILY

"Coop, coop!" called Mary Tavy. "Cooley, cooley! Aw now, du'ye come, my dear. He be proper contrairy when he'm minded to," she cried to Farmer Chegwidden as she shook a gorse-bush, which was her shepherd's staff, towards a big goose waddling ahead of her in the path of its own selection, and spluttering and hissing like a damp firework.

"Did ever see such a goosie?" said Mary. "When I wants 'en to go one way he goes t'other. There he goes, down under, to Helmen Barton. If he lays his egg there they'll keep 'en, and say one of their fowls dropped 'en. He wun't come home till sundown. Contrairiest bird on Dartmoor be Old Sal."

"I don't hold wi' old geese," said Farmer Chegwidden. "They'm more trouble than they'm worth. When they gets old they'm artful."

"So be volks," said Mary. "Goosies be cruel human. Old Sal knows as much as we. He'm twenty-two years old. He lays an egg every month. He'm the best mother on Dartmoor, and Peter says he shan't die till he've a mind to." By her continued use of the masculine gender any one might have thought Mary was not quite convinced herself as to her goose's sex; but it was not so really. There is nothing feminine on Dartmoor except tom-cats.

Mary lived with brother Peter close to the edge of Tavy Cleave, a little way beyond Wapsworthy. There was a rough road from the village of St. Peter Tavy, passing round the foot of Lynch Tor, and ending in a bog half-a-mile further on. Ger Cottage – so named because the most prominent feature of the landscape was Ger, or Gurt, Tor – which was the home of the Tavys, the man and the woman, not the river, nor the cleave, nor the stannary town, nor the two villages of that ilk, appeared amid boulders and furze between the rough road and the gorge cut by the river. The cottage, or to be strictly accurate, the cottages, for Peter and Mary had separate apartments, which was quite right and proper, was, or were, in a situation which a house-agent would have been justified in describing as entirely detached. There was no other dwelling-place within a considerable distance. The windows looked out upon romantic scenery, which has been described in somewhat inflated language, six-syllabled adjectives, and mixed metaphors, as something absolute and unassailable; and has been compared to the Himalayas and Andes by excitable young people under commission to write a certain number of words for cheap guide-book purposes. However, the ravine of the Tavy is perhaps the finest thing of its kind on Dartmoor; and "gentle readers" who go abroad every winter have some reason to feel ashamed of themselves if they have not seen it.

When the New Zealander comes to explore England, he will, perhaps, – if he is interested in such things – write letters to such newspapers as may have survived concerning the source of the Tavy. He will probably claim to have discovered some new source which the ignorant and vanished race of Anglo-Saxons never happened on. Most people will say that the Tavy rises at the south side of Cut Hill. Others, who do not wish to commit themselves, will make the safe statement that its source is upon Cranmere. As a matter of fact the Tavy would be a very wise river if it knew its own head. By the time it has assumed any individuality of its own and received its first titled tributary, which is the Rattle Brook, it has come through so many changes, and escaped from such a complicated maze of crevasses, that it would have to be provided with an Ariadne's clue to retrace its windings to its source. In the face of general opinion it seems likely that the Tavy begins its existence rather more than two miles north of its accredited source, at a spot close to Cranmere Pool, and almost within a stone's cast of the Dart. It would be impossible, however, to indicate any one particular fissure, with its sides of mud and dribble of slimy water, and declare that and none other was the river of Tavy in extreme and gurgling infancy.

There is no doubt about the Tavy by the time it has swallowed the Rattle Brook and a few streams of lesser importance, and has entered the cleave which it has carved through the granite by its own endless erosion. It is an exceedingly self-assertive river; passing down with a satisfied chuckle in the hot months, when the slabs of granite are like the floors of so many bakers' ovens; and in the winter roaring at Ger Tor, as though it would say, "I have cut through a thousand feet of granite since I began to trickle. I will cut through a thousand more before the sun gets cold." It is a noble little river, this shallow mountain stream, the proudest of all Dartmoor rivers. More romance has gathered around the Tavy than about all the other rivers in England put together, leaving out the Tamar. The sluggish Thames has no romance to compare with that of the Tavy. The Thames represents materialism with its pleasure-boats and glitter of wealth. It suggests big waistcoats and massive watch-chains. The Tavy stands for the spiritual side. Were the god of wine to stir the waters of each, the Thames would flow with beer; good beer possibly, but nothing better; while the Tavy would flow with champagne. The Tavy is the Rhine of England. It was beside the Tavy that fern-seed could be gathered, or the ointment obtained, which opened the eyes of mortals to the wonders of fairyland. It was on the banks of the Tavy that the pixies rewarded girls who behaved themselves – and pinched and nipped those who didn't. Beside the Tavy has grown the herb forget-me-not, which not only restored sight to the blind, but life also to the dead; and the marigold which, when touched early on certain mornings by the bare foot of the pure-minded, gave an understanding of the language of birds. Many legends current upon the big Rhine occur also beside the shallow Tavy. There are mining romances; tales of success, struggles, and failures, from the time of the Phoenicians; tales of battles for precious tin; tales of misery and torture and human agony. That is the dark side of the Tavy – the Tavy when it roars, and its waters are black and white, and there are glaciers down Ger Tor. The tiny Lyd runs near the Rattle Brook, the bloody little Lyd in which the torturers of the stannary prison cleansed their horrible hands. The Rattle Brook knew all about it, and took the story and some of the blood down to Father Tavy; and the Tavy roared on with the evidence, and dashed it upon the walls of Tavistock Abbey, where the monks were chanting psalms so noisily they couldn't possibly hear anything else. That was the way of the monks. Stannary Laws and Tavistock Abbey have gone, and nobody could wish for them back; but the Tavy goes on in the same old way. It is no longer polluted with the blood of tin-streamers, but merely with the unromantic and discarded boots of tramps. The copper-mines are a heap of "deads"; and Wheal Betsey lies in ruin; but the Tavy still brings trout to Tavistock, although there are no more monks to bother about Fridays; and it carries away battered saucepans and crockery for which the inhabitants have no further use. This attention on the part of the townsfolk is not respectful, when it is remembered that the Tavy brought their town into being, named it, and has supplied it always with pure water. It is like throwing refuse at one's godfather.

The Tavy is unhappily named, so is its brother the Taw – both being sons of Mother Cranmere – if it is true their names are derived the one from the Gaelic *tav*, the other from the Welsh *taw*. The root word is *tam*, which appears appropriately enough in Thames, and means placid and spreading. The Tavy and the Taw are anything but that. They are never placid, not even in the dog-days. They brawl more noisily than all the other rivers in Devon. Perhaps they were so named on the *lucus a non lucendo* principle; because it is so obvious they are not placid. The river Tavy has a good deal of property. Wherever it winds it has bestowed its name. The family of Tavy is a very ancient one. It was rich and important once, possessing a number of rights, many valuable mines, much romance, to say nothing of towns abbeys, and castles; but, like most old families, it has decayed, and its property is not worth much now. It possesses Tavy Cleave; the villages of St. Peter and St. Mary (they were twins, exceedingly healthy in their youth, but growing feeble now); Mount Tavy, which is of no importance; Tavystoc, the fortified place upon the Tavy, which has been turned into Tavistock and has become famous, not for its Abbey, nor for its great men, but solely and simply for its Goose Fair; and Mary and Peter Tavy, who were not made of cob, or granite, or water, or tin, or any of those other things which made the fortune of the Tavy family, but were two simple animals of the human race, children

of the river out of that portion of Dartmoor which it owns, two ignorant beings who took life seriously enough and were like the heather and gorse which surrounded them. Evolution has accomplished such marvels that Peter and Mary may possibly have been lineally descended from antediluvian heather and gorse; or perhaps Nature had intended them for heather and gorse, and while making them had come across a couple of shop-soiled souls which were not of much use, and had stirred them into the mixture which, after a certain treatment only to be explained by a good deal of medical dog-Latin, resulted in Mary and Peter being brought forth as divine images upon the edge of Tavy Cleave.

Peter and Mary were savages, although they would have used strange language had any one called them so. They did not display their genealogical tree upon their cottage wall. Had they done so it would have shown, had it been accurate, that they were descended from the Gubbingses, who, as every man knows, were as disreputable a set of savages as have ever lived. This pedigree would have shown that a certain young Gubbings had once run away with a certain Miss Gubbings to whom he was attached, and with whom he was probably related more or less intimately. Fearing capture, as they had conveyed from the gorge of the Lyd as much of the portable property of their connections as they could conveniently handle, the young couple assumed the name of Tavy from the river beside which they settled. They had a number of little Tavies, who, it was said, founded the villages of Peter Tavy and Mary Tavy, which good Christians subsequently canonised; and who, by intermarriage without much respect for the tie of consanguinity, or for such a form of religious superstition as a marriage service – if, indeed, they had ever heard of such a thing – became in time a rival band of Scythians almost as formidable to law-abiding commoners as their relations in Gubbings Land. Peter and Mary were direct descendants of these pleasant people. They didn't know it, however. It was just as well they were in ignorance, because knowledge of the truth might have turned their heads. The chief of the Gubbings was a king in his own land; therefore Peter and Mary would certainly have boasted that they were of royal blood; and Peter would assuredly have told his neighbours that if every man had his rights he would be occupying the throne of England. He would have gone on acquiring knowledge concerning those things which appertain unto ancient families, and no doubt would have conferred upon himself, although not upon Mary, a coat-of-arms such as a sheep in one quarter, a bullock in another, a bag of gold in the third, and in the fourth a peaceful commoner's head duly decollated, with the motto: "My wealth is in other men's goods." Peter would have become an intolerable nuisance had he known of his royal ancestry.

Mary was quite a foot taller than her brother. Peter was like a gnome. He was not much more than four feet in height, with a beard like a furze-bush, a nose like a clothes-peg, and a pair of eyes which had probably been intended for a boar, but had got into Peter by mistake. His teeth were much broken and were very irregular; here a tooth like a tor, there a gap like a cleave. In that respect he resembled his neighbours. Dartmoor folk have singularly bad teeth, and none of them submit to dentistry. They appear to think that defective teeth are necessary and incurable evils. When they are ill they send for the doctor at once; but when they have toothache they grin and bear it. Perhaps they know that dentists are mercenary folk, who expect to be paid for their labours; whereas the doctor who has any claim to respectability works solely for the love of his profession, and is not to be insulted by any proposal of payment. A doctor is a sort of wandering boon-companion, according to the Dartmoor mind. There is nothing he enjoys so much as being called from his bed on a bitter winter's night, to drive some miles across the moor that he may have a pleasant chat with some commoner who feels dull. He will be invited to sit by a smouldering peat-fire, and the proposal, "Have a drop o' cider? you'm welcome," will fall gratefully upon his ears. He will be encouraged to talk about certain ailments, and to suggest remedies for the same. Then he will be pressed to finish the crock of cider, and be permitted to depart. After such hospitality he would be a base-minded man if he made any suggestion of a fee. Peter had often consulted a doctor, but he could not remember ever parting with cash in return for advice. The doctor could not remember it either.

Peter generally wore a big leather apron, which began somewhere about the region of his neck and finished at his boots. He had taken it, in a fit of absent-mindedness, out of the blacksmith of Bridestowe's smithy some years ago. He was a bit of a traveller in those days. Peter often boasted of his wanderings. That expedition to Bridestowe was one of them. It would have been six miles across the moor from Tavy Cleave, and yet Peter had made light of it. He had done much greater things. He had put to silence one of those objectionable, well-washed, soft-handed, expensively-dressed creatures who call themselves gentlemen. One of these had described to Peter his wanderings about the world, mentioning such fabulous countries as India, China, Mexico, and Peru. Peter listened in an attitude which expressed nothing if not contempt. He allowed the traveller to go on some time before crushing him. "I've travelled tu," he said at last. Then, with the manner of one dropping a brick upon a butterfly, he added, "I've been to Plymouth." Peter often mentioned that the traveller had nothing more to say.

Peter had been absent-minded when he procured the blacksmith's apron, somewhat after the manner of his early ancestors who had inhabited Lyd Gorge or Gubbings Land. He was liable to such fits. They were generally brought on by beer. One evening Mary had sent him to a farm – or rather he had permitted her to send him – with a can and a string-bag in order that he might receive payment of a debt in the form of ducks' eggs and buttermilk. On the way Peter became absent-minded. The attack was fully developed by the time he reached the farm. He forced the eggs into the can and poured the buttermilk into the string-bag.

Mary also must have been made during a fit of Nature's temporary insanity. She had been started as a man; almost finished as one; then something had gone wrong – Nature had poured the buttermilk into the string-bag, so to speak, and Mary became a female to a certain extent. She had a man's face and a man's feet. Larger feet had never scrambled down Tavy Cleave since mastodons had gone out of fashion. The impression of Mary's bare foot in the snow would have shocked a scientist. She was stronger than most men. To see Mary forking fern, carrying furze-reek, or cutting peat was a revelation in female strength. She wore stout bloomers under a short ragged skirt; not much else, except a brown jersey. The skirt was discarded sometimes in moments of emergency. She was flat-chested, and had never worn stays. She was as innocent concerning ordinary female underwear as Peter; more so, perhaps, for Peter was not blind to frills. Mary would probably have worn her brother's trousers sometimes, had it not been for that muddle-headed act of Nature, which had turned her out a woman at the last moment. Besides, Peter was a foot shorter than his sister, and his legs were merely a couple of pegs.

Somewhere in his head Peter despised Mary. He did not tell her so, or she might have beaten him with a furze-bush. He was far superior to her. Peter could read, write, and reckon with a dangerous facility. He was also an orator, and had been known to speak for five minutes at a stretch in the bar-room. He had repeated himself certainly, but every orator does that. Peter was a savage who knew just enough to look civilised. Mary was a savage who knew nothing and was therefore humorous. It was education which gave Peter the upper hand, Mary could not assert her superiority over one who read the newspapers, spoke in a bar-room, and described characters on a piece of paper which would convey a meaning to some one far away.

Ger Cottage, or the twin huts occupied by the Tavys, had been once hut-circles, belonging to the aboriginal inhabitants of Dartmoor. They were side by side, semi-detached as it were, and the one was Peter's freehold, while the other belonged to Mary. They had the same legal rights to their property as rabbits enjoy in their burrows. Legal rights are not referred to on Dartmoor, unless a foreigner intervenes with a view to squatting. "What I have I hold" is every man's motto. The hut-circles had been restored out of all recognition. They had been enlarged, the walls had been built up, chimneys made, and roofs covered with furze and held in place by lumps of granite had been erected. Peter and Mary were quite independent. Peter was the best housewife, just as Mary was the best farmer. Peter also called himself a handy man, which was merely another way of saying that he was no good at anything. He would undertake all kinds of jobs, ask for a little on account, then

postpone the work for a few years. He never completed anything. Mary was the money-maker, and he was really her business-manager. Mary was so ignorant that she never wondered how Peter got his money. It was perfectly simple. Peter would sell a twelve-pound goose at eightpence a pound. When he collected the money it naturally amounted to eight shillings. When he paid it over to Mary it had dwindled to five shillings. "Twelve times eight be sixty," Peter would explain. "Sixty pence be five shilluns." Mary knew no better. Then Peter always asked for a shilling as his commission, and Mary had to give it him. Peter had studied ordinary business methods with some success; or perhaps it came to him naturally. He had some ponies also. There is plenty of money in pony-breeding as Peter practised it. He would go out upon the moor, find a young pony which had not been branded, drive it home without any ostentation, and shut it-up in his linhay. After a time he would set his own brand upon it and let it run loose. When the annual pony-drift came round he would claim it, subsequently selling it at Lydford market for five pounds. Sometimes he would remove a brand, and obliterate all traces of it by searing his own upon the same spot; but he never went to this extreme unless he was hard pressed for money, because Peter had certain religious convictions, and he always felt when he removed a brand that he was performing a dishonest action.

The only other member of the Tavy family was Grandfather. He was the reprobate. Peter and Mary had morals of their own, not many, but sufficient for their needs; but Grandfather had none. He was utterly bad; a wheezing, worn-out, asthmatic old sinner, who had never been known to tell the truth. Grandfather was always in Peter's hut. Mary had often begged for him to keep her company at nights, but Peter steadfastly refused to let the old rascal leave his quarters. So Grandfather lived with Peter, and spent his time standing with his back to the wall, wheezing and chuckling and making all sorts of unpleasant noises, as if there was some obstruction on his chest which he was trying always to remove.

Grandfather's hands were very loose and shaky, and his face was dreadfully dirty. Peter washed it sometimes, while the old fellow wheezed and groaned. Sometimes Peter opened his chest and examined Grandfather's organs, which he declared were in a perfectly healthy condition. There appeared to be no excuse for Grandfather's mendacious habits. He had got into the way of lying years back, and could not shake it off. Grandfather was well over a hundred years old, and he was not the slightest use except as a companion. Some people would have been afraid of him, because of his unpleasant noises, but Peter and Mary loved him like dutiful grandchildren. They recognised in Grandfather the true Gubbings spirit. He was a weak, sinful creature like themselves.

Grandfather had commenced life as a clock, but he had soon given up that kind of work, or something had occurred to turn him from a useful career; just as Peter had been meant for some sort of quadruped, and Mary had been a man up to the last possible moment. Some evil spirit must have entered into Grandfather; a malicious impet from the Tavy river perhaps; or possibly the wild wind of Dartmoor had passed down the cleave one day, to enter Grandfather's chest and intoxicate him for ever. The fact remained that Grandfather was hopelessly bad; he was a regular misanthrope; his ticks were so many curses, his strikings were oaths. He did his best to mislead the two grandchildren, although it didn't matter much, because time is of no account on Dartmoor. "He'm a proper old brute, Gran'vaither," Peter would say sometimes, but never in the old clock's hearing.

Mary's mission in life was to breed geese. She had been sent into the world for the express purpose of supplying folk with savoury meat stuffed with sage and onions at Christmas time. She succeeded admirably. She was the best goosewoman on Dartmoor, and her birds were always in demand. One year Peter had obtained a shilling a pound for three unusually fine young birds; but Mary didn't know that. She fattened her geese, and incidentally Peter also.

