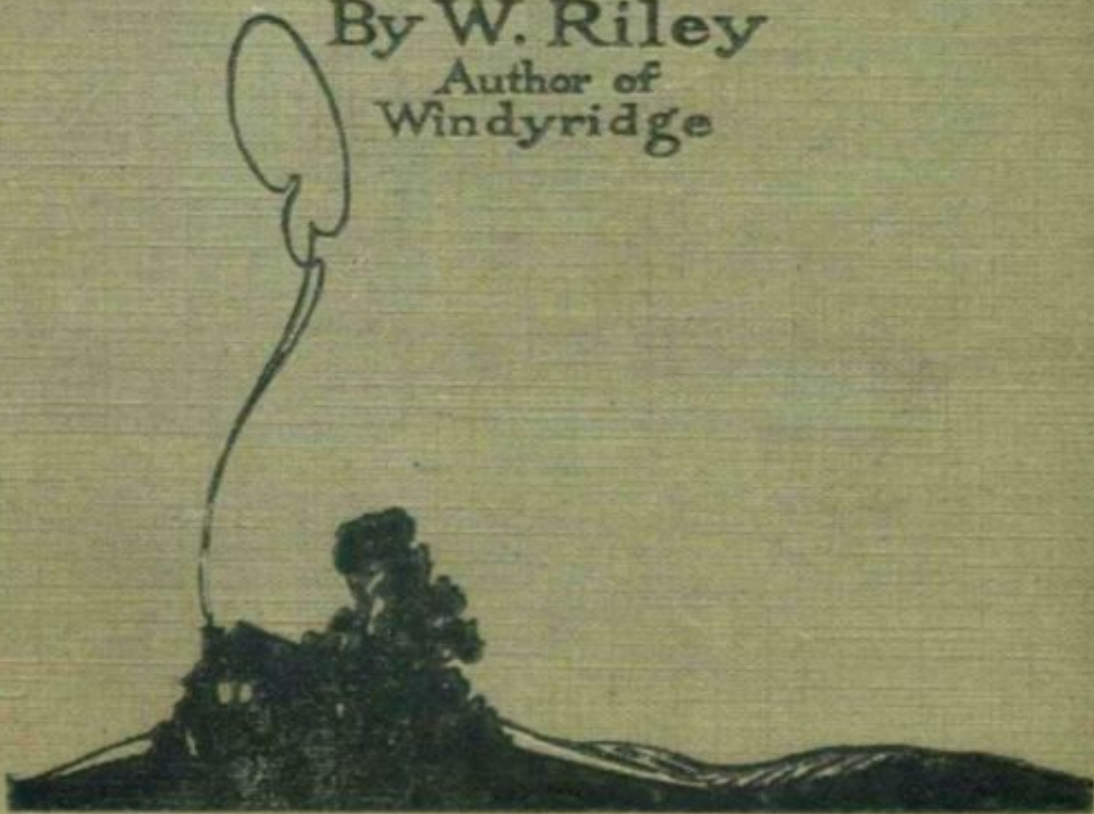


# MEN of MAWMM

By W. Riley  
Author of  
Windyridge



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## WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

For a short space Mr. Riley forsook the white for the red rose, and wrote *The Lady of the Lawn* as a result. He has now definitely returned to his own country, and in his new novel is told the story of Maniwell Drake, who has lost an arm; but maintains his cheerful and genial nature, and Baldwin Briggs, whose motto is "All for my-sen."

The story deals with one of those contrasts of conflicting personalities that Mr. Riley loves to draw. There are dramatic episodes as well as character studies, and the local colour that Mr. Riley loves to introduce. Above all there blows through the book the breath of the Moors, without which a Riley book would not be a Riley book.

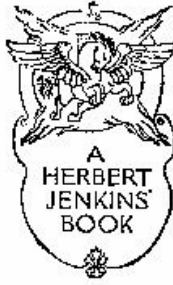
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# MEN OF MAWM

BY  
W. RILEY

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# MEN OF MAWM

## CHAPTER I

IN WHICH JAMES INMAN ENTERS MAWM AND IS  
FAVoured BY FORTUNE

TO one who had no love for them the Yorkshire moors could hardly have been less attractive than on this bleak, damp afternoon in early November, when the air was moist though no rain had fallen, and a mist that was too thin to hide more than the smaller details of the landscape made the distant hills a grey shadow against the lighter grey of the sky.

There was snow on the mountains, but only on their crowns; only there, and in the deeper fissures that faced north and so paid no toll to the sun. The nearer mountains were almost black, like the moor that stretched its weary length to the sky-line; like the dry walls, that divided the lower slopes of the moor into curiously-shaped allotments.

The road was little better than a track, but it was just distinguishable, for which mercy James Inman was thanking the gods as he strode along. He had not found much to thank them for after leaving the village of Scaleber, and his acknowledgements were not too cordial.

His one anxiety was to reach the hamlet of Mawm before darkness set in, and to find there at least warmth and possibly good fortune.

Everything was still; weirdly, painfully so. There must have been birds in the great crags that rose terrace above terrace from the grey-green grass and lost themselves in the low-lying clouds; but they had shown no sign of life. The lonely farm he passed might have been deserted, for no sound came from it—not even the inquiring bark of a dog. The moor bird's cry is not agreeable, but the man would have welcomed anything that cut the silence. A howling wilderness was better than a wilderness of death.

He had climbed six hundred feet or more in an hour, and the exertion had put no strain on either heart or lungs. He was in excellent physical condition, and, though perhaps a little too lean to be perfectly proportioned, a fine athletic-looking man. His dress was superior to that of a labourer or even a journeyman, but it was ill-fitting as if bought ready-made for the emergency of a funeral, and it was entirely black. He

carried neither stick nor baggage and was without overcoat. A bowler hat shabbier than the rest of his outer clothing, was worn low down on his head and almost concealed his hair. The face was expressive of determination and self-confidence and these qualities made it striking; but one would have needed to scan the features a second time or a third before pronouncing the man even passably good-looking. He trod firmly; yet despite his unwillingness to company with darkness on that grim waste he was not forcing the pace. Three miles an hour on such a rough upland road was enough and more than enough.

When the track became a mere stretch of grass the man paused. He was in the shadow of two high mountains whose summits were barely two hundred and fifty feet above his head. Night lurked already in the dark gullies, and he cursed the folly that had led him to risk the shorter bridle route when a third-rate road had been available, and nothing saved but a mile or two of foot-drill at the most.

With a shrug of the shoulders he went forward again; but another quarter-hour brought him to the apex of the path and the mountains ran out on to the moor. It was downhill now and he plodded on, sometimes half uncertain of his way, until the descent became abrupt, when he narrowed his eyelids and sought for signs of the village which he knew must lie some five hundred feet below. He failed to find them, however, for in the murk of advancing night it was difficult to discern grey houses against grey hillsides, and what was worse he lost the path, and was some time in finding it again.

At length he struck the road and saw the glimmer of lights in the valley.

“That’ll be Mawm,” he muttered. “The longest way round ’ud have been the shortest way home. Now which end of the village has this old hammer-slinger his shop, I wonder?”

The location could have been of little consequence, for the houses were few in number and straggled to no great distance. Fortune, however, had placed Baldwin Briggs’ woodyard at the extreme northerly end of the village, so that Inman stumbled upon it without the necessity of seeking information, being also guided by the sound of voices in altercation.

A low wall bounded the road on which the front of the two-storied shop abutted and several men of advanced years were leaning against it and giving silent audience to the disputants at the door. To these the stranger joined himself.

“You’ve changed, Mr. Briggs,” a man about Inman’s own age was saying in an emphatic but not loud voice; “I’ve heard father say ’at when you and him worked for Mr. Clegg there was nobody readier than you to ask for your wages raising. Oft and oft I’ve heard him say it, and ’at you egged the others on to stand by you. Now

it's like skinning the flint to get another penny out of you, for all you're putting your own prices up every few months. You've changed, I say."

The voice fell away and became almost plaintive and the stranger's lip curled contemptuously.

Mr. Briggs' hands were lost in his pockets, and his whole attitude (for in the dim light his features were scarcely visible) betokened indifference. When he spoke his voice was charged with contempt, and his sneering tone brought an approving smile to the newcomer's face.

"Nay, I've none changed, Jagger; not I. I was for my-sen then and I'm for my-sen now."

"And that's God's truth," replied the other bitterly. "And your heart's like your own grunstone too. I'm hanged if I'd stay with you if my hands weren't tied, but needs must when the devil drives, and father's too old to shift."

"My hands aren't tied," the other replied with a sudden fierce passion that electrified the atmosphere and startled the stranger. The voice became a hiss, and the man's face was bent forward until his cap almost touched the other's forehead. A string of curses followed which, so far from relieving the pressure, seemed only to accentuate the master's wrath.

"My hands aren't tied," he repeated, "and I'll just manage without your help, Jagger Drake. I'm stalled of your long tongue and your milksop ways; and to be shut of you at t' cost of a week's wages'll be a cheap bargain, so you can take yourself off to where they'll do better for you. Here——:"

He pulled out a purse, and having carefully counted sundry silver coins offered them to the young man who mechanically stretched out his hand to receive them. When they were in his palm the fingers did not close over them, nor did the hand drop.

"I'm sacked, then?" he asked in a low, uncomprehending voice.

"You're sacked," the other answered hotly. "Do you think I'm forced to stand here to be jawed at; let alone 'at you rob me out o' good money, nearhand as oft as you do a job for me?"

"Rob you?"

"Aye, rob me! What else is it but robbery when you spend half as long again over a job as any other man? I haven't forgot that there bit o' work at Lane End, and the lip you gave me."

The man's temper was still warm; but at the mention of Lane End the other recovered himself. He lowered his hand and thrust the coins uncounted into his trousers' pocket, and the stunned look left his face.

“If I’ve to choose between robbing widows and robbing you, Baldwin Briggs,” he said, “I’ll none need to think twice. And widow or no widow, honest folks don’t scamp their work; and I’ve been brought up in t’ wrong school for tricks o’ that sort. So if that’s your last word I’ll get my bass and make my way home.”

He turned as he spoke and Mr. Briggs said nothing, but spat angrily after the retreating figure. Not one of the elderly men had uttered a word or moved a hand during the colloquy, and they remained motionless when the stranger crossed the road and going up to the master-carpenter laid a hand on his arm.

“Are you filling this chap’s place?” he asked.

Mr. Briggs turned with an angry gesture, but at sight of the stranger he controlled his features and took stock of the situation whilst staring into the newcomer’s face. He was naturally cautious, and his brain worked slowly. Some instinct told him that the man was a carpenter, probably skilled at his trade—“a likely lad” as he put it in his thoughts.

On the other hand Jagger Drake was a good worker and a steady,—some of his customers would have no other—with no fault worth speaking of but a ridiculous conscientiousness; and the episode which had just ended had been more than half “play-acting” designed to bring the lad to his senses and show him on what dangerous ground he was standing.

Inman bided his time but never moved his eyes from the other’s face, and in the steely concentrated gaze there was a suggestion of hypnotic power. Interpreting the master’s hesitation as a sign of wavering he went on in a firm but studiously respectful voice:

“I’ll do a job whilst yon chap’s planning it out. I’ll do in five minutes what’ll take him twenty, and do it right too. Yon chap’s too slow to go to his own funeral.”

“Where d’you come from?” Mr. Briggs growled.

“From Scaleber,” he said, offering the tag end of truth. “My name’s James Inman and luck sent me here—your luck and mine. I came to seek a job with you, and when I heard you sack yon ninny I knew I’d come in the nick of time.”

“Oh, did you?” replied Mr. Briggs sharply. “It takes two to make a bargain, young fellow, and I wouldn’t be too sure o’ that. Trade’s slack just now and I’m thinking I can do without another man for a week or two till it mends. I’ll sleep on it, anyway.”

Inman saw the mouth tighten and read the sign. He had already recognised and regretted his blunder and was feeling round for another starting point when Jagger re-appeared from the shed at the back with his “bass” over his shoulder, and without even looking in their direction walked smartly down the road.

A red flush tinged the sallow features of the master and again Inman read the sign.

“Ought to work for a woman, he did,” he observed with a sneer; “man milliner, or something o’ that sort.”

Mr. Briggs’ expression was ugly. “Come inside,” he said.

Inman’s eyes swept the workshop with a swift, comprehensive glance. “American machines,” he said to himself; “old Hotspur isn’t altogether a Rip Van Winkle.”

The office was upstairs and the master led the way there. An oil lamp was burning on a table and by its light Mr. Briggs scanned the newcomer’s face.

“You’re a joiner by trade?” he inquired.

The other nodded. “I’ve papers, if you care to see them,” he said; and tossed a packet on to the desk against which the master was leaning.

“What makes you come here if you’re such a dab hand as all that?” he asked suspiciously when he had read one or two of the documents. “Been a bit of a rolling stone, haven’t you?”

“I’m moorland born,” Inman replied, “and town life doesn’t suit me. Now I’m getting older I sort o’ want to settle down.”

Mr. Briggs scowled. He did not like glibness, and the young man was an adept in that smooth art. All strangers were under suspicion, and a stranger who turned up from nowhere in time to step into another man’s shoes—a stranger who travelled so light that he had not even a spare collar for his neck, and whose tone was domineering although under control, was doubly suspicious. Mr. Briggs stared steadily and thoughtfully at his visitor, and frowned until his eyes were almost hidden by the pepper-coloured tufts of hair that overhung them. Inman bore the scrutiny well and made his face expressionless.

“It’s a rum tale,” said the master, “and as for getting older you’ll not have topped twenty-six, I’ll warrant.”

“Barely,” replied the other. “I was six and twenty three weeks since. Now come, Mr. Briggs, I’m just the man for you. I can handle tools, as these papers tell you, and you’re wanting a man to handle ’em. I’ll fetch my bass across to-morrow and start on Monday. You shall give me what you gave yon other chap, and if I don’t satisfy you, you can sack me, same as you did him.”

He would have said more, but the change that came over the master’s face caused him to pull up abruptly. Mr. Briggs was a loosely-built, shambling man of sixty, with long legs that would not have passed the test of his own straight-edge, a neck of many hollows, and a face that was chiefly remarkable for the prominence of

the cheek-bones and a peculiarly knobbed nose. Hair of the same pepper-coloured variety that thatched his eyebrows grew thickly on his cheeks and chin, but was shaved from the upper lip. In revenge, perhaps, for that slight, some seeds had rooted themselves on the end of the nose and flourished there.

In spite of this abnormality there was nothing repulsive about Baldwin Briggs' features except when one of those sudden gusts of passion swept over them and distorted them. Then a row of large, discoloured teeth, with sundry gaps of irregular shape, was disclosed, and the pepper-coloured hair on the nose actually bristled. It was a disturbance of this kind that checked the easy flow of Inman's speech.

He stood unmoved until the spluttered oaths had run out, but was inwardly surprised at the quick, volcanic outburst, and contemptuously amused. Not a sign of this, however, was revealed by his expression.

"Devil take you, with your 'shalls' and your 'cans'," hissed Mr. Briggs. "When I want a boss I'll let you know. You're a piece too clever, young fellow, for a plain man like me. You're a cock 'at crows over loud and 'ud want all t' yard to yourself. Here!" he tossed the envelope back to Inman, who caught it and thrust it into his pocket; then, as he turned down the lamp, he remarked gruffly:

"I'll bid you good-night. There's nothing here for you, young man."

Inman allowed his eyes to drop and spoke softly.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said, "I've been used to town ways, and my tongue was a bit free, maybe. I meant no harm, and as for being boss, that's a cap that doesn't fit my head. If you care to try me I'll serve you well, and you'll get no 'lip' from me."

The allusion was craftily designed to bring the master back to realities, but the tone was not aggressive, and Mr. Briggs' features unbent.

"I let no man tell me what I 'shall' give him," he growled. "That's for me to say. You're not in t' town here bear in mind, with a union to stand aside you with a stick. I give a man what he's worth to me, and if he doesn't like it, he chucks it, or I chuck him."

"Quite so," Inman assented. "That'll do for me."

"You're more ready to toe t' line than I altogether care about," the other went on. He was still suspicious, and whilst the mastery in the grey eyes fascinated it also irritated him.

"I want a job in the country," Inman said soothingly. "I want to be among men o' my own breed—among moormen. I'm sick to death of the little painted images of men they have in the towns. They told me in Scaleber you were a just man, Mr. Briggs—not soft, but just—and I'll trust you to give me what I'm worth—that's all I meant, however badly I put it."

The master threw a keen glance at him, and seeing nothing but frankness and something not unlike humility in the face and attitude, allowed himself to be appeased.

“Well, I’ll try you for an odd week,” he said, “and see what you’re made of. I could like to teach you lad a lesson. He’ll be back in t’ morning, like enough, with his cap in his hands; but I’ll see him blaze before I’ll stand his jaw. Where’ll you put up for to-night?”

“I’ll find a spot somewhere,” Inman replied indifferently.

“Will you step in and have a bite o’ bread before you go down t’ village?” Mr. Briggs inquired gruffly, and with no heartiness to season the invitation. “My sister’ll happen know o’ somebody ’at’ll give you a bed.”

A light came into the man’s eyes for a second or two, but he quickly curtailed it.

“No thanks,” he said. “I’ll not trouble you. There’ll be an inn, I reckon. I’ll go down there.”

## CHAPTER II

IN WHICH INMAN RECEIVES A COLD RECEPTION AND  
SOME INFORMATION

A FEEBLE moon lit up the darkness that had fallen rapidly whilst he had been engaged with the master-carpenter, and enabled Inman to find his way without difficulty down the sloping street to the green, where the weather-beaten inn squatted in close proximity to the purling river—a baby stream of mysterious origin, and only a mile or two old, if one may put it so.

A few other houses, substantially but plainly built of millstone grit and limestone, and varying from the humble whitewashed cottages of the labouring classes to the more pretentious dwellings of farmers and apartment-providers faced the green on three sides. An hotel of somewhat imposing dimensions stood back a few yards from the main road on the west; but after one brief glance in that direction Inman turned on his heel, and crossing the stream and the upper section of the green entered the low door of “The Packhorse,” and found himself in a well-filled room, where he discerned amidst the smoke the features of the phlegmatic elders who had been silent witnesses of the scene at the carpenter’s.

His entrance interrupted the conversation for a few seconds only, and when he had ordered and been served with a pot of ale, he rested his chin on his hands and set himself to pick up the threads. It was quite evident that the incident in which he had taken part had been under discussion for some time, and he was quick to realise that his action, the ultimate result of which was not known, had aroused some measure of resentment. The knowledge amused without embarrassing him; but he masked his features as carefully as he had done in the master’s office.

“A trew word, as Jagger tell’d him,” said an elderly man whose beard bore wintry evidences of a former fiery splendour. “I mind when he wor nowt but a wisp of a lad and laiked taws<sup>[1]</sup> wi’ t’ rest on us he wor a rare trader; and there worn’t many he didn’t diddle out o’ all their glass uns. Allus for his-sen, wor Baldwin, and t’ owder he gets t’ worse he becomes.”

“It’s t’ way o’ t’ world, Swith’n,” a spare, undersized man of advanced age observed in a thin, leaking voice that whistled at every sibilant. “I made a verse of it when I wor a young man i’ my prime. I can’t think o’ things same as I use to could. When I try to call ’em up it’s same as they start a-dancin’ a polka, and I can’t pick out one from t’other. I know ‘pelf’ came at t’ end o’ one line and ‘self’ at t’other. It wor a good rhyme, and t’ plain meanin’ of it wor ’at it’s i’ t’ way o’ Natur’ for a man to look after his-sen. I had a gift i’ them days for puttin’ my thoughts into verse.”



“And uncommon well you did it, Ambrus; that’s a fact,” admitted Swithin, whilst two or three others grunted approval.

“Common metre, short metre, six-lines-eights and sometimes a peculiar metre,” said the old man with manifest gratification; “it wor all one to me when I wor i’ that gifted mood. My mother traced it back to her gran’ father ’at ’ad been a fearful good hand at a bass fiddle i’ t’ Gurt Revival, and could play any tune o’ Wesley’s in his cups.”

“Aye, there’s been gifts wasted i’ your family, Ambrus; there’s no getting over that,” said Swithin with a solemn headshake, “but none o’ your lot has had t’ gift o’ making brass. Contraireywise, brass pours in to Baldwin same as watter to t’ Cove.”

“But it doesn’t pour out i’ t’ same way,” laughed a younger man. “T’ Cove passes it on to watter t’ land, Swithin. Baldwin hugs it to his-sen.”

“Not so fast, lad,” replied Swithin; “tha wants to make sure ’at that egg tha’s laid isn’t a pot ’un before tha clucks so loud. Has tha never heard tell ’at there’s tremendous deep pits behind t’ Cove ’at’s got to be filled wi’ t’ watter from t’ Tarn before any creeps out into t’ river bed? It serves it-sen, does t’ beck, before it spares owt for anybody else; and all t’ land gets is t’ overflow. Same way wi’ Baldwin.”

He glanced round the company and reading approval in Inman’s eyes allowed his own to suggest what would have been a wink in a more jocund man.

“Nay, nay,” he continued as nobody seemed disposed either to applaud or challenge his contention; “I’m one ’at ’ud go a long way o’ t’ same road wi’ Baldwin ’cause it’s both natur’ and religion. Natur’ seems all for it-sen, and I suppose them ’at set things going ordered it i’ that way.”

“Maniwel wouldn’t say so,” the young man who had spoken before ventured to interpose.

“Maniwel’ll maybe fiddle another tune if Baldwin holds to his word and sacks Jagger,” returned Swithin complacently. “Not but what I’m sorry for Jagger,” he added after a short interval. “As well-meaning a lad as there is i’ t’ village, and as handy wi’ his tools as here and there one. Baldwin can spare Jagger as ill as any.”

It was evident that Swithin had voiced the common opinion, and each man present offered his quota of evidence relating to the skill and even more the conscientiousness of the dismissed workman. Only old Ambrose and Inman remained silent, and the latter scarcely troubled to hide the amused contempt that the recital of his predecessor’s virtues called forth. He was on the point of speaking when there came an interruption from Ambrose, whose features had been working convulsively for some time.

‘I’ve got the hang on it,” he said absently:

“Whether it’s pudden or parish or pelf,  
He’s a noodle what doesn’t look after hisself.”

‘I wouldn’t take my Bible oath, neighbours, to them two words ‘parish’ and ‘noodle’ but t’ meanin’ was t’ same, chewse how.’”

Inman thought this a fitting moment for breaking silence.

“Well done, grandad,” he exclaimed. “You deserve your pot filling for that. Take it out o’ this, landlord,” he said, tossing a half-crown to that worthy who was standing with his back to the fire; “or rather fill up these other pots, and let me know if I owe you ought.”

The act of generosity evoked no response, except that one or two of the younger men grunted a “Good ’ealth!” as they raised the mug to their lips, but Inman was in no way disconcerted.

“A moorman needs no introduction to moormen,” he said pleasantly. “I don’t blame you for being shy o’ strangers, but that’ll wear off. We shall neighbour kindly, I don’t doubt, for I may as well tell you I’ve signed on for Mr. Briggs, and I shall be making my home with you.”

A chilling silence greeted this communication, and the air thickened with the reek from a dozen pipes, diligently pulled at.

“It’s every man for himself as our friend here remarked a minute or two ago,” he continued. “There’d be no progress if it wasn’t so. It’s the survival of the fittest, as these science chaps put it. The weak *have* to go to the wall, or we’d be a nation of noodles before long. You were right, grandad; noodle’s the word.”

Even yet nobody spoke. Inman’s speech had cut across the smooth flow of conversation like another Moses’ rod, and dried it up. Every man stared stonily at the deal table or sand-strewn floor, and the landlord frowned and found himself tongue-tied.

“It isn’t my fault, mind you,” Inman continued more sharply, “that this other young fellow’s got the sack. That was just accident; just a piece of luck. ‘Fortune favours the brave,’ and good luck comes to them who deserve it. That’s my theory; it’s Nature’s way of ensuring progress. There’s no mercy in Nature for the individual if he stands in the way of progress. It cares no more for milksops—for noodles, grandad—than it cares for the fly that’s fast in this spider’s web; no more than I care for the spider.”

A grim smile spread over his face as he stretched out a thumb and finger and carelessly squeezed the life out of the little creature on which his eye had been resting

for the last few moments; but there was no responsive smile on the countenances of the grim men who watched him. Nearly every forehead carried a frown or its shadow, and where this was missing there was a half-hostile stolidity.

“Every man’s for himself,” he went on, with a hint of impatience in his tone, for the frosty air of the bar-parlour was beginning to tell on him; “but lame dogs have to pretend that they don’t like rabbits. Stuff and nonsense! A man who isn’t for himself deserves to go under and it’s a kindness to help him.”

He leaned back defiantly; but there was still no reply. Swithin pushed back his chair and pulled forward his hat. “I’ll be saying ‘good-night’ neighbours,” he said, “I’ll have to be stirring i’ good time i’ t’ morning,” and several others rose and left the room with him. Ten minutes later the rest had emptied their mugs and gone, and Inman was left with old Ambrose and the innkeeper. There was a scowl upon the latter’s face that caused the young man to say with a laugh:

“Come, come, landlord, the loss of a handful of coppers won’t bank you. Mix yourself and me a whisky apiece and keep grandad’s pot filled. There’s room for three round that fire—pull a chair up to it and bid dull care begone.”

He crossed over himself and sat down comfortably with his legs stretched out on the hearth. Ambrose occupied the corner seat, and the landlord, whose brow had cleared as he perceived that the defection of his regular customers was not likely to impoverish his till, seated himself at the opposite end.

“A bit touchy, these neighbours of ours,” Inman suggested with a laugh. “Don’t exactly hold out the right hand of fellowship, d’you think? But I’m a moorman myself, though I’ve been a renegade the last ten years, and I know their feelings for ‘offcomeduns,’ as we called newcomers in my part of the world.”

“And what part might that ha’ been?” inquired the landlord.

“Worth way,” he answered shortly. “There’s surly dogs bred in Worth Valley, I can tell you—dogs with a snap in their teeth; dogs that like to be *top* dog and intend to be.”

It was said meaningly, though it was accompanied by another laugh, and the landlord eyed him thoughtfully.

“This man, Jagger; what sort of a fellow is he?” Inman went on. “Not one of your best customers, I reckon?”

“He never tastes,” the landlord replied, “unless its a ginger-ale or summat o’ that sort now and again. It isn’t oft he darkens this door, but his father, Maniwel’ll come and sit for an hour now and then, though he puts naught much i’ my pocket. All t’ same”—the landlord’s clan loyalty triumphing over the narrower emotion of self-interest—“they’re nayther of ’em a bad sort; nayther Maniwel nor Jagger.”

“Two o’ t’ best,” Ambrose added. “I mind well makin’ happen six verses for Maniwel to recite at a teetotal meetin’—dearie me! it mun be forty year back. Terrible bad word it is, an’ all, for verse. That wor afore Maniwel happened his accident.”

“Afore he happened his accident!” the landlord laughed. “Why, man alive! he was a lad when he said them verses, and it isn’t more’n ten year since he lost his arm.”

“I shouldn’t wonder,” assented Ambrose; “it was sin’ I giv’ up making verses now I come to think of it. If I’d ha’ been i’ my prime I could ha’ made a set o’ grand verses out o’ Maniwel’s arm.”

“Who is this Maniwel?” inquired Inman with some impatience. “Jagger’s father, you say, and a kind of local oracle, I gather?”

“Oracle or no oracle,” replied the landlord, who was not going to commit himself on a term with whose meaning he was unfamiliar; “he’s most people’s good word, and if Baldwin Briggs isn’t among ’em it’s because Maniwel won’t knuckle under to him. And why should he, when they worked side by side at t’ same bench and saw-mill for thirty year and more, and him t’ best man o’ t’ two? There is them ’at says ’at if he hadn’t lost his arm Baldwin ’ud never ha’ gotten t’ business; but that’s as may be. To make matters worse there’s a lass i’ t’ case, and where there’s lasses there’s mischief.”

Ambrose chuckled. “A trew word, Albert, and brings up a verse about lasses I \_\_\_\_\_”

“Never mind your verses,” Inman broke in. “What about this particular lass, landlord; and how did she come to concern this Maniwel and Baldwin Briggs?”

“Well, you see,” the landlord explained, “t’ saw-mill belonged her father, Tom Clegg, and it was only a poorish sort of a business in Tom’s time. Tom had part brass and only this lass to leave it to, and besides being as queer as Dick’s hatband, he’d summat growing in his inside ’at took all t’ sperrit out of him, as it would out o’ most men.

“Well, he tried to sell t’ business when he knew he couldn’t last much longer but nobody’d give him his price, so he let on a new scheme. Maniwel and Baldwin were his main hands, and he made each on ’em t’ boss for a year. He went off down south wi’ t’ lass, and Baldwin took hold, and varry well he did. Then, when t’ year was up and they’d ta’en their stock, it was Maniwel’s turn and it seemed as if he were going to top Baldwin when t’ accident happened, and t’ saw caught his thumb. It seemed naught much at t’ time but he’d ha’ done better to ha’ seen a doctor, for it turned to blood-poisoning and there was naught for it but to take his arm off. Aye, and even

then he near-hand lost his life.

“Of course Baldwin had to take hold again then, for by this time Tom was at t’ last gasp, and to mend matters he died afore Maniwel came out o’ t’ hospital. When they read his will it turned out ’at he’d left all his brass to his lass, but part on it was to stop i’ t’ business for capital. And he left t’ goodwill o’ t’ business to him ’at ’ad made t’ most brass during t’ year he’d been i’ charge, barring ’at he’d to pay his lass part o’ t’ profits. It was all worked out by a lawyer so as Nancy wasn’t a partner, you understand; but she must ha’ done fairly well, for Baldwin’s made brass, there’s no question o’ that.”

Inman’s face expressed his interest.

“Then Baldwin got the business, you say?”

“More’n that,” continued the landlord; “he’d to be guardian to t’ lass. She wouldn’t be more’n eleven or twelve at t’ time, and Baldwin wasn’t a married man, but he took t’ job on, I can tell you.”

“And what about Maniwel?” inquired Inman. “Was there no law over t’ job? If it had been me I should ha’ tried to make a case out.”

“Maniwel’s no fighting man,” the landlord replied, “and he was on his back. But there was them ’at ’ud have made a fight for him if he’d ha’ let ’em. All t’ same t’ lawyers said Baldwin was in t’ right.”

“Pigeon livers run in families,” said Inman. “I could have guessed father when I saw son. But what of the girl, landlord? It was a mad whim of the father to hand her over in a haphazard sort of way to the highest bidder, and one of his own workmen at that. How did the lass take it? Was she dove or donkey—lamb or lion?”

The landlord spat into the fire and withheld reply for some moments.

“You mun ask someb’dy ’at knows better ’n me,” he said at length cautiously. “Nancy’s as deep as t’ Tarn, and as proud and hot-tempered as a broody hen. She stops with him, anyway, though she’s been her own missus a year and more. Some say they fratch like two bantams, but I’ve never come across them ’at’s heard ’em; and as for Keturah Briggs—that’s Baldwin’s sister ’at’s always kept house for him—she’s a quarry you can neither pick nor blast. They keep themselves *to* themselves, and give naught away, does t’ Briggses.”

“And is she content, this Nancy,” inquired Inman indifferently, “to be shut up in a village like this? Has she no desire, think you, to see the world and have her fling like other lasses?”

The question ended on a half-suppressed yawn; but the landlord shot an inquiring glance before he replied:

“You said you were moorland born yourself, and hankered after t’ moors.

Maybe Nancy's t' same, but if you've signed on wi' Baldwin you'll be able to ask her. She's been away a toathri weeks in a town; but whether it's smittled her or no I know no more'n you. She's back again, choose how. Maybe there's summat i' t' village she can't get i' t' town?"

"Fresh air and sunshine?" queried Inman sleepily. "That's so, I suppose; but lasses like pictures, and the pit of a music-hall or a band in the park in summer time, where they can see what other women carry on their heads and backs."

"Aye, that's right enough," responded the landlord; "but I've known when a pair o' corduroy breeches and a coat you couldn't pawn has had a bigger pull than all t' ribbons and laces you could lay your hands on."

A quick light leaped to Inman's eyes, and a frown that was instantly suppressed mounted his brow.

"I see," he queried, with an inflection of amusement; "then Miss Nancy has a lover?"

"That's more'n I've said," replied the landlord curtly. "She doesn't hand me her secrets to lock up."

Inman laughed and rose. "I'll have a bed with you, landlord," he said, "if you'll get one ready. This good fire after a rough walk has made me sleepy. I'll stroll round for half an hour before turning in."

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[1] Played marbles.

## CHAPTER III

### IN WHICH MANIWEL DRAKE MAKES A SUGGESTION

THE cottage had its full complement of occupants when Jagger entered, and the noise of his “bass” as he dropped it on the stone floor and pushed it noisily with his foot alongside an old-fashioned chest of drawers that stood against the wall, caused each of them to look up. Hannah, his sister and the family housekeeper, turned again at once to the grid-iron on which something was grilling for the evening meal; but the father’s eyes fixed themselves on the young man’s face.

“That’s right, lad,” he said, as he let the weekly paper he had been reading fall to his knees; “take it out of t’ bass! It’s as meek as Moses and’ll say naught. Who’s been treading on your corns this time?”

“T’ bass may lie there while I find another job,” said Jagger surlily, untying his apron as he spoke. “I’m paid off. Baldwin’s stalled, and so am I.”

Hannah said nothing, but an exclamation came from the other side of the hearth where Grannie Drake was busy with her darning needles—a wordless exclamation produced by the tip of the tongue and the roof of the mouth in conjunction; and the old woman rested her hands on her lap whilst she turned her spectacled eyes on her grandson.

“Stalled of each other, are you?” It was the father who spoke and there was humour in his voice and in the eyes that scrutinised the other’s face. “Well, bad news’ll keep. Get you washed and we’ll have our tea; and then if you think you’ve got to make all our coffins ’cause Baldwin’s sacked you I’ll help you to take t’ measures.”

Jagger’s face clouded more heavily and Hannah stole a glance at it as her brother opened the scullery door; but he avoided her gaze; and she wheeled round and looked into her father’s eyes with a smile on her lips that was both question and comment. Maniwel had picked up his paper again and was apparently engaged with its contents but the smile reached his consciousness and he glanced up and met his daughter’s eyes.

“You two ought to have changed places,” he said with grim pleasantry, “Jagger’d have made a good lass.”

“And me a fine lad!” she commented. “It can’t be helped; we’re as we are.”

She turned the kidneys on to a hot dish and the good smell filled the room. “I could almost wish it was Baldwin I had on t’ bars,” she remarked and her father laughed.

“According to t’ Book, lass, t’ best way would be to heap t’ fire on his head and

try to melt his heart. Your grannie turns her nose up. You think they're getting t' grid-iron ready for him in t' hot place, eh mother? Well, maybe they are; but that's devil's work, anyway."

He tossed the newspaper into the window bottom as he spoke and drew his chair up to the table. The sleeve of his right arm was pinned to his coat, but if the defect were overlooked, he was a fine figure of a man—tall, erect, broad-shouldered and well-proportioned. His hair and beard were thick and only faintly streaked with grey, and the firm lips and deep chin and straight nose, together with the placidly-playful brown eyes, indexed a character that was at the same time virile and sympathetic. In some respects the son was like him; but the mouth was sulkier, the chin weaker, and the eyes lacked humour—you had to turn to the daughter to find the father's features reproduced more successfully, though not his frame.

"It'll blow over, softhead," said Hannah, with sisterly candour as Jagger made slow headway, staring moodily at his plate instead of eating. "Get on with your tea before it goes cold. I wouldn't miss a good meal for t' best man living; much less for one o' t' worst."

"It isn't going to blow over," the young man burst out hotly. "If it does there'll be another storm before t' week's out and we shall have it all to go through again. I've got just about to t' far end, father, and I may as well chuck it now as next week or next month."

Maniwel raised his eyes for a moment and regarded his son steadily, but all he said was:

"Get on with your tea as Hannah tells you. If you've got to fight trouble never do it on an empty belly. Them kidneys are wasted on you."

He himself was eating with evident enjoyment and making good progress in spite of his handicap; and it was grannie who continued the conversation.

"A bad lot is Baldwin Briggs, and the son and grandson of bad 'uns; black-hearted as t' bog and hard as t' rock on Gordel; all for themselves, and ne'er troubling to put a fair face on i' front o' their neighbours; and that mean they'd let crows pick their bones to save a burying——"

They were strong words for such a thin, weak voice; and they conveyed the impression of a strong will. The deeply seamed shrivelled face, in which the sunken eyes were dim as unclean lanterns and the receding mouth gave away the secret of tenantless gums, was that of a woman who had ruled her household in her day, and with a firm hand. Her eyes were fixed on her grandson and the jaw continued to move long after her son interrupted her.

"Now come, mother," said he, "let's give Baldwin a rest. A bad 'un he may be,



but if badness was passed on from his grandfather same as t' twist of his mouth and them nose-whiskers of his, he's more to be pitied than blamed. But trouble's as you make it, and a poor seasoning for meat at any time. Jagger'll none burst if he bottles his for a while, so we'll just keep t' cork in and enjoy what's set before us, if you please."

Jagger made an impatient gesture; but catching the warning look in Hannah's eye restrained himself, and went on with his meal. Grannie, however, ate little and was not to be silenced; indeed she was apparently unconscious of the prohibition. The half-sightless eyes stared into space as if she saw there the ghosts of the dead whom memory had summoned.

"There was never but one son born to any Briggses. There mud be as many as half a dozen lasses, and Keturah's great-aunt, I bethink me, had nine; but there was never more nor one lad in any o' their families, and he was always a Baldwin and always a bad 'un, and came to a bad end."

Maniwel's fist came down upon the table with a force that set all the pots a-dancing.

"That'll do, mother," said he. "Give a dog a bad name and it'll live up to it. Baldwin isn't dead yet, and there's room for him to mend. Pour your grannie out a cup more tea, Hannah, and keep her busy, or we shall be having all t' Briggses' corpses for generations back laid aside o' t' table before we've finished."

He began roughly but ended on a note of humour and the meal was completed without further incident.

Then as grannie returned to her seat and Hannah cleared the table Maniwel bade his son draw up to the hearth.

"Now," he said, "let's hear what's been amiss between you and Baldwin."

The look of strain and annoyance had never left the young man's face, and he scowled heavily, goaded by his father's half bantering tone. His long legs were thrust out on to the hearth, his hands were buried in his trousers pockets, and his temper, like his limbs, was at full stretch.

"You think it's same as it has been before," he said sullenly—"we've fallen out and we shall fall in again; but if he comes on his bended knees I've finished with him. I'd sooner beg my bread or starve than I'd——"

"Aye, aye," interrupted his father. "You can cut out all t' high-and-mighty, lad, and get down to bed-rock. What's he sacked you for?"

"For asking for a rise," Jagger answered hotly. "I work hours and hours overtime as you know well without as much as a 'Thank-ye' for my labour; and t' harder I work t' less he thinks of me. I told him he was fond enough of putting his

claim in when he was man instead of master, and he laughed in my face. He said he was for himself then and he's for himself now, and for once in his life he spoke t' truth. But it didn't end there. He says I rob him because I won't scamp my work and diddle his customers; and that filled t' cup up, and I brought my bass home. You have it all there; he isn't a man, he's a devil."

"Maybe he is," the father replied coolly, "or if he isn't he keeps a lodging-house in his inside for them o' that breed, same as most of us; and they're like as they've got t' upper hand o' t' Briggses, as your grannie says. However, we'll keep to bed-rock—Baldwin'll none come on his bended knees; but if you were to bend your stiff neck and go to him——."

"I'll see him hanged first!"

"Well, he keeps inside o' t' law, does Baldwin, and I doubt if they've started making t' rope 'at'll hang him, so we'll move on a step; what are you thinking of doing?"

The frown on Jagger's brow beetled the deep caverns of his eyes; but the tone in which he replied that he supposed he must leave the village and seek a job in the town, where jobs were plentiful and wages were regulated by the unions, was not convincing.

"And what sort of a show would you make in a town?" Hannah's voice broke in. "You that has t' moor in your blood! You'd choke! Ling doesn't grow on paved streets and it's poor fishing you'll get in a bath-room!"

"You can do without what you can't get. Needs must when the devil drives, as I told Baldwin. I shan't be t' first who's left t' village and made his way in t' town."

"If you make your way in t' town you'll be t' first i' our family that ever managed it," said his father. "Not that I'm again' you trying it, mind you, if there isn't a better way, though there is an old wife's tale that no Drake comes to any good that turns his back on t' moor."

"It's true, Maniwel; God's truth it is," the old woman across the hearth interposed sharply; "and no old wife's tale, neither. Didn't they bring your Uncle Ben back with a stroke on him and all his money 'at he'd piled up sunk like a rock i' t' Tarn; and him thankful for sup and bite out o' them he'd looked down on. And there was your great-uncle, Rueben——"

"Aye, aye, mother," her son broke in pleasantly; "and there was his father before him, that they buried at t' cross roads with a stake in his inside and made a tale of. I know all t' catalogue of shockers; but I'm t' wrong man to be frightened o' boggards, and I could wish our Jagger was. If t' finger o' duty pointed me to t' town I'd follow it same as Luther talked about if it rained boggards and I'd to wade

through 'em up to t' waist, but I doubt if Jagger's grit enough."

"You're over hard on him, father," expostulated Hannah who was standing, dish-cloth in hand, at the scullery-door; and her brother forced a bitter laugh.

"What do I care how hard he is! I know he thinks I'm a milksop because I haven't his spirit, and don't laugh when things go all wrong. But where is there another thinks as he does 'at if you go straight all 'll turn out for t' best? What has he to show for his belief but an empty sleeve?"

A red flush surged over his neck and face as he completed the sentence; and half-ashamed of his outburst he looked into his father's face.

"Nay, lad, you've no 'casion to run t' red flag up," Maniwel replied; but there was nothing bantering in his tone now, and his face had sobered. "If we'd windows to our hearts you'd happen be capped to see what there is inside o' mine, both good and bad; but one thing you *would* find if you looked close—you'd find 'at my belief, as you call it, had brought me a deal more than an empty sleeve, and you'd see naught 'at I'm ashamed of in my thoughts of you."

"You oughtn't to have said that, Jagger," said his sister reproachfully; but her father waved the rebuke aside.

"I'd sooner a blain showed on his lip than fester under t' skin, and I've tried to learn you both to speak your minds. For twenty years I've done my best to walk t' street called Straight, and I've got it rooted in my mind 'at there's no better road. Baldwin favours t' street called Crook'd, as long as it isn't *too* crook'd, 'cause he thinks it's a short cut to t' Land o' Plenty. I think he's mista'en; but whether he is or no I should be sorry for any lad o' mine to follow him; and that's why I'm glad 'at Jagger goes by t' straight road even if he grumbles at t' ruts."

There was just a hint of suspicion in the eyes Jagger turned on his father's face but what he saw there reassured him and his brow cleared a little. His tone, however, was still gruff as he said:

"Crook'd ways seem to pay all right. They landed Baldwin's feet in Mr. Clegg's shoes and put money in his purse; and t' street called Straight has done precious little for us. If it pays to do right, how is it that you happened your accident and how is it I get sacked? I suppose it'll be made up to us i' heaven!"

The suggestion was something less than a sneer, in that it conveyed a want of understanding as honest as Job's in similar, if more tragic, circumstances, and the father read it as such.

"All I know about heaven," he said, "and all I want to know, is 'at t' street called Straight runs through it as well as to it, and if it doesn't put money in your purse it keeps t' fountain sweet in your soul, and that's something. But walking straight

doesn't take t' bite out o' t' teeth of a circ'lar saw when you run your thumb again' it, and it doesn't take trouble out o' life. All t' same if you're frightened o' trouble you're as like to meet with it on t' crook'd road as on t' straight."