"They'm contrairy birds," observed Farmer Chegwidden, while he smoked and rested himself upon a boulder, watching Mary's efforts to collect her flock. "Never goes the way us want 'em to. Like volks," he added, with philosophic calm. He might have been assisting Mary, only he didn't believe in violent exercise which would not be suitably rewarded.

"Volks calls 'en vulish, but they bain't. They'm just vull o' human vices," said Mary, flopping to and fro and waving her furze-bush.

"They'm vulish to look at," explained Farmer Chegwidden.

"'Tis their artful way. Peter looks vulish tu, and he knows plenty. More'n any of they goosies, I reckon. Coop, coop! Drat the toad! I'll scat 'en."

The leader of the feathered choir was off again. Chegwidden could have headed it off, only he had finished his day's work. He managed to summon up the energy to remark, "They gets over the ground surprising, wi' their wings spread."

"He'm a proper little brute. I wun't waste no more time over 'en," said Mary, as she wiped her forehead with a bunch of fern. "He'll come home when he've a mind to, and lay his egg in the linny likely, where Peter'll tread on 'en in the morning. Peter be cruel clumsy wi' his boots. Will ye please to step inside, Varmer Chegwidden?"

"I mun get home. Got the bullocks to feed."

"Fine bullocks tu. I seed 'em down cleave last night. Cooley, cooley! Come along home, my purty angels. Wish ye good-night, Varmer Chegwidden."

"Why du'ye call 'em angels?" asked the farmer, making strange sounds of laughter behind his hand.

"Aw now, I'll tell ye. There was a lady down along, a dafty lady what painted, and her come to Peter, and her ses, 'I wants they goosies to paint.' Well, us wouldn't have it. Us thought her wanted to paint 'em, one of 'em red, 'nother green likely, 'nother yellow maybe, and it might be bad for their bellies. But us found her wanted to put 'em on a picture. Her had got a mazed notion about the cleave and resurrection, wi' angels flapping over, and her wanted my goosies for angels. Peter ses he didn't know goosies were like angels. Knows a lot, Peter du."

"Angels be like gals," declared Chegwidden. "Like them gals to Tavistock what pulls the beer, wi' pert faces and vuzzy hair. That's what angels be like. I've seed the pictures in a Bible."

"Aw now. Us couldn't make she out," went on Mary. "The lady said 'twas just the wings her wanted. Her said angels ha' got goosies' wings, and us couldn't say 'em hasn't, 'cause us ain't seed any. Her knew all about it. So Peter druve the goosies down cleave, and her painted 'em for angels sure 'nuff. Us never knew angels has goosies' wings, but the lady knew. Her was sure on't."

Mary stalked towards the hut-circles at the head of her row of geese, grave, waddling, self-important, and blissfully unconscious of anything in the nature of sage and onions. There was a touch of humour about the procession. It was not altogether unlike the spectacle to be witnessed in certain country boroughs of the mayor and corporation walking into church.

"Goosies be cruel human," said Mary.

CHAPTER II

ABOUT BRIGHTLY

Up the road from Brentor to St. Mary Tavy came Brightly, his basket dragging on his arm. He was very tired, but there was nothing unusual in that. He was tired to the point of exhaustion every day. He was very hungry, but he was used to that too. He was thinking of bread and cheese and cider; new bread and soft cheese, and cider with a rough edge to it. He licked his lips, and tried to believe he was tasting them. Then he began to cough. It was a long, heaving cough, something like that of a Dartmoor pony. He had to put his basket down and lean over it, and tap at his thin chest with a long raw hand.

Nobody wanted Brightly, because he was not of the least importance. He hadn't got a home, or a vote, or any of those things which make the world desire the presence of people. He was only a nuisance, who worried desirable folk that he might exist, though the people whom he worried did not ask him to live. Brightly was a purveyor of rabbit-skins. He dealt in rubbish, possibly because he was rubbish himself. He tramped about Dartmoor, between Okehampton and Tavistock, collecting rabbit-skins. When he was given them for nothing he was grateful, but his stock of gratitude was not drawn upon to any large extent. It is not the way of Dartmoor folk to part with even rubbish for nothing. To obtain his rabbit-skins Brightly had to dip his raw hand beneath the scrap of oilcloth which covered his basket, and produce a horrible little red and yellow vase which any decent-minded person would have destroyed at sight. Brightly bore most things fairly well, but when, on one occasion while climbing over the rocks, he had dropped the basket and all the red and yellow vases were smashed to atoms, he had cried. He had been tired and hungry as usual, and knew he had lost the capital without which a man cannot do business. The dropping of that basket meant bankruptcy to Brightly.

The dealer in rabbit-skins was not alone in the world. He had a dog, which was rubbish like its master. The animal was of no recognised breed, although in a dim light it called itself a fox-terrier. She could not have been an intelligent dog, or she would not have remained constant to Brightly. Her name was Ju, which was an abbreviation of Jerusalem. One Sunday evening Brightly had slipped inside a church, and somewhat to his surprise had been allowed to remain, although a sidesman was told off to keep an eye upon him and see that he did not break open the empty poor-box. A hymn was sung about Jerusalem the golden, a piece of pagan doggerel concerning the future state, where happy souls were indulging in bacchanalian revels, and over-eating themselves in a sort of glorified dairy filled with milk and honey. The hymn enraptured Brightly, who was, of course, tired and famished; and when he had left the warm church, although without any of the promised milk and honey, he kept on murmuring the lines and trying to recall the music. He could think of nothing but Jerusalem for some days. He went into the public library at Tavistock and looked it up in a map of the world, discovered it was in a country called Palestine, and wondered how many rabbit-skins it would cost to take him there. Brightly reckoned in rabbit-skins, not in shillings and pence, which were matters he was not very familiar with. He noticed that whenever he mentioned the name of Jerusalem the dog wagged her tail, as though she too was interested in the dairy produce; so, as the animal lacked a title, Jerusalem was awarded her. Brightly thought of the milk and honey whenever he called his poor half-starved cur.

Presently he thought he had coughed long enough, so he picked up his basket and went on climbing the road, his body bent as usual towards the right. At a distance he looked like the half of a circle. He could not stand straight. The weight of his basket and habit had crooked him like an oak branch. He tramped on towards the barren village of St. Mary Tavy. There was a certain amount of wild scenery to be admired. Away to the right was Brentor and the church upon its crags. To the left were piled the "deads" of the abandoned copper-mines. The name of Wheal Friendship might have

had a cheerful sound for Brightly had he known what friendship meant. He didn't look at the scenery, because he was half blind. He could see his way about, but that was all. He lived in the twilight. He wore a big pair of unsightly spectacles with tortoise-shell rims. His big eyes were always staring widely behind the glasses, seeing all they could, which was the little bit of road in front and no more.

Brightly was known about that particular part of the moor which he frequented as the Seal. Every one laughed whenever the Seal was mentioned. Brightly's wardrobe consisted chiefly of an old and very tightly-fitting suit of black, distinctly clerical in cut. They had been obtained from a Wesleyan shepherd in exchange for a pair of red and yellow vases to embellish the mantel of the nonconforming parlour. Rain is not unknown upon Dartmoor, and in the neighbourhood of St. Mary Tavy it descends with pitiless violence. Brightly would be quickly saturated, having no means of protecting himself; and then the tight clerical garments, sodden and sleek and shining, would certainly bear some resemblance to the coat of a seal which had just left the sea; a resemblance which was not lessened by his wizened little face and weary shuffling gait.

Brightly did not think much while he tramped the moor. He had no right to think. It was not in the way of business. Still, he had his dream, not more than one, because he was not troubled with an active imagination. He tried to fancy himself going about, not on his tired rheumatic legs, but in a little ramshackle cart, with fern at the bottom for Ju to lie on, and a bit of board at the side bearing in white letters the inscription: "A. Brightly. Purveyor of rabbit-skins"; and a lamp to be lighted after dark, and a plank for himself to sit on, and a box behind containing the red and yellow vases. All this splendour to be drawn by a little shaggy pony. What a great man he would be in those days! Starting forth in the morning would be a pleasure and not a pain. Frequently Brightly babbled of his hypothetical cart. He felt sure it must come some day, and so he had begun to prepare for it. He had secured the plank upon which he was to sit and guide the pony, and every autumn he cut some fern to put at the bottom of the cart should it arrive suddenly. The plank he had picked up, and the fern had been cut upon the moor. He had clearly no right to them. The plank had probably slipped out of a granite cart, and the fern belonged to the commoners. There was plenty of it for every one, but, as the commoners would have argued, that was not the point. They had a right to cut the fern, and people like Brightly have no right to anything, except a cheap funeral. Brightly had no business to wander about the moor, which was never made for him, or to kick his boots to pieces against good Duchy of Cornwall granite. All the commoners cheated the Duchy of Cornwall, while they loyally cheered the name of the Duke. They took his granite and skilfully evaded payment of the royalty, and prayed each Sunday in their chapels for grace to continue in honesty; but the fact of their being commoners, some of them having the privilege of the newtake, and others not having the privilege but taking it all the same, made all the difference. They had to assert themselves. When it came to a question of a few extra shillings in the money-box, or even of a few extra pence, minor matters, such as petty tyrannical ordinances of law and Church, could take their seats in a back corner and "bide there." Brightly had no privileges. He had to obey every one. He was only a worm which any one was at perfect liberty to slice in half with a spade.

Brightly had a home. The river saw to that; not the Tavy, but the less romantic Taw. Brightly belonged to the Torridge and Taw branch of the family. On the Western side of Cawsand are many gorges in the great cleave cut by the Taw between Belstone and Sticklepath. There narrow and deep clefts have been made by the persistent water draining down to the Taw from the bogs above. In the largest of these clefts Brightly was at home. The sides were completely hidden by willow-scrub, immense ferns, and clumps of whortleberries, as well as by overhanging masses of granite. The water could be heard dripping below like a chime of fairy bells. In winter the cleft appeared a white cascade of falling water, but Brightly's cave was fairly dry and quite sheltered. He was never there by day, and at night nobody could see the smoke of his fire. He had built up the entrance with shaped stones taken from the long-abandoned cots beside the old copper-mines below. The cleft was full of copper, which stained the water a delightful shade of green. Brightly had furnished his home with those things

which others had thrown away. He had long ago solved the difficulty of cooking with a perforated frying-pan, and of turning to practical uses a kettle with a bottom like a sieve.

Brightly reached the moor gate. On the other side was the long straggling village of St. Mary Tavy. Beside the gate was a heap of refuse. Brightly seated himself upon it, because he thought it was the proper place for him.

"I be cruel hungry, Ju," explained Brightly.

"So be I," said the dog's tail.

"Fair worn to bits tu," went on Brightly.

"Same here," said the tail.

"Wait till us has the cart," said Brightly cheerily, placing the rabbit-skins upon the dirt beside him. "Us won't be worn to bits then. Us will du dree times the business, and have a cottage and potato-patch, and us will have bread and cheese two times a day and barrel o' cider in the linny. Us will have fat bacon on Sundays tu."

Brightly did not know that ambition is an evil thing. It was ridiculous for him to aspire to a cottage and potato-patch, and bread and cheese three times a day. Kindly souls had created stately mansions for such as he. There was one at Tavistock and another in Okehampton; beautiful buildings equipped with all modern conveniences where he could live in comfort, and not worry his head about rabbit-skins, or about Ju, or about such follies as liberty and independence, or about such unnecessary aids to existence as the moorland wind, his river Taw, the golden blossoms of the gorse, the moonlight upon the rocks, and the sweet scent of heather. Brightly was an unreasonable creature to work and starve when a large stone mansion was waiting for him.

"Us ha' come a cruel long way, Ju," said the little man, descending from his dream. "Only two rabbit-skins. Business be cruel bad. Us mun get on. This be an awkward village to work. It be all scattery about like."

Brightly rose with some alacrity. The moor gate rattled. The hand of the village constable was upon it, and the eyes of that official, who was to Brightly, at least, a far more considerable person than the Lord Chief Justice, were regarding the vagabond with a suspicion which was perfectly natural considering their respective positions.

"Good-evening, sir," said Brightly with deep humility. The policeman was not called upon to answer such things as Brightly. He condescended, however, to observe in the severe tones which his uniform demanded: "Best be moving on, hadn't ye?"

Brightly agreed that it was advisable. He was well aware he had no right to be sitting upon the heap of refuse. He had probably damaged it in some way. The policeman had his bicycle with him, as he was on his way to Lydford. Brightly stood in a reverential attitude, held the gate open, and touched his cap as the great man rolled by. The constable accepted the service, without thanks, and looked back until the little wanderer was out of sight. Such creatures could be turned to profitable uses after all. They could be made to supply industrious village constables with opportunities for promotion. They could be arrested and charged with house-breaking, rick-burning, or swaling out of season; if such charges could not be supported, they could be summoned for keeping a dog without a licence. The policeman made a note of Brightly, as business was not very flourishing just then. There was the usual amount of illegality being practised by the commoners; but the village constable had nothing to do with that. Commoners are influential folk. A man could not meddle with them and retain his popularity. The policeman had to be polite to his social superiors, and salute the elders of Ebenezer with a bowed head, and wink violently when it was incumbent upon him so to do.

Dartmoor has no reason to be proud of St. Mary Tavy, as it is quite the dreariest-looking village upon the moor. Even the river seems to be rather ashamed of it, and turns away as if from a poor relation. St. Peter, over the way, is much more cheerful. They were well-to-do once, these two. They were not only saints, but wealthy, in the good days when the wheals were working and the green stain of copper was upon everything. Now they have come down in the world. The old gentleman

lets lodgings, and the old lady takes in washing. They have put away their halos, dropped their saintly prefix, and it is exceedingly improbable that they will ever want them again. They always found it hard work to live up to their reputations; not that they tried very much; but now they are both easy and comfortable as plain everyday folk, neither better nor worse than their neighbours Brentor and Lydford. Peter is a fine, rugged old gentleman; but Mary is decidedly plain with age. There is nothing tender or pleasant about her. She is shamelessly naked; without trees or bushes, and the wheal-scarred moor around is as bald as an apple. The wind comes across her head with the blast of ten thousand bagpipes; and when it rains upon St. Mary – it rains!

Brightly knew all about that rain. He had often played the Seal upon that wild road, and had felt the water trickling down his back and making reservoirs of his boots; while people would stand at their windows and laugh at him. Nobody had ever asked him to come in and take shelter. Such an idea would never have occurred to them. Ponies and bullocks were out upon the moor in all weathers, and every winter some died from exposure. Brightly was nothing like so valuable as a pony or bullock, and if he were to die of exposure nobody would be out of pocket.

Brightly went from cottage to cottage, but there were no rabbit-skins that day. There seemed to be a rabbit famine just then. Lamps were lighted in windows here and there. When the doors were opened Brightly felt the warmth of the room, smelt the glowing peat and the fragrant teapot, and sometimes saw preparations for a meal. What a wonderful thing it must be, he thought, to have a room of one's own; a hearth, and a mantelpiece holding china dogs, cows with purple spots, and photographs of relations in the Army; a table covered with rare and precious things, such as waxen fruit beneath a dome of glass, woollen mats, and shells from foreign lands; a clock in full working order; a dresser stocked with red and green crockery; and upon the walls priceless oleographs framed in blue ribbon, designed and printed in Austria, and depicting their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall, simpering approvingly at a scarlet Abraham in the act of despatching a yellow Isaac with a bright-blue scimitar. Brightly sighed as each door was closed upon him, and each smoky little paradise disappeared. He was having a run of bad luck. Ju knew all about it. She put what was left of her tail between her legs and shivered. No doubt she wished she had been born into the world a genuine dog, and not a mongrel; just as Brightly sometimes wished he had been born a real human being, and not a poor thing which dealt in rabbit-skins.

He reached the top of the village. The road heaved above him, and then came the bare upland. He could do no more that evening. There was no food, or fire, or shelter for him. He knew of a barn in which he could sleep at Brentor, but it was too late to go back there. Darkness was coming on. Brightly did not require to feel in his pocket to discover the state of his finances. He knew he had just twopence.

There was a gate beside him, and on the other side a row of very small whitewashed cottages one room high, which had been built for miners in the days when Mary Tavy had been a saint and prosperous; they were then occupied by assorted families. Brightly stumbled through and knocked at the door of the first. It was opened by a young woman nursing a baby; another was hanging to her skirts; a third sprawled under the table; there was a baby in a cradle, another wrapped upon a chair. It appeared to be a congress of babies. The place was crawling with them. It was a regular baby-warren. They had been turned out wholesale. Even Brightly felt he had come to the wrong place, as he asked the extraordinarily fertile female if she would give him a cup of tea and piece of bread for one penny.

The answer was in the negative. The woman was inclined to be hysterical, which was not surprising considering her surroundings. She was alone in the house, if she could be called alone when it was hardly possible to step across the floor for babies which were lying about like bees under a lime-tree. Brightly was known as a vagabond. He looked quite the sort of man who would murder her and all the children. She told him to go away, and when he did not move, because he had not heard, she began to scream.

"I'll send for policeman if ye don't go. You'm a bad man. Us knows ye. Coming here to scare me, just as I be going to have a baby tu. 'Twill be cross-eyed, poor dear, wi' yew overlooking me. Get along wi' yew, or I'll call neighbours."

Brightly begged her pardon in his soft voice and went. He knew it was no use trying the other cottages. The woman with the army of children would only follow from door to door, and describe how he had insulted her. He made his way to the top of the village and sat upon the hedge. Ju crouched beside him and licked his boots. It was a fine evening, only they were too hungry to appreciate it properly.

"Us mun get food, or us wun't tramp far in the morning," said Brightly. "This wind du seem to mak' a stomach feel cruel empty."

"Makes a dog's stomach empty too, father," said the eloquent tail of Ju.

"Us will go to the shop, and get what us can for a penny. Mun keep one penny for to-morrow," said Brightly.