"Now look you here, lad," he continued as his son made no reply; "if you'll get out o' t' cradle and give up supping dill-water, but stand on your feet like a man I'll help you to plan something out. I'm none for you going back to Baldwin, though I don't doubt he expects it; and I'm none for you leaving t' village unless you're forced. You're a moorman, and t' moor's in your blood as Hannah says, same as it's i' mine. It'll call you and rive at your heart strings if you put t' sea between you and it. You'd hear t' pipit 'peep-peeping' over t' heather and t' jackdaws cawing on Gordel; and you'd see t' trout leaping i' t' beck and t' dippers plunging their white breasts into t' water below t' Cove if you were in t' thick o' London streets——"

"And it's a bad end you'd come to, Jagger. Some can do it and be no worse for't, but there's naught but ill follows them Drakes that leaves t' moor; don't ee do it, my lad!" Grannie's voice was pleading, and her eyes were troubled.

"Let's hear what father has in his mind," said Hannah who had joined the group and drawn a chair up to the hearth. Then she turned to her father. "You oughtn't to plague him with talking of 'dill-water' and such like. If it was me it 'ud get my back up."

"Aye, right enough," said Maniwel with a significance that the girl resented though it left Jagger unmoved; "but I'll get to t' point. There's been a notion i' my head for some time back 'at we happen couldn't do better than start i' business for ourselves. There's room for two i' t' village, if one's a small 'un, and small we should have to be 'cause all t' brass we should have 'ud be that three hundred 'at's lying out at interest wi' John Clegg. But if Jagger's willing I'll call it in, and we'll fix up a bit of a shop and get to work. It'll be a poor do if between us we can't make a living; for if I've got shut of an arm I've kept my head, and that'll come in handy when Jagger loses his. T' big jobs'll have to go to Baldwin 'cause we shan't have neither machines nor capital; but there'll be enough little 'uns to keep some meal i' t' barrel, I'll warrant. What think you, lad?"

A complete change had come over Jagger whilst his father was speaking and the face was now that of another man. The brow became unbent and the eyes mild and pleasant. He withdrew his hands from his pockets and rubbed them together slowly like one who anticipates a satisfaction near at hand.

"By gen, it's a trump card! I'd give a dollar to see Baldwin's face when he hears tell what we're doing! Jobs? There'll be no lack of 'em. I mayn't have your headpiece for scheming out ways and means, but Baldwin hasn't a man in his shop

'at can come near me at my job, and there's more than him knows it. It'll serve the old lickpenny right, and teach him not to rob widows. Where'll we find a shop?"

Maniwel looked at him steadily for a moment or two, and Hannah watched her father's face, knowing what he was thinking.

"When folks are in a hurry to swallow they have to have their meat minced for 'em. It 'ud suit me better, lad, if you'd get off spoon-food, and begin to chew for yourself. You've jumped at this plan o' mine same as a bairn at a rattle. You'd better sleep on it, and then we'll talk about t' shop. But if we do start for ourselves it shall be in t' street called Straight, anyway. Baldwin's for himself all t' way through; we'll be for ourselves and company."

Hannah turned to look at her brother; but it was evident he had only partly heard his father's remarks, being engaged with his own thoughts; and her brow bent into an expression of impatience.

## CHAPTER IV

### IN WHICH THE WOMAN ENTERS WITH THE SERPENT

THREE hours later Hannah and Jagger were alone, but for a while neither of them had much to say. To watch the changing expression on the woman's face you would have said that tenderness and contempt were striving for the mastery on the battlefield of her soul and that the issue was uncertain. Hannah was only thirty but Nature had taken little pains in her fashioning, leaving her angular in outline and pinched in features; and responsibility had unloaded its burden on her shoulders at an age when most girls are unfettered or at worst in leading-strings, for the mother had died when Hannah was fourteen. Ten years later the grandmother, recently widowed, had come to share the home and the income and to add to the girl's trials. Grannie was masterful; but Hannah was mistress and had no mind at twenty-four to bend her neck to the authority of seventy-five. The encounters that took place were by tacit consent of both parties confined to occasions when the men-folk were out of hearing, and victory was not always on one side, but in the end Hannah triumphed, and her crowning achievement, the trophy of her success, was not in the subjugation but the conversion of her grandmother. In the hour that grannie lay down her arms she confessed that she "liked a lass o' mettle," and could rest satisfied that one of the family had "a bit o' bite in her," now that Maniwel had turned queer in his head, and had bred a son whose bark was loud enough but who never bared his teeth in the good old moorland fashion. From that time Hannah's ascendancy had been undisputed, but the conflict, and the anxiety that had attended her father's accident, had left their mark upon her features which contradicted the parish register by ten years at least.

You had only to enter the cottage to discover at once where Hannah's energies found their outlet and justification. If her house was no cleaner than the houses of her neighbours it was to their credit and not to her disparagement. Not all the women of Mawm made pretensions of godliness but there were few who did not worship at the shrine of cleanliness, and with no mere lip-service—were they not Yorkshire folk and moor-folk?

"Cleanliness next to godliness?" Yea, verily; and in that order.

There was something about the Drakes' cottage, however, that was not found everywhere; something not quite definable—a daintiness, a touch of refinement, revealed in the harmony of colours and the sight of flowers, perhaps, and accentuated by the absence of anything that jarred. It was Hannah's doing, but it aroused neither admiration nor envy in the breasts of her neighbours, none of whom

was very concerned to inquire how it was that the Drakes' home was the cosiest and pleasantest in the village.

Having been sent into the world by a watchful Providence four years in advance of her brother, and installed by force of circumstances in the position of mother to the boy of ten, the girl recognised in the position a special responsibility which she changed into a privilege. Other lads, other young men, rather annoyed her; she treated them with the scant attention that is almost a discourtesy; but she lavished a mother's as well as a sister's affection on Jagger, and did her best to correct the faults in his character which the maternal instinct enabled her to remark even before they became apparent to the quick eyes of her father. It was quite in accordance with her nature that she rarely discussed her hopes and fears and difficulties with her father, though she endowed him in her thoughts with all the virtues of the superman; a sense of loyalty to her brother and also a recognition of her father's ability to deal with the situation held her back. But she lost no opportunity to repress the boy's tendencies to indulge in a half-feminine peevishness that made him moody and irritable, and,—to one of her temperament—even contemptible. It had the same effect on her father; but what she fought against in herself she could not tolerate in another, so the exhibition of disdain in look or word always brought her to arms.

The room was looking particularly attractive in the yellow light of the lamp and the red glow of the dwindling fire, and as Hannah leaned back in the chair grannie had vacated an hour before and listened to the wind which was now howling about the door, her eyes rested with an appraising scrutiny on this article and that as if she were determining what ravage of to-day would call for first attention on the morrow.

Jagger had not moved from his place on the hearth, and sat with his head in his hands gazing into the embers where he had already built sufficient wooden castles to line the banks of the Rhine. It was one of Jagger's faults (or excellences, if that is your point of view) that he was ready to build without troubling his brain over much on the subject of foundations.

Hannah's eyes fell from the two hams that were suspended from the rafters to the bowl of chrysanthemums on the chest of drawers, and finally rested on the big Bible that lay open beneath the lamp, where her father had left it when he went upstairs to bed, and her thoughts were diverted.

"There are some queer ideas in t' Bible," she remarked, "some of them he read to-night there isn't many goes by—not in this neighbourhood, anyway."

Jagger roused himself and yawned. "I never heard a word he read," he admitted. "I was putting t' new shop up and getting some bill-heads printed—'Drake and Son, Timber Merchants and Contractors, Mawm.' I could very near forgive Baldwin for

sacking me.”

“Timber Merchants and Contractors!” repeated Hannah with a scornful intonation that ought to have crumpled up her brother like a blighted leaf. “All kinds of jobbing work promptly attended to’ would be nearer t’ mark. If you weren’t my own brother I should think you a fool. One minute you’re at t’ bottom o’ Gordel and all t’ Scar tumbling on you, and t’ next you’re atop o’ Fountain Fell with your head in t’ clouds. You’d be in a poor way if it wasn’t for father; and it ’ud pay you to take a leaf out of his book as I’ve told you hundreds o’ times. *He* keeps his head in all weathers, and naught moves him. He’s a pauper compared wi’ Baldwin; but to listen to him you’d think he was a millionaire, like Mr. Harris. ‘As having nothing, yet possessing all things.’ His face fair lit up when he read it.”

Jagger’s lip curled and he spoke impatiently. “It’s a fad he’s got into his head and it’s turned him soft. You ask grannie what she thinks about it! With notions like his no man could make his way—always bending his back for someone else to climb up on his shoulders. I’m tired of being naught but a ladder, but father thinks it’s what we’re here for. You’ve to look after yourself in this world, and leave other folks to look after theirselves.”

Hannah leaned back in her chair and regarded her brother with a scornful look.

“That’s Baldwin’s motto,” she said. “You’d better go partners with *him*, Jagger Drake. ‘All for my-sen!’ I thought that was what him and you had quarrelled over. You want to know your own mind, my lad, and find out whose side you’re on before you start in business for yourself.”

“I’m not such a mean devil as Baldwin is,” he returned, flushing a little; and his sister replied:

“Happen you dursn’t be; but ‘all for my-sen’ ’ud soon bring you to where he stands. You can’t blow both hot and cold at t’ same time; and you want to know where you are, as I say, before you put your sign up.”

The only reply was a scowl and Hannah changed her tone.

“I’m vexing you,” she said soothingly; “I know you didn’t mean it. It’s as father says, you go t’ straight road if you grumble at t’ ruts; but I wish from my soul you weren’t always looking as if you’d made a meal o’ baking-powder.”

The conversation was interrupted at this point by a knock at the door and the raising of the latch, and as Hannah got to her feet a girl entered the room and unwrapped the scarf that had covered her neck and shoulders. Jagger’s face lost its look of inertness when he recognised the visitor.

“Nay, Nancy! Who’d have thought of you popping in at this time o’ night?” was Hannah’s greeting; but the tone was cordial and not as overcharged with surprise as



the words implied.

“Do you call it late?” the newcomer asked indifferently. “In Airlee we should have said the evening was just beginning. *I’m* not going to bed just yet, but I won’t keep you two up though Jagger’ll be able to lie a bit longer than usual in the morning. Keturah’s only just told me that you’re sacked,” she continued, turning eyes that were more curious than sympathetic on the young man; “and that a stranger has got your job; and I dodged them both and came down to see what you’re going to do.”

“A stranger got my job, do you say?” inquired Jagger as Nancy sat down in his father’s chair. “Who is he?”

He was vexed, and face and tone showed it; it was just another instance of Baldwin’s cursed good luck.

“I don’t know. Somebody who had walked over from Scaleber to seek a job, and heard you rowing.”

“We didn’t row,” returned Jagger. “I just told Mr. Briggs a thing or two that was on my mind as quietly as I’m talking to you now, and then he slipped his temper and went for me tooth and nail. Called me a thief into t’ bargain, and that bides a bit of swallowing.”

“He’ll take you on again,” said Nancy confidently; “not because he loves you, but because he knows when he’s well served; and I daresay he’ll give you your rise, too, when his gorge goes down. You’re short of tact, Jagger. You get naught out of Baldwin by holding a pistol at his head.”

Jagger laughed, knowingly and triumphantly. “I’ve a card up my sleeve that’ll pull Mr. Briggs’ face to twice its length. If he was to double my wage I wouldn’t go back to a man that’s called me thief. I’m starting for myself, Nancy, as soon as I can get a few things together.”

“Starting for yourself—here?” The question was rapped out, and the expression of the speaker’s eyes became suddenly hostile.

“Aye, here,” he replied; and he looked across at his sister so that he missed the shadow that swept over their visitor’s face and left it black. In just the same way does the Tarn that lies on the lap of the wild moor, 900 feet above the village and overlooked by mountains that lift their heads hundreds of feet higher still, display its mood—at one moment calm, unruffled, streaked and dotted with blue, or brilliantly white with cloud reflections; the next, grey and angry-looking as a storm leaps up from the south, making the sky leaden.

Nancy Clegg was only in her twenty-third year, but she was a woman full-grown and quite conscious of her developed powers. There was an air of distinction about her that other young women lacked—an air that had brought men to her side and

kept them there even in the city where she had been spending a few weeks with her uncle's family, and though she was rather sparely built, on the model of the moorwoman, she had none of Hannah's angularities to destroy the symmetry of her figure, and her black hair and clear black eyes together with a straight, fine nose and expressive lips would have made her noticeable in any company and aroused admiration in most. Few women ever had their features in better control than she; but there were occasions when she gave them free play and this was one of them. Hannah noticed the change, and her mouth tightened.

"Oh, I see!" said Nancy, and the coldness in the voice caused Jagger to look up. Instantly his face fell as he saw that his communication was ill-received.

"Why shouldn't I?" he inquired petulantly. "I should never have thought of starting for myself if he hadn't sacked me, but you can't always be lying down and letting a man wipe his feet on you. A bit of competition'll do Baldwin good, and teach him a lesson!"

"I suppose you won't expect me to congratulate you, seeing that I've an interest in the business?" she replied coldly; and she stretched out her hand for the scarf which she proceeded to wrap about her shoulders. "If you've made up your mind there's nothing more to be said, and I might have spared myself my errand. Don't get up, Hannah. I can let myself out."

Poor Jagger! A chill like that of night when the wet mists steal down the sides of Cawden sent a shiver over his spirits and choked his speech. In his eagerness to avenge himself upon his master he had forgotten that Nancy would be affected by the scheme, and Nancy was the all-important consideration. When he had spoken of his father's age as the barrier to his freedom of action he had been half-conscious of insincerity, and he knew now, if he had not definitely acknowledged it to himself before, that it was she of the black locks and black eyes and not his sire who made the thought of leaving Mawm unpalatable. His mind was not quick enough to grapple with the situation, however, and whilst he was groping round for a way of escape Hannah's voice cut the silence.

"It was father's idea," she said with a coldness equal to Nancy's own, as she rose and moved towards the door. "Maybe he hadn't just thought how it 'ud concern you; but by all accounts Mr. Briggs turns trade enough away to keep one pair o' hands busy. You know father well enough, Nancy, to be sure he'll do naught to hurt you, and I'm sorry if you take it amiss. If you were Jagger's sister you'd be tired o' seeing him eat dirt to keep in with a master 'at holds him down. *I'd* have chucked it long since, if it had been me."

"Jagger's a right to please himself, and I'm not disputing it," said Nancy

haughtily; “but if there’s to be two firms in the village you can’t expect me to be any friend to the second.”

Jagger had found his tongue by now and he followed the girl to the door and stood with her in the opening, uttering vehement protests to which Hannah closed her ears and Nancy listened reluctantly.

“You’d best think it over,” she said in tones that had lost nothing of their iciness as she turned away. “I’ll say naught about it at home, Jagger, in the hope that you’ll change your mind.”

She walked away rapidly; but hearing footsteps quicken behind her thought Jagger was following and wheeled round with an impatient dismissal on her lips.

It was some other, however, who hurried up—a stranger obviously, for a bowler hat was silhouetted against the sky and gear of that kind was never seen on the heads of the male fraternity of Mawm except on Sundays. Although a glance was all she gave him when she perceived her mistake there was something that seemed familiar in the man’s outline, and for a second or two she puzzled over it and wondered why she was followed; but though she went on her way more quickly she was not afraid.

“You walk fast, Miss Clegg!” The voice was low and carried a laugh in its tones and Nancy started and stood still.

“Who are you?” she inquired; but the revelation came to her as the moonlight fell upon his face, and her heart beat more quickly than exertion could account for; yet her subdued exclamation—“If it isn’t Mr. Inman!” was coloured by annoyance rather than pleasure.

“James Inman, at your service,” he replied, raising his hat with a courtesy that was deliberately theatrical. “I believe I told you when you doubted my word, that I should find ways and means to see you again; and here I am.”

Nancy tossed her head—a trick she had not needed to learn in the town, and answered him sharply.

“If you’ve followed me here because you think that I’m likely to take any interest in you, Mr. Inman, the sooner you’re undeceived the better for us both. And if it’s you that’s got a job at our shop let me tell you straight that it goes against you, and I’ve only to let Mr. Briggs know what you’re after for you to be sent about your business.”

Inman laughed. “And what worse should I be then than I am now? I should have had ten minutes with my heart’s delight, and that’s worth a month of dreams. And why shouldn’t your guardian know that I’m after a wife? Other men before me have hunted that quarry and not been burned at the stake for it. If I hunt fair what harm is

there in it? But perhaps you think he'll be vexed to find that Jagger Drake has a competitor."

Nancy's cheeks grew red with anger, but even as hot words rose to her tongue her judgment cooled them, and her thoughts ran on ahead and reviewed the situation. Baldwin and Jagger were at enmity; and though a word in the older man's ear might start the fires of his wrath against the newcomer, they were not likely to burn the more fiercely at the knowledge that this young man was Jagger's rival for her affections. The effect might be quite opposite, for the large contempt in which Baldwin held the Drakes, both father and son, might lead him to favour another suitor.

Nancy had remained standing and she held Inman by a haughty stare whilst these thoughts crossed her mind at telegraphic speed.

"You don't leave your meaning to be guessed at, anyway," she said in her most freezing tones; "but a woman isn't like a hare; she can choose who she lets hunt her, and I don't choose to be hunted by you. Those are plain words, Mr. Inman, and I hope you appreciate them."

"I do," he replied. "I'm a moorman and you're a moorwoman. Moor-folk don't go by round-about ways when there's a straight cut. I tell you as I told you before that I love you and would make you my wife. 'Not like a hare!' Of course you aren't. I want no woman for a wife who's like a hare. An oily towns-man would have turned the tables on you and crooned out that he was hunting a 'dear'; but I don't deal in soft nothings. Maybe Jagger Drake does; I heard him this afternoon when he whined like a whipped dog, and I took his measure. If you marry him you'll have a baby in your arms to start with——"

"I've listened to you long enough," Nancy broke in at this point with increased hauteur. "Who's been coupling my name with Jagger Drake's I don't know, but it's no concern of either theirs or yours; and as there's sure to be some eyes spying on us, and I've no wish to have my character taken away, as it's likely enough it will be if I stop talking with a strange man, the first night he's in the village, I'll just wish you good-bye; and if you take my advice you'll set off back where you came from tomorrow morning."

"One minute then," he replied, as she turned away with a frown on her face. "We mayn't have another opportunity as good as this for understanding one another. You call me a stranger, and you propose to treat me as a stranger. So be it, I learn my lessons quickly, and I shan't worry you, you may rely on that. But I've buried my mother since you saw me last, and I've a mind to get back to the moors. If I stop with Mr. Briggs I can help to ginger up the business, though it's plain enough to see

that he thinks himself God Almighty and wants no help. But if he won't have me, or if you think fit to put a spoke in the wheel, I'll just start for myself and maybe get our young friend Jagger to help me. Soft as he is there are sure to be some old women who'll fancy him for their work, and I'll bet between us we can make things hum. Whichever way I go, your road'll cross mine, Miss Nancy, and we'll go on arm in arm before the end; but it shall be of your own free will, I promise you that!"

She was staring him in the face with curling lip; but the effort to keep back hot, indignant words and to hide their nearness from him almost choked her; and all the time she was conscious of an icy feeling at her heart. He was meeting her glance with a smile of quiet assurance; and when she said—"We are just strangers, Mr. Inman. I shall not interfere with Mr. Briggs' business arrangements, so you may be easy on that point. All I want is to be left alone!" he merely nodded, and raising his hat, wished her good-night.

## CHAPTER V

### IN WHICH JAGGER DRAKE SETS HIS TEETH

LIKE an impatient housewife whose activities have been thwarted, and who rises whilst others sleep to make onslaught on her foes with mop and besom, the wind busied itself in the night with the work of sweeping away the frosty mists which for a week past had been clinging to the sides of the hills and stretching across the gullies like thin, silvered cobwebs; and when the sun peeped over the shoulder of Cawden and sent his heralds with streaming banners of pink and lances tipped with gold to warn such few laggards as were still abed of his coming, the village was looking as bright as a healthy babe fresh from its morning bath. There was nothing babe-like, of course, about such a venerable place except the river, which tumbled and tinkled along its course as if it rejoiced in its liberty after being shut in underground so long, but which, seen from the slopes a few hundred yards away, seemed as restful as the grey hamlet itself.

If you estimate the importance of a place by its size you would never bestow a second glance at Mawm, even if the beam of bigness in your eye permitted you to see it, for the hamlet is a mere mote among the mountains; a speck of grey upon the moors. If you doze for twenty seconds you may pass through it in your car and find when you rouse yourself no hint of its existence; and you will have missed—what people with beams in their eyes must often miss—a pleasing picture in shotted green and grey that you might have carried away with you, and that would have enriched your gallery of memories through all the years.

Like a humble lodge at the entrance gate of the park which holds some lordly dwelling-house, Mawm stands at the junction of three roads one of which brings the traveller from the amenities of the railway, five miles distant, whilst the others transport him at once to the heart of the moors and the deep cold shadows of the Pennines. From those wild heights the winter gales sweep down upon the hamlet, lashing it with whips of ice and half burying it in snow, bracing and hardening men of Viking blood, and sending to their rest beneath the graveyard sod at Kirkby Mawm, lower down the valley, those of softer breed. In summer it is still wind-swept; but the breezes are kindlier (though still rough and sharp-toothed), and they load themselves with the fragrant spices of the moors—the sweetness of heather and mountain berries and peaty-bog. And at all seasons of the year the air is pure as purity itself.

But Mawm is a guardian of other and rarer treasures than these. Beyond the village, but only a few strides away, great inland cliffs that are the wonder of all who see them rear their giant forms; and in the Cove and Scar you will find rock scenery

whose like few countries can produce and which is unmatched in all Britain. With these gifts of air and earth and earth's convulsions for their heritage the men of Mawm are a strong race and fortunate, though not all are conscious of their good fortune.

Maniwel Drake (the greater number of his acquaintances did not know that his name figured as Emmanuel in the parish register, and he himself had almost forgotten it), was not to be numbered with these dullards. A man of the moors, whose ancestors on both sides for generations back had been moorland folk, the air of the uplands was to him the best of tonics, sweeping over his soul no less than his body, and containing what the old physiologists called "a hidden food of life." No gale, however wild, had ever been able to pierce the defences of his hardy frame and undermine his constitution, and he had long ago shaken off the ill-results of the accident which, by reason of the light regard in which he had held it, had well-nigh cost him his life. With his one arm he could do more work than many could accomplish with two; but until now he had been content to lend a hand when and where it was needed, and his earnings had been precarious, which would have mattered more, if his wants had not been few.

His whitewashed cottage neighboured with the little one-arched bridge that spanned the stream, and its tiny panes gathered the greater part of the sun's rays, for they faced east and south, and as they looked down the valley with no nearer obstruction than hills that were miles distant the house was always so bright that a speck of dust had not the faintest chance to escape Hannah's observant eyes. It was because the house was sunny and close to the laughter-loving stream that Maniwel had chosen it. It harmonised with his nature.

He was thinking of Jagger and the new scheme as he leaned against the parapet of the bridge, with the sun's rosy beams playing about his uncovered head like an incipient halo—particularly of Jagger, and of Jagger's mother on whose vitals some slow cancerous disease had fixed its wolfish teeth some months before the lad's birth, tearing at her strength and leaving her for the rest of her weary life querulous and spiritless who up to then had known neither ache nor pain. It was Jagger's misfortune to have been born with a weight on his spirits which it was as difficult to dislodge as the Old Man of the Sea from the shoulders of Sindbad—it is not only the sins of parents that are visited on the children: often it is their sorrows. Like Naaman the Syrian, Jagger combined with many excellencies one outstanding defect—he was a good workman, skilful, painstaking and conscientious, and he was a creditable member of the community; but he was a grumbler.

Maniwel's eyes, travelling observantly about the green though his thoughts were

indoors, apprised him that a stranger had left the "Packhorse," and was walking towards the bridge, and his quick wit told him that this was Jagger's successor. Inman had no need to guess that the tall figure on the bridge was the father of his despised rival, for the landlord had pointed him out as they parted company at the door of the inn; and if the path had not led in that direction, curiosity would have taken him there.

Each took the other's measure as Inman approached; but whereas the younger man flashed a hawk-like glance at Maniwel's face and let that suffice, Maniwel himself indulged in a scrutiny that took in every detail of the newcomer's dress, from the serviceable, thick-soled boots to the incongruous bowler hat; yet so unmoved were the features, so deliberate was the sweep of the eye that even a close observer might have thought him indifferent.

Inman raised his head and nodded and would have passed on but for the inviting note in Maniwel's greeting.

"Promises well for a fine day, I'm thinking."

"I can do with it," said Inman bluntly. "It'll be seven miles, I understand, to Scaleber, and I've got to do the double journey."

"Seven miles by t' low road," replied Maniwel; "and a trifle less by that over t' top."

"I came by the straight road last night," Inman replied grimly, "and I'm having no more of straight roads. I'll give the low road a turn in future."

They were looking into each other's faces, and Inman was puzzled and half irritated by the expression of shrewdness and serenity that he saw on his side of the picture. Instinctively he recognised in the father a man of different calibre from the son; a man whose gentleness could not be mistaken for weakness; a man whose eyes and jaw told conflicting stories of their owner's character. The note of easy playfulness in Maniwel's voice vexed him because it placed him at a disadvantage.

"I don't know about t' top road being straight. They're both about as straight as a dog's hind leg if it comes to that. They're same as lots of us folk—they go straight when it's easier then to go crook'd. But there'll be a grand breeze on t' top this morning, and all t' scents in t' moor's bottle let loose into t' bargain."

Inman stared at him and broke into a laugh.

"I'm no judge of scents and hair-oil," he replied. "I leave that sort o' thing for women and dandies. The low road'll do for me."

He turned away and at that moment Hannah opened the house-door and beckoned her father with an upward movement of the hand, whereupon he went down and stood beside her in the angle of the bridge.



“That’ll be him that’s got Jagger’s job,” she said, “and it reminds me that t’ fat’s in t’ fire and no mistake”; but the wry smile about her lips and the light that shone in her grey eyes seemed to contradict the declaration.

“Then there’ll be a bit o’ spluttering, likely,” said her father calmly. “Whose fat is it?”

Hannah made a significant motion towards the upper storey and lowered her voice as she replied:

“Nancy came in last night and Jagger told her what you had in your minds about starting for yourselves. My word! It was hoity-toity in a minute. She might have been sitting on t’ hot oven-plate by t’ way she got to her feet. If Jagger weds her I fancy t’ hen’ll crow louder than t’ cock in their farmyard.”

Maniwel nodded, and looked down into his daughter’s face more soberly than she had expected.

“That ’ud be because she’s a sort o’ interest in t’ concern. I’d thought about that, and reckoned on Jagger tumbling to it first thing; but when he didn’t I said naught. There’s something in it from t’ lass’s point o’ view. What did Jagger say?”

“Say! He was as dumb as a dumpling till she’d taken herself to t’ door, then he ran up and started twittering like a hedge-sparrow with a cuckoo in its nest. But he might as well have saved his wind, for her ladyship was standing on stilts, and she wasn’t for getting down when she took herself home.”

“I daresay,” commented Maniwel. “Then Jagger’ll have chucked t’ new scheme up, I reckon? I half expected as much.”

“I don’t know what he’ll have done by now,” she replied. “He shifts like t’ hands of t’ clock till you can’t tell where he is. I’d be ashamed not to have a mind o’ my own.”

“Aye,” said her father grimly, “a man ’at can’t walk unless he’s tied tight to someb’dy else, same as he was running a three-legged race, isn’t likely to make much headway, and I doubt he’ll have to fit his stride to Nancy’s if he weds her. However, she’s put him in t’ sieve and we shall have to see what comes of it.”

“He wasn’t for dropping t’ idea when he went to bed,” said Hannah as she turned indoors where the newly-lighted fire was now roaring in the grate; “and if he keeps t’ same look on his face he ought to do well in t’ undertaking line—Baldwin wouldn’t have a cat’s chance; but we shall have to wait and see what he says when he comes down to his breakfast.”

The father sat down and spreading his legs on the hearth, gave himself up to thought whilst Hannah laid the cloth and began to prepare the meal. When she came and stood over the fire where the kettle was singing cheerfully he looked up into her

face.

“Will she wed him, lass?” he asked. “If he swallows his pride and begs on again \_\_\_\_\_”

“If he does aught o’ t’ sort I shall give him up for a bad job——” she broke in hotly; but her father laid his left hand on her arm.

“It’s either that or leaving t’ village if he’s to keep in with Nancy,” he said. “She’s her father’s child, and Tom Clegg was a stiff-necked ’un and could never see no way but his own. Not but what he had his good points, and at his worst he was a lot better than Baldwin; but when he set himself it ’ud ha’ taken powder to shift him. I don’t want to wrong t’ lass, and maybe I don’t know her well enough; but it strikes me she’ll turn awk’ard if Jagger crosses her, and there’s no telling what lengths a lass like her’ll go to.”

“Then let her go,” said Hannah impatiently. “She’ll be no great loss ’at I can see, barring ’at she’s a tidy bit o’ money. Jagger says he reckons naught o’ t’ money; but if you scrape t’ gilt off Nancy there’s very little left, if you ask me. I could find him \_\_\_\_\_”

“I daresay you could,” her father interrupted again. “But Jagger’ll bait his own hook, lass, and either land his fish or lose it. We’ll get back to where we started from; if he begs on again, I doubt she’ll scorn him; if he leaves t’ village——”

The kettle boiled over at that moment and Maniwel rose and lifted it on to the hob. When he sat down again Jagger was standing on the hearth.

“Well, what if I leave t’ village?” he asked with a firmer note in his voice than either his father or sister had expected to find there. “It’s me you’re talking about, I suppose—me and Nancy? Beg on again I won’t, so that’s flat; whether she scorns me or she doesn’t. Baldwin and me’s parted company for good; but what if I leave t’ village?”

He seated himself in grannie’s chair, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees and looking with a steady gaze into his father’s eyes—eyes that rested complacently upon the stalwart frame and supple hands and that only became slightly shadowed when they settled on the face. Jagger’s lips were closed firmly, and though the eyebrows narrowed into a frown, there was scarcely a suggestion of sulkiness about the mouth, and the whole expression appeared to indicate a fixity of purpose that had been wanting the night before.

“If you leave t’ village,” the father replied, “you leave her behind, and what’ll happen then——”

“But suppose I *don’t* leave her behind?” he broke in. “Suppose I take her with me? She’s sick to death of Keturah, and Baldwin nags at her till she’s almost made

up her mind to finish with 'em. She's had a taste of freedom while she's been at her uncle's, and is beginning to want a home of her own—she's as good as said so. I've naught but my two hands, I know; but pay's good in t' towns and if she cared to help me to furnish a little home to start with it 'ud be much if I couldn't make ends meet and tie. If only you two and grannie could bring yourselves to go with us——”

“Steady, lad!” the father interposed as Hannah threw back her head and seemed about to speak. “You're galloping a bit over fast, same as a colt 'at isn't used to t' shafts. You can leave us three out o' your calculations and think about yourself. Your grannie and me are same as t' ling—rooted i' moorland soil—and we should make naught out in t' backyard of a town; and Hannah isn't t' sort to resin another woman's fiddle. Dost think Nancy'll go wi' you?”

“I'm not saying she would,” he answered, without hesitation and with a look that spoke more confidently than his tongue; “but she's going to have t' chance. Letting her help to provide t' home is a pill that bides a bit of swallowing; but you can't have it all ways; and I'd pay her back when I get on to my feet——”

“You've eaten dirt while you've got used to t' taste,” Hannah broke in excitedly. “Would I, if I were a man, beg any woman to make me a home! I'd go single all my days first! I'll lend you my petticoats, Jagger.”

The hot blood rushed to the young man's cheeks and he turned angry eyes on his sister; but the father checked the torrent of words that began to pour from his lips.

“Sit you down, lad! Hannah's as much at fault with *her* false pride as you are with yours. If a man and woman love each other so as to forsake all others and live together till death parts 'em it's a small matter which o' t' two buys t' furniture. It isn't what's bought wi' brass 'at makes a home, it's what brass can't buy. I aren't sure but what Jagger's right, only I doubt he'll make a mullock of it when he names it to Nancy; and I wish I could be as sure as he seems to be 'at she'll see it in t' same light. I wouldn't do t' lass a wrong; but her father set brass first, and for aught I know she may do t' same. Love is of God; but t' love o' money isn't; and you have it in t' Book 'at you cannot serve God and mammon. Now suppose by some odd chance she doesn't fall in wi' t' idea—what then?”

“Then we put t' sign-board up, same as we talked about,” said Jagger stoutly.

“You mean it?”

“I mean it! If she doesn't like it, I can't help it. Go back to Baldwin, I won't, and there's an end on't.”

Maniwel gazed at his son long and steadily and Jagger's face put on a look of stubbornness.

“I mean it,” he repeated doggedly. “The day she says ‘No’ sees t’ new firm started.”

“Good lad!” said Hannah. “If Nancy has any sense she’ll rather have a bull-dog on t’ rug than a pet poodle on her lap. But pull your chair up to t’ table for t’ porridge is cooling on your plates, and a spoiled breakfast off means a spoiled day.”

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The greater part of the tea-things had been cleared away when Jagger entered the cottage in the evening. All day he had been on the watch for Nancy, but it was late afternoon before he had found his opportunity. His face was white and his eyes were troubled, but his voice was quite firm when he spoke.

“If you’ve naught to do, father,” he said, “we’ll look round for a shop. There’s that barn of Haggas’s standing empty; I daresay we could rent it for very little. I want no tea. What say you if we go down and see Ben?”

“Then Nancy doesn’t favour t’ scheme?” inquired his father.

“Nancy’s chucked both t’ scheme and me,” he replied gruffly. “She’d scarce listen; and naught’ll do but I must go back to Baldwin and help to work t’ business up to fill all their pockets. It’s of no consequence ’at mine’s empty.”

His father regarded him for a minute in silence; but Hannah made light of the quarrel, preaching patience, and the virtue of the cold-shoulder treatment, to which Jagger gave no heed.

“I was afraid you’d make a mullock of it, lad,” said his father at length. “There’s edges on all women that you can’t get off with either chisel or smoothing plane, and it’s a mistake to try sandpaper. You told her a straight tale, I reckon?”

“I told her all she’d listen to. I hid naught from her,” he replied.

“Then pour him out his tea, Hannah,” said Maniwel. “A man can sup when he can’t bite, and a drop o’ tea’ll very likely set t’ wheels going. I’ll go down and see Ben; I’d thought of his place myself. You’ll be best on t’ hearthstun for a bit till your face shortens.”

“T’ street called Straight is about as full o’ troubles as Gordel’s full o’ stones,” said Jagger with some bitterness when his father’s back was turned.

“T’ Book says ’at man’s born to trouble,” returned his sister, “and I daresay you’d run up against it whichever road you travelled; but there’s no need to wed it, and that’s what you will do if you marry Nancy, as I’ve told you all along. She’ll want to be t’ top dog, Jagger, and all t’ peace you’ll get’ll be when she’s having her own way.”

“I thought you reckoned to be her friend,” growled Jagger.

“So I am,” she replied, “and I’m yours too. That’s why I’m talking. What Nancy

wants is someb'dy 'at'll master her and tame her temper, and that isn't you."

Jagger scowled. He had emptied the cup his sister had set before him; but he refused to eat and after a while Hannah threw a shawl over her head and left the house. Then grannie, whose eyes had been fixed on him with dog-like sympathy and intentness, leaned forward and said:

"Nancy'll have more to bide than thee, lad. It's been written in her face ever since she was a little 'un 'at she's marked for sorrow. She's like all t' Cleggs—t' black Cleggs, we used to call 'em 'cause of their hair—proud and blind wi' hot temper till they take t' wrong turning in their hurry. It was so wi' her father. He'd been warned 'at t' mare 'ud throw him; but he knew better, and she set her foot on him when he was under her belly, and it killed him i' t' long-run. Then there's his brother, John——"

"Aye, there's Nancy's uncle," prompted Jagger when the old woman hesitated. He had been listening with a tolerance that was tinged with contempt yet not free from curiosity, and he now repeated the inquiry as grannie remained silent. "What ails Uncle John? He's done well enough, hasn't he?"

"I don't trust him, lad!" She shook her head solemnly and turned her dim eyes not to him but to the fire where she seemed to see portents that were slow to clothe themselves in words. "It's same wi' t' Cleggs as wi' t' Drakes; there's naught but mischief happens to them what leave t' moors. John was always under-hand; fair-looking as t' bog, and fair-spoken as a lass 'at wants a new gown; but shifty, lad, shifty. You may beware of a Clegg 'at leaves t' moor. There was his grandad——"

"Uncle John's got on all right, anyway," said Jagger, who knew that if the old lady once set out on the stream of reminiscence she would carry him along with her to wearisome lengths. "He's made money, and he's done us a good turn as well as Nancy and Baldwin; gives us double what we should get from t' bank."

"Maybe," she replied. "I know naught about it; but it's written in his fam'ly's fate 'at he'll come to mischief i' t' long run if he leaves t' moor."

"Well, if he does it won't bother us," said Jagger with a yawn. "Nancy settled that when she threw me overboard, and t' bit we have with him'll be wanted now. All t' same, grannie, I should like to swop places with Uncle John."

## CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH BALDWIN'S SCAFFOLDING GIVES WAY AND  
ALSO HIS RESERVE

“BREATHES there a man with soul so dead—?” You would have said that even Baldwin's dank soul must have fired as he left the Tarn road and struck across the moor to Walker's farm. Inman, who walked uncomfortably beside him, accommodating his long strides to the other's nervous steps, felt the thrill of the morning in his veins if not in his soul and would have liked to quicken the pace and enliven the solitude with a whistled melody. As it was, the keen November wind was left to do the whistling, with the long bent grass for its pipe, and it did it so tunefully that Inman remarked upon it.

“The bag-pipes are busy this morning,” he said.

The pepper-coloured tufts on Mr. Briggs' eyebrows almost touched, as he turned uncomprehending eyes on his companion's face, and the look was easy of interpretation. Inman knew that his master thought him a fool and was therefore prepared for the reply:

“I suppose you know what you're talking about; I don't.”

The tone was so cold that Inman thought it best to be silent. He therefore shifted his bass to the other shoulder and made no further attempt at conversation. Nine out of ten moormen are influenced more or less consciously by the moor's moods, and frequently reflect them—Baldwin was the tenth man, impervious to such spiritual currents by reason of his brass-bound soul as was horny-hided Siegfried to the thrust of his enemies. They covered the remaining distance like mutes, Baldwin with his eyes on the ground, and Inman sweeping the waste with a careless glance until they reached the farm where new buildings awaited their labour.

Inman dropped his tools and looked critically at the scaffolding.

“Did Drake fix them sticks?” he asked. “They aren't safe.”

Baldwin's anger blazed out immediately. The structure had been erected since Jagger left, and his own judgment told him that it was faulty. The poles were thinnings of sycamore which had been lying about on the farm and had seemed good enough for the purpose, though in reality they were much too brittle. Inman's quick eyes had detected evidences of this; but Baldwin was not to be instructed by a stranger. It was for him to decide whether the erection was safe or not, and he said so in language overcharged with emphasis, bidding Inman doff his coat and get to work without more ado.

For a moment Inman hesitated, then without a word took off his coat, rolled up

his short sleeves and mounted the ladder. Before his master could climb up and stand beside him he had tested the plank with his foot and formed his conclusions, but what they were not even a movement of his shoulders made known, and he picked up his tools and began to work.

For a while Baldwin did little more than watch him; and though he had schooled himself in the art of concealing his satisfaction those who knew him would have judged by the way he at length turned to his own task that he was well pleased with the skill and industry of his new hand. Inman needed no instruction and no prodding. Jagger Drake himself was not more skilful and was incomparably slower. The master had to acknowledge to himself that no man he had ever employed had framed so well on such short acquaintance as this mysterious newcomer from nowhere; and he experienced a sense of relief that he was careful not to communicate by any relaxation of tone or feature to the man whose whole attention seemed to be centred on his work.

Inman guessed what was passing in the other's mind; and though he controlled his features as carefully as Baldwin himself, he was in reality in a state of tension regarding the stability of the structure on which they were standing; but all went well until the afternoon when on a sudden heavy movement of the master the far pole gave way.

Inman acted with the promptitude of a man who had formed his plans long before. Baldwin had been unable to repress a sharp exclamation of alarm as he felt the plank incline beneath his feet, and his fingers opened involuntarily but found nothing to clutch and he must inevitably have fallen to the ground if the collar of his coat had not been seized in a strong grip.

"I have you! Keep still!" Inman's calm voice said; and Baldwin felt himself being swayed towards the near pole which was still standing. Inman's strength was marvellous. He was grasping the newly-erected water-duct with his left hand and resting his feet against the sloping board. The dead weight of Baldwin's body caused the sharp edge of the woodwork to cut deep into the flesh but he was scarcely conscious of pain as he swung his master towards the pole.

"Get your legs round it," he said.

The noise of the fallen ladder and scaffolding had brought out the inmates of the farm and Baldwin was helped to the ground, whereupon Inman lowered himself down without assistance, and Baldwin caught sight of the bleeding hand.

"Best have that bathed and bandaged," he said; and the women took him indoors.

Work for that day was finished, and the two men by and by walked back

together, Inman's damaged hand hidden in the pocket of his coat. They had gone some distance before Baldwin spoke, and the gruff words came reluctantly as if pushed from behind by some more generous prompter.

"It might ha' been a nasty fall if you hadn't grabbed my coat. I'll say one thing for you—you've nerve and strength."

Inman, who was thinking in his heart that he would as soon have wrung the miserable old fellow's neck, replied carelessly that he was glad that he had saved him from accident and that it would be as well if he was allowed to see to the scaffolding in future.

This reminder brought a scowl on to the master's face and a harder note into his voice.

"If Jagger'd ha' been there—but Abe Thompson's feet aren't big enough for Jagger's shoes. It was him 'at said there was tackling enough on t' spot without sending any up. Did I read i' yon papers o' yours 'at you've had a foreman's job?"

"I was foreman at Marshall's for four years," he replied. "When I left I was under-manager."

"Then why the devil did you seek a job with me?" Baldwin burst out. "There's no under-managers wanted i' my concern, and not likely to be. I'm not one to pay men fancy wages for walking about wi' their hands in their pockets. I can manage my own business, young man."

"So I've observed," Inman replied—and though there was not the slightest inflection of sarcasm, Baldwin shot a suspicious and half-angry glance at the man's face. "I'm not seeking any other job but what I've got."

"You're seeking something, or you wouldn't have signed on with a little man like me," growled Baldwin. "If I'm not one o' your smart town folk I don't go about wi' my eyes full o' sawdust, and there's something behind all this 'at I should be better pleased if I knew of."

"Then I'll tell you," said Inman coolly. "It isn't a thing I could mention when I asked you to give me a job, but there's no reason why I should keep it secret from you now, Mr. Briggs. I met Miss Nancy when she was staying with her uncle a week or two ago—I've known Mr. John Clegg off and on since I was a lad—and I asked her to marry me. You'll very likely say I was over hasty; but I'm a man who knows his own mind, and bad to shake off when I've set my heart on a thing. Now, you can put two and two together."

Baldwin's brain worked slowly, as has been said; but it was capable of spurts of activity, and it had been speeding about whilst Inman was making his confession, gathering together these strange occurrences and the thoughts they gave rise to and



putting them on the scales of his judgment to determine whether or no the weight was to his advantage. From force of habit as well as policy the scowl deepened on his brow as he replied:

“Putting two and two together isn’t all t’ sum. You’ve said naught about how Nancy looks at it, and that may make a deal o’ difference.”