He turned his dim eyes towards the road. A horse was trotting up the long hill, and presently he saw it; a big ugly grey with a shaggy coat. Brightly knew who it was approaching him, and had there been time he would have hidden, because he was afraid of the man who rode. "It be Varmer Pendoggat," he whispered. "Don't ye growl, Ju."

Possibly the rider would have passed without a word, but the grey horse saw the creatures upon the hedge and shied, crushing the rider's leg against one of the posts opposite. This was unfortunate for Brightly, as it was clearly his fault. Quaint objects with big spectacles and rabbit-skins have no business to sit upon a hedge in the twilight. He had frightened the horse, just as he had frightened the woman with a family. The horse had hurt his master, and Pendoggat was not the sort of man to suffer patiently.

There is a certain language which must not be described. It may be heard to perfection in the cheap enclosures at race-meetings, in certain places licensed to sell beer, at rabbit-shoots, and in other places where men of narrow foreheads come together and seem to revert to a type of being which puzzles the scientist, because there is nothing else in the entire animal world quite like it. Pendoggat made use of that language. He had a low forehead, a scowling face, small eyes, which looked anywhere except at the object addressed, bushy black moustache, and high cheek-bones. He never laughed, but when he was angry he grinned, and spittle ran down his chin. He was a strong man; it was said he could pick up a sack of flour with one hand. He could have taken Brightly and broken him up like a rotten stick. Most people were respectful to Pendoggat. The village constable would have retired on a pension rather than offend him.

"I be sorry, sir. I be cruel sorry," muttered poor shivering Brightly. "I did bide still, sir, and I told the dog to bide still tu. I hopes you hain't hurt, sir. Don't ye be hard on I, sir. Us have had a bad day, and us be hungry, sir."

Pendoggat replied with more of the same language. He tried to destroy Ju with his thick ground-ash, but the wise cur escaped. Then he sidled the horse towards the hedge, and crushed Brightly against its stones. He saw nothing pathetic in the poor thin creature's quivering face and half-blind eyes; but he obtained some enjoyment out of the piping cry for mercy. Brightly thought he was going to be killed, and though he didn't mind that much, he did not want to be tortured.

"Don't ye, sir. Don't ye hurt I," he cried. "I didn't mean it, sir. I was biding quiet. You'm hurting I cruel, sir. I'll give ye two vases, sir, purty vases, if yew lets I go."

Pendoggat struck his horse, and the animal started back. Brightly reached his raw hand up the hedge and lifted his basket tenderly. It was like losing flesh and blood to part with his vases, but freedom from persecution was worth any ransom. He removed the oil-cloth. What was left of the light softened the hideous ware and made the crude colouring endurable.

"Tak' two, sir," said Brightly piteously. "Them's the best, sir."

"Give me up the basket," Pendoggat muttered.

The shivering little man lifted it. Pendoggat snatched at the handle, pulled out a vase, and flung it against the stone hedge. There was a sharp sound, and then the road became spotted with red and yellow fragments.

This was something which Brightly could hardly understand. It was too raw and crude. He stood in the road, with his hands swaying like two pendulums against his thin legs, and wondered why the world had been made and what was the object of it all. There was another crash, and a second shower of red and yellow fragments. Pendoggat had selected his pair of vases, and he was also enjoying himself. He looked up and down, saw there was no one in sight; Dartmoor is a wild and lawless place, and nobody could dictate to him. He was a commoner; master of the rivers and the granite. Brightly said nothing. He lifted a red hand for his basket, which contained what was left of his capital, but Pendoggat only struck the clumsy fingers with his ground-ash. It was darker, but a wild gleam was showing over what had been Gubbings Land. The moon was coming up that way.

"I'll learn ye to scare my horse," growled Pendoggat. "I saw you shake your hand at him. I heard you setting on the dog. If I was to give you what you deserve, I'd – " He lifted his arm, and there was another crash, and more flesh and blood were wasted.

"Don't ye, sir," cried Brightly bitterly. "It be ruin, sir. I tored they once avore, and 'twas nigh a month 'vore I could start again. I works hard, sir, and I du try, but I've got this asthma, sir, and rheumatism, and I can't properly see, master. I've been in hospital to Plymouth, sir, but they ses I would never properly see. 'Tis hard to start again, master, and I ain't got friends. Don't ye tear any more, master. I'll never get right again."

Pendoggat went on smashing the vases. There were not many of them, not nearly enough to satisfy him. The last was shattered, and he flung the basket at Brightly, hitting him on the head, but fortunately not breaking his spectacles. Brightly wanted to be alone; to crawl into the bracken with Ju, and think about many things; only Pendoggat would not let him go.

"Hand up those rabbit-skins," he shouted. He was growing excited. Smashing the vases had put passion into him.

"I've tramped ten miles for they, master. Sourton to Lydford, and Lydford to Brentor, and Brentor to Mary Tavy. Times be very bad, sir. Ten miles for two rabbit-skins, master."

"Hand them up, or I'll break your head."

Brightly had to obey. Pendoggat flung the skins across the saddle and grinned. He passed his sleeve across his lips, then put out his arm, seized Brightly by the scarf round his neck, and dragged him near. "If I was to give ye one or two across the head, 'twould learn ye not to scare horses," he said.

Brightly shivered a little more, and lifted his wizened face.

"Got any money? Tell me the truth, or I'll pull the rags off ye."

"Duppence, master. 'Tis all I has now you'm torn the cloam and got my rabbit-skins. If it warn't for the duppence I don't know what me and Ju would du."

"Hand it over," said Pendoggat.

"I can't, master. I can't," whispered Brightly, gulping like a dying fish.

"Hand it over, or I'll strangle ye." Then in a fit of passion he dragged Brightly right across the saddle and tore his pocket open. The two copper coins fell into his hand. He dropped Brightly upon the red and yellow fragments, which cut his raw hands, then hit his horse, and rode on triumphing. He had punished the miserable little dealer in rubbish; and he fancied Brightly would not venture to frighten his horse again.

Pendoggat rode up to the high moor and felt the wind. He was about to strike his horse into a canter, when a spectre started out of the gloom, a wizened face reached his knee, an agonised voice cried: "Give I back my duppence, master. Give I back my duppence."

Pendoggat shivered. He did not enjoy the sound of that voice, or the sight of that face. He thought of death when he saw that face. Brightly was only one of the mean things of the earth, and

mean things make a fuss about trifles. That face and that voice all over the loss of twopence! Probably the wretched thing was mad. Honest men are often frightened when they see lunatics.

"Us be cruel hungry, master. Us have eaten nought all day. Us have lost our cloam and our rabbit-skins. Give I back my duppence, master. I'll work for ye to-morrow."

Pendoggat hit his horse, and the animal cantered away, and the spectre troubled him no longer. He wiped his chin again and felt satisfied. He had made a poor creature suffer. There was a certain amount of crude pleasure in that thought. But why had that face and voice suggested death, the death of a man who has used his power to deprive a poor wretch of his vineyard? Pendoggat flung the rabbit-skins into the gaping pit of a mine-shaft and cantered on. He was a free man; he was a commoner; the rivers and the rocks were his.

Brightly stumbled back to the hedge to reclaim his empty basket. He talked to Ju for a little, and tried to understand things, but couldn't. He would have to start all over again. He discovered a turnip, which had probably rolled out of a cart and was therefore any one's property, and he filled his stomach with that. Ju raked a bone bearing a few sinews out of a rubbish-heap. So they might have done worse.

At the top of the village was an old cow-barn. Above was a loft containing a little dry fern. Brightly and Ju lodged there. It was quite away from other buildings, standing well out upon the moor, therefore nobody heard a queer piping voice, singing and feasting on the quaint doggerel far into the night —

"Jerusalem the golden,
Wi' milk and honey blest...

CHAPTER III

ABOUT PASTOR AND MASTER

Unpleasant creatures are so plentiful in the world that they cannot be overlooked. Were there only a few they might be ignored; but they throng, they thrust themselves forward, they shout to attract attention, they push the decent-looking out of the way. The ugliest women make the most noise; the ugliest men shove to the front in a crowd; the ugliest insects make their way into bed-chambers. Why Nature made so much ugliness, side by side with so much that is beautiful, only Nature knows. Some countries are made detestable to live in by the presence of hideous creatures. There is the fire-ant of the Amazon valley, which will put human beings to flight. There is the Mygale spider, covered with poisonous red hair, its body the size of a duck's egg, the spread of its legs covering eight inches, which scuttles into a room by moonlight and casts a horrible shadow upon the bed. There is the wolf-spider which, if a man passes near its lair, will leap out and pursue him, and bite him if it can. There are so many of these repulsive things that they cannot be disregarded. Some things can be kept out of the way: abattoirs, operating-theatres, vivisection-hells. People ignore and forget these, because they are not seen; but the man wolf-spider cannot be forgotten, because he leaps out and pursues those that come near his lurking-place.

Nothing in the entire system of creation can be more inexplicable than the persistent cruelty of Nature. Death there must be, but Nature resents a painless death. Animals not only kill but torture those which are inferior to them. Mason-wasps deliberately vivisect spiders, which are insects extremely tenacious of life. It is the same all the way along the scale up to and including man. Nature does her work with bloody hands; birth, life, death, become a miserable dabble of blood and passion. Some people shut their eyes to it all; others cannot; others add to it; churches with their tolling bells and black masses revel in the mystic side of it.

There is not a person living who has not done an act of cruelty. It is impossible to refrain from it. However kindly the soul may be Nature will whisper bloody messages; and some day there is sure to be a temporary breakdown. In a town the wretched business is not much seen. It lurks in the dark corners, like the Mygale spider, and comes out perhaps at moonlight to cast its shadow upon the bed. On the sparsely inhabited moor it is visible, for it cannot hide away so easily, and it tries less because it is fiercer. It is like the wolf-spider which dashes out in a mad fury. Upon a wild upland passions are fiercer, just as physical strength is greater. Everything seems to suggest the dark end of the scale; the rain is more furious, the clouds are blacker, the wind is mightier, the rivers are colder; Nature is at full strength. She is wild and lawless, and men are often wild and lawless too. Tender lilies would not live upon the moor, and it is no use looking for them. They are down in the valleys. Upon the moor there is the granite, the spiny gorse, the rugged heather. It is no use looking for the qualities of the lily in those men who are made of the granite, and gorse, and heather.

Pendoggat was the sort of man who might have melted into tears at hearing a violin played, and then have kicked the performer down a wheel if he asked for a copper. Nature turns out a lot of contradictory work like that. She never troubles to fit the joints together. Had any one told Pendoggat he was a cruel man, he would first of all have stunned the speaker into silence, and then have wondered whatever the man had been driving at. It is a peculiarity of cruelty that it does not comprehend cruelty. No argument will persuade a rabbit-trapper that the wretched animals suffer in the iron jaws of his traps. The man who skins an eel alive, and curses it because it won't keep still, cannot be brought to understand that he is doing anything inhuman. Perhaps he will admit he had never given the subject a thought; more probably he will regard the apostle of mercy as a madman. The only way to enlighten such men is to skin them alive, or compel them to tear themselves to death in an iron trap; and there are, unfortunately, laws to prevent that. The only just law ever made was the *lex talionis*, and Nature

recognises that frequently. Pendoggat trapped rabbits in his fields, and if they were not dead when he found them he left them as a rule. The traps were supposed to kill them in time, and the longer they were in dying the longer their flesh would keep. That was the way he looked at it. Quite a practical way.

Very likely Pendoggat was of Spanish extraction in spite of his Cornish name. The average Cornishman has a thoroughly good heart, and is, if he be of the true stock, invariably fair. The Cornish man or maid who is dark owes something to foreign blood. There are in Cornwall many men and women so strikingly dark as to attract attention at once; and if their ancestry could be traced back a couple of hundred years it might be found that a Spanish name occurred. While the stout men of Devon were chasing the Armada up channel and plucking the Admiral's feathers one by one, and the patriotic Manacles were doing Cornwall's share by giving the big galleons a hearty welcome, many a shipwrecked sailor found his way into the cottages of fishermen and wreckers, and with the aid of a pocketful of gold pieces made themselves at home. Some possibly were able to return to Spain; others probably seduced their protectors' young women; others were lawfully wedded; others settled down in their new land and took a Cornish name. It is a difficult piece of history to trace, and much must remain pure hypothesis; but it is fairly certain that had there been no Spanish Armada to invade England, and to send Queen Elizabeth to her writing-tablets to reel off a lot of badly-rhymed doggerel in imitation of Master Spenser, there would also have been no Farmer Pendoggat dwelling at Helmen Barton in the parish of Lydford and sub-parish of St. Mary Tavy, as a commoner of Dartmoor and a tenant in name of Elizabeth's descendant the Duke of Cornwall.

There was nothing of a sinister nature about the Barton. Even its name meant simply in its original Celtic the place of the high stone; *hel* being a corruption of *huhel*, and *men* one of the various later forms of *maen*; just as *huhel twr*, the high tor, has now become Hel Tor. Wherever people have been given a chance of dragging in the devil and his dwelling-place they have taken it; actuated, perhaps, by the same motive which impelled the old dame to make a profound reverence whenever the name of the ghostly enemy was mentioned, as she didn't know what would be her fate in a future state, so thought it wise to try and propitiate both sides. The Barton was a long low house of granite, damp and ugly. No architect could make a house built of granite look pleasant; no art could prevent the tough stone from sweating. It was tiled, which made it look colder still. Creepers would not crawl up its walls on account of the winds. One half of the Barton was crowded with windows, the other half appeared to be a blank wall. A good many farm-houses are built upon that plan, the stable and loft being a continuation of the dwelling-house, and to all outward appearance a part of it. There was not a tree near the place. The farm was in a fuzzy hollow; above was a fuzzy down. It ought to have been called Furzeland, a name which is borne by a tiny hamlet in mid-Devon, which nobody has ever heard of, where the furze does not grow. The high stone which had named the place – probably a menhir – had disappeared long ago. Some former tenant would have broken it up and built it into a wall. The commoners' creed is a simple one, and runs thus: "Sometimes I believe in God who made Dartmoor. I cling to my privileges of mining, turbary, and quarrying. I take whatever I can find on the moor, and give no man pay or thanks. I reverence my landlord, and straighten his boundary walls when he, isn't looking. The granite is mine, and the peat, and the rivers, and the fish in them, and so are the cattle upon the hills, if no other man can put forward a better claim. No foreign devil shall share my privileges. If any man offers to scratch my back he must pay vor't. Amen."

It was fitting that a man like Pendoggat should live among the furze, farm in the furze, fight with the furze. He resembled it in its fierceness, its spitefulness, its tenacity of life; but not in its beauty and fragrance. He brought forth no golden blossoms. There was no thorn-protected fragrance in him. He was always struggling with the furze, without realising that it must defeat him in the end. He burnt it, but up it came in the spring. He grubbed it up, but portions of the root escaped and sent forth new growth. He would reclaim a patch, but directly he turned his back upon it to attack a fresh piece the furze returned. To eradicate furze upon a moor was not one of the labours allotted to Hercules. He would have found it worse than cutting off the heads of the water-snake. Pendoggat

had fought for twenty years, and the enemy was still undefeated; he would die, and the gorse would go on; for he was only a hardy annual, and the gorse is a perennial, as eternal as the rivers and the granite. It bristled upon every side of the Barton, the greater gorse as well as the lesser, and it was in flower all the year round, as though boasting of its indomitable strength and vitality. On the west side, where the moorland dipped and made an opening for the winds from Tavy Cleave, a long narrow brake remained untouched to make a shelter for the house. The gorse there was high and thick, and its ropy stems were as big round as a man's wrist. Pendoggat would have grievously assaulted any man who dared to fire that brake.

People who talked scandal in the twin villages, namely, the entire population, wondered whether Mrs. Pendoggat was really as respectable as she looked. They decided against her, as they were not the sort of people to give any one the benefit of a doubt. They were right, however, for Annie Pendoggat had no claim to the latter part of her name. She was really Annie Crocker, a degraded member of one of those three famous families – Cruwys and Coplestone being the other two – who reached their zenith before the Norman invasion. She had come to Pendoggat as housekeeper, and could not get away from him; neither could he dismiss her. She was a little woman, with a sharp face and a soft voice; much too soft, people said. She could insult any one in a manner which suggested that she loved them. She had been fond of her master in her snake-like way. She still admired his brute strength, and what she thought was his courage. He had never lifted up his hand against her; and when he threatened to, she would remark in her soft way that the long brake of gorse darkened the kitchen dreadfully, and she thought she would go and set a match to it. That always brought Pendoggat to his senses.

It was a quiet life at the Barton. Pendoggat had no society, except that of some minister whom he might bring back to dinner on Sundays. On that day he attended chapel twice. He also went on Wednesday, when he sometimes preached. His sermons were about a cruel God ruling the world by cruelty, and preparing a state of cruelty for every one who didn't attend chapel twice on Sundays and once during the week. He believed in what he said. He also believed he was himself secure from such a punishment; just as certain ignorant Catholics sincerely rely on the power of a priest to forgive their sins. Pendoggat thought that he was free to act as he pleased, so long as he didn't miss his attendances at chapel. If he cheated a man, and missed chapel, his soul would be in danger; but if he attended chapel the sin was automatically forgiven. It was a strange form of theology, but not an uncommon one. Many excellent people tend towards it. Pious old ladies will do all they can to induce young men to attend church. It does not appear to trouble them much if the young men read comic papers, wink at the girls, or slumber audibly, while they are there. The great point has been gained. The young men are in church; therefore they are religious. The young man who goes for a walk to the top of the highest tor to watch the sunset is a vile creature who will be damned some day.