“Miss Nancy was taken by surprise,” Inman answered. “She wasn’t used to my blunt ways and—well, she gave me no encouragement.”

“And though she gave you ‘No’ for an answer, you followed her here on t’ off-chance ’at she’d change her mind, if she saw more of you?”

“I usually get what I set my mind on,” Inman answered, so calmly that Baldwin turned his eyes upon him in amazement at the note of assurance. “She knows I shan’t plague her; if she becomes my wife it’ll be of her own free will; and I’m willing to take my chance.”

He smiled as he completed the sentence, and the look and tone of assurance kindled Baldwin’s wrath.

“I’ve a good mind to send you about your business,” he stormed, peppering the declaration with the hottest words in his vocabulary. “You’re the coolest devil I ever came across, and I’d as lief have old Nick himself in the place. If Nancy has said ‘No’——”

Inman laid his hand on the other’s arm and spoke more sternly though even yet with studied restraint.

“Listen, Mr. Briggs! If you sack me I shall find a job somewhere about——”

“It won’t be wi’ Drake’s, that’s certain,” broke in Baldwin hotly, “Jagger’ll none be keen on finding a job for a rival; and who else is there, nearer nor Scaleber?”

“We needn’t discuss it, Mr. Briggs,” Inman replied. “I’m more likely to want to put a spoke in Jagger Drake’s wheel than to help him to put one in yours. You’ve seen enough to know that I can take Jagger’s place, and you’ve nobody else that can; and seeing that I’ve promised not to molest Miss Nancy what harm will there be in keeping me on?”

The cunningly-designed argument left Baldwin without an answer, and the milder tone in Inman’s voice served to modify him. After all, as he said to himself, Nancy was her own mistress and had for some time past shown an independence of spirit that had been anything but welcome. Now that Jagger had set up in opposition there was no reason why he should lose the services of the one man who could help to checkmate the Drakes’ move—indeed self-interest pointed in the opposite direction. He therefore said:

“When a man’s been Nancy’s guardian it’s naught but right he should think of her

interests. But what you say seems right enough, and I'll take to it 'at I could like to scotch this new scheme o' Maniwel's. It's true 'at I haven't a man i' t' shop, bar, happen you, 'at can take Jagger's place; and you're a man with a head on. I must think it over; or else I had been going to say 'at I'd make you foreman."

"That's as you think fit," replied Inman. "I shouldn't care, of course, to take my orders from anyone but you; but you must please yourself. As, for these Drakes—two heads are better than one and naught 'ud give me more pleasure than to scheme against 'em."

Baldwin concentrated his thoughts on the subject, and Inman knew better than to attempt to pursue his advantage. At length the master spoke:

"I see naught gained by sleeping on it. It's all one to me who Nancy marries and I'm not likely to be consulted; but it 'ud go again' t' grain to have her marry Jagger. That being so there's no reason why I should put my finger in your pie, to say naught about my owing you something for this morning's do. T' foreman's job's waiting, and you can have it if you've a mind."

A smile crossed Inman's lips; but Baldwin did not see it, and he was gratified by the thanks the young man offered and even more by the brisk inquiry that followed:

"And now, Mr. Briggs, let us turn to these Drakes. Running 'em to earth is a sport just to my liking. I suppose they've no money?"

"Maniwel'll have a bit wi' John Clegg," replied Baldwin, "unless he's had to draw it out, which I hardly think he will ha' done. There'll be a toathri hundred pound there, I fancy."

"But why with John Clegg?" inquired Inman, bending puzzled brows upon his master.

"Well, you see,"—now that Inman was fellow-conspirator, Mr. Briggs was willing to indulge him with an explanation—"Tom Clegg, who had t' business before me, always banked with his brother John, and it was through him that Maniwel and me got a chance to put our bits o' savings in with him. John could find use for brass in his business, and pay five per cent., which was a deal better than t'other banks 'ud do. So I've always banked with him, same as Tom did; and I feel sure Maniwel'll have a bit lying there."

Inman became thoughtful, and beyond saying "I see," made no remark for some minutes. He was wondering how he could ascertain if Nancy's money was also in her uncle's keeping without arousing suspicion of his motives when Baldwin answered the unspoken question.

"It's a funny thing 'at t' only one 'at doesn't fairly trust John is his own niece. Nancy doesn't believe in having all her eggs in one basket, and them 'at's been laid

since her father died she banks i' Keepton, where she just gets half t' interest her uncle 'ud pay her. But women haven't much business about 'em and it's her own look-out and not mine."

"That's so," Inman agreed absently. He was relieved to find that Nancy had so much sense, and was undecided what course his own interests should lead him to pursue in continuing the conversation.

"Can Drake get the money at short notice?" he asked.

"Nay, he'll have to give him six months. Of course, I've a different arrangement, and he sends me bankers' drafts to pay my accounts with; but even I couldn't draw t' lump out under six months, so it's certain Maniwel can't."

Again Inman was silent for a space, thinking hard.

"I don't know but what Miss Nancy's right," he said with unusual hesitation. "John Clegg isn't a banker, though he calls himself one—he's a moneylender." He looked inquiringly into Baldwin's face but saw no look of concern or suspicion there; and the voice was indifferent enough that replied:

"I caren't what he is. He went off o' t' moor and made his way i' t' town. Tom put his trust in him, and for twenty years he's never let us down. He calls himself a banker, and he pays five per cent. on wer brass, and that's good enough for me. Whether Maniwel knows he's i' t' Jew line or no, I can't say; but his brass is as safe as houses."

A comment rose to Inman's lips but he checked it there, and remained silent so long that Baldwin looked up suspiciously.

"You seem to have something up your sleeve," he said. He had surrounded himself so long with an atmosphere of distrust that he was as sensitive to the moods of those about him as a spider to the vibrations of its web.

"I was wondering if there was any way of keeping the Drakes' money back," he replied readily, but in a thoughtful tone. "Lack of capital'll hamper 'em, you see. I've only seen this Maniwel's face once, but I guess he's not the man to plunge much. I mean he's not likely to get far into debt."

"He's t' last i' t' world," admitted Baldwin, appeased at once by this evidence of his companion's discrimination.

"I don't see at this minute how it's to be managed," continued Inman, "but it'll come to me. There's always ways and means for those who're prompt to handle 'em. All we've got to do is to bide our time, and as you say, keep the sawdust out of our eyes."

They had reached the shop by this time and the subject was necessarily dropped; but Inman remained thoughtful during the remainder of the day, and paid

no attention to the rough handling the other man received, and especially the incompetent Abe, at the hands of the master.

## CHAPTER VII

### IN WHICH NANCY SPEAKS HER MIND

ALTHOUGH Keturah had been up and busy for the better part of two hours, and Nancy was in the habit of rising at the same time and taking a subordinate share in such household duties as the older woman's methodical housewifery allocated to the period before breakfast, the girl still lay in bed with her eyes wide open and her arms behind her head, and listened unmoved to the clatter downstairs, the increasing volume of which told her quite plainly that mistress Keturah was in a bad temper. The result of the ebullition she could have foretold with accuracy; and she smiled as it occurred to her that in similar circumstances, if she had been living in a city like Airlee, she could have found a café within a hundred yards of her home which would have spared her the trouble of preparing a meal for herself. That everything would be cleared away, and the kettle cold upon its iron stand when she should presently appear in the kitchen was as certain as the tides.

The thought amused her, but set no machinery in motion save that of the brain which, indeed had been running for some time. For a few minutes Nancy let her mind contrast the conditions of town and country life. At her uncle's a maid had brought her an early cup of tea at an hour when in Mawm the breakfast things had all been washed up and put away; and had drawn back the curtains, perhaps in order that the sight of bricks and chimney-pots through a smoke-laden atmosphere might beget a desire to rise and escape. To Nancy that "early" cup was just softness and a nuisance, not to be compared with the breezes that blew straight from the moors upon her bed, through the window which was never closed except when northerly gales drove rain before them.

From the maid Nancy turned her thoughts to the master, and admitted to herself, not for the first time, that she would have liked Uncle John better if he had held up his head and looked at people like a man, instead of glancing at them sideways with the look of a dog that has been in mischief and is afraid somebody knows. His own daughter, her cousin Ellen, said he was a "screw"; but Nancy saw no signs of that characteristic in the home; and he had always seemed fond of her and treated her as generously as could be expected of a man of his type. Still there was something—and because of that indefinable something Nancy banked her profits in Keepton, and allowed her uncle—who was too deeply absorbed in his own affairs to trouble himself about hers—to think she was as extravagant as her cousin. Aunt Eleanor, on the other hand, was a downright nice woman, with only one fault worth speaking of, and which she had transmitted to her daughter—that she looked upon country

places as “holes,” and upon Mawm as the least endurable of them all. Aunt and cousin were towns-women through and through, and the latter had certain superficialities of education that Nancy lacked and despised; but though they had money, “society” closed its doors to them, and their friends were all of the lower middle classes from which both parents had sprung and to which by every right save that of money they still belonged. That was how she had made the acquaintance of Inman, with whose mother Uncle John had lodged when he began business for himself, and whom the so-called “banker” held in high esteem as a young fellow who knew how to use his elbows in “pushing along.”

She was stopping in bed to think about Inman and to try to determine what her relations with him in these new circumstances were to be; where too she must place him in her scale of values. Apart from his rough wooing and the complacency with which he took its rejection she had nothing against the man; there was, indeed, something in his sturdy independence and almost impudent conceit that appealed to her moorwoman’s spirit; though her lips curled scornfully as she recalled the air of calm certainty with which on two occasions—once in Airlee and again on the night of his arrival in the village—he had received her cold refusal. It was evident enough that he thought he had only to wait, and the bird would be found in the snare. Would it! The curl on the girl’s lips straightened into a thin line of defiance at the mental suggestion. It would have paid the man, she said to herself, to be a little less cocksure, and a little more humble; to have given the leaven time to work instead of wanting to bake his cake and eat it within five minutes. Then, perhaps—

That was a greater concession than she had made before; and it startled her to discover how far and how quickly she had advanced since her last interview with Jagger. Jagger was in disgrace. He had developed a quite unaccountable stubbornness that she was determined to punish, and she quite forgot in her vexation how often she had called him a “lad in leading-strings,” and bidden him shake a loose leg. Nancy’s objection to leading-strings did not extend to those she held in her own hands.

And yet, if Jagger was a rebel, Inman was a despot whose whole bearing showed that he would break his neck sooner than bend it to any woman’s yoke; why then did she turn her thoughts to him with a more favourable inclination? Is it that after all, woman likes to be mastered, and is flattered by the attentions of a masterful man who promises her nothing but his name, and who, when he has fulfilled that promise will expect her to be content with such poor crumbs of attention as he can spare from his dogs? Or is it that her almost unconquerable spirit matches itself against man’s obstinacy and believes it can make it yield?

Although Nancy told herself with suspicious reiteration that Inman was obnoxious to her it was in reality an evil hour for Jagger's prospects of early marriage when Nancy set the two men side by side and took their measures. On the physical side there was not much to choose. Jagger was as fine an animal as Inman; more agile if less weighty—"the spotted panther and the tusked boar" might figure them. Intellectually, the balance swayed heavily on Inman's side, for Jagger had none of his father's alertness and would have made a poor show in a duel of words with the towns-man. Inman's mind was quick and had been well sharpened in debate; John Clegg had intimated that his name was known in certain political circles in Yorkshire as that of a man who might have to be reckoned with by and by when he had made money enough to be listened to with respect. As to the other branch of the spiritual; the branch that deals with morals and the soul; Nancy left that out of account altogether as people mostly do, forgetting that the kernel is of more importance than the shell.

Only once did the scale swing over to Jagger's side and that was when Nancy weighted it with considerations that she did not recognise as spiritual when she put into it Jagger's love for the moors, and, all that the moors stood for—for freedom and wild beauty and the joy of life; and his love for herself, which was of the same order; deep and unchangeable. She was so accustomed to all this that she perhaps failed to notice how heavily the scale banged.

At length she rose and dressed, spending more time than usual over her toilet because her thoughts refused to clothe themselves satisfactorily; and she was in an unsettled frame of mind when she went downstairs.

Keturah was kneading bread, and much more vigorously than the process required, when Nancy entered the kitchen. One sullen glance of inquiry she flung over her shoulders, and seeing neither illness nor penitence in the girl's expression tightened her lips.

She was an elderly sharp-featured woman, rather tall and spare, with hair that had grown thin and scanty and was twisted into a bunch not much bigger than a walnut at the back of her head. It was pepper-coloured, like her brother's, but of a warmer tint, as if damp had got to it, which was not improbable seeing that the reservoir that supplied the tears which self-pity always called forth must have been very near to her eyes. They were dry enough now because vexation was choking the ducts.

"I'd forgotten it was baking-day," said Nancy, as she lifted the lid of the kettle and peeped inside, "but I had a bad night and wasn't rested."

Silence greeted the explanation, and Nancy said no more but proceeded to

prepare her breakfast.

“Where’s the butter?” she asked, as she returned from the larder with a half loaf and the empty dish in her hand.

“I can’t help it if it’s finished,” Keturah snapped. “One pair o’ hands can’t get a man his breakfast, and put him up his dinner, and be off down t’ road for butter and get bread into t’ bowl so as it can be rising all in a minute. You should ha’ seen we were short o’ butter last night, i’stead o’ bending over fancy work, same as you’d naught to do but ring t’ bell and there’d be a toathri servant lassies to come and put you a cob on t’ fire. You mud well have a poor night, and naught but right too, making a slavey of one ’at’s nearhand old enough to be your gran’mother, and then expecting me to be running errands like a six-year-old, while you lie i’ bed and rest yourself.”

What had begun as a snap ended as a wail; but Nancy was unmoved.

“Well, you’ve salted the bread already I suppose,” she returned coolly; “and you’ll not improve the dough by crying over it. Dry toast’ll do for me nicely, for there’s a bit of dripping with the ham, I see, and I’d as soon have it cold as not.”

“I’ll warrant you!” said Keturah, with a note of disappointment added to that of vexation. “If there’s a bit o’ something tasty hidden away you’ll nose it out like a dog with a bone. I’d meant that mouthful o’ ham for my own supper, for it’s little enough support I get ’at has all t’ weight o’ t’ house on my shoulders. But it’s t’ way o’ t’ world; them ’at work their fingers to t’ bone for fine ladies must be content to lick t’ dish out for their share o’ t’ pudding.”

“It’s the rule of the house, isn’t it?” replied Nancy indifferently. “Catch as catch can.’ You should bury your bones deeper, Keturah, if you don’t want ’em to be found.”

The woman flashed into temper; but her spirit was too moist to fire and the spark ended in a sizzle.

“You’ve been that aggravating, Nancy, since you came back from your uncle’s I could find it i’ my heart to box your ears. But well you know I’m past it, and I was always too soft wi’ you when you were a child. Many and many’s the time I’ve screened and petted you, when a good hiding ’ud ha’ been a better kindness, and I’m rightly served for acting silly. I might ha’ known that there is them that bites the hand that strokes ’em.”

The pathos in the metaphor opened the water-gates and made it necessary for Keturah to pass the rolled-up sleeve of her blouse across her eyes; but Nancy was not melted by the exhibition; on the contrary, her tone was distinctly cold and superior.



“You’re forgetting yourself, Keturah, and I’ll thank you not to talk about boxing my ears as if I was a child. I’m my own mistress and I intend to be, and if you don’t like it, you’ve only to say so, and I’ll find other quarters where my money’ll perhaps be more acceptable, and there’ll be less spite and malice dished up instead of breakfast.”

With these words, the water having boiled by this time, Nancy seated herself at the table in the window and began to eat, turning her back upon Keturah, who sighed heavily as she set the baking bowl on a stool in front of the fire. The tears hung in her eyes, however, for whatever her faults, Keturah was admittedly economical, and there was no sense in allowing tears to run to waste, especially as Nancy would be sure to assume that they were flowing.

The atmosphere remained heavy and humid throughout the day, though Nancy caught up with her work (which was never very exacting) long before noon, and might have been considered to have atoned for her morning lapse. On her way home with the butter towards tea-time she caught sight of Baldwin and Maniwel standing together in the street, and guessed from their manner that relations were strained. After a while Baldwin entered the kitchen and having hung his hat on the peg, kicked a small stool which had the temerity to stand in his way into a corner, and seated himself at the table with a scowl on his face that was as threatening as a thundercloud.

“So you’ve managed to get down, have you?” he growled, as he turned his weasel eyes on Nancy who was buttering bread.

“I’ve been down an hour or two,” she replied with studied indifference; “just long enough to get the dust out of my eyes.”

“It was nigh on ten before she landed,” Keturah explained, exaggerating the hour by something like forty minutes. “What we’re coming to I dursn’t think, but it’s plain to see who’s missus and who’s maid——”

Nancy dropped the knife and faced them both with flashing eyes.

“If it’s the maid you expect me to be then I hand in my notice,” she said scornfully. “As to being missus, it isn’t of *this* house I’d want the job, anyway. I’m neither missus nor maid I’d have you to know, but a lodger; and a lodger who pays well, as you don’t need to be told; and I don’t know that lodgers have to be at the beck and call of them they pay. You’ve only to say another word and I’ll leave to-morrow—they’d be glad enough to have me at Uncle John’s. I’m sick to death of your snappiness and bad temper, and you may as well know it.”

Keturah had lifted her apron to her eyes, cowed by this display of hot resolution which was much fiercer than anything that had preceded it; and Baldwin pushed

back his chair and stamped his foot.

“Have done, will you!” he shouted. “Do you think I care if you take yourself to blazes this minute, and your brass with you? Am I fast, think you, for t’ few shillings a week you seem to think keeps t’ house going——?”

“Of course you’re not,” Nancy broke in with a cold disdain that lashed like a whip, “but you make a profit on them, and you’d sooner lose a tooth than lose money. You’ve stung me into saying this. I’ve held myself in till I’ve nearly choked, but I’ve stood your sneers and nasty talk as long as I’m going to. You quarrel with a man like Maniwel, and because you can’t get the best of him you come home and try to take it out of me. I’m not having any more—Good Heavens! Why should I? Here! you can butter the bread for yourself!”

She pushed the loaf towards the angry man and crossed over to the rug, where she leaned her head against the mantelpiece, and Baldwin’s anger bubbled up so furiously that at first he could only splutter out a succession of oaths. Then he said:

“But what can you expect?”—he was apparently directing the inquiry to Keturah, but his eyes were on Nancy’s averted head. “She’s like to side wi’ Maniwel, seeing ’at he’s Jagger’s father! Aye, even though he’s taking bite and sup out of her mouth. Isn’t her interests and mine t’ same? What ’ud John Clegg think to a man ’at reckons he’s fain to wed a lass, and at t’ same time sets up to rob her of her business...?”

“What would he think of a master who sacked his best man rather than pay him a fair wage?” she asked, wheeling round and speaking hotly. “Who was it forced him to begin for himself? You wind the clock up and then blame it for going!”

“If I sacked my best man I found a better,” he answered, somewhat discomfited by the logic of the attack. “Inman’s worth six of Jagger.”

“Then what are you grumbling about?” she replied still fiercely. “What harm can Jagger do you with a non-such like Inman to help you? But whether he hurts you or he doesn’t I’m not going to be the ash-heap where you throw all your nasty tempers, and you may as well make your mind up to it.”

“But you can’t deny, Nancy, ’at you’ve been same as a dog with a sore tail ever since Jagger left,” pleaded Keturah whose idea of storms fell short of whirlwinds, and who, like many another nagging woman was a coward at heart. “I’m sure there’s been no living with you, you’ve been that contrary.”

“Then we’d better part,” rejoined Nancy, “and that’ll maybe suit us all.”

Hereupon Baldwin growled a suggestion that instead of clacking like a couple of condemned hens it would be advisable to get on with the tea. Although his brain worked slowly it worked accurately along a certain brass-lined groove, and he had

already repented of his attack on Nancy, with whom it was not policy to quarrel beyond remedy. The girl, however, was not so easily appeased.

“I can have mine when you’ve finished,” she said, “then foul looks won’t turn the milk sour.”

“And that’ll be making work,” protested Keturah, “or anyway it’ll be spreading it out. Draw your chair up and take no notice of Baldwin. You ought to know by this time ’at he’s either to uncork his-self or burst, same as other men.”

“I’m going to uncork *myself*,” said Nancy with a fierceness that surprised herself and which was the outcome of her own disturbed mind. “Father might have guessed if he’d looked at your faces what a life you’d lead me between you, and what a life you would have led me if it hadn’t been for my money-bags. But you knew how to use the oil-can when he was alive, and he’d too much to bear to think things out for himself or he’d have put Maniwel in your place. Oh, yes he would——” she continued, as Baldwin’s face grew red and his hands tightened on the arms of his chair—“I’ve thought it many a thousand times same as all t’ rest o’ t’ village, and I may as well let it come out. You have to uncork yourself, have you, or else burst? Well, you can see how you like other folk to uncork *themselves*!”

Keturah was standing horrified, but sundry soliloquies such as “Eh, dear, dear!” “Now, hark to t’ lass!” “If this doesn’t beat all!” showed that her breath had not been altogether lost, whereas anger had momentarily paralysed Baldwin’s tongue. When he recovered himself he rose, and seizing Nancy roughly by the shoulder pushed her towards the door.

“Outside wi’ you!” he shouted, and the oaths he poured out called forth a protest even from his sister whose “Nay, for shame, Baldwin!” fell on deaf ears. “Way wi’ you to Maniwel, you ungrateful——” But why continue to string together the coarse language that made Keturah hold her apron to her ears and caused Nancy to wrench herself free and wheel round upon him with a face that was white but strangely composed.

“That’ll do, Baldwin Briggs,” she said. “This house is mine, not yours, and if anyone goes it’ll not be me. You’d perhaps forgotten that, same as I had. You’ve had the use of it so long that you’d come to think it was yours. I said I was your lodger, but it’s *you* who’re lodgers, and I’ll leave when it suits me. You’d best get your teas, if you can eat any. I want none. Maybe we shall all have cooled by morning.”