The Barton had its parlour, and Pendoggat practised the entire ritual connected with that mysterious apartment. No Dartmoor farm-house would have the slightest pretensions to be regarded as a civilised home without the parlour. Its rites and ceremonies remain unwritten, and yet every farmer knows them, and practises them with the precision of a Catholic priest obeying his rubrics, or with the zeal of an Anglican parson defying his. It must be the best room in the house, and it must be kept locked and regarded as holy ground. The windows must not be opened lest fresh air should enter, and equally dangerous sunlight must be excluded by blinds and curtains and a high bank of moribund plants. The furniture is permitted to vary, with the exception of a few ornaments which must be found in every house as a mark of stability and respectability. There must be a piano which cannot be used for purposes of music, and a lamp which is not to be lighted. Whatever books the house contains must be arranged in a manner pleasing to the householder, and they must never be opened. There is a central table, and upon it recline albums containing photographs of the family at different stages of their careers, together with those of ancestors; and these photographs have little value if they are not yellow and faded to denote their antiquity. In the centre of the table must appear a strange device; a stuffed bird in a glass case, a piece of coral on a mat, or some recognised family

heirloom. The pictures must be strongly coloured and should have a religious accent. As Germany has achieved surprising results in the matter of colour, the pictures are usually from that fatherland. Ruined temples on the Nile are a favourite subject; only the temples should resemble dilapidated barns, and the Nile bear a distinct likeness to a duck pond. Upon the mantel must stand a clock which has not gone within living memory, and some assorted crockery which if viewed continuously in a strong light will bring on neuralgia. A copy of a penny novelette, and a sheet of music-hall songs lying about, denote literary and musical tastes; but these are unusual. There is generally a family Bible, used to support a large shell, or a framed photograph of the master in his prime of life; and this is opened from time to time to record a birth, marriage, or death. The pattern of the wall-paper must be decided and easily discernible; scarlet flowers on a yellow background are always satisfactory.

The ceremony of entering the parlour takes place usually on Sunday. There is a Greater Entry and a Lesser Entry. The lesser takes place after tea. The master in his best clothes, his face and hands washed, although that point is not always insisted upon, carefully shaven, or with well-groomed beard, as the case may be, his boots removed after the manner of a Mussulman, enters the holy place, sits stiffly upon a chair without daring to lean back lest he should disturb the antimacassar, lights his pipe, and revels in the odour of respectability. He does not really enjoy himself, but after a time he grows more confident and ventures to cross his legs. From time to time he rises, goes out, walks along the passage, and spits out of the front door. The greater entry takes place after chapel. The entire family assemble by the light of the kitchen lamp and say wicked things about their neighbours. Sometimes guests are introduced, and these display independence in various ways, chiefly by leaning back in their chairs and shuffling their boots on the carpet. The ceremonies come to a close at an early hour; the members of the family file out; father, leaving last, locks the door. The parlour is closed for another week.

Pendoggat's parlour was orthodox; only more cold and severe than most. The wall-paper was stained with moisture, and the big open fire-place always smoked. The master thought himself better than the neighbouring commoners, and none of them were ever invited to enter his sanctuary. In a way he was their superior. He could write a good hand, and read anything, and he spoke better than his neighbours. It is curious that of two commoners, educated and brought up in exactly the same way, one will speak broad dialect and the other good English. There was naturally very little society for Pendoggat. He lived in his own atmosphere as a philosopher might have done. He encouraged his minister to visit him, but he had a good reason for that. Weak-minded ministers are valuable assets and good advertising agents; for, if their congregations do not exactly trust them, they will at least follow them, which is more than they will do for any one else.

The sanctity of the parlour may be violated on weekdays; either upon the occasion of some chapel festival, or when a visitor of higher rank than a farmer calls. When Pendoggat reached the Barton he knew at once that the place was haunted by a visiting body, because the blinds were up. Annie Crocker met him in the yard, which in local parlance was known as the court, and said: "The Maggot's waiting for ye in the parlour. Been there nigh upon an hour. He'm singing Lighten our Darkness by now, I reckon, vor't be getting whist in there, and he'm alone where I set 'en, and told 'en to bide till you come along."

"Given him no tea?" said Pendoggat, appearing to address the stones at his feet rather than the woman. That was his usual way; nobody ever saw Pendoggat's eyes. They saw only a black moustache, a scowl, and a moving jaw.

"No, nothing," said Annie. "No meat for maggots here. Let 'en go and eat dirt. Bad enough to have 'en in the house. He'm as slimy as a slug."

"Shut your noise, woman," said Pendoggat. "Take the horse in, and slip his bridle off."

"Tak' 'en in yourself, man," she snapped, turning towards the house.

Pendoggat repeated his command in a gentler voice; and this time he was obeyed. Annie led the horse away, and the master went in.

The Reverend Eli Pezzack was the Maggot, so called because of his singularly unhealthy complexion. Dartmoor folk have rich red or brown faces – the hard weather sees to that – but Eli was not a son of the moor. It was believed that he had originated in London of West-country parents. He had none of the moorman's native sharpness. He was a tall, clammy individual, with flabby hands dun and cold like mid-Devon clay; and he was so clumsy that if he had entered a room containing only a single article of furniture he would have been certain to fall against it. He was no humbug, and tried to practise what he taught. He was lamentably ignorant, but didn't know it, and he never employed a word of one syllable when he could find anything longer. He admired and respected Pendoggat, making the common mistake with ignorant men of believing physical strength to be the same thing as moral strength. He agreed with those grammarians who have maintained that the eighth letter of the alphabet is superfluous.

"Sorry to have kept ye sitting in the dark," said Pendoggat as he entered the parlour.

"The darkness has not been superlative, Mr. Pendoggat," said Eli, as he stumbled over the best chair while trying to shake hands. "The lunar radiance has trespassed pleasantly into the apartment and beguiled the time of lingering with pleasant fancies." He had composed that sentence during "the time of lingering," but knew he would not be able to maintain that high standard when he was called on to speak extempore.

"The darkness is no darkness at all, but the night is as clear as the day," quoted Pendoggat with considerable fervour, as he drew aside the curtains to admit more moonlight.

"True, Mr. Pendoggat," said Eli. "We know who uttered that sublime contemplation."

This was a rash statement, but was made with conviction, and accepted apparently in the same spirit.

"You know why I asked you to come along here. I'm going to build up your fortune and mine," said Pendoggat. "Let us seek a blessing."

Eli tumbled zealously over a leg of the table, gathered himself into a kneeling posture, clasped his clay-like hands, and prayed aloud with fervour and without aspirates for several minutes. When Pendoggat considered that the blessing had been obtained he dammed up the flow of words with a stertorous "Amen." Then they stood upon their feet and got to business.

"Seems there's no oil in this lamp," said the master, referring not to the pastor, but to the lamp of state which was never used.

"We do not require it, Mr. Pendoggat," came the answer. "We stand in God's light, the moonlight. That is sufficient for two honest men to see each other's faces by."

Pendoggat ought to have winced, but did not, merely because he had so little knowledge of himself. He didn't know he was a brute, just as Peter and Mary did not know they were savages. Grandfather the clock knew nearly as much about his internal organism as they did about theirs.

"I want money," said Pendoggat sharply. "The chapel wants money. You want money. You're thinking of getting married?"

Eli replied that celibacy was not one of those virtues which he felt called upon to practise; and admitted that he had discovered a young woman who was prepared to blend her soul indissolubly with his. The expression was his own. He did not mention what he imagined would be the result of that mixture. "More maggots," Annie Crocker would have said. Annie had been brought up in the atmosphere of the Church, and for that reason hated all pastors and people known as chapel-volk. Pendoggat was the one exception with her; but then he was not an ordinary being. He was a piece of brute strength, to be regarded, not so much as a man, but as part of the moor, beaten by wind, and producing nothing but gorse, which could only be burnt and stamped down; and still would live and rise again with all its former strength and fierceness. Pastor Eli Pezzack was the poor weed which the gorse smothers out of being.

"Come outside," said Pendoggat.

Eli picked up his hat, stumbled, and wondered. He did not venture to disobey the master, because weak-minded creatures must always dance to the tune piped by the strong. Pendoggat was already outside, tramping heavily in the cold hall. Unwillingly Eli left the parlour, with its half-visible memorials, its photographs, worthless curios, hair-stuffed furniture and glaring pictures; blundering like a bee against a window he followed; he heard Pendoggat clearing his throat and coughing in the court.

"Got a stick?" muttered the master. "Take this, then." He gave the minister a long ash-pole. "We're going down Dartmoor. It's not far. Best follow me, or you'll fall."

Eli knew he was certain to fall in any case, so he protested mildly. "It is dangerous among the rocks, Mr. Pendoggat."

The other made no answer. He went into the stable, and came out with a lantern, unlighted; then, with a curt "Come on," he began to skirt the furze-brake, and Eli followed more like a patient sheep than a foolish shepherd.

There is nothing more romantic than a wide undulating region of high moorland lighted by a full moon and beaten by strong wind. The light is enough to show the hills and rock-piles. The wind creates an atmosphere of perfect solitude. The two men came out of the dip; and the scene about them was the high moor covered with moonlight and swept by wind. Pendoggat's face looked almost black, and that of the Maggot was whiter than ever by contrast.

"Where are you taking me?" he asked gently. "Need we proceed at this present 'igh velocity, Mr. Pendoggat? I am not used to it. I cannot be certain of my equilibrium."

The other stopped. Eli was deep in heather, floundering like a man learning to swim.

"You're an awkward walker, man. Lift your feet and plant 'em down firm. You shuffle. Catch hold of my arm if you can't see. We're not going far. Down the cleave – a matter of half-a-mile, but it's bad walking near the river."

Eli did not take the master's arm. He was too nervous. He struggled on, tumbling about like a drunken man; but Pendoggat was walking slowly now that they were well away from the Barton.

"Sorry to bring you out so late," he said. "I meant to be home earlier, and then we'd have got down the cleave by daylight."

"But what are we going to inspect?" cried Eli.

"Something that may make our fortunes. Something better than scratching the back of the moor for a living. I'll make a big man of you, Pezzack, if you do as I tell ye."

"You are a wonderful man, and a generous man, Mr. Pendoggat," said Eli. Then he plunged heavily into a gorse-bush.

Pendoggat dragged him out grimly, almost crying with pain, with a hundred little white bristles in his face and hands. He mentioned this fact with suitable lamentations.

"They'll work out. What's a few furze-prickles?" Pendoggat muttered. "Get your hands hard, and you won't feel 'em. Mind, now! there's bog here. Best keep close to me."

Eli obeyed, but for all that he managed to step into the bog, and made the ends of his clerical trousers objectionable. They reached the edge of the cleave, and stopped while Pendoggat lighted his lantern. They had to make their way across a wilderness of clatters. The moonlight was deceptive and crossed with black shadows. The wind seemed to make the boulders quiver. Eli looked upon the wild scene, heard the rushing of the river, saw the rugged range of tors, and felt excited. He too felt himself an inheritor of the kingdom of Tavy and a son of Dartmoor. He was going to be wealthy perhaps; marry and rebuild his chapel; do many things for the glory of God. He was quite in earnest, though he was a simple soul.

"I lift up mine eyes to the 'ills, Mr. Pendoggat," he said reverently.

"Best keep 'em on your feet. If you fall here you'll smash your head."

"When I contemplate this scene," went on Eli, with religious zeal undiminished, "so full of wonder and mystery, Mr. Pendoggat, I repeat to myself the inspired words of Scripture, 'Why 'op ye so, ye 'igh 'ills?'"

Pendoggat agreed gruffly that the quotation was full of mystery, and it was not for them to inquire into its meaning.

Somehow they reached the bottom of the cleave, Eli shambling and sliding down the rocks, tumbling continually. Pendoggat observed his inartistic scramblings with as much amusement as he was capable of feeling, muttering to himself, "He'd trip over a blade o' grass."

They came to an old wall overgrown with fern and brambles; just below it was the mossy ruin of a cot, the fire-place still showing, the remains of the wall a yard in width. They were among works concerning which history is hazy. They were in a place where the old miners wrought the tin, and among the ruins of their industry. Perhaps a rich mine was there once. Possibly it was the secret of that place which was guarded so well by the Carthaginian captain, who sacrificed his tin-laden galley to avoid capture by Roman coastguards. The history of the search for "white metal" upon Dartmoor has yet to be learnt. They went cautiously round the ruin, and upon the other side Eli dived across the bleached skeleton of a pony and became mixed up in dry bones.

A deep cleft appeared overhung with gorse and willows. Eli would have dived again had not Pendoggat been holding him. They clambered across, then made their way along a shelf of rock between the cliff and the river. Beyond, Pendoggat parted the bushes, and directed the light of his lantern towards what appeared to be a narrow gully, black and unpleasant, and musical with dripping water.

"Go on," he said curtly.

The minister held back. He was not a brave man, and that black hole in the side of the moor conjured up horrors.

"Take my hand, and let yourself down. There's water, but not more than a foot," said Pendoggat.

He pushed Eli forward, then caught his collar, and lowered him like a sack. The minister shuddered when he felt the icy water round his legs and the clammy ferns closing about his head. Pendoggat followed. They were in a narrow channel leading towards a low cave. Frogs splashed in front of them. Small streams trickled down a hundred tiny clefts.

"This is a very disagreeable situation, Mr. Pendoggat," said Eli meekly.

"Come on," said the other gruffly. "I'll show you something to open your eyes. Step low."

They splashed on, bent under the arch of the cave, and entered the womb of the moor. Hundreds of feet of solid granite roofed them in. They were out of the wind and moonlight. Pendoggat guided the minister in front of him, keeping him close to the wall of rock to avoid the deep water in the centre. About twenty paces from the entry was a shaft cut at right angles. They went along it until they had to stoop again.

"Be'old, Mr. Pendoggat!" cried Eli, with amazed admiration. "Be'old the colours! I have never seen anything so beautiful in my life. What is it? Jewels, Mr. Pendoggat? You don't say they are jewels?"

"Pretty, ain't they? More than pretty too. Now you know what I've brought you for," said Pendoggat, as he turned up the light to increase the splendour of the wall.

It was a pretty sight for a child, or any other simple creature. The side wall at the end of the shaft was streaked and veined with a brilliant purple and green pattern. These colours were caused by the iron in the rocks acting upon the slate, which was there abundant. Pendoggat knew that well enough. He knew also that the sight would impress the minister. He lifted the lantern, pointed to a streak of pale blue which ran down the rock from the roof to the water, and said gruffly: "You can see for yourself. That's the stuff."

"What is it?" whispered the excited pastor.

"Nickel. The rock's full of it."

"But don't they know? Does anybody know of it?"

"Only you and me," said Pendoggat.

"Why have you told me? You are a very generous man, but why do you let me into the secret?"

"Come outside," said Pendoggat.

They went out. Not a word was spoken until they reached the side of the cleave. Then Pendoggat turned upon the minister, holding his arm and shaking it violently as he said: "I've chosen you as my partner. I can trust you. Will you stand in with me, share the risks, and share the profits? Answer now, and let's have done with it."

"I must go home and pray over it, Mr. Pendoggat," cried the excited and shivering Eli. "I must seek for guidance. I do not know if it is right for me to seek after wealth. But for the chapel's sake, for my future wife's sake, for the sake of my unborn infants –"

"Yes or no," broke in Pendoggat. "We'll finish it before we move."

"What can I do?" said Eli, clasping his clay-like hands. "I know nothing of these things. I don't know anything about nickel, except that I have some spoons and forks –"

"Don't you see we must get money to work it? You can manage that. You have several congregations. You can persuade them to invest. My name must be kept out of it. The commoners don't like me. I'll do everything else. You can leave the business in my hands. Your part will be to get the money – and you take half profits."

"I will think over it, Mr. Pendoggat. I will think and pray."

"Make up your mind now, or I get another partner."

Pendoggat lifted the glass of the lantern and blew out the light.

"Have we the right to work a mine upon the moor?"

"Leave all that to me. You get the money. Tell 'em we will guarantee ten per cent. Likely it will be more. It's as safe a thing as was ever known, and it is the chance of your lifetime. Here's my hand."

Eli took the hand, and had the gorse-prickles forced well into his.

"I'll do my best, Mr. Pendoggat. I know you are an honest and a generous man," he said.

CHAPTER IV ABOUT BEETLES

There was a whitewashed cottage called Lewside beside the moorland road, and at a window which commanded a view of that road sat a girl with what appeared to be a glory round her face – it was nothing but soft red hair – a girl of seventeen, called Boodles, or anything else sufficiently idiotic; and this girl was learning doggerel and singing —

"The West wind always brings wet weather,
The East wind wet and cold together;
The South wind surely brings us rain,
The North wind blows it back again.'

"And that means it's always raining, which is a lie. And as I'm saying it I'm a liar," laughed Boodles.

It was raining then. Only a Dartmoor shower; the sort of downright rain which makes holes in granite and plays Wagner-like music upon roofs of corrugated iron.

"There's a bunny. Let me see. That's two buns, one man and a boy, a cart and two horses, three wild ponies, and two jolly little sheep with horns and black faces – all been along the road this afternoon," said Boodles. "Now the next verse —

'If the sun in red should set.
The next day surely will be wet;
If the sun should set in grey.
The next will be a rainy day.'

"That's all. We can't go on lying for ever. I wish," said Boodles, "I wish I hadn't got so many freckles on my nose, and I wish my hair wasn't red, and thirdly and lastly, I wish – I wish my teeth weren't going to ache next week. I know they will, because I've been eating jam pudding, and they always ache after jam pudding; three days after, always three days – the beasts! Now what shall I sing about? Why can't people invent something for small girls to do upon a rainy day? I wish a battle was being fought on the moor. It would be fun. I could sit here and watch all day; and I would cut off bits of my hair and throw them to the victorious generals. What a sell for me if they wouldn't pick them up! I expect they would, though, for father says I'm a boodle girl, and that means beautiful, though it's not true, and I wish it was. Another lie and another wish! And when I'm dressed nicely I am boodle-oodle, and that means more beautiful. And when the sun is shining on my hair I am boodle-oodliest, and that means very beautiful. I suppose it's rather nonsense, but it's the way we live here. We may be silly so long as we are good. The next song shall be patriotic. We will bang a drum and wave a flag; and sing with a good courage —

'It was the way of good Queen Bess,
Who ruled as well as mortal can,
When she was stugged, and the country in a mess,
She would send for a Devon man.'