With these words she crossed the room and went upstairs; and Baldwin and Keturah looked at each other, and finding nothing to say turned to the table and made a sorry meal.

## CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH NANCY QUESTIONS HER HEART AND  
MANIWEL QUESTIONS HIS SON

**A**LAS! for Nancy. Heroics, she discovered, were all very well in their way, but they were only the husks of satisfaction, containing nourishment for neither body nor soul, and leaving behind them a bitter task and the beginnings of a headache. And though to retire to one's room some five hours before the usual time might be a picturesque way of registering a protest it was one that reacted awkwardly on the protestor, obliging her to fast when hungry, and (for lack of a candle) to company with darkness; the only alternative being to swallow her pride and return for supplies. Rather than eat so nauseous a dish of humble pie Nancy preferred to treat herself as a prisoner, and she flung up the window and let the cold night air blow upon her hot cheeks as she sat there, resting her elbows on the sill.

The breath of the uplands is tonic at all times; but on the wild moors of Mawm when winter grips the Pennines and forges its weapons of offence on the rocky heights, the tonic is that of iron and steel, a tonic that spurs and goads. "According to its quality and temperature air hath an effect on manners," the old physiologists affirmed, "and that of mountains is a potent predisposer to rebellion." We have let the theory die; but these forefathers of our scientists were no fools, and we find the proof of their hypothesis in the high places of the land, where rebels are bred and flourish. Nancy may have cooled as she sat there, watching the stars light their lamps in the black sky; but the cooling was that of iron that has been bent to a purpose and is no longer malleable.

For half an hour she never changed her position, and was unconscious that her elbows were sore from the pressure of her weight upon the window-frame; but even when she saw that a splinter had pierced the flesh and drawn blood she scarcely moved, being too busy with her thoughts to concern herself with trifles.

The house and the shop to which it was attached, were hers, though Baldwin rented them, and the sum was included in the payment she received once a year; if she were married she would live there and Baldwin might find other quarters. If she were married a great many problems would solve themselves automatically, therefore, obviously, the one thing to do was to marry.

It was significant that in this crisis Inman was banished from her mind and Jagger occupied all her thoughts. If her head busied itself with speculations now and then, her heart told her that it was Jagger whom she loved, and Jagger had only been waiting until his prospects were brighter and his savings more considerable. He

would see the matter from her point of view, and if he was a little stupid at first she would easily talk him round. Nancy, it will be seen, like most women who have experimented in love, was not disposed to under-estimate her powers; and her plan of campaign took no account of opposition. In drafting it she forgot hunger and headache and became mildly exhilarated. Jagger and she would marry as soon as possible, and Baldwin would be made to understand that in his own interests something in the nature of a partnership with her husband would have to be arranged. Baldwin would be awkward but no more awkward than she; and there was always Uncle John in the background—a reserve force that she did not doubt could be used on her side in an emergency.

It all looked very simple and easy of execution as she ran a mental eye over it when completed—all light and no shade, like an architect's ground-plan; and she put it aside and began upon the details with the satisfaction of a resolute woman who has no doubt of her ability to get her own way.

The first thing was to see Jagger and unfold the scheme, but she could scarcely go down to the cottage and spread it out in the presence of Maniwel and Hannah. No girl, however unconventional and business-like would propose marriage to the most willing of lovers in the presence of witnesses. She would contrive a meeting on the morrow, and make her peace with Jagger, admitting that she had been too precipitate, and wheedling him into a similar admission, after which she would have a straight talk with Baldwin and lay down her terms.

A noise in the workshop, which was on the same level as her room and divided from it only by a thick wall, ceased at this moment and the cessation of sound made her conscious for the first time that it had existed. She knew that Inman was leaving work, for nobody but Baldwin and he put in any overtime, and it brought a smile to her face to realise how completely she had forgotten him. A moment later she heard his voice in the street below.

“Going home, are you? It's a lonely road in the dark. I'll step along with you, part way.”

“Lord! I aren't afraid o' the dark, Mr. Inman,” a voice that Nancy recognised as belonging to Swithin's granddaughter replied with a giggle.

“What if bargest snaps at you, Polly?” he suggested. “There's no moon, and he may be on the moor.”

“How you talk!” she replied, but the voice was fainter, and Nancy knew they were walking away together; and she turned with a smile on her lips and began to undress.

“All the better!” she muttered. “James Inman doesn't come into the play.”

When she got into bed she was quite composed, even though the painful throbbing of her head for some time drove sleep away. She was very much in love with herself and her scheme, and physical discomfort counted for little. When at length she lost consciousness, though the wind rose and blew through the open window with such force as to disorder the room, she slept soundly until morning.

Meantime in the cottage by the stream, Maniwel and Jagger had also been busy with their plans. The father's description of his encounter with Baldwin had roused the son's wrath.

"He's a low lot," he said savagely; "a dirty, under-handed cad 'at's doing all he can to block t' road for us. It takes me all my time to keep my fingers off him; and yon Inman's just such another, if he isn't t' worst o' t' two."

"Let 'em be, lad," said his father calmly, "Baldwin snarls and snaps; but his tantrums go over me same as a dull plane on a greasy board. But it's different wi' you and Nancy, and I'm afraid there's a gap there that'll bide a bit o' bridging. By what Baldwin let slip she's badly huffed wi' you and me over our new shop; and a lass like Nancy'll suck a humbug o' that sort a long time before she swallows it."

"All t' better for her," said Hannah as her brother's face became moody; "it'll save it from sticking in her throat. You just sit tight, Jagger, and let her go on sucking. T' longer she sucks t' smaller it'll get, and t' more used she'll get to t' taste."

"You hold your noise, Hannah," her father interposed good humouredly. "I'd as soon trust t' ferret to settle what's best for t' rabbit as one lass for another. I'm thinking you were a bit too blunt wi' Nancy, lad, when she came in that night."

"I told her straight, if that's what you mean," replied Jagger promptly. "I thought t' straight road was what you favoured."

"So it is," returned his father caustically, "but t' straight road isn't always t' shortest, and when you're dealing wi' a lass like Nancy, 'at's got a will of her own and is as bad to move as Balaam's donkey when she sets herself, t' longest way round might be t' shortest way home. Eh, lad! I could like to do your courting for you for an odd hour or so."

Jagger smiled. "She'll come round, you'll see. I know what she has to stand from Baldwin,—aye, and Keturah, too. They'll put kindling under her till she boils over, now 'at she scarcely puts her nose out o' doors; mark my words, if they don't."

"What about Christmas?" inquired Hannah. "If she misses coming to tea it'll be t' first time since her father died. It wants short o' three weeks, so you've got to look handy if you bring her round."

"Now, what say you, lad?" continued his father; and though the tone was

whimsical it was also half serious. “Am I to do a bit o’ courting for you? All Nancy wants is t’ smooth plane on her and I fancy I could manage it.”

“I’d like to see my lad’s father come a-courting me,” said Hannah. “I’d take t’ yard brush to t’ pair of ’em——”

“Shut up, Hannah!” said Jagger impatiently, as he turned his eyes on his father. “What would you say to Nancy if it was you?”

“It isn’t what I’d say, but t’ way I’d say it. T’ same helm ’at sends t’ ship on to t’ rocks ’ud steer it into deep water. But I’m only plaguing you, lad. Hannah’s right enough; you’ll have to fend for yourself.”

“If she talks till she’s black in t’ face,” said Jagger sullenly, “she’ll not get me to give t’ shop up and go back to Baldwin.”

“Well, I wouldn’t be in a hurry to tell her so,” returned his father, “or she’ll happen think t’ new hobby-horse has put you out o’ love wi’ t’ old doll.”

Grannie had been silent all this time but now her voice broke in:

“A Clegg lass,  
And a wedding for brass!  
A Clegg wife,  
And it’s sorrow or strife!”

“That’s a true word, Maniwel, and always has been, though it’s few lassies the Cleggs have bred; and they may thank the Lord for that, seeing as how the few they’ve had supped sorrow by t’ canful. You’ll not rec’lect Nancy’s aunt—nay it ’ud be her great-aunt....”

“No, but I know t’ tale, mother, and it’s time it was coffined. If there’s a spell on t’ Clegg lassies I could like Nancy to break it, and Jagger’s more sense than to be frightened out of his wits wi’ jingles. But we’ll put ’em all on one side, and just read a chapter out o’ t’ Book for a bit of a lightening, before we go to bed. When it comes to troubles there’s them in t’ Book could give us all a long start and catch up with us quick. Jagger ’ud stare if he’d Job’s troubles to hug.”

The Book was put away and grannie left them, but the father sat on long past his usual hour, and by and by Hannah yawned and rose up to turn the key in the lock of the outer door.

“Quakers’ meetings turn me sleepy,” she said; and wished them good-night.

Not until stillness overhead told him that Hannah was in bed did Maniwel speak. A man of sound sense and judgment, prompt to decide which road to take when two ways met, and impatient of “softness,” like most moorland folk, he was himself more emotional than any of his neighbours. The trait had been present, though not so

strongly marked, before the death of his wife, and had developed with the added responsibility her loss brought him; but it was really due to the mellowing influences of his religion—a religion he owed to an unschooled old shepherd who had spent a few months on the lonely farm where Maniwel's parents had been employed. His only debt to the man was for the seed he had dropped as he had gone about his work. There had been no set preparation of the ground, no tilling or forcing, and the crop that was eventually produced would probably have been regarded by the sower as full of tares, for Maniwel's creed was his own, and not something that had been standardised, like a plumber's fittings. He had found it in the Gospels and without reducing it to a formula had fashioned his life on it, to the dismay of his father and the distrust of his mother, both of whom were worthy people who looked upon religion as a kind of medicine that it was advisable to have within reach for times of serious sickness, but which was likely to upset the stomach, and indeed the whole course of life, if taken regularly as a cordial. Yet if religion is what Mr. Carlyle called it—the thing a man honestly believes in his heart—Maniwel's parents were not without it, for every superstition and old wife's tale that lingered on the moors found a place in their creed.

Maniwel's religion, then, was old enough to be new-fashioned, and therefore to be looked upon with misgiving by those who insisted on adherence to theological articles; but inasmuch as he kept up with his creed instead of hitching his wagon to a theoretical star, they were constrained to admit that he was a decent sort of chap, and a better guide and comforter than most when there was "a bit o' bother on."

His love for his two children was very deep, though that for his son was not unmixed with irritation at his sulkiness and want of stamina; conditions attributable, he told himself, to the circumstances that attended his birth and early up-bringing. He was concerned for him now, and with womanly clairvoyance could read something of both his mind and Nancy's.

"Jagger!" he said, and the tone roused the young man from his dreams and caused him to turn an almost startled look on his father. "I've stopped up to have a word wi' you when there's nobody else by. A mother 'ud manage a job o' this sort better than a man, but when the mother's wanting a man must do his best. I was young myself once and I've stood where you're standing. Your mother was all in all to me i' them days, lad; and if I'd missed her t' moor 'ud have become a wilderness. It's a question she'd have asked you—do you feel i' that way regarding Nancy?"

"Aye, God knows I do," replied Jagger with emphasis.

"You want to be mortal sure on't," continued his father. "If you love t' new business better than her—if you'd rather give her up than it—then you can afford to



lose her.... Nay, you'd better hearken and let me talk; it'll pay you better, if it isn't for me to say so. Baldwin threw out a hint—he tried to pull it back but it was too late—'at yon young fellow 'at's got your job is after her an' all; but if you care for each other as you think you do there's no 'casion to worry about that; there was more than me 'ud ha' liked your mother."

"I'll wring his neck for him yet," muttered Jagger savagely.

"Words, lad! Naught but words! It's that I don't like to hear i' you. If she favours Inman she'll wed him, and his neck'll be safe enough, so we'll let that pass. What I want you to be sure of is that she's the right lass for you; and if you're sure o' that then I want you to go the right way to get her."

Maniwel's eyes were shining with a tender light, and his face looked almost young again as the glow from the grate cast its reflection over it. He was leaning forward a little, searching his son's face and trying to catch the eyes that were bent downward.

"It's a fact what grannie says—though I've no patience with their silly rhymes, 'at stand for more than t' Bible wi' some folks—'at most o' t' Clegg women have sopped sorrow when they wed. It's a job when lassies are run after for their brass and not for theirselves, and that's what's happened wi' most o' t' Cleggs. When a man and a maid come together, lad, brass has to be thought on; but it's a poor foundation for a happy home. 'Love never faileth,' we read i' t' Book,—it stands like t' Cove; but brass fails oft enough, and so does fancy. Are you sure, lad? Are you sure?"

"Yes," he said hoarsely; "my love for Nancy'll stand like t' Cove; there's naught'll shake it."

The father gazed at him in silence, not yet satisfied, but wondering how far it was wise to go and bewailing his lack of woman's ready intuition.

He was not sure of Nancy—how should he be? But after all that was his son's affair and one it was ill to meddle with. If they loved each other with all their hearts he would wish them Godspeed in spite of all the doggerel in the witch-wives' collection.

"Then I'd go t' straight road wi' her, lad," he continued. "Make it in your way to see her before another day's out, and just tell her 'at you think more of her than of aught else there is i' t' wide world. As like as not she'll say 'at i' that case you'll do as she wants you and make friends wi' Baldwin; and all t' time it'll be you and not Baldwin she's thinking about, and if you'll only bide your time and look where you're going, you'll as like as not come back wi' your arm round her waist. But women has to be humoured and made to think 'at they're getting their own way; and

when they've got a whimsey i' their head it's no use taking t' hammer and punch to it, 'cause that only drives it deeper in; you've got t' use t' oil-can and loosen it bit by bit till they hardly know they've lost it. And i'stead o' bending your brows while you look like t' Gordel i' a thunderstorm it 'ud pay you to put a smile on, and a face like t' Cove when t' afternoon sun shines on it. 'Laugh and the world laughs with you,' it says on t' almanack, and t' worst gift your mother left wi' you—and, poor lass, she couldn't help it—was a long face and a quick temper. I'm afraid for you, Jagger, but I wish you well, lad; and I'm stumbling along t' road your mother 'ud ha' gone easy."

The young man looked steadily into his father's face, but the shadow was still deep on his forehead.

"Then if that's her last word you'd have me knuckle under to Baldwin, and be t' laughing stock o' t' country-side?" he asked in a low hard voice.

"If I loved her better than aught else i' t' world I'd be like t' man in t' parable 'at was seeking goodly pearls; I'd sell all 'at I had to get her," replied his father. "Mind you, lad, I'm straight wi' you; I don't think Baldwin'll have you back; but I daresay he'd like t' chance o' refusing you and glorying in it, for little minds take pleasure i' little things. But i' that case, you see, you'll ha' won your case wi' Nancy——"

"And if he's more sense than you give him credit for," interrupted Jagger, in a voice that had grown even more bitter; "if he knows which side his bread's buttered on, and takes me back with this Inman to be my boss, and the pair of 'em to force me to do their dirty work or else be called a thief, you'd have me swallow it?"

He set his teeth as he finished his inquiry, and kept his eyes fixed on his father's; but the older man was unmoved.

"There's nobody can force you to do dirty work," he said, "and if Nancy 'ud want you to do it, then t' pearl isn't worth t' price 'at's asked for it. But I'd like to think better o' t' lass. Her father was a queer 'un, but straight; and if you don't use t' file where you should use t' plane I think you'd smooth things out. If you can't—well, t' straight road is t' only right road. You may sell all you have to buy t' pearl, but you may neither borrow nor steal. Right's right, Sundays and week-days and t' year through."

Jagger removed his eyes and the tense look left his face. For a while he did not speak and the father was also silent. Then he said:

"I'll try to see her to-morrow. She'll be going to Betty Walker's and I can meet her as she comes down t' Cove road. But she's a temper of her own and I bet a dollar we fratch."

Something not unlike a sigh, but with a touch of impatience in it, escaped Maniwell's lips.

“If you meet her wi’ your prickles out you might as well stop at home,” he said. “Turn ’em inside so as they’ll check your tongue, and then you’ll maybe win through.”

## CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH ONE LOVER WALKS OUT AND ANOTHER  
WALKS IN

PURE is the air on Mawm moor, charged with the virtues of the sea and the strength of the hills! and pure are the streams that fill the runnels and tinkle their accompaniment to the music of the breeze as it sweeps the strings of bent grass and reed!

Good and desirable as these things are, however, Mawm can claim in their possession nothing extraordinary. There are other moors where the air is as heavily charged with life's elixir and the waters course as sweet and fresh.

But in the Cove, Mawm has something altogether unique; it has, as I have said, one of the most imposing natural wonders of the land. To picture it imagine yourself first on a wide stretch of moorland, hemmed in by mountains—a grassy moor, whose surface is scarred by great terraces of fissured limestone in whose crevices the winds and the birds have dropped seeds of ferns and flowers that peep above the tops and splash the scene with colour.

Imagine an impossible giant furnished with an impossible spade, standing on the edge of the moor where it begins to fall steeply down into the valley. He is a giant of the unrecorded past when impossible things happened; when frozen waters sundered continents and shattered mountains and scooped out valleys; when great rocks were hurled as if they had been shuttlecocks from peaks that seemed firm as the world's foundations, and embedded themselves on far distant slopes where they were alien to the soil.

It is a hollow, crescent-shaped spade on which our giant sets his foot, and he thrusts it vertically through the solid limestone, piling up the débris (soon to be covered with the short grass of the moors) on either side as he proceeds until instead of the green declivity you see a perpendicular cliff, little short of three hundred feet in height and nearly a quarter of a mile wide, dazzlingly white when the southern sun rests there; spectral in the colder moonlight.

From underneath its base the river emerges; the baby river, conceived nobody quite knows where on the wild heights above, and carried in that dark womb of nature until its birth at the foot of the Crag—a giant's child, itself destined to be a slave, whose lot it will be to bear to the sea the filth and off-scouring of factory and dye-house. That, however, is later history; our concern is with Meander; let the towns lower down account for Styx!

The face of the gigantic cliff has its seams and wrinkles, and at a point midway

rapidly-narrowing ledges run out from either side and paint streaks of green across the grey; but each tapers off and disappears long before the centre of the crescent is reached. On the western ledge a few dwarfed ash-plants have rooted themselves on the steeply-shelving soil, and their presence gives the illusion of breadth and inspires in the adventurer an entirely false sense of security. One tree stands within a foot or two of the ledge's vanishing-point; but few are the youths of Mawm who have ventured within many yards of it without self-reproach and prayer.

Save for the call of the jackdaw and other birds that nest in the crannies, and the faint puling of the stream, the Cove is quiet in winter-time as a cathedral cloister, and has something of the cathedral's air of mystery and awe. And when the sun is setting in a haze that betokens snow and frost, and a section of the white cliff borrows a warmer hue from the blood-red globe whose rays penetrate the western windows, the sense of reverence is heightened; and though a man may not bare his head as he stands there it is much if he does not lower his voice.

It was just after two o'clock when Nancy left the road at the point where it begins to fall, and having stood for a moment to watch the sun tripped down the slippery hillside to the foot of the Cove. It was an adventure to slide over the short grass, to cling to the slender boles of the stunted trees in order to check the pace or save herself from falling, but it was an adventure to which she was accustomed, and which involved no greater risk than that of a twisted ankle or a bruised knee; and with one as agile as Nancy there was little fear of either.

Her cheeks burned as she reached the bottom, and more hotly when Jagger walked forward and greeted her.

"I thought you'd be at Betty's," he said, "and guessed you'd come this way."

He was the answer to her thoughts—one might say to her prayers; the embodiment of the image she had been carrying with her all the afternoon; the substance of her hopes and fears.

Very strong and masculine and altogether desirable he looked as he stood there, though his clothes were well worn and the collar he had put on for the occasion of Saturday was badly frayed. An uneasy smile was on his face, and his hands played awkwardly with the stick they held; but Nancy knew by intuition that he had come to make his peace, and her heart bounded; yet the perverse adviser who is the instrument of our worse selves, bade her harden her voice and hold back the answering smile which had almost escaped control. She had been rehearsing the smooth things she would say if they should meet; but now that the movement had come from the other side she stiffened, yielding to the traitor within the gates; and by that act wrecked her hopes.

“If I’d known you were here I’d as like as not have kept to the road. I’ve things that want thinking out.”

It was a lie; but how was he to know it? How was he to know that all he had to do was to seize her in his arms and master her? His own voice hardened, and the light died down in his eyes, yet he made a brave attempt at self-control, remembering his father’s advice, and it was not perhaps entirely his fault that his tone was querulous and unconvincing.

“I’m wanting to make it up, Nancy. I’ve been miserable this last three weeks; and it’s a shame it should have come to this just when we’d got to an understanding. If it hadn’t been for you I shouldn’t have been so particular about a rise, and Baldwin and me wouldn’t have quarrelled. Not but what it ’ud have had to come sooner or later, for there’s nobody knows better than you that he taxes your patience past all bearing, and there comes a time when a fellow’s bound to make a stand.”

He paused, realising that this was not what he had meant to say, and Nancy stood with her eyes averted and her hands clasped in front of her.

“I don’t know that all this gets us much forrader,” she answered coldly, hating herself all the while for her coldness, but yielding to the miserable pressure from within. “I’d been thinking that maybe you’d come and say you were sorry, and fall in with what’s best for both of us. To go straight away, same as you did, and plan to start for yourself when you knew the business was my living as well as Baldwin’s, didn’t seem as if you thought overmuch o’ me——”

Where were all the tender thoughts, all the pleasing projects, she had entertained for hours past and been seeking an opportunity to reveal? Where were all the cajoling artifices she had designed to melt his stubborn mood and convict him of folly? All flung to the winds forsooth, for no better reason than that he had made the first overtures for peace.