"Well now, that's the truth. Miss Boodles. The principal county in England is Devonshire, and the principal town is Tavistock, and the principal river is the Tavy, and the principal rain is upon

Dartmoor, and the principal girl has red hair and freckles on her nose, and she's only seventeen. And the dearest old man in Devon is just coming along the passage, and now he's at the door, and here he is. Father," she laughed, "why do people ask idiotic questions, like I'm doing now?"

"Because they are the easiest," said Abel Cain Weevil, in his gentle manner and bleat-like voice.

"I was sitting here one day, and Mary Tavy came along," went on Boodles. "She said: 'Aw, my dear, be ye sot by the window?' And I said: 'No, Mary, I'm standing on my head.' She looked so frightened. The poor thing thought I was mad."

"Boodles, you're a wicked maid," said Weevil fondly. "You make fun of everything. Some day you will get your ears pulled."

The two were not related, except by affection, although they passed as father and daughter. Boodles had come from the pixies. She had been left one night in the porch of Lewside Cottage, wrapped up in a wisp of fern, without clothing of any kind, and round her neck was a label inscribed: "Take me in, or I shall be drowned to-morrow." Weevil had taken her in, and when the baby smiled at him his eccentric old soul laughed back. He entered into partnership at once with the baby-girl, and she had been a blessing to him. He knew that she had been left in his porch as a last resource; if he had not taken her in she would have been drowned the next day. It was all very pretty to imagine that Boodles had come from the pixies. The truth was nobody wanted her; the unmarried mother could not keep the child, Weevil was believed to be a tender-hearted old fool, so the baby was wrapped in fern and left in his porch; and the tenant of Lewside Cottage lived up to his reputation. Boodles knew her history. She sat at the cottage window every day, watching every one who passed; and sometimes she would murmur: "I wonder if my mother went by to-day." She had once or twice inserted an unpleasant adjective, but then she had no cause to love her unknown parents. Much of her love was given to Abel Cain Weevil; and all of it went out to some one else.

The old man was one of those mysteries who crop up in desolate places. Nobody knew where he came from, what he had been, or what he was doing in the region watered by the Tavy. He was poor and harmless. He kept out of every one's way. "Quite mad," said St. Peter. "An honest madman," answered St. Mary. "He had at least the decency to recognise that child, for of course she is his daughter." St. Peter had his doubts. He did not like to think too highly of old Weevil. That was against his principles. He suggested that Weevil intended to make some base use of the girl, and St. Mary agreed. They could generally agree upon such matters.

Weevil was quite right to keep out of the world. He was handicapped in every way. There was his name to begin with. He had no objection to Abel, but he saw no necessity in the redundant Cain. It had been given him, however, and he could not escape from it. Every one called him Abel Cain Weevil. The children shouted it after him. As for the name Weevil, it was objectionable, but no worse than many another. It was not improper like some surnames.

"An insect, my dear," he explained to Boodles. "A dirty little beetle which lives upon grain."

"I'm a weevil too," said she. "So I'm a dirty little beetle."

The old man wouldn't allow that. Boodles belonged to the angels, and he told her so with foolish expressions; but she shook her glorious red head at him and declared that beetles and angels had nothing in common. She admitted, however, that she belonged to a delightful order of beetles, and that on the whole she preferred chocolates to grain. The silly old man reminded her that she belonged to the boodle-oodle order of beetles, and so far she was the only specimen of that choice family which had been discovered.

A man is eccentric in this world if he does anything which his neighbours cannot understand. He may go out in the garden and cut a cabbage-leaf. That is a sane action. But if he spreads jam on the cabbage-leaf, and eats the same publicly, he is called a madman. Nothing is easier than to be thought eccentric. You have only to behave unlike other people. Stand in the middle of a crowded street and gaze vacantly into the air. Every one will call you eccentric at once, just because you are gazing in the air and they are not. Weevil was mad because he was unlike his neighbours. The adoption of

Boodles was not a sane action; even if she were his daughter it was equally insane to acknowledge her with such shameless publicity. A sane person would have allowed Boodles to share the fate of many illegitimate children.

They were happy these two, papa Weevil and his Boodles. They had no servant. The girl kept house and cooked. The old man washed up and scrubbed. Boodles knew how to make, not only a shilling, but even the necessary penny go all the way. She was a treasure, good enough for any man; there were no dark spots upon her heart. If she had been made away with one of the best little souls created would have gone back into limbo.

No storm disturbed Lewside Cottage, except Dartmoor gales, and as for religion they were sun-worshippers; like most people who come out in fine raiment and glory in the sun, and when it is wet hide indoors, talk of the sun, think of the sun, long for the sun, until he appears and they can hurry out to worship. The savage calls the sun his god in so many words; and the human nature which is in the savage is in the primitive folk of open and desolate places also; it is present in the most civilised of beings, but only those who live on a high moor through the winter know what a day of sunshine means. The sun has places dedicated to him upon Dartmoor. There is Bel Tor and there is Belstone. A tradition of the Phoenician occupation still exists, handed down from the remote time when the sun was directly worshipped. The commoners still believe that good luck will attend the man who shall see the rising sun reflected on the rock-basin of Bellivor. An altar to the sun stood once upon that lonely tor. Weevil worshipped the sun quietly. Boodles offered incense with enthusiasm. She deserved her name when the sun shone upon her radiant head and made a glory round it. When the greater gorse was in flower, and Boodles walked through it hatless, wearing her green frock, she might have been the spirit of the prickly shrub; and like it her head was in bloom all the year round.

"Have we got anything for supper, Boodle-oodle?" asked the silly old male beetle.

"Ees, lots," said the small golden one.

It was not unpleasant to hear Boodles say "ees." She split the word up and made a kind of anthem out of it. The first sound was very soft, a mere whisper, and spoken with closed lips. The rest she sang, getting higher as the final syllable was reached – there were more syllables in the word than letters – then descending at the drawn-out sibilant, and finishing in a whisper with closed lips.

"Oh, I forgot," she cried. "No eggs!"

They looked at each other with serious faces. In that simple household small things were tragedies. There were no eggs. It was a matter for serious reflection.

"Butter?" queried the old man nervously. "Milk? Cheese? Bread?"

"Heaps, piles, gallons. The kitchen is full of cheese, and you can't move for bread, and the milk is running over and dripping upon everything like a milky day," said penitent Boodles. "I have been saying to myself: 'Eggs, eggs! Yolks, shells, whites – eggs!' I made puns that I shouldn't forget. I egged myself on. I walked delicately, and said: 'I'm treading on eggs.' I kept on scolding myself, and saying: 'Teach your grandmother to suck eggs.' I reminded myself I mustn't put all my eggs in one basket. Then I went and sat in the window, forgot all about them, and now I'm a bad egg."

"Boodles, what shall we do?" said the chief beetle.

"I think you ought to torture me in some way," suggested the forgetful one. "Drag me through the furze. Beat me with nettles. Torture would do me a lot of good, I expect, only not too much, because I'm only a baby."

That was her usual defence. Whatever happened she was only a baby. She was never likely to grow up.

"Don't jest. It is too serious. If I don't have two eggs for my supper I shall have no sleep. I shall be ill to-morrow."

"I'll give you two poached kisses," promised Boodles.

"I cannot exist on spiritual food alone. I must have my eggs. Custom has made it necessary."

"I'll make you all sorts of nice things," she declared.

But the eccentric old beetle could not be pacified. He had eggs upon the mind. The produce of the domestic fowl had become an obsession. He explained that if the house had been well stocked with eggs he might have gone without. He would have known they were there to fall back upon if desire should seize him during the silent watches of the night. But the knowledge that the larder was destitute of eggs increased his desire. He would have no peace until the deficiency was made good.

"Well," said Boodles resignedly, "it's my fault, so I'll suffer for it. I don't want to hear you screaming for eggs all night. I'll go and get wet for your salvation. I expect Mary can let me have some."

Weevil was himself again. He trotted off for the child's boots. He always put her boots on, and took them off when she came in. Boodles was a little sun-goddess, and as such she accepted adoration. It was part of the tribute due to the sun-like head. When the boots were on – each ankle having previously been worshipped as a part of the tribute – she assumed a jacket, packed her hair under a fluffy green hat, stabbed it on four times with long pins, picked up her walking-stick; and was off, Weevil gazing after her adoringly until she passed out of sight. "There goes the pride o' Devon," murmured the silly old man as the green hat vanished.

The sight of Boodles took the weather's breath away. It forgot to go on raining; and the sun was so anxious to shine upon her hair that he pushed the clouds off him, as a late slumberer tosses away his blankets, and came out to work a little before evening. It became quite pleasant as Boodles went beside Tavy Cleave.

Peter was not visible, but Mary was. She was plodding about in her huge boots with an eye upon her geese, especially upon the chief of the flock. Old Sal, who, as usual, was anxious to seek pastures new. When Boodles came up Mary smiled. She was very fond of the child. Boodles seemed to have been made out of such entirely different materials from the odds and ends which had gone towards her own construction. The little girl's soft flesh was as unlike Mary's tough leather as the white bark of the birch is unlike the rugged bark of the oak.

"Well, Mary, how are you?" said Boodles.

"I be purty fine, my dear, purty middling fine. Peter be purty fine tu. And how be yew, my dear, and how be the old gentleman? Purty fine yew be, I reckon."

"We are splendid," said Boodles. "How is the old goose, Mary?"

"Du'ye mean Old Sal, my dear? There he be trampesing 'bout Dartmoor as though 'twas his'n. Aw, he be purty fine, sure 'nuff."

"She must be very old," said Boodles.

"Aw ees, he be old. He be a cruel old artful toad, my dear," said Mary.

"How old is she?"

"Well, my dear, he be older than yew. He be twenty-two come next Michaelmas, I'm thinking."

"You will never kill her?" said Boodles. "You couldn't, after having her for so long. You won't kill her, will you, Mary?"

"Goosies was made to kill. Us keeps 'en whiles they be useful, and then us kills 'en," said Mary.

"But twenty-two years old!" cried Boodles. "She would be much too tough to eat."

"Aw, my dear life," chuckled Mary. "He wouldn't be tough. I would kill 'en, and draw 'en, and rub a little salt in his belly, and hang 'en up for a fortnight, and he would et butiful, my dear."

Boodles laughed delightfully, and said she thought no amount of salt or hanging, to say nothing of sage and onions, could ever make the venerable Sal palatable.

"Peter wun't let 'en be killed. Peter loves Old Sal," Mary went on. "He laid sixteen eggs last year, and he'm the best mother on Dartmoor. Aw ees, my dear. He be a cruel fine mother, and Peter ses he shan't die till he've a mind to."

Then Boodles got to business and asked Mary for eggs, not those of Old Sal, but the produce of the hen-house. Mary said she would go and search. As it was dirty in that region Boodles declined to go with her. "Please to go inside. There be only Gran'vaither. Go and have a look at 'en, my dear,"

said Mary, who always referred to Grandfather as if he had been a living soul. "Hit 'en in the belly, and make 'en strike at ye."

Boodles went into Hut Circle Number One, which was Peter's residence, and stood in the presence of Grandfather. Obeying Mary's instructions, she hit him "in the belly." The old sinner made weird noises when thus disturbed. He appeared to resent the treatment, as most old gentlemen would have done. He refused to strike, but he rattled himself, and wheezed, and made sounds suggestive of expectoration. Grandfather was a savage like Peter. He was a rough uneducated sort of clock, and he had no passion for Boodles. Pendoggat would have been the man for him. Grandfather would have shaken hands with Pendoggat had it been possible. His own quivering hands were stretched across his lying face, announcing quarter-past nine when it was really five o'clock. Grandfather was a true man of Devon. He had no sense of time.

Boodles had nothing but contempt for the old fellow. Having assaulted him she opened his case. Evidently Grandfather had been drinking. His interior smelt strongly of cider. There were splashes of it everywhere; rank cider distilled from the lees; in one spot moisture was pronounced, suggesting that Grandfather had recently been indulging. Apparently he liked his liquor strong. Grandfather was a picker-up of unconsidered trifles also. He was full of pins; all kinds of pins, bent and straight. Item, Grandfather had a little money of his own; several battered coppers, some green coins which had no doubt been dug up outside, or discovered upon the "deads" beside one of the neighbouring wheals, and there was a real fourpenny-bit with a hole through it. Fastened to the back of the case behind the pendulum was a scrap of sheepskin as hard as wood, and upon it some hand had painfully drawn what appeared to be an elementary exercise in geometry. Boodles frowned and wondered what it all meant.

"Here be the eggs, my dear. Twenty for a shillun to yew, and ten to a foreigner," said Mary, standing in the door, making an apron out of her ragged skirt, and blissfully unconscious that she was exposing the sack-like bloomers which were her only underwear.

"Twenty-one, Mary. There's always one thrown in for luck and me," pleaded Boodles.

"Aw ees. One for yew, my dear," Mary assented.

That was the way Boodles got full value for her money.

"My dear life! What have yew been a-doing of?" cried Mary with alarm, when she noticed Grandfather's open case. "Aw, my dear, yew didn't ought to meddle wi' he. Grandfather gets cruel tedious if he be meddled with."

"I was only looking at his insides," said Boodles. "He's a regular old rag-bag. What are all these things for – pins, coins, coppers? And he's splashed all over with cider. No wonder he won't keep time."

"Shet 'en up, my dear. Shet 'en up," said superstitious Mary. "Aw, my dear, don't ye ever meddle wi' religion. If Peter was to see ye he'd be took wi' shivers. Let Gran'vaither bide, du'ye. Ain't ye got a pin to give 'en? My dear life, I'll fetch ye one. Gran'vaither got tedious wi' volks wance, Peter ses, and killed mun; ees, my dear, killed mun dead as door nails; ees, fie 'a did, killed mun stark."

Boodles only laughed, like the wicked maid that she was. She couldn't be bothered with the niceties of religion.

Peter and Mary were only savages. According to their creed pixies dwelt in Grandfather's bosom; and it was necessary to retain the good-will of the little people, and render the sting of their possible malevolence harmless, by presenting votive offerings and inscribing spells. The rank cider had been provided for midnight orgies, and, lest the pixies should become troublesome when under the influence of liquor, the charm upon the sheepskin had been introduced, like a stringent police-notice, compelling them to keep the peace.

"It's all nonsense, you know," said Boodles, as she took the eggs, with the sun flaming across her hair. "The pixies are all dead. I went to the funeral of the last one."

Mary shook her head. She did not jest on serious matters. The friendship of the pixies was as much to her as the lack of eggs had been to Weevil.

"Anyhow," went on wicked Boodles, "I should put rat-poison in there if they worried me."

"Us have been bit and scratched by 'em in bed," Mary declared. "Peter and me have been bit cruel. Us could see the marks of their teeth."

"Did you ever catch one?" asked Boodles tragically.

"Catch mun! Aw, my dear life! Us can't catch mun."

"You could, if you were quick – before they hopped," laughed Boodles.

CHAPTER V

ABOUT THOMASINE

Thomasine sat in the kitchen of Town Rising, sewing. It was a dreary place, and she was alone and surrounded with stone. The kitchen walls were stone; so was the floor. The window looked out upon the court, and that was paved with stone. Beyond was the barn wall, made of blocks of cold granite. Above peeped the top of a tor, and that was granite too. Damp stone everywhere. It was the Stone Age back again. And Thomasine, buried among it all, was making herself a frivolous petticoat for Tavistock Goose Fair.

Among undistinguished young persons Thomasine was pre-eminent. She was only Farmer Chegwidden's "help"; that is to say, general servant. Undistinguished young persons will do anything that is menial under the title of "help," which as a servant they would shrink from. To the lower classes there is much in a name. Thomasine knew nothing. She was just a work-a-day girl, eating her meals, sleeping; knowing there was something called a character which for some inexplicable reason it was necessary to keep; dreaming of a home of her own some day, but not having the sense to realise that it would mean a probably drunken husband on a few shillings a week, and a new gift from the gods to feed each year; comprehending the delights of fairs, general holidays, and evenings out; perceiving that it was pleasant to have her waist squeezed and her mouth kissed; understanding also the charm in being courted in a ditch with the temperature below freezing-point. That was nearly all Thomasine knew. Plenty of animals know more. Her conversation consisted chiefly in "ees" and "no."

It is not pleasant to see a pretty face, glorious complexion, well-made body, without mind, intellect, or soul worth mentioning; but it is a common sight. It is not pleasant to speak to that face, and watch its vacancy increase. A dog would understand at once; but that human face remains dull. A good many strange thoughts suggest themselves on fair-days and holidays in and about the Stannary Towns. There are plenty of pretty faces, glorious complexions, and well-made bodies surrounded with clothing which the old Puritans would have denounced as immoral; but not a mind, not an intellect above potato-peeling, in the lot. They come into the towns like so many birds of passage; at nightfall they go out, shrieking, many of them, for lack of intelligent speech, and return to potato-peeling. The warmth of the next holiday brings them out again, in the same clothes, knowing just as much as they did before – how to shriek – then the pots and potatoes claim them again. All those girls have undeveloped minds. They don't know it, not having been told, so their minds remain unformed all their lives. The flower-like faces fade quickly, because there is nothing to keep the bloom on. The mind does not get beyond the budding stage. It is never attended to, so it rots off without ever opening. Sometimes one of these girls discovers she has something besides her body and her complexion; or somebody superior to herself impresses the fact upon her; and she uses her knowledge, cultivates her mind, and with luck rises out of the rut. She discovers that her horizon is not limited by pots and potato-peel. Beyond it all, for her, there is something called intelligence. Such girls are few. Most of them have their eyes opened, not their minds, and then they discover they are naked, and want to go away and hide themselves.

Thomasine's soul was about the size and weight of a grain of mustard seed. She was a good maid, and her parents had no cause to be sorry she had been born. She had come into the world by way of lawful wedlock, which was something to be proud of in her part of the country, and was living a decent life in respectable employment. She sat in the stone kitchen, and built up her flimsy petticoat, with as much expression on her face as one might reasonably expect to find upon the face of a cow. She could not think. She knew that she was warm and comfortable; but knowledge is not thought. She knew all about her last evening's courting; but she could not have constructed any little romance which differed from that courting. In a manner she had something to think about; namely, what

had actually happened. She could not think about what had not happened, or what under different circumstances might have happened. That would have meant using her mind; and she didn't know she had one. Yet Thomasine came of a fairly clever family. Her grandfather had used his mind largely, and had succeeded in building up, not a large, but a very comfortable, business. He had emigrated, however; and it is well known that there is nothing like a change of scene for teaching a man to know himself. He had gone to Birmingham and started an idol-factory. It was a quaint sort of business, but a profitable one. He made idols for the Burmese market. He had stocked a large number of Buddhist temples, and the business was an increasing one. Orders for idols reached him from many remote places, and his goods always gave satisfaction. The placid features of many a squatting Gautama in dim Eastern temples had been moulded from the vacant faces of Devonshire farm-maids. He was a most religious man, attending chapel twice each Sunday, besides teaching in the Sunday-school. He didn't believe in allowing religion to interfere with business, which was no doubt quite discreet of him. He always said that a man should keep his business perfectly distinct from everything else. He had long ago dropped his Devonshire relations. Respectable idol-makers cannot mingle with common country-folk. Thomasine's parents possessed a framed photograph of one of the earlier idols, which they exhibited in their living-room as a family heirloom, although their minister had asked them as a personal favour to destroy it, because it seemed to him to savour of superstition. The minister thought it was intended for the Virgin Mary, but the good people denied it with some warmth, explaining that they were good Christians, and would never disgrace their cottage in that Popish fashion.

Innocent of idols, Thomasine went on sewing in her stone kitchen amid the granite. She had finished putting a frill along the hem of her petticoat; now she put one higher up in regions which would be invisible however much the wind might blow, though she did not know why, because she could not think. It was a waste of material; nobody would see it; but she felt that a fair petticoat ought to be adorned as lavishly as possible. She did not often glance up. There was nothing to be seen in the court except the usual fowls. It was rarely an incident occurred worth remembering. Sometimes one stag attacked another, and Thomasine would be attracted to the window to watch the contest. That made a little excitement in her life, but the fight would soon be over. It was all show and bluster; very much like the sparring of two farm hands. "You'm a liar." "So be yew." "Aw well, so be yew." And so on, with ever-increasing accent upon the "yew." Not many people crossed the court. There was no right of way there, but Farmer Chegwidden had no objection to neighbours passing through.

Whether Thomasine was pretty could hardly be stated definitely. It must remain a matter of opinion whether any face can be beautiful which is entirely lacking in expression, has no mind behind the tongue, and no speaking brain at the back of the eyes. Many, no doubt, would have thought her perfection. She was plump and full of blood; it seemed ready to burst through her skin. She was somewhat grossly built; too wide at the thighs, big-handed, and large-footed, with not much waist, and a clumsy stoop from the shoulders. She waddled in her walk like most Devonshire farm-maids. Her complexion was perfect; so was her health. She had a lust-provoking face; big sleepy eyes; cheeks absolutely scarlet; pouting lips swollen with blood, almost the colour of an over-ripe peach. It was more like paint than natural colouring. It was too strong. She had too much blood. She was part of the exaggeration of Dartmoor, which exaggerates everything; adding fierceness to fierceness, colour to colour, strength to strength; just as its rain is fiercer than that of the valleys, and its wind mightier. Thomasine was of the Tavy family, but not of the romantic branch. Not of the folklore side like Boodles, but of the Ger Tor family, the strong mountain branch which knows nothing and cannot think for itself, and only feels the river wearing it away, and the frost rotting it, and the wind beating it. The pity was that Thomasine did not know she had a mind, which was already fading for want of use. She knew only how to peel potatoes and make herself wanton underwear. Although twenty-two years of age she was still a maid.

There were steps upon the stones, and Thomasine looked up. She saw nobody, but sounds came through the open window, a shuffling against the wall of the house, and the stumbling of clumsy boots. Then there was a knock.

There was nothing outside, except miserable objects such as Brightly with an empty and battered basket and starving Ju with her empty and battered stomach and her tongue hanging out. They were still trying to do business, instead of going away to some lonely part of the moor and dying decently. It was extraordinary how Brightly and Ju clung to life, which wasn't of much use to them, and how steadfastly they applied themselves to a sordid business which was very far less remunerative than sound and honest occupations such as idol-making. Brightly looked smaller than ever. He had forgotten all about his last meal. His face was pinched; it was about the size of a two-year-old baby's. He looked like an eel in man's clothing.

"Any rabbit-skins, miss?" he asked.

"No," said Thomasine.

Brightly crept a little nearer. "Will ye give us a bite o' bread? Us be cruel hungry, and times be hard. Tramped all day yesterday, and got my cloam tored, and lost my rabbit-skins and duppence. Give me and little dog a bite, miss. Du'ye, miss."

"If master was to know I'd catch it," said Thomasine.

"Varmer Chegwidden would give I a bite. I knows he would," said Brightly.

Chegwidden would certainly have given him a bite had he been present, or rather his sheep-dog would. Chegwidden was a member of the Board of Guardians in his sober moments, and it was his duty to suppress such creatures as Brightly.

"I mun go on," said the weary little wretch, when he saw that Thomasine was about to shut the door. "I mun tramp on. I wish yew could ha' given us a bite, miss, for us be going to Tavistock, and I don't know if us can. Me and little dog be cruel mazed."

"Bide there a bit," said Thomasine.

There was nobody in the house, except Mrs. Chegwidden, who was among her pickle jars and had never to be taken into consideration. Chegwidden had gone to Lydford. The girl had a good heart, and she didn't like to see things starving. Even the fowls had to be fed when they were hungry, and probably Brightly was nearly as good as the fowls. She returned to the door with bread and meat, and a lump of cheese wrapped in a piece of newspaper. She flung Ju a bone as big as herself and with more meat upon it, and before the fit of charity had exhausted itself she brought out a jug of cider, which Brightly consumed on the premises and increased in girth perceptibly.

"Get off," said Thomasine. "If I'm caught they'll give me the door."

Brightly was not well skilled in expressing gratitude because he had so little practice. He was generally apologising for his existence. He tried to be effusive, but was only grotesque. Thomasine almost thought he was trying to make love to her, and she drew back with her strained sensual smile.

"I wun't forget. Not if I lives to be two hundred and one, I wun't," cried Brightly. "Ju ses her wun't forget neither. Us will get to Tavistock now, and us can start in business again to-morrow. Ye've been cruel kind to me, miss. God love ye and bless ye vor't, is what I ses. God send ye a good husband vor't, is what I ses tu."

"You'm welcome," said Thomasine.

Brightly beamed in a fantastic manner through his spectacles. Ju wagged what Nature had intended to be a tail, and staggered out of the court with her load of savoury meat. Then the door was closed, and Thomasine went back to her petticoat.

The girl could not exactly think about Brightly, but she was able to remember what had happened. A starving creature supposed to be a man, accompanied by a famished beast that tried to be a dog – both shocking examples of bad work, for Nature jerry-builds worse than the most dishonest of men – had presented themselves at the door of her kitchen, and she had fed them. She had obeyed the primitive instinct which compels the one who has food to give to those who have none. There

was nothing splendid about it, because she did not want the food. Yet her master would not have fed Brightly. He would have flung the food into the pig-sty rather than have given it to the Seal. So it was possible after all that she had performed a generous action which was worthy of reward.

It must not be supposed that Thomasine thought all that out for herself. She knew nothing about generous actions. She had listened to plenty of sermons in the chapel, but without understanding anything except that it would be her duty some time to enter hell, which, according to the preacher's account, was a place rather like the top of Dartmoor, only hotter, and there was never any frost or snow. Will Pugsley, with whom she was walking out just then, had summed up the whole matter in one phrase of gloomy philosophy: "Us has a cruel hard time on't here, and then us goes down under." That seemed to be the answer to the riddle of the soul's existence: "having a cruel hard time, and then going down under."

Thomasine had never read a book in her life. They did not come her way. Town Rising had none, except the big Bible – which for half-a-century had performed its duty of supporting a china shepherdess wreathing with earthenware daisies the neck of a red and white cow – a manual upon manure, and a ready reckoner. No penny novelette, dealing with such matters of everyday occurrence as the wooing of servant-girls by earls, had ever found its way into her hands, and such fictions would not have interested her, simply because they would have conveyed no meaning. A pretty petticoat and a fair-day; these were matters she could appreciate, because they touched her sympathies and she could understand them. They were some of the things which made up the joy of life. There was so much that was "cruel hard"; but there were pleasures, such as fine raiment and fair-days, to be enjoyed before she went "down under."

Thomasine was able to form mental pictures of scenes that were familiar. She could see the tor above the barn. It was easy to see also the long village on the side of the moor. She knew it all so well. She could see Ebenezer, the chapel where she heard sermons about hell. Pendoggat was sometimes the preacher, and he always insisted strongly upon the extremely high temperature of "down under." Thomasine very nearly thought. She almost associated the preacher with the place which was the subject of his discourse. That would have been a very considerable mental flight had she succeeded. It came to nothing, however. She went on remembering, not thinking. Pendoggat had tried to look at her in chapel. He could not look at any one with his eyes, but he had set his face towards her as though he believed she was in greater need than others of his warnings. He had walked close beside her out of chapel, and had remarked that it was a fine evening. Thomasine remembered she had been pleased, because he had drawn her attention towards a fact which she had not previously observed, namely, that it was a fine evening. Pendoggat was a man, not a creeping thing like Brightly, not a lump of animated whisky-moistened clay like Farmer Chegwidden. No one could make people uncomfortable like him. Eli Pezzack was a poor creature in comparison, although Thomasine didn't make the comparison because she couldn't. Pezzack could not make people feel they were already in torment. The minister frequently referred to another place which was called "up over." He reminded his listeners that they might attain to a place of milk and honey where the temperature was normal; and that was the reason why he was not much of a success as a minister. He seemed indeed to desire to deprive his congregations of their legitimate place of torment. What was the use of talking about "up over," which could not concern his listeners, when they might so easily be stimulated with details concerning the inevitable "down under"? Pezzack was a weak man. He refused to face his destiny, and he tried to prevent his congregations from facing theirs.

Thomasine looked at the clock. It was time to lift the peat from the hearth and put on the coal. Chegwidden would soon be back from Lydford and want his supper. She admired the petticoat, rolled it up, and put it away in her work-basket.

"Dear life!" she murmured. "Here be master, and nothing done."

A horseman was in the court, and crossing it. The window was open. The rider was not Chegwidden. It was the master of Helmen Barton, his head down as usual, his eyes apparently fixed

between his horse's ears; his head was inclined a little towards the house. Thomasine stood back and watched.

A piece of gorse in full bloom came through the window, fell upon the stone floor, and bounded like a small beast. It jumped about on the smooth cement, and glided on its spines until it reached the dresser, and there remained motionless, with its stem, which had been bared of prickles, directed upwards towards the girl like a pointing finger. Pendoggat had gone on. His horse had not stopped, nor had the rider appeared to glance into the kitchen. Obviously there was some connection between Pendoggat, that piece of gorse, and herself, only Thomasine could not work it out. She picked it up. She could not have such a thing littering her tidy kitchen. The sprig was a smother of blossom, and she could see its tiny spears among the blooms, their points so keen that they were as invisible as the edge of a razor. She brought the blooms suddenly to her nose, and immediately one of the tiny spears pierced the skin and her strong blood burst through.

"Scat the vuzz," said Thomasine.

Iron-shod hoofs rattled again upon the stones, and the light of the window became darkened. Pendoggat had changed his mind and was back again. He tumbled from the saddle and stood there wagging his head as if deep in thought. Supposing she was wanted for something, the girl came forward. Pendoggat was close to the window, which was a low one. She did not know what he was looking at; not at her certainly; but he seemed to be searching for her, desiring her, sniffing at her like an animal.

"Du'ye want master, sir? He'm to Lydford," said Thomasine.

A drop of blood fell from her nose and splashed on the stone floor between them. She searched for a handkerchief and found she had not got one. There was nothing for it but to use the back of her hand, smearing the blood across her lips and chin. Pendoggat saw it all. He noticed everything, although he had his eyes on the window-sill.

"You're a fine maid," he said.

"Be I, sir?" said Thomasine, beginning to tremble. Pendoggat was her superior. He was the tenant of Helmen Barton, a commoner, the owner of sheep and bullocks, and married, or at least she supposed he was. She felt somehow it was not right he should say such a thing to her.

"Going to chapel Sunday night?" he went on, with his head on one side, and his face as immobile as a mask.

"Ees," murmured Thomasine, forgetting the "sir" somehow. The question was such a familiar one that she did not remember for the moment the standing of the speaker. This was the man who had drenched her with hell-fire from the pulpit.

"How do ye come home? By the road or moor?"

"The moor, if 'tis fine, sir. I walks with Willum."

"Young Pugsley?"

"Ees, sir."

"You're too good for him. You're too fine a maid for that hind. You won't walk with him Sunday night. I'll see you home."

"Ees, sir," was all Thomasine could say. She was only a farm-maid. She had to do as she was told.

"Going to the fair?" he asked.

The answer was as usual.

"I'll meet you there. Take you for rides, and into the shows. Got your clothes ready?"

The same soft word, which Thomasine made a dissyllable, and Boodles sang as an anthem, followed. Goose Fair was the greatest day in the girl's year, and to be treated there by a man with money was to glide along one of the four rivers of Paradise, only that was not the expression which occurred to Thomasine.

Pendoggat reached in and took her hand. It was large with labour, and red with blood, but quite clean. He pulled her towards him. There was nobody in the court; only the unobservant chickens, pecking diligently. A cloud had settled upon the top of the tor, which was just visible above the barn, an angry cloud purple like a wound, as if the granite had pierced and wounded it. Thomasine wondered if it would be fine for Goose Fair.

Her sleeve was loose. Pendoggat pressed his fingers under it, and paddled the soft flesh like a cat up to her elbow.

"Don't ye, sir," pleaded Thomasine, feeling somehow this was not right.

"You're a fine, lusty maid," he muttered.

"'Tis time master was back from Lydford, I reckon," she murmured.

"You're bloody."

"'Twas that bit o' vuzz."

He drew her closer, threw his arm clumsily round her neck, dragged her half through the window, kissing her savagely on the neck, lips, and chin, until his own lips were smeared with her blood, and he could taste it. She began to struggle. Then she cried out, and he let her go.

"Good blood," he muttered, passing his tongue over his lips. "The strongest and best blood on Dartmoor."

Then, he flung himself across his horse, as if he had been drunk, and rode out of the court.

CHAPTER VI

ABOUT VOCAL AND INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

There was a concert in Brentor village in aid of that hungry creature the Church, which resembles so many tin- and copper-mines, inasmuch as much more money goes into it than ever comes out. Brentor is overdone with churches. There is one in the village, and the little one on the tor outside. Maids like to be married on the tor. They think it gives them a good start in life, but that idea is owing to tradition, which connects Brentor with the worship of Baal. The transition from Paganism to Christianity was gradual, and in many cases the old gods were merely painted up and made to look like new. The statue of Jove was bereft of its thunderbolt, given a bunch of keys, and called Peter; the goddess of love became a madonna; the sun-temple was turned into a church. Where the original idea was lost sight of a legend was invented; such as that of the merchant who, overtaken by a storm when beating for shore, vowed to build a church upon the first point of land which should appear in sight. There is no getting away from sun-worship upon Dartmoor, and no easy way of escape from tradition either. That is why maids like to be sacrificed upon Brentor, even when the wind is threatening to sweep them down its cliffs.

Local talent was not represented at the concert. People from Tavistock came to perform; all sorts and conditions of amateurs in evening dress and muddy boots. The room was crowded, as it was a fine evening, and therefore there was nothing to prevent the inhabitants of the two holy Tavys from walking across the moor, and a jabbering cartload had come from Lydford also. There was no chattering in the room. The entire audience became appalled by respectability as represented by gentlemen with bulging shirt-fronts and ladies with visible bosoms. They stared, they muttered hoarsely, they turned to and fro like mechanical figures; but they did not chatter. They felt as if they were taking part in a religious ceremony.

The young lady who opened proceedings, after the inevitable duet on the piano – which, to increase the sense of mystery, was called on the practically illegible programme a pianoforte – with a sentimental song, made an error. She merely increased the atmosphere of despondency. When she had finished some of the audience became restless. They were wondering whether the time had come for them to kneel.

"Bain't him a cruel noisy thing?" exclaimed Mary, with a certain amount of enthusiasm. "What du'ye call 'en?" she asked a small, dried-up ancient man who sat beside her, while indicating the instrument of music with an outstretched arm.

The old man tried to explain, which was a thing he was famous for doing. He was a superannuated school-master of the nearly extinct type, the kind that knew nothing and taught as much, but a brave learned man according to some of the old folk.

Peter sat by his sister, trying to look at his ease; and he too listened intently for what school-master had to say. Peter and Mary were blossoming out, and becoming social and gregarious beings.

This was the first grand entertainment they had ever attended. Tickets had been given them, or they would certainly not have been there. As Peter had failed in his efforts to sell the tickets they had decided to use them, although dressing for the event was something of an ordeal. Mary had a black hat and a silk dress, both of early Victorian construction, and beneath, her huge nailed boots innocent of blacking. Peter wore a tie under his chin, and a wondrous collar some three inches lower down. The rest of his costume was also early nineteenth century in make, but effectual. He was very much excited by the music, but dreadfully afraid of showing it.

"That there box," said Master, with an air of diving deep in the well of wisdom "he'm full o' wires and hammers."

"My dear life!" gasped Mary. "Full o' wires and hammers! Du'ye hear, Peter?"

Her brother replied in the affirmative, although in a manner which suggested that the information was superfluous.

"Volks hit them bones, and the bones dra' on the hammers, and the hammers hit the wires," proceeded Master.

"Bain't that artful now?" cried Mary.