“I’m sorry,” he answered; but only too doggedly; “not for what I did but for t’ way I did it. I wouldn’t have hurt you for t’ world, neither i’ your pocket or any other way, and I wasn’t meaning ought o’ t’ sort——”

“There’s a way of showing that,” Nancy interrupted, with a degree more warmth in her tone. “If you mean what you say you’ll be willing to drop it——” She avoided the word “shop” or “business,” but Jagger understood her. “You’ll see for yourself you were too hasty, and if you’d only taken me into your confidence we could have planned something together that would have put a flea in Baldwin’s ear.”

“What could we have planned?” asked Jagger, on whose horizon a ray of light was breaking, though he was still suspicious, still half-hostile because of the confidence of the girl’s rebuke.

“We could have told him we were going to be married,” she said, “and you could have left the rest to me.” Perhaps the cold note that crept into her voice again was intended to screen the wave of colour that swept over her face, which Jagger never saw because he was gazing at a possibility. “I should have told him that he’d have to make you a partner, seeing that you were going to be my husband, and that it was my property and partly my money.”

She ended haltingly, because her coldness was disappearing and she was drawing near to the starting point that she had planned before they met; also because she began to wonder if there had been anything bold and unmaidenly in her explanation.

Half timidly she stole a glance at Jagger’s face, and the look she saw there stopped all further utterance.

“And do you think I’d truckle to a man like Baldwin Briggs for all t’ partnerships i’ t’ world?” he broke in hotly. “Would I sell my soul to the devil for money? It’s bad enough to work for a man like him for wages; but to share t’ responsibility for all his thieving underhanded ways is a thing I wouldn’t have for all t’ brass i’ t’ Bank of England. Me a partner with Baldwin Briggs! I’ll beg i’ t’ streets first!”

He drove the stick into the ground in his temper, and Nancy froze for a moment, and then a wave of hot anger and humiliation swept over her.

“So that’s your love, is it?” she cried. “It’s to humble me and turn me away with your foot that you’ve come here! Thank God I’ve found you out before it was too late! Aye, and God forgive me ’at I should have lowered myself to talk o’ marrying you, only to be scorned and spat at. To tell me to my face that I’d have you sell your soul to the devil! I hate you, Jagger Drake! Get you gone before I sell my soul to the devil and do you a mischief! Get you gone, I say!”

If only the tears had come then, all might have been well; but the springs were parched,—dried up by the heat of her indignation, and it was fire and not moisture that shone in her eyes. Jagger faced the storm, and like Lot’s wife when the ashes of Sodom fell on her, was turned to stone. Too late he remembered his father’s caution, the torrent of his temper had passed the sluice-gates and could not be recalled though its force was spent. For a few moments he remained immovable whilst the fierce anger of the girl he loved expended itself in words that battered and dulled his senses without reaching his understanding; then with a groan he turned away like a fool, and stumbled up the hillside to the road.

Yet though his spirits were heavy as lead, it was upon the girl and not him that the catastrophe fell with crushing weight. Bitterly as he cursed the fate that had parted them again in anger, he was too sure of his love for her, too convinced of her

love for him, to doubt that the hour of their reconciliation was only delayed; and the thought that was uppermost in his mind as he neared his home was of his father's kindly scorn—a scorn that cut across the soul sometimes like the lash of a whip.

Nancy read the situation more truly, though perhaps she did not read it at all, but just listened to the malevolent inward voice that told her the breach was widened beyond repair at last.

She was heartsick, and nursed an anger that would not be pacified: the anger of self-reproach and humiliation; and as she stood there with set teeth and clenched hands, breathing like one who endures severe physical pain and is restraining the impulse to cry aloud, she knew that she would not marry Jagger Drake, and that the fault was hers, no less than his. Instinctively she realised that the moment of reconciliation had passed and would not return; and for a while she was stunned; conscious of nothing but shame and bitter resentment. She hated Jagger, but not as bitterly as she hated herself.

Slowly the sun sank and the haze thickened; but she still stood there with her eyes on the Cove. On the moor above a shepherd was gathering his sheep. She could not see him, but occasionally the sound of his voice reached her ear, and more regularly the sharp admonitory bark of dogs. Incuriously she turned her eyes in the direction and saw through the mist the shadowy forms of the flock 300 feet above her head. There were two dogs, she noticed, and by that sign knew that the voice she had heard was Swithin's. One of the dogs was young and frolicsome, and had much to learn of life's responsibilities. It was fussing about the outside of the flock now, harassing the sheep instead of guiding them, out of mere playfulness and mischief. One of them, tormented beyond endurance, broke away from the rest and ran down the slope towards the side of the Cove, pursued by the dog which made no attempt to head it off until a stern cry from the shepherd sought to bring it to a sense of its duty, when it stood still and gazed upwards. By this time the older dog was tearing down the precipitous slope, but the sheep was already on the grassy track that ran out on to the narrow ledge on the cliff face, where the shepherd could not see it.

"There's the devil of a mess there," said a voice in Nancy's ear that she recognised as Inman's.

She experienced no sensation of surprise, just as she had felt none of excitement or suspense at what was happening before her eyes. For the moment she was dead to all external experiences and thrills, and the real was shadowy as a dream.

"Ben will fetch her back," she said. "It was Robin's fault: he drove her there and now hangs back."



It was true. Swithin was clambering down the steep slope with an old man's slow speed and the young dog was standing a body's length behind Ben who was on the ledge, silent and calculating. Then there came an angry call, and Robin turned and slunk back up the hill at a careful distance from his master.

Meantime the sheep was also standing with its head turned inquiringly in the direction of old Ben, who was creeping quietly forward.

"If it goes another step its number's up," said Inman coolly. "I've been on there as far as it was safe to go, and I know what I'm talking about. It's barely room to turn now."

"Lots of animals have lost their lives there," Nancy replied in a dull voice. "Once a fox got on and couldn't get back. It dropped to the bottom."

She was roused now and fascinated with the tragedy that was taking place before her eyes; but Inman took a cigarette from the case in his waistcoat pocket and lit it deliberately.

"The old dog's got it weighed up," he said, as he tossed the match away. "What's he going to do?"

Almost as he spoke, the question was answered. The sheep had half turned, but seemed to hesitate, and suddenly Ben sprang forward, quite over the sheep's back; struggled for a second or two to keep his feet,—and fell down the face of the cliff.

Nancy clutched Inman's arm and closed her eyes. When she opened them again the sheep was making its way up the hill to join the flock, and Swithin was clambering over the rocks to where Ben's body lay in the water. To the sickness of Nancy's soul there was added a physical nausea that caused her to lean heavily against Inman's supporting arm.

"He gave his life for her, and died like a hero. What is there better than dying game?" Inman's voice was calm and matter-of-fact. "He'd have come to a gun-shot, or a pennorth o' poison sooner or later, so what's the odds? The other dog—Robin, did you call him? a better name 'ud be Jagger—'ll take his place, I suppose."

Still she was silent; but the arm that was about her waist did not tighten, and she could not complain that he took advantage of her faintness.

"It was horrible," she said at length, as she made an attempt he did not resist to stand erect. "Life is full of horrible things."

"Not a bit of it," he said, and he threw the half-smoked cigarette into the stream as he spoke. "Life is full of very pleasant things if you know where to look. Ben's dead and done for, and Swithin 'ud do better to get back to his work instead of standing blubbing and cursing over a carcass. Every dog has his day, and Ben ended his nobly, though I daresay the sheep 'ud have come off all right if he'd left

her alone. It was Jagger's fault—I beg pardon, I mean Robin's. He had his fun out of her, and what does it matter to him if he drove her crazy so long as he saved his own skin? Did you see how he crept away? All the same I suppose he'll get Ben's job. It's the way of the world!"

"Jagger's no coward," she answered listlessly. It was no concern of hers to defend the man who had gone out of her life, and the protest was the last spark from the ashes of a love that was nearly cold. Nothing that Inman could say would cause her to fire again.

"Coward!" he repeated, without emotion of any kind. "We don't call babies cowards, whether they're dog-babies or men-babies. Jagger's a baby, playing at being a man. He's in trouble o' some sort now—I met him down the road with a face as long as a fiddle, running to his daddy to have his sore finger kissed."

She had no reply ready and indeed was not disposed to reply. Her heart was like an arid desert where every fountain of emotion was dry. Life was like a desert, too, with no prospect save that of limitless dreariness. She had been dreaming of marriage; of a home of her own where she would be free from Baldwin's petty tyrannies and Keturah's complaints. She had fashioned a husband out of her own fancy, and he had fallen to pieces—crumbled like dust at the first test. What better was Jagger, in spite of all his protestations, than Inman or even Baldwin? He was all for himself, just as they were, though self-righteousness might deceive him. And he had humiliated her bitterly, which Inman had never done. Inman was masterful and showed his worst side——.

The sun had passed behind the mountains and Nancy shivered. Inman drew her arm within his own and moved forward up the hill, and she made no protest, realising in a dull half-conscious way that her future had been determined for her.

The next morning she left the village and went to stay with her uncle.

## CHAPTER X

IN WHICH THE COMPANY AT THE "PACKHORSE" IS  
INVITED TO DRINK A HEALTH

CHRISTMAS! The weather that ushered in the festive season was false to all the hoary traditions of crisp air and powdery snow, and could hardly have behaved more churlishly. When the sun turned away its red face from the melancholy scene at the Cove on that fateful Saturday afternoon in early December, it showed itself no more for a whole fortnight. The thin haze, which had been beautiful as gossamer when the noon-day sun shone through it, and resplendent as samite when the fingers of dying day embroidered it with gold, became a clammy mist, cold as the touch of death, that found the crevices in the human frame where aches and pains lay dormant and stirred them to activity. Old Cawden, shirted and night-capped, hid his great bulk from sight. Vapours rose like water-sprites from the stream and mingled with the cloud overhead. Robin and starling sat—who knows how miserably?—in their nests, and left crabbed winter to its mood of peevish silence.

On Christmas Eve a Viking's wind, the "black-north-easter," awoke in the caverns of the Pennines, and went out to sweep the mists from the moors with his broom of sleet, and right well he did his work. All through the hours of Christmas Day he carried on, and with such fierce zeal that hailstones danced in the streets of Mawm almost without cessation, like goblins set free by some Lord of Misrule to celebrate their Saturnalia! Shades of Charles Dickens! There was little enough of his genial spirit upon the moors that Christmastide!

Conditions improved a little on Boxing Day, and the wind that blustered up the valley from the south, and barked at the heels of the black-north-easter, was kinder and more playful. Patches of blue appeared among the clouds. The sun opened a sleepy eye at intervals and smiled on the grey old village, as much as to say that this game of hide-and-seek would not last for ever; and when evening fell the stars came out and studded a blue-black sky from horizon to horizon, with not a single cloud to dim the lustre of any one of them.

The sanded bar-parlour of the "Packhorse," gaily decorated with holly and one huge bunch of mistletoe, was full, and business brisk. The landlord was kept on the run, but managed to find time to contribute an occasional scrap to the conversation of his guests, which was under no restraint. Prominent amongst the crowd because of his position near the fire, where he occupied an arm-chair and faced old Ambrose, was Maniwel Drake, whose custom it had always been to make the evening of Boxing Day the occasion of one of his rare visits to the inn; and it was

plain to see that his presence had affected the drift of the elders' talk.

"It's nowt but what you could expect," piped old Ambrose. "There wor a sayin' o' my mother's when I wor a young lad 'at's trew as Holy Gospil to this day, 'at there's no gettin' white meal out of a coal sack; and by that figger o' speech I do Baldwin no wrong, neebours; not even this blessed Kersmas-time when we're meant to be i' love an' charity, same as it says i' t' Prayer Book."

"That's a trew word, Ambrose," said Swithin "Kersmas or Midsummer-day, a coal sack's a coal sack and t' description fits Baldwin same as a dinner o' broth. But by his-sen Baldwin's no match for Maniwel, being a bit over slow i' t' uptake; and what bothers me is 'at this young fellow should ha' turned up just i' t' nick o' time, as you may put it, to fill Jagger's place and scheme for his maister, for there's no getting over it 'at he has a gift God never gave him and the devil's own headpiece for mischief-making."

"Well, well," said Maniwel cheerily; "we're partly as we're made, Swithin, and partly as we make ourselves, and there's few of us 'at don't carry both coal-sacks and meal-sacks about wi' us; and it's as much as we can do to see 'at we don't use one for t'other ourselves without peeping into our neighbour's storeholes. Baldwin isn't all bad, as I can bear witness 'at worked alongside of him thirty year and more."

"Maybe not," conceded Swithin in a doubtful voice. "There's worse, I dare say, if bad 'uns could all be put through t' sieve. This here Inman now——"

"Aye," interrupted old Ambrose with as much energy as his feeble frame was capable of; "but they're both plannin' an' schemin' for one end which is nayther more nor less nor to put a spoke i' Maniwel's wheel; an' t'owd saying is reyt, 'at a man mud as weel eat the divel his-sen as t' broth he's boiled in. Baldwin swallows all this young fellow puts on his plate; and if one's worse nor t'other it's both on 'em. You can trust Maniwel to see what isn't there; but I say they're a pair o' ill 'uns, an' nowt but mischief is like to come when sich a pair o' black crows get their 'eads together."

"My word, but Ambrose has gotten steam up," said the landlord admiringly, as he leaned for a moment against the mantelpiece and held one hand towards the flame. "Since Inman came he's had to bottle his-self a bit; but wi' him being away for t' holidays he's blowing off i' t' old style."

"He's a black-hearted 'un," began the old man again excitedly, but Maniwel interposed.

"He's no friend o' mine, right enough, Ambrose; but i' this country we reckon a man innocent while he's proved guilty, and it's no blame to this Inman 'at he does his

best for his own master. And seeing 'at Jagger and me know 'at we have t' good will of all our neighbours we don't ruffle our feathers over their goings-on same as a hen when it sees a hawk. Right enough, they've tried to rut t' road a bit, but they can't block it, so you've no 'casion to worry about us."

"It was Inman 'at put Baldwin up to t' trick of holding t' whip over Joe Gardiner," said one of the younger men. "Joe told me himself 'at Inman had done it, and threatened him 'at if he carried timber for you they'd start a dray o' their own."

"All right, my lad," replied Maniwel, who knew better than any present what ingenious plans had been prepared and executed to hamper his business; how not only the carrier had been suborned to delay the carriage of his goods, but the timber-merchants themselves had been warned of the risk they were running in affording him supplies. These, and a dozen similar annoyances he and his son had suffered in silence, and had succeeded in countering with more or less difficulty.

"I don't doubt but what you're right, and no doubt he'd ha' liked me and Jagger to pull a face over t' job. But I'm a pig-headed chap myself, and bad to move when I get set; and it's a theory o' mine 'at a man who goes t' straight road'll find fewer pits to fall into than them 'at goes crook'd. And that being so I've never been one to wet my handkercher and try to make t' ship move wi' groaning into t' sails; but just keep jogging on wi' a good heart, and when one stick fails me, find another."

A movement of pots and feet indicated the applause of Maniwel's audience, for though there was not a man among them who understood and shared his philosophy, his uprightness and geniality had made most men his well-wishers.

"And how be ye getting on, Maniwel, if it's a fair question?" asked Swithin. "If nobbut them got on 'at deserved it you'd none be long on t' road; but it's a trew word 'at I've seen the wicked i' great prosperity, and there's some we could name 'at brass fair oozes out on."

"Aye, reyt enough," broke in the thin eager voice of old Ambrose; "but there's a verse I made when I wor a young man 'at puts it in a nutshell. When a man's in a gifted mood he sees things as clear as Cove watter, and two o' them lines comes back to me at this minute:

'Too mich o' owt  
Is good for nowt';

and it'll 'appen turn out 'at Baldwin'll go as dry as a gill i' summer time."

"It'll none be James Inman's fault if he isn't drained," said one of the younger men.

“Nay, but I wouldn’t go as far as that,” old Ambrose replied, shaking his head to emphasise the negative; “hawks willn’t pick out hawks’ een, and Baldwin is gettin’ into years and’ll maybe be thankful to have an able-bodied young fellow o’ t’ same kidney to fetch and carry for him.”

“Aye, but not to share what he fetches,” persisted the other, “they’re both playing for their own hand, and yon Inman’s t’ cleverest rogue o’ t’ two.”

“Nay, nay, come now!” Maniwel broke in, “it’s t’ wrong time o’ t’ year for calling any man a rogue; and it ’ud seem most of us better to look after our own ’tatie patch than to count t’ thistles in our neighbour’s plot. You were asking me how we’re getting on, Swithin, and all I can say is ’at things might be a deal worse; and we’ve good hopes ’at when I’ve got my brass in they’ll be a deal better. As to t’ wicked prospering—well, there’s some kinds o’ prosperity ’at ’ud be dear at a gift.”

Swithin had laid down his pipe and cleared his throat preparatory to answering this argument when the abrupt entrance of Inman turned all eyes in the direction of the door. With easy deliberateness the newcomer unwound the scarf from his neck and opened his great-coat, but removed neither. An amused and half-contemptuous smile was on his lips, and his dark eyes swept the company and rested for a moment with malignant satisfaction on the undisturbed features of Maniwel.

“We’re favoured to-night, I see,” he remarked. “The gods have come down in the likeness of men!”

Nobody answered him, and he stood with his back to the closed door with the sardonic smile deepening about his lips.

“I haven’t had the opportunity of wishing you the usual compliments, gentlemen,” he continued. “Absence must be my apology, and my absence can be explained in a few words. I prefer to be my own messenger when I have any news, good or ill, to share with my neighbours, and what I have to tell you is altogether good. I have been married whilst I was away, and have just brought my bride home with me. She has bid me leave this sovereign with you, Albert, so that the company may drink her health—the health of Nancy Inman, lately Nancy Clegg. I won’t ask you to drink mine.”

He put the coin into the astonished landlord’s hand as he spoke, and curled his lip contemptuously as he noted the hostile silence which greeted the communication. Only one man spoke—it was he who had revealed his thoughts a moment before.

“A lass ’at’ll wed thee is no loss to nob’dy,” he muttered sourly.

“Indeed!” said Inman, wheeling round and fixing the speaker with an eye that stabbed. “I’ll remember that to your credit, Jack Pearce.”

“Nay,” said Maniwel calmly; “you’d best forget it. Jack spoke before he

thought. There's one at my house 'at'll be sorry he's lost her, if so be as Mr. Inman's speaking truth, which I don't doubt."

"The truth's here, in black and white," Inman replied with equal calmness; "anyone can see it who wants"; and he offered a paper to the landlord.

"Then poor Nancy's tied a knot wi' her tongue 'at she willn't be able to loosen wi' her teeth," wailed old Ambrose, and would have said more but Inman interrupted him.

"I fancy you find me in the way, gentlemen, and will discuss this happy event more freely in my absence. There are some of you I cannot expect to honour this toast with any enthusiasm; but I won't remain to spy on you. I am to share my wife's home, and you will excuse me if I now return there to share her company."

He spoke mockingly, like an actor who had rehearsed his part until he knew it by heart, but when he was about to withdraw Maniwel's voice stopped him.

"This'll be sore news for Jagger, Mr. Inman, and well you know it. But disappointment comes to us all one time or another; and the lad played his cards badly and must make t' best on't. Maybe he'll come to see 'at you were t' best man for her; maybe she'll come to see 'at you weren't—there's no telling. But anyway I'll drink her health, my lad, wi' a right good will, for I wish t' lass naught but good, so if you were thinking 'at I should be one to stand out you're mista'en. And there's one word I'd say to you 'at it'll do you no harm to remember—'A good Jack makes a good Jill,' and it's t' same with a bad 'un."

The voice and the eyes were alike sympathetic and sincere, and Inman was disconcerted; but only for a moment.

"Much obliged, I'm sure," he said dryly. "I hope you'll spend a profitable evening in this Mutual Improvement Class, gentlemen. I'm sorry I can't."

When the door closed upon him Maniwel spoke again.

"This'll be a sad blow, neighbours, for Jagger; but he's got to keep his feet. I should be sorry for him to hear of it from anyone else, and I'll step round home now, and help to buck him up. But if you're agreeable we'll just drink to the lass first. God bless her! say I."

"Aye, and God help her!" growled the protester.

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A dim light from a storm lantern threw into strong relief the features of father and son as they sat, the younger man on the bench; the older on an upturned box, amid the shadows of the workshop. Jagger's eyes were on the ground, on the heap of shavings that he had been turning over with his foot for half an hour; gathering them into a heap, dispersing them, and gathering them again.

Maniwel's eyes were fixed on his son's face. Talking was over, or almost over. He had said all that he could think of, and if earnest solicitude for another's welfare, keen anxiety that character should be hardened and tempered by adversity, is prayer, then Maniwel was praying. The door was barred, and there had been no interruption of any kind.

At length Jagger raised his head and met his father's gaze. His own face was white and weary-looking; there were lines on the brow that looked in that feeble light like ink-smudges, and there were similar shadows at the corners of the mouth.

He had received the communication and all his father's comments in absolute silence and now that he spoke his voice was hard and resolute.

"You'll have heard, maybe, that 'Zekiel's little lad died this afternoon. They came down soon after you went across to Albert's, and I went back with 'em. They want to bury on Wednesday, so I'll stay up and be getting on with the job."

"I'll bide wi' you, lad," said the father. "I've done naught this last three days"; but Jagger shook his head.

"Nay, get you to bed. I shall lose no sleep and you would. I've got something else to coffin beside Billy."

"Well, happen you'll be better by yourself. But when you've nailed your trouble up, lad, put it out o' sight, and don't let its ghost walk about wi' you. There's two ways of dealing wi' trouble—you can either lie down and let it crush t' sperrit out of you, or you can climb on t' top of it and get an uplift."

Jagger looked steadily into his father's eyes.

"That's so," he said firmly. "I've got to put my back into this business now and make it move, and, by gen, I will."



## CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH THE CONDITIONS ARE WINTRY

WINTER tightened its grip on the moor when the New Year came in. The weather-wise knew it would be so, when night after night a deep halo of gold and brown circled the moon, and the farmers gathered their sheep together lest they should be lost in the drifts with which long experience had made them familiar.