"Sure 'nuff," agreed Peter, unable to restrain his admiration.

"Couldn't ye mak' one o' they? You'm main cruel larned wi' your hands," Mary went on.

Peter admitted that was so. Given the material, he had no doubt of his ability to turn out a piano capable of producing that music which his sister described as cruel noisy.

"It taketh a scholard to understand how to mak' they things," said Master, with some severity. "See all that carved wood on the front of him? You couldn't du that, and the piano wouldn't mak' no music if 'twasn't for the carved wood. 'Twould mak' a noise, you see, Peter, but not music. 'Tis the noise coming out through the carving what makes the music. Taketh a scholard to du that."

"Look at she!" cried Mary violently, as another lady rose to warble. This songster had a good bust, and desired to convince her audience of the fact. "Her ha' grown out of her clothes sure 'nuff. Her can't hardly cover her paps."

"Shet thee noise, woman," muttered Peter.

"Her be in full evening dress," explained Master.

Mary subsided in deep reflection. She knew perfectly well what "full" meant. There were plenty of full days upon Tavy Cleave. It meant a heavy wet mist which filled everything so that nothing was visible. For Mary every word had only one meaning. She could not understand how the word "full" could bear two exactly opposite meanings.

The back seats were overflowing. Only threepence was charged there, but seats were not guaranteed. The majority stood, partly to show their independence, chiefly to look as if they had just dropped in, not with any idea of being entertained, but that they might satisfy themselves there was nothing objectionable in the programme. Several men stood huddled together as near the door as possible, showing their disapproval of such frivolity in the usual manner, by standing in antagonistic attitudes and frowning at the performers. Chegwidden was there, containing sufficient liquor to make him grateful for the support of the wall. He had tried to get in for nothing, by explaining that he was a member of the Board of Guardians, and had been from his youth a steadfast opponent of the Church as by law established. These excuses having failed, he had paid the threepence under protest, explaining at the same time that if he heard anything to shock his innocent mind he should demand his money back, visit his solicitor when next in Tavistock with a view to taking action against those who had dared to pervert the public mind, and indite letters to all the local papers. The entertainment committee had a troublesome threepennyworth in Farmer Chegwidden. He had already spent a couple of shillings in liquor, and would spend another couple when the concert was over. That was money spent upon a laudable object. But the threepence demanded for admission was, as he loudly proclaimed, money given to the devil.

Near him stood Pendoggat, his head down as usual, and breathing heavily as if he had gone to sleep. He looked as much at home there as a bat flitting in the sunlight among butterflies. Every one was surprised to see Pendoggat. Members of his own sect decided he was there to collect material for a scathing denunciation of such methods from the pulpit of Ebenezer. Chegwidden pushed closer, and asked hoarsely, "What do 'ye think of it, varmer?"

"Taking money in God's name to square the devil," answered Pendoggat.

"Just what I says," muttered Chegwidden, greatly envying the other's powers of expression. "Immortality! That's what it be, varmer. 'Tis a hard word, but there ain't no other. Dirty immortality!" He meant immorality, but was confused by righteous indignation, the music, and other things.

"Can't us do nought?" Chegwidden went on. "Us lets their religion bide. They'm mocking us, varmer. That there last song was blasphemy, and immortality, and a-mocking us all through."

Pendoggat muttered something about a demonstration outside later on, to mark their disapproval of such infamous attempts to seduce young people from the paths of rectitude. Then he relapsed into taciturnity, while Chegwidden went on babbling of people's sins.

Most of the ill-feeling was due to the fact that the room had been used several years back as a meeting-house, where the pure Gospel had flowed regularly. Chegwidden's father had carried his Bible into a front seat there. Souls had been saved in that room; anniversary teas had been held there; services of song had been given; young couples, whose Nonconformity was unimpeachable, had conducted their amours there; and upon the outside of the door had been scrawled shockingly crude statements concerning such love-affairs, accompanied by anatomical caricatures of the parties in question. It was holy ground, and representatives of a hostile sect were defiling it.

Greater evils followed. An eccentric gentleman rose and recited a story about a lady trying to mount an overcrowded street-car, and being dragged along the entire length of a street, chatting to the conductor the while; quite a harmless story, but it made Brentor to grin. Church-people laughed noisily, and even Methodists tittered. Nonconformist maids of established reputations giggled, and their young men cackled like geese. It was in short a laughing audience. The threepenny-bits shivered. Fire from heaven was already overdue. Complete destruction might be looked for at any moment. One nervous old woman crept out. She had heard the doctrine of eternal punishment expounded in that place, and she explained she could remain there no longer and listen to profanity. The performer again obliged; this time with a comic song which set the seal of blasphemy upon the whole performance. Chegwidden turned his face to the wall, moaned, and demanded of a neighbour what he thought of it all.

"Brave fine singing," came the unscrupulous answer, which seemed to denote that the speaker had also been carried away by enthusiasm.

This was the last straw. Even the lights of Ebenezer were flickering and going out. Chegwidden and Pendoggat appeared to be the only godly men left. The farmer turned upon the irreligious speaker, and crushed him with weighty words.

"'Twas here father prayed," he said, in a voice unsteady with grief and alcohol. "Twice every Sunday, and me with 'en, and he've a-shook me in this chapel, and punched my ear many a time when I was cracking nuts in sermon time. Father led in prayer here, and he've a-told me how he once prayed twenty minutes by the clock. Some said 'twas nineteen, but father knew 'twas twenty, 'cause he had his watch in his hand, and never took his eyes off 'en. Never thought he'd do the last minute, but he did. They was religious volks in them days. Father prayed here, I tells ye, and I learnt Sunday-school here, and 'twas here us all learnt the blessed truths of immorality." – again he blundered in his meaning – "and now it be a place for dancing, and singing, and play-acting, and us will be judged for it, and weighed in the balances and found wanting."

"Us can repent," suggested the neighbour.

Chegwidden would not admit this. "Them what have laughed here to-night won't die natural, not in their beds," he declared. "They'll die sudden. They'll be cut off. They've committed blasphemy, which is the sin what ain't forgiven."

Then Chegwidden turned upon the doorkeeper and demanded his money back. He was not going to remain among the wicked. He was going to spend the rest of the evening respectably at the inn.

After that the programme continued for a little without interruption. Then a young lady, who had been especially imported for the occasion, obliged with a violin solo. She played well, but made the common mistake of amateurs before a rural audience; preferring to exhibit her command over the instrument by rendering classical music, instead of playing something which the young men could whistle to. It was a very soft piece. The performer bent to obtain the least possible amount of sound from a string; and at that critical moment a loud weary voice startled the religious silence of the room —

"Aw, my dear life! Bain't it a shocking waste o' time?"

It was Mary, who was feeling bored. The novelty of the performance had worn off. She was prepared to sit there and hear a good noise. She liked the piano when it was giving forth plenty of crashing chords; but that whining scraping sound was intolerable. It was worse than any old cat.

There was some commotion in the front seats, and shocked faces were turned upon Mary, while the performer almost broke down. She made another effort, but it was no use, for Mary continued at the top of her voice —

"Ole Will Chanter had a fiddle like thikky one. Du'ye mind, Peter?"

Indignant voices called for silence, but Mary only looked about in some amazement. She couldn't think what the people were driving at. As she was not being entertained there was nothing to prevent her from talking, and it was only natural that she should speak to Peter; and if the folks in front did not approve of her remarks they need not listen. The violinist had dropped her arms in despair; but when she perceived silence was restored she tried again.

"Used to play 'en in Peter Tavy church," continued Mary, with much relish. "Used to sot up in the loft and fiddle cruel. Didn't 'en, Master? Don't ye mind ole Will Chanter what had a fiddle like thikky one? His brother Abe sot up wi' 'en, and blowed into a long pipe. Made a cruel fine noise, them two."

Mary was becoming anecdotal, and threatening to address the audience at some length, so the violinist had to give up and make way for a vocalist with sufficient voice to drown these reminiscences of a former generation.

After the concert there were disturbances outside. One faction cheered the performers; another hooted them. Then a light of Ebenezer kindled into religious fire and hit an Anglican postman in the eye. The response of the Church Militant loosened two Nonconformist teeth. Chegwiddden reappeared on horseback, swaying from side to side, holding on by the reins, and raising the cry of down with everything except Ebenezer and liquor-shops.

Pendoggat stood aloof, looking on, hoping there would be a fight. He did not mix in such things himself. It was his custom to stand in the background and work the machinery from outside. He liked to see men attacking one another, to watch pain inflicted, and to see the blood flow. Turning to the man whose mouth had been damaged he muttered: "Go at him again."

"I'm satisfied," came the answer.

"He called you a dirty monkey," lied Pendoggat.

The insult was sufficient. The Anglican postman was walking away, having fought a good fight for the faith that was in him, by virtue of two shillings a week for various duties, and his Opponent seizing the opportunity attacked him vigorously from the rear. Peter and Mary watched the conflict, and their savage souls rejoiced. This was better than all the pianos and fiddles in the world. They felt at last they were getting value for their free tickets.

Sport was terminated by the sudden appearance of the Maggot. He had been drafting a prospectus of the "Tavy Nickel Mining Company, Limited," and had issued forth to look for the managing director. He stopped the fight and lectured the combatants in spiritual language. He comprehended how the ex-chapel had been desecrated that night by godless people, and he appreciated the zeal which had prompted a member of his congregation to defend its sanctity; but he explained that it was not lawful for Christians to brawl upon the streets. To take out a summons for assault was far holier. The man with the loosened teeth explained that he should do so. It was true he had incited the postman to fight by striking him first; but then he had struck him with Christian charity in the eye, which entailed only a slight temporary discomfort and no permanent loss; whereas the postman had struck him with brutal ferocity on the mouth, depriving him of the services of two teeth; and had moreover added obscene language, as could be proved by impartial witnesses. Pezzack assured him that the teeth Bad fallen in a good cause; men and women had been tortured and burnt at the stake for their religion; and he quoted the acts of Bloody Mary, that bigoted lady who has

become the hardy perennial of Nonconformist sermons, with a strong emphasis upon the qualifying, adjective. The champion went away delighted. He had won his martyr's crown, and his teeth were not so very loose after all. A little beer would soon tighten them.

The crowd was dwindling away with its grievances. The folks would chatter furiously for a few days; then the affair would drop and be forgotten, and a fresh scandal would fill the vacancy. They would never bite so long as they had liberty to bark. Chegwidden had galloped off across the moor in his usual wild way. Every week he would visit some inn, upon what might have been called his home circuit, and at closing time would commit his senseless body to his horse with the certain hope of being carried home. To gallop wildly over Dartmoor at night might be ranked as an almost heroic action. The horse had brains fortunately. Chegwidden was only the clinging monkey upon its back. The farmer had fallen on several occasions, but had escaped with bruises. One night he would break his neck, or crack his head upon a boulder, and die as he had lived – drunk. Drunkenness is not a vice upon Dartmoor; nor a fault even. It is a custom.

The Maggot found Pendoggat. They greeted one another in a fraternal way, then began to walk down from the village. The night was clear ahead of them, but above Brentor, with its church, which looked rather like an exaggerated locomotive in that light, the sky, or "widdicote," as Mary might have called it, was red and lowering.

"Well, what about business?" said Pendoggat.

"I am not finding it easy, Mr. Pendoggat," said the minister. "Folks are nervous, and, as you know, there is not much money about. But they trust me, Mr. Pendoggat. They trust me," he repeated fervently.

"Got any promises?"

"A few half-promises. I could do better if I was able to show them the mine. If you would come forward, with your wisdom and experience, I think we should do well. I mentioned that you were interested."

"I told you to keep my name out of it," said Pendoggat.

"But that is impossible. I cannot tell a lie, Mr. Pendoggat," said Eli, with the utmost deference.

"You're suspicious," said the other sharply. "You don't trust me. Say it out, Pezzack."

"I do trust you, Mr. Pendoggat. I have given you this 'and,'" said Eli, extending a clay-like slab. "I have seen with my own eyes the sides of that cave gleaming with precious metal like the walls of the New Jerusalem. I can take your 'and now, and look you in the heye, and say 'ow I trust you. We 'ave prayed side by side, and you 'ave always prayed fair. Now that we are working side by side I know you'll work fair. But I 'ave thought, Mr. Pendoggat, 'ow you seem to be putting too much upon me."

"I'll tell you how it is. I'm pushed," Pendoggat muttered. "Nobody knows it, but I'm deep in debt. Do you think I'd be such a fool as to give this find of mine away for nothing, as you might say, unless I'd got to?" he went on sullenly. "I've known of it for years. I've spent days planting willows and fern about the entrance to that old shaft, to close it up and make folk forget it's there. I meant to bide my time till I could get mining folk in London to take it up and make a big thing out of it. I'm a disappointed man, Pezzack. I'm in debt, and I've got to suffer for it."

He paused, scowling sullenly at his companion.

"My 'eart bleeds for you, Mr. Pendoggat," said simple Eli. He thought that was a good and sympathetic phrase, although he somewhat exaggerated the actual state of his feelings.

"I've kept 'em quiet so far," said Pendoggat. "I've paid what I can, and they know they can't get more. But if 'twas known about this mine, and known I was running it, they'd be down on me like flies on a carcass, and would ruin the thing at once. The only chance for me was to look out for a straight man who could float the scheme in his name while I did the work. I knew only one man I could really trust, and that man is you."

"It is very generous of you, Mr. Pendoggat," said the buttered Eli.

They had reached the railway bridge, and there stopped, being upon the edge of the moor. Beneath them was Brentor station gone to sleep; beyond, in its cutting, that of Mary Tavy. The lines of two rival companies ran needlessly side by side, silently proclaiming to the still Dartmoor night the fact that railway companies are quite human and hate each other like individuals. Pendoggat was looking down as usual, therefore his eyes were fixed upon the rival lines. Possibly he found something there to interest him.

"I'll get you some samples. You can take them about with you," he went on. "We'll have a meeting too."

"At the Barton?" suggested Eli.

"The chapel," said Pendoggat.

"Commencing with a prayer-meeting," said Eli. "That is a noble thought, Mr. Pendoggat. We will seek a blessing on the work."

"The chapel must be rebuilt," said Pendoggat.

"The Lord's work first. Yes, that is right. That is like you, Mr. Pendoggat. I will communicate with some friends in London. I 'ave an uncle who is a retired grocer. He lives at Bromley, Mr. Pendoggat. He will invest part of his savings, I am convinced. He has confidence in me. He had me educated for the ministry. He will persuade others to invest, perhaps."

Pendoggat moved forward, and set his face towards the moor. "I must get on," he said. "I'll see you on Sunday. Have something to tell me by then."

"Let us seek a blessing before we part," said Pezzack.

Pendoggat turned back. He was always ready to obtain absolution. They stood upon the bridge, removed their hats, while Eli prayed with vigour and sincerity. He did not stop until the rumble of the night mail sounded along the lines and the metals began to hum excitedly. The "widdicote" above St. Michael's was still red and lowering. The church might have been a furnace, emitting a strong glow from fires within its tower.

CHAPTER VII ABOUT FAIRYLAND

By the time Boodles was sixteen she was shaped and polished. Weevil had done what he could; not much, for the poor old thing was neither learned nor rich; and she had gone to Tavistock, where various arts had been crammed into her brain, all mixed up together like the ingredients of a patent pill. Boodles knew a good deal for seventeen; but Nature and Dartmoor had taught her more than the school-mistress. She was a fresh and fragrant child, with no unhealthy fancies; loving everything that was clean and pretty; loathing spiders, and creeping things, and filth in general; and longing ardently already to win for herself a name and a soul a little higher than the beetles. They were presumptuous longings for a child of passion, who did not know her parents, or anything about her origin beyond the fact that she had been thrown out in a bundle of fern, and taken in and cared for by Abel Cain Weevil.

At the tender age of fourteen Boodles received her love-wound. It was down by the Tavy, where the water swirls round pebbles and rattles them against its rocks below Sandypark. Her love-affair was idyllic, and therefore dangerous, because the idyllic state bears the same resemblance to rough and brutal life as the fairy-tale bears to the true story of that life. The tales begin with "once upon a time," and end with "they lived happily ever after." The idyllic state begins in the same way, but ends, either with "they parted with tears and kisses and never saw each other again," or "they married and were miserable ever afterwards." Only children can blow idyll-bubbles which will float for a time. Elderly people try, but they only make themselves ridiculous, and the bubbles will not form. People of thirty or over cannot play at fairy-tales. When they try they become as fantastic a sight as an old gentleman wearing a paper hat and blowing a penny trumpet. Shakespeare, who knew everything about human nature that men can know, made his Romeo and Juliet children, and ended their idyll as such things must end. Customs have changed since; even children are beginning to understand that life cannot be made a fairy-tale; and Romeo prefers the football field to sighing beneath a school-girl's balcony; and Juliet twists up her hair precociously and runs amok with a hockey-stick.

Still fairy-tales lift their mystic blooms to the moon beside the Tavy, and Boodles had seen those flowers, and wandered among them very delicately. The boy was Aubrey Bellamie, destined for the Navy, and his home was in Tavistock. He had come into the world, amid an odour of respectability, two years before Boodles had crept shamefully up the terrestrial back stairs. All he knew about Boodles was the fact that she was a girl; that one all-sufficient fact that makes youths mad. He knew, also, that her head was glorious, and that her lips were better than wine. He was a clean, pretty boy; like most of the youths in the Navy, who are the good fresh salt of Devon and England everywhere. Boodles came into Tavistock twice a week to be educated, and he would wait at the door of the school until she came out, because he wanted to educate her too; and then they would wander beside the Tavy, and kiss new knowledge into each other's young souls. The fairy-tale was real enough, because real life had not begun. They were still in "once upon a time" stage, and they believed in the happy ending. It was the age of delusion; glorious folklore days. There was enough fire in them both to make the story sufficiently life-like to be mistaken for the real thing. Aubrey's parents did not know of the love-affair then; neither did Weevil. In fairy-tales relations are usually wicked creatures who have to be avoided. So for months they wandered beside the river of fairyland, and plucked the flowers of that pleasant country which were gleaming with idyllic dew.