January passed, however, and their expectations were not realised; but the long bent grass curved beneath the weight of its frosted jewels; and the surface of the moor and the shelving sides of the hills were so silvered that scarcely a hint of green was given over the whole extent. The waters of the tarn were frozen, inches thick, and the ruts in the road were hard as chiselled masonry.

Overhead the sky was faintly blue, and the sun pursued his daily course from Cawden to Fountains' Fell, shawled in mist, like an age-worn and enfeebled pilgrim who will do his duty while he has strength to move at all, but who has no warmth to spare for those who travel in his company.

If the sun was sluggish and ineffective no such fault could be found with the winds that whistled over the moors and in the chimneys of farm and cottage, for they were strong as wild horses, and biting as fine hail. Woe to the ears that were exposed to the full force of the blast upon the uplands, for they were seared as with hot irons! Yet who that was healthy and stout of heart; who that was moorland born, and was, with the ling and the cotton-grass part and parcel of the moor but felt his pulse beat to a quicker and more joyous rhythm as he fought the wind or leaned his back against it!

Of that doughty company was old Squire Harris, lord of the manor and owner, though not master, of thousands of broad rebellious acres; master, on the other hand, of the hearts of men and women who owed him no allegiance governed by the purse; a man of whom Mawm was proud, and whose kindness and justice earned him the respect even of evildoers. Heavy of body and light of heart he sat his horse on this cold February morning, paying no heed to the stinging attentions of the wind, but with an observant eye on the work that was going on in the yard of the home farm.

"A good lad at his job, Yorke," he said approvingly to the steward who was standing at the stirrup; "Jagger always framed well from being a lad; and Briggs has been a fool to part with him. Did you say his father was about?"

"He left not ten minutes ago," replied the steward. "You'll overtake him if you're going towards the village."

The squire nodded and moved away. Five minutes later he caught sight of Maniwel's sturdy figure and cantered up to his side.

"Well, Drake!" he said heartily as he checked his horse's pace; "your head would make the fortune of one of these new-fangled painters, for it's a study in bright colours—blue ears and pink cheeks!"

"A Happy New Year to you, Mr. Harris—what's left of it!" returned the other. "It's better to be blue outside than inside, anyway; and after all it's a bit o' real Yorkshire, is this wind; and what more can a man want i' February?"

"Right you are, Drake! A man who wants ought better wants a thrashing for his greediness, eh? You and I drink life in with every breath, don't we? Beats all your orange-scented breezes into a cocked hat. A Happy New Year to you, too, my friend, and prosperous! How are things looking?"

"Neither pink nor blue," answered Maniwel with a twinkle in his eye, "thank you kindly for asking. Some days they're drab wi' a bit o' blue in; and other some they're drab wi' a bit o' pink."

"But never black, I hope," inquired Mr. Harris.

"I'm colour blind to black," answered Maniwel, "when it gets as far as a blue-drab I stir t' fire up. There's always something cheerful there."

The squire looked down at the honest face admiringly.

"And what about these rumours that are flying round that you're not being treated fairly?" he asked. "Is there anything in them? Can I put in a word usefully anywhere?"

"No, sir," said the other firmly, "though it's like you to name it. What you've heard, I don't know, but when tales begin to fly about they pick up more than they started with, and I dare bet I've naught to put up with i' business no worse than what you've had i' politics."

"Perhaps not," returned Mr. Harris with a laugh; "but if some of these stories are true, or only partly true, they're beyond what's fair and I shouldn't hesitate to tell the parties so. However, I admire your grit, and you shall have what I can put in your way, I promise you. I've told Mr. Yorke so."

"Thank you kindly, Mr. Harris; and you shall have honest work in return; but as to putting a word in wi' them 'at wish us harm it 'ud happen only breed more slyness and bitterness. I've a notion 'at t' best way o' dealing wi' ill-will is to live it down and try to make a' enemy into a friend. It's a slow way, and it doesn't always come off, but it's worth trying."

"Very well," said the squire cheerily, "but it takes a deal of oil to soften the grindstone, Drake! However, you can but try. Is Jagger of your way of thinking? I

thought he was looking well, if just a wee bit frost-bitten.”

“Jagger was converted as sudden as a Methody, t’ night o’ Boxing Day,” replied Maniwel; “and t’ penitent form was t’ saw-bench in t’ new shop. If he isn’t altogether o’ my way o’ thinking he has his face that road.”

“Converted? How so?” The squire turned puzzled eyes on the other, who, looking up and catching the expression, allowed a smile to overspread his face.

“Aye, converted! Put away childish things and became a new creature! You wouldn’t know him for t’ same man, if you had to live wi’ him. He was always more of a lass than his sister; but from that night he’s been a man; and that’s what I call conversion, though it happen isn’t what ’ud go by that name wi’ t’ Methodies.”

“I see,” laughed the squire, “I suppose there was a cause for the change?—but you needn’t tell me. Yorke gave me a hint when I remarked on the improvement in Jagger’s bearing. His disappointment won’t be an unmixed evil, I hope. Well, good luck, Drake! Let me know if I can be of service to you.”

The horse leaped forward at a touch of the bridle and Maniwel was left to his reflections; but before he had covered another mile the squire reined up again, as he overtook a second solitary pedestrian.

“So it’s you, Mistress Nancy, is it?” he said, looking down mischievously into the face that was upturned to his own. “Isn’t the air fresh enough down below that you must needs come up here for your promenade? Or is your skin too hard to be turned into a pin-cushion for the wind? Mine is stabbed in ten thousand places!”

“It nips a bit, sir,” she answered; “but that’s nothing. I thought a sharp walk on the moor would do me good.”

“I see!” The squire was reading the face that had been quickly turned away from his scrutinising gaze. The girl was not ill at ease in his company, but her expression was hard in harmony with her surroundings, and there was nothing in her voice that responded to the squire’s geniality. All the same she was an attractive picture, for the tawny cheeks were suffused with a rich red, and the black eyes sparkled like polished jet, besides which she had a good figure and an elastic step, and held her head like a woman of spirit.

“I see!” he repeated; and paused before he continued—“You’ve been entering into the holy estate of matrimony, I’m told, whilst I was away. I’m afraid I forget the name; but you must allow me to wish you much happiness. Mistress Nancy.”

“Thank you, sir. The name is Inman,” she replied; and though she had schooled herself to repeat the word without revealing the abhorrence it caused her, a slight curl of the lip and contraction of the brow afforded signs the squire was not slow to interpret, especially as the information had been given in the coldest of tones.

“I shall be making your husband’s acquaintance, no doubt,” he said kindly. “Meantime I wish you a Happy New Year—the happiest you have ever experienced!”

“Thank you, sir,” she answered in the same unemotional voice. “I wish you the same!”

When he was out of sight she stopped and stamped her foot.

“Why can’t they leave me alone?” she muttered angrily. “The happiest I ever experienced! It’s likely, isn’t it?”

She had reached a point in the road which was on a level with the top of the Cove, a hundred yards distant, and as she raised her clouded face she caught sight of the familiar landmarks and raised her hands to her eyes as if memory as well as vision could be blotted out. Then, with an impatient exclamation she turned and opening the gate on the opposite side of the road, raced across the crisp grass of the moor as though she fled from a pursuer.

It was in vain, for the huntsman was within her breast, and when she stopped from sheer exhaustion on the steep slopes of Kirkby Fell, she realised the fruitlessness of flight and laughed at her folly.

“Fool and coward!” she said aloud; and her feelings found relief in the very sound of her voice though it was charged with scorn. “Can’t you lie on the bed you’ve made for yourself without whining and crying like a chained puppy? Are you going to let everybody see what an idiot you’ve been? ‘Marry in haste and repent at leisure!’ That’s what they’ll say, wagging their wise heads. What business is it of theirs if I do repent—the twopenny-ha’penny gossips?”

The wind whistled on the height and stung her ears until they became ashen-coloured rather than blue; but she experienced no sense of physical discomfort, though after the one hot outburst she turned her feet homewards. By and by she raised her eyes, and looking eastwards saw the great sweep of the Cove far below, and again averted her head. But she recovered herself in a moment, and forced her gaze back.

“You silly fool!” she said. “The Cove’ll neither tell tales nor snigger at you!”

She lashed her soul with scorn as mercilessly as the wind scourged her body, and what the force outside of her could not accomplish the spirit inside effected with ease, for she shuddered as she looked on the scene of her frustrated hopes, though she made her eyes sweep the whole circumference of the crag.

“Now!” she said in a quieter tone; “go back, Nancy Inman, and speak smoothly to your lord, and put blinkers on your eyes when Baldwin and Keturah sneer at you.”

The mid-day meal had been in progress some minutes when Nancy entered the kitchen, and the girl read in the black looks of each face promise of an impending storm.

“I’m sorry I’m late,” she said, with an indifference that belied her words; “I went further than I thought.”

Baldwin contracted his brow until the pepper-coloured tufts above his eyes pointed straight towards her; but he remained silent and Keturah merely sulked. Inman looked steadily into his wife’s face and said:

“It isn’t just a question of being late. There’s your share of the work to do, and Keturah says you’re leaving it all to her——”

Before he could finish the reproof or Nancy could reply Keturah’s resolution gave way, and raising her apron to her eyes she broke in——

“What’s t’ use o’ talking about me? I’m just my lady’s servant, to fetch and carry for her from t’ time she gets up in a morning to when she lays her down at night. I knew what it ’ud be, well I did, when Baldwin said we mud all live together, for if I don’t know her fine-lady ways ’at’s brought her up from a child I’d like to know who does. But it’s come to a nice pass when one o’ my years, and ’at’s been a mother to her, has to be her slavey.”

Baldwin pushed back his chair with a hasty exclamation.

“Slavey be ——!” He used an expression that was not fit for the women’s ears, and followed it up with the usual succession of spluttered oaths; until Inman whose vexation had not been deep and was rapidly changing to contempt took advantage of a lull caused by the older man’s choking to remark coolly:

“There’s no need to talk about slaveys or anything of the sort; and there’s no need to spill either water or—aught else over the job. Nancy’s made a mistake that she won’t repeat——”

Nancy had drawn a chair up to the table, but the space in front of her was empty, for Baldwin was too excited to serve her; and at her husband’s words she threw back her head. Inman fixed an eye of steel upon her.

“That she won’t repeat,” he said again with slow emphasis, and Nancy’s lip curled though she remained silent. “It’s right that there should be a fair division of labour, and Nancy’ll do her share——”

Baldwin’s face had been working strangely during this judicial delivery and he now seized the carving knife and brought the handle down upon the table with such vehemence that Keturah screamed.

“And who the devil are you to lay down the law same as you were master and I was man? A nice pass, as Keturah says, if we’ve to be set i’ wer places i’ wer own

house. For two pins I'll bundle you both out, neck and crop. A man 'at can't make his wife toe t' line isn't fit to be wed; but you're not going to lord it over me, if Keturah cares to sup all Nancy gives her. You're sadly too ready, young man, with your wills and your won'ts, as I've told you before; and I'm beginning to be sorry I ever set eyes on you, for there's been t' devil to pay ever since."

"You see what a storm you've raised," said Inman, looking across at his wife, who was sitting back in her chair, pleating the edge of the tablecloth between her fingers. His voice was stern but there was a scornful look in his eye which partly counteracted the tone. As she made no reply he turned to his master.

"If you hadn't lost your temper you wouldn't blame me for what I couldn't hinder. It isn't my fault that Nancy wasn't here to help with the dinner, and I've said it shan't happen again. I can say no more. As to turning us out neck and crop——" he paused and looked significantly at Baldwin who scowled in reply; "perhaps Nancy and I had better talk things over between ourselves."

There was no mistaking the veiled threat though the voice was quite calm, and Baldwin fired again; but before he could speak Inman continued in a more conciliatory tone.

"I meant no offence in what I said a while back, and nobody can say that I've tried to be master. I've served you well, and you know it, but if we can't live peaceably together we must make other arrangements. Hadn't we best let t' matter drop now and get on with our dinner?"

"I'm sure," said Keturah with a timid glance at her brother who had at length suffered himself to fill Nancy's plate and push it across the table; "it's no wish o' mine to make trouble; but there's things flesh and blood can't stomach, and when a body isn't as young as she once was it stands to reason 'at she can't be expected to wait hand and foot on them 'at's years younger——"

Nancy rose and walked round Keturah's chair in order to reach the mustard, and Inman smiled grimly though he remarked:

"It isn't to be expected. Nancy didn't give it a thought or she wouldn't have done it; but as you'll have no reason to complain again I'd let it drop now if I were you."

Nancy smiled provokingly and by ill-luck Baldwin saw her and his wrath blazed out afresh. He had been only half placated by Inman's smooth words—indeed his foreman's coolness always irritated him more than an outburst of temper as he had sense enough to know that it placed him at a disadvantage. He now turned to Nancy, the veins on his forehead swelling into tense blue cords.

"You ——!" Imagination must supply the coarse expressions that sent Keturah's

hands to her ears and a scowl to Inman's brow. "You sit there making game o' us; same as you'd naught to do but pull t' strings and we should all dance to your tune. But you've t' wrong pig by t' ear, I can tell you, when you've Baldwin Briggs to deal wi'. A nice fool I should ha' been to turn t' business over to another man just because you've wed him. Shut your mouth!" he roared, turning angrily about as Inman interjected a word; "You've had your say; and I don't doubt but what you're hand-in-glove wi' t' lass for all your smooth talk. Partners! I'll see you both blaze first. I wasn't born i' a frost. 'Do nowt and take all!' that's your motto."

His eyes were on Nancy again, and for the first time she deigned a reply.

"That only shows what a good scholar I've been," she said with calm contempt. "All for my-sen' has been the watchword in this house ever since you came into it, so why blame me for adopting it?"

Amusement and something not unlike admiration was in Inman's eyes; but he veiled his feelings. The next moment he said:

"We'll have no stirring up strife, Nancy. Mr. Briggs knows that it was none o' my doing to ask to be made partner; and whether he believes me or not I want no partnership. But he can't blame a wife for seeking t' best she can get for her husband, and especially when she takes 'No' for an answer and makes no more to do about it. I say again we'd best forget what's been said and try to cool down. I've told you you'll have no more trouble with Nancy."

The girl met his meaning glance defiantly, but allowed her expression to speak for her; and Baldwin made no reply of any sort.

When the meal was finished Inman signalled to his wife to follow him into the parlour, which had been allocated to their use.

"You silly fool!" he began when they were alone; lowering his voice to a whisper and in a tone that was entirely without malice. "Why can't you play your cards patiently when you've a handful of trumps? You've only to wait a while and you shall be lady to your heart's content; but you'll spoil all if you set Baldwin against me."

She looked up into his face disarmed by the unexpected gentleness.

"There was nothing whatever to do," she replied. "It was cold meat; the potatoes were ready for the pan, and Keturah allows nobody to mix her puddings. If I'd laid the cloth it would have been as much as I should have done."

"Very likely," assented Inman. "The time'll come maybe when you can set Keturah her work; but it isn't yet, and we've got to lie low for a while. Partner!"—he laughed with sinister meaning and looked into his wife's eyes which reflected none of his humour. "We'll have no partnerships now, my lass. 'All for my-sen' is a game two can play at, and the cleverest wins."

He said no more nor did he kiss his wife as he took his leave of her, matrimonial trimmings of that kind not being to his taste—for which relief Nancy was thankful. She remained standing with her eyes on the ground for quite a long time after he was gone, professing to debate with herself her future line of conduct but fearing all the time that she would obey. The power of those steely eyes was over her awake and asleep.

“Silly fool indeed!” she muttered as she returned to the kitchen.



## CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH BALDWIN'S SKY BECOMES  
SLIGHTLY OVERCAST

**D**ESPITE frequent tiffs and an occasional battle-royal like that which has just been described, Inman's influence with his master strengthened as the days went by. However cunning and suspicious a man may be he is in danger of being outwitted if he has no better weapons than a quick temper and a slow brain to oppose to the coolness and acumen of an alert adversary. And when the adversary protests friendship, and, refusing to be provoked, offers indisputable evidences of loyalty and goodwill, the most churlish nature must be affected, as the continual dropping of water will in course of time smoothen the grittiest rock.

Such evidences were too conspicuous to be overlooked for Inman never tired of devising ingenious schemes for crippling the enterprise of the Drakes; and Baldwin stored in his memory an admiration that nothing would have wrung from his lips, as he saw with what subtle ingenuity Inman spread his nets and succeeded in obliterating all traces of his operations. Suspicion there might be, but where concealment was advisable Inman took care there should be no proof. Baldwin reconciled his mind to what was unpalatable in his foreman's manner because of the Machiavelian service he was rendering to his interests. The one bitter ingredient in the cup of his satisfaction was the knowledge that his competitors—father and son alike—went steadily on their way, undisturbed by all the hindrances that were set in their path.

One day towards the end of April Baldwin summoned Inman to the office. The morning's letters lay open on the desk, and one of them the master held in his hand and perused a second time with a sullen look.

"There's something here I don't like," he said when the foreman had obeyed his command to close the door. "John Clegg wants me to hold back my payments this month; says he's hard put to it what wi' one and another calling their brass in, and very little new money coming forrad; wants me to gi' three months bills to Johnsons and Greens and put some o' t'others off a bit. It's a nasty look wi' 't 'at I don't fancy."

Inman's brows contracted. "Is it the first time this has happened?" he asked.

"Nay, there was another some years back," Baldwin replied, "when he wor for holding me up i' t' same way; but there wasn't so much owing then. It's been a heavy quarter, has this——"

"How did you go on, on that occasion?" asked Inman, edging his master back to

essentials. "It came all right in the end, I suppose?"

"It came all right at t' time," explained Baldwin sourly. "I got my back up, and when he saw it he caved in. It wor naught but a try-on; a dodge to diddle me out of a bit o' interest, I reckon, 'at didn't come off; and from that day to this all's gone square. I suppose he thinks I'm getting old and addled now, and he can have another try; damn him."

"He'll be having to make provision for paying Drake his money out," said Inman thoughtfully. "If there's been one or two more on the same hop—and there may have been for aught we know—he'll want time to turn round, that's all."

"That's all! is it?" snapped Baldwin. "Then it's too much! Am I to have my credit ruined to pay them two devils t' money they'll use again' me? I'll see 'em blaze first! He can try it on wi' someb'dy else—I aren't having it!"

"Hadn't you best go over to see him?" suggested Inman, "and tell him straight out how things stand between you and Drakes? After all, he's Nancy's uncle; and when you pointed out that she'd suffer as well as you if the firm got a bad name he'd be sure to see that it 'ud be the best plan to put old Drake off, who'd make no bones about it, but think it was the way Providence was leading him. Then you'd be getting a bit of your own back at t' same time."

Baldwin's eyes showed his satisfaction at this advice, for the strained look gave place to one of cunning; but he suppressed any note of enthusiasm as he replied:

"I should spoil t' job if I was to see him, for my temper's that hot it 'ud flame out t' minute he crossed me; and I couldn't put it into words same as you. And you being Nancy's husband, and a friend of his by what you've told me, it 'ud come more natural 'at you should see him, pointing out as you say 'at Nancy's a partner in a manner o' speaking, and 'at Maniwel's set on doing her a' injury. That's t' card you want t' play wi' John; and happen you'd pull it off where I should mullock it."

"It's one of those jobs where they don't expect a man to take the master's place," said Inman with crafty hesitation. "I'd go in a minute if I thought it was the best plan; but will Mr. Clegg like it?"

"Of course he will; and if he doesn't he can lump it," replied Baldwin, who knew that he was no match for his foreman in a wordy argument with a man of the world like his banker. "If you hadn't ha' been Nancy's husband it 'ud ha' been different; but seeing as you are there's naught more fitting. If you could catch t' noon train you could be back i' t' morning, or maybe to-night."

"Very well," said Inman; "but don't expect me before morning. These are jobs that can't be hurried, and a bit of time lost is neither here nor there."

The glamour of spring sunlight was on the landscape as Inman set out upon his

six-mile tramp to the station, and even the grey hills looked warm and hospitable, whilst the meadows of the low-lands were a mosaic of rich greens of varied shade. Signs of new and joyous life were everywhere. Yellow celandines and dandelions caught the sunshine on their outspread petals and sparkled in the shadows of the dry walls and river banks. Nor was the eye the only recipient of April's gifts, for the sweet scents that Nature had released at the coming of spring greeted another sense; the delicate odours of budding trees and the good smell of newly-turned earth. And with all these bounties another equally good—a brave, bracing wind from the heights, sharp and sweet, charged with the power to stimulate and purify. It was a day to make a man shout aloud for very joy of being alive.

But let Nature do her utmost—spread her glories like a peacock,—a man's thoughts may curtain his senses and stifle every emotion except that which is uppermost, so that the hills may clap their hands never so loudly and he will be deaf as the dead to their music. Inman's thoughts were not of yellow sunlight but of yellow gold; and though he was devising traps as he walked along the road with his eyes on the ground, they were certainly not intended to catch sunbeams. Beyond the curt statement that he was going to Airlee on the firm's business he had given his wife no explanation of his journey; but it was Nancy's interests that occupied his thoughts to the exclusion of all others, for Nancy's interests were now his. Baldwin might go to the devil for all he cared; and if a push of his foot could speed him there it should be given with great goodwill, provided always he did not lose his own balance in the act, and that the kick should be from behind. A finer ambassador than Inman could not have been found in all the empire if Baldwin's object was to save the throne regardless of who should occupy it. "All for my-sen!" A smile flitted across the man's hard face as the thought occurred to him.

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Soon after six o'clock that evening Nancy visited the Cove for the first time since the fatal quarrel with Jagger. She had thought she would never see the place again with pleasure—there had been one hour of bitter repentance when she had vowed that the scene of her folly should have no existence for her in the future—but she was surprised to find her heart warm as she looked upon the great crag and saw the jackdaws wheeling about in the neighbourhood of their nests. The sun would not set for another hour, but its couch was behind the mountains and Mawm would see it no more until the morrow, yet there was a wash of amber on the limestone, and the rock looked genial and friendly. There was something soul-stirring and at the same time strangely