"I can't think why you love my head so," Boodles had protested, when a thunderstorm of affection had partially subsided. "It's like a big tangle of red seaweed. The girls at the school call me Carrots."

"I should like to hear them," said Aubrey fiercely; "Darling, it's the loveliest head in the world."

And then he went on to talk a lot of shocking nonsense about flowers and sunsets, and all other wondrous flaming things, which had derived their colour and splendour from the light of his sweetheart's head, and from none other source or inspiration whatsoever.

"If I was a boy I shouldn't love a girl with red hair. There are such a lot of girls you might love. Girls with silky flaxen hair, and girls with lovely brown hair – "

"They are only girls," said Aubrey disdainfully. "Not angels."

"Do angels have red hair?" asked Boodles.

"Only a very few," said the boy. "Boodles – and one or two others whose names I can't remember just now. It's not red hair, sweetheart. It's golden, and your beautiful skin is golden too, and there is a lot of gold-dust scattered all over your nose."

"Freckles," laughed Boodles. "Aubrey, you silly! Calling my ugly freckles gold-dust! Why, I hate them. When I look in the glass I say to myself: 'Boodles, you're a nasty little spotted toad.'"

"They are just lovely," declared the boy. "They are little bits of sunshine that have dropped on you and stuck there."

"I'm not sticky."

"You are. Sticky with sweetness."

"What a dear stupid thing!" sighed Boodles. "Let me kiss your lovely pink and white girl's face – there – and there – and there."

"Boodles, dear, I haven't got a girl's face," protested Aubrey.

"Oh, but you have, my boy. It's just like a girl's – only prettier. If I was you, and you was me – that sounds rather shocking grammar, but it don't matter – every one would say: 'Look at that ugly boy with that boodle-oodle, lovely, *butiful* girl.' There! I've squeezed every bit of breath out of him," cried Boodles.

There was a certain amount left, as she soon discovered; enough to smother her.

"If you hadn't got golden hair, and freckles, I should never have fallen in love with you," declared the boy. "If you were to lose your freckles, if you lost only one, the tiniest of them all, I shouldn't love you any more."

"And if you lose that dear girl's face I won't love you," promised Boodles. "If you had a horrid moustache to tickle me and make me sneeze, I wouldn't give you the smallest, teeniest, wee bit of a kiss. Well, you can't anyhow, because you've got to be an admiral. How nice it will be when you are grown up and have a lot of ships of your own."

"We shall be married long before then. Boodles, darling," cried the eager boy. "Directly I am twenty-one we will be married. Only five more years."

"Such a lot happens in a year," sighed Boodles. "You may meet five more girls far more sunshiny than me, with redder hair and more freckles, since you are so fond of them – "

"I shan't. You are the only girl who ever was or shall be."

That is how boys talk when they are sixteen, and when they are twenty-six, and sometimes when they are very old boys of sixty; and girls generally believe them.

"I wonder if it is right of you to love me," said Boodles doubtfully.

The answer was what might have been looked for, and ended with the usual question: "Why not?"

"Because I'm only a baby."

"You are fourteen, darling. You will be nineteen by the time we are married."

Although they were only at the beginning of the story they were already slapping over the pages, anxious to reach the "lived happily ever after" conclusion. Young people are always wanting to hurry on; middle-aged to marktime; old to look back. The freshness of life is contained in the first chapter. Youth is a time of unnatural strength, of insanity, a dancing-round-the-may-pole sort of time. Common-sense begins to come when one has grandchildren. Boodles and Aubrey wandered a thousand times in love's fairyland on the romantic banks of the rattling Tavy, and knew as much

during their last walk as upon the first; knew they were in love cleanly and honestly; knew that the joy of life was no myth; but knowing nothing, either of them, concerning Giant Despair, who has his mantle trimmed with lovers' hearts, or the history of the fair maid of Astolat, or the existence of Castle Dolorous. Love is largely a pleasure of the imagination, thus a fairy-tale, and sound practical knowledge sweeps the romance of it all away.

The whole of that folly – if the only real ecstatic bliss of life which is called first love be folly – seemed gone for ever. Aubrey was packed off to do his part in upholding the honour of Boodlesland, as his country named itself in his thoughts; and the years that intervened discovered him probably kissing girls of all complexions, girls with every shade of hair conceivable, girls with freckles and without; and being kissed by them. Boys must have their natural food, and if the best quality be not obtainable they must take what offers. In the interval Boodles remained entirely unloved, and received no letters. She wasn't surprised. His love had been too fierce. It had blazed up, burnt her, and gone out. Aubrey had forgotten her; forgotten those wonderful walks in Tavyland; forgotten her radiant head and golden freckles. It was all over, that romance of two babies. It was Boodles who did not forget; Boodles who had the wet pillow sometimes; Boodles who was constant like the gorse, which is in flower all the year round.

No one would call the ordinary Dartmoor postman an angel – his appearance is too much against him – but he does an angel's work. Perhaps there is nothing which quickens the heart of any lonely dweller on the moor so perceptibly as the heavy tread of that red-faced and beer-tainted companion of the goddess of dawn. He leaves curses as well as blessings. He pushes love-letters and bills into the box together. Sometimes he is an hour late, and the miserable watcher frets about the house. Sometimes the wind holds him back. He can be seen struggling against it, and the watcher longs to yoke him to wild horses. There are six precious post-times each week, and the lonely inhabitant of the wilds would not yield one of them to save his soul alive.

There was an angel's visit to Lewside Cottage, and a letter for Boodles fell from heaven. The child pounced upon it, rushed up to her room like a dog with a piece of meat, locked the door lest any one should enter with the idea of stealing her prize, gloated upon it, almost rolled upon it. She did not open it for some time. She turned it over, smelt it, pinched it, loved it. Tavistock was blurred across the stamp. There was no doubt about that letter. It was a tangible thing. It did not fade away like morning dew. She opened it at last, but did not dare to read it through. She took bites at it, tasting it here and there; and had every sentence by heart before she settled down to read it properly. So she was still dearest Boodles, and he was the same devoted Aubrey. The child jumped upon her bed, and bit the pillow in sheer animal joy.

He had just come home, and was writing to her at once. She wouldn't recognise him because he had become a tough brown sailor, and the girl's face was his no longer. He was coming to see her at once; and they would walk again by the Tavy and be just the same as ever; and swear the same vows; and kiss the same kisses; and be each other's sun and moon, and all the rest of the idyllic patter, which was as sweet and fresh as ever to poor Boodles. For he had been all the world over and discovered there was only one girl in it; and that was the girl with the radiant head, and the golden skin, and the gold-dust upon her nose. He was as true as he always had been, and as he always would be for ever and evermore.

Boodles saw nothing mad or presumptuous in that closing sentence. It was just what she would have said. There is no hereafter for young people in their teens; there is an ever and evermore for them. They are like a kitten playing with its own tail, without ever realising that it is its tail.

Boodles became at once very light and airy. She seemed to have escaped from the body somehow. She felt as if she had been transformed into a bit of sunshine. She floated down-stairs, lighted up the living-room, wrapped herself round Abel Cain, floated into the kitchen to finish preparations for breakfast, discovered the material nature of her hands by breaking a milk-jug, and then humanity asserted itself and she began to shriek.

"Boodle-oodle!" cried old Weevil; "you have been sleeping in the moonshine."

"I've broken the milk-jug," screamed Boodles.

Weevil came shuffling along the passage. Small things were greatly accounted of in Lewside Cottage. There were most of the ingredients of tragedy in a broken milk-jug.

"How did you do it?" he wailed.

"It was all because the butter is so round," laughed Boodles.

Weevil was frightened. He thought the child's mind had broken too; and that was even more serious than the milk-jug. He stood and stared, and made disjointed remarks about bright Dartmoor moons, and girls who would sleep with their blinds up, and insanity which was sure to follow such rashness. But Boodles only laughed the more.

"I'll tell you," she said. "The butter is very round, and I had it on a plate. I must have tilted the plate, and it was roll, butter, roll. First on the table, where it knocked the milk-jug off its legs. Then it rolled on the floor, and out of the door. It's still rolling. I expect it is nearly at Mary Tavy station by now, and it ought to reach Tavistock about ten o'clock at the rate it was going. It's sure to roll on to Plymouth, right through the Three Towns, and then across the Hoe, and about the time we go to bed there will be a little splash in the sea, and that will be the end of the butter, which rolled off the plate, and broke the milk-jug, and started from the top of Dartmoor at half-past eight by the clock in Lewside Cottage, which is ten minutes fast – and that's all I can think of now," gasped Boodles.

"My poor little girl," quavered Weevil. "The butter is on the plate in front of you."

"Well, it must have rolled back again. It wanted to see its dear old home once more."

Weevil began to pick up the fragments of the milk-jug. "There is something wrong with you, Boodle-oodle," he said tenderly. "I don't want you to have any secrets, my dear. You are too young. There was a letter for you just now?"

At that the whole story came out with a rush. Boodles could hold nothing back that morning. She told Weevil about the fairy-tale, from the "once upon a time" up to the contents of that letter; and she begged him to play the part of good genie, and with his enchantments cause blissfulness to happen.

Weevil was very troubled. He had feared that the radiant head would do mischief, but he had not expected trouble to come so soon. The thing was impossible, of course. Even radiant growths must have a name of some sort. Aubrey's parents could not permit weeds to grow in their garden. There were plenty of girls "true to name," like the well-bred roses of a florist's catalogue, wanting smart young husbands. There was practically no limit to the supply of these sturdy young plants. Boodles might be a Gloire de Devon, but she was most distinctly not in the catalogue. She was only a way-side growth; a beautiful fragrant weed certainly, like the sweet honeysuckle which trails about all the lanes, and is in itself a lovely thing, but is not wanted in the garden because it is too common; or like the gorse, which as a flowering shrub is the glory of the moor, but not of the garden, because it is a rank wild growth. Were it a rare shrub it would be grown upon the lawns of the wealthy; but because it is common it must stay outside.

"Boodles, darling, I am so sorry," the old man murmured.

"But you mustn't be," she laughed. "Sorry because I'm so happy! You must be a *butiful* old daddy-man, and say you are glad. I can't help being in love. It's like the measles. We have to catch it, and it is so much better to go through it when you're young. Now say something nice and let me go. I want to run to the top of Ger Tor, and scream, and run back again."

"Oh, dear heaven!" muttered Weevil, playing with the bits of milk-jug. "I can't tell the poor baby, I can't tell it."

"Don't be weepy, daddy-dear-heart," murmured Boodles, coming and loving him. "I know I'm only a baby, but then I'm growing fast. I'll soon be eighteen. Such a grown-up woman then, old man! I'll never leave him – that's the trouble, I know. I'll always boil him's eggs, and break him's milk-jugs. Only he must be pretty to Boodles when she's happy, and say he's glad she's got a lovely boy with the beautifullest girl's face that ever was."

Weevil unmeshed himself and shuffled away, pelting imaginary foes with bits of milk-jug, blinking his eyes like a cat in the sunshine. He could not destroy the child's happiness. As well expect the painter who has expended the best years of his life on a picture to cut and slash the canvas. Boodles was his own. He had made and fashioned her. He could not extinguish his own little sun. He must let her linger in fairyland, and allow destiny, or human nature, or something else equally brutal, to finish the story. Elementary forces of nature, like Pendoggat, might be cruel, but Weevil was not a force, neither was he cruel. He was only an eccentric old man, and he wanted it to be well with the child. She would have her eyes opened soon enough. She would discover that innocents thrust out on the moor to perish cannot by the great law of propriety take that place in life which beauty and goodness deserve. They must go back; like Undine, coming out with brave love to seek a soul, succeeding at first, but failing in the end, and going back at last to the state that was hers. Poor little bastard Boodles! How mad she was that morning! Weevil hardly noticed that his eggs were hard-boiled.

"Darling," he said tenderly, anxious to divert her mind – as if it could be diverted! – "go and see Peter, and tell him we must have that clock. You had better bring it back with you."

That clock was a favourite subject of conversation. It had amused Boodles for two years, and it amused her then. It was only a common little clock, or Peter would never have been entrusted with it. Peter, who knew nothing, was among other things a mechanician. He professed his ability to mend and clean clocks. Possibly Grandfather had taught him something. He had studied the old gentleman's internal arrangements all his life, and had, he considered, mastered the entire principle of a clock's construction and well-being. Therefore when Boodles met him one day, and informed him that a little clock in Lewside Cottage was choked with dust and refused to perform its duty, Peter promised he would attend at his earliest convenience, to lay his hand upon it, and restore it to activity. "When will you come?" asked Boodles.

"To-morrow," answered Peter.

The day came, but not Peter. He was hardly expected, because promises are meaningless phrases in the mouths of Dartmoor folk. In the matter of an eternal "to-morrow" they are like the Spanish peasantry. They always promise upon their honour, but, as they haven't got any, the oath might as well be omitted. When reminded of their solemn undertaking they have a ready explanation. Their conscience would not permit them to come. It is the same when they agree to charge an unsuspecting person so much for duties performed, and then send in a bill for twice the amount. Conscience would not allow them to charge less. The Dartmoor conscience is a beautiful thing. It urges a man to act precisely as he wants to.

A month or so passed – the exact period is of no account in such a place – and Boodles saw Peter approaching her. When within sight of her he put out his arm and began to cry aloud. She hurried towards him, afraid that something was wrong; the arm was still extended, and the cry continued. Peter was like an owl crying in the wilderness. Drawing near, he became at last intelligible. "I be coming," he cried. "I be coming to mend the clock."

"Now?" asked Boodles.

"To-morrow," said Peter.

This sort of thing happened constantly. Whenever they came within sight of each other, and Peter called often at the village to purchase pints of beer, the little man would hurry towards Boodles, with his outstretched arm and monotonous cry: "To-morrow." He was always on his way to Lewside Cottage, but something always hindered him from getting there. He did not despair, however. He felt confident that the day would arrive when he would attend in person and restore the clock. It was merely a matter of time. Thus a year went by and the pledge remained unfulfilled.

One Sunday evening Boodles went to church, and it so happened that Peter was there also. Peter had just then reasons of his own for wishing to ingratiate himself with the church authorities, and he considered that the appearance of his vile body in a devotional attitude somewhere in the neighbourhood of the pulpit would be of material assistance to his ambition. Peter entered with a

huge lantern, the time being winter, and the evening dark – the night rather, for the Dartmoor day in winter is well over by five o'clock – flapped up the aisle with goose-like steps, tumbled into a seat breathing heavily, and making as much noise with his boots as a horse upon cobblestones, banged the lantern down, and gazed about the building with an air of proprietorship. The next thing was to blow out the candle in his lantern. He opened it, and made windy noises which were not attended with success. "Scat 'en," cried Peter boisterously. "When her's wanted to go out her never will, and when her bain't wanted to go out her always du."

At that moment Boodles entered. Peter was delighted to see her friendly face. The lantern clattered to the floor, and its master stretched out his arm, and exclaimed in a whisper which would have carried from one side of Tavy Cleave to the other: "I was a-coming yesterday, but I never got as far. Had the tweezers in my trousers, and here they be." He brought out the implement and brandished it in the faces of the congregation. "I'm a-coming to-morrow sure 'nuff." Then he went to work again at the lantern. Peter had not developed the spirit of reverence; and the service was unable to commence until he had finished blowing.

When the proceedings were over he followed Boodles out of church and along the road, all the time asserting that the tweezers and his trousers had been inseparable for the last six months, that he had started for Lewside Cottage every day, and something had always cropped up to prevent him from reaching his destination, but that the next day would bring him, wet or fine, upon his word of honour it would. He had been remiss in the past, he owned, but if he failed to attend on Monday morning at half-past eleven punctual, with the tweezers in his trousers, he hoped the young lady and the old gentleman would never trust him again.

A few more weeks went by, and then Boodles put the clock into a basket, and came out to the hut-circles.

Peter was grievously dismayed. "Why didn't ye tell me?" he said. "I'd ha' come for 'en. I wouldn't ha' troubled yew to ha' brought 'en. If yew had told I there was a clock to mend, I'd ha' come for him all to wance, and fetched him home, and mended him same day."

It would have been useless to remind Peter of his promises and his eternal procrastination. He would only have pleaded that he had forgotten all about it. People such as Peter cannot be argued with.

Boodles left the clock, and Peter promised it should be cleaned at once, and brought back in a day or two.

During the next few months the couple at Lewside Cottage made merry over that clock. Left to himself Peter would have said no more about it, but would simply have added it to his stock of earthly possessions. However, Boodles gave him no peace. Peter could hardly enter the village for the necessity of his existence without being accosted upon the subject; and at last the slumbering fires of mechanism within him kindled into flame. He declared he had never seen such a clock; it was made all wrong; it was not in the least like Grandfather. He explained that it would be necessary to take it entirely to pieces, alter the works considerably, and reconstruct it in accordance with the recognised model, adding such things as weights and pendulum; and that would be a matter of a year's skilled labour. He pointed out, moreover, that the clock was painted green, and that in itself would be sufficient to clog the works, as it was well known that clocks would not keep proper time unless they were painted brown. That was a trade secret. Boodles replied that there was nothing whatever wrong with the works of the clock. It only required cleaning, and she believed she could do it herself. Peter wagged his head in amazement. The folly and ignorance of young maids eclipsed his understanding.

The second year came to an end, and the clock was in precisely the same condition as at first. Peter was glad to have it because it made a nice ornament for his section of Ger Cottage. He had only touched it once, and then Mary, who happened to be present, exclaimed: "Dear life, Peter, put 'en down, or you'll be tearing 'en."

The tenants of Lewside Cottage had become tired of the endless comedy. So, on that morning when Boodles had her letter, it was the most natural thing in the world for Weevil to suggest that she

should go and reclaim their property; and as the girl was longing for the open moor and the sight of Tavy Cleave, which was on the way to fairyland, she went, running part of the way for sheer joy, singing and laughing all the time.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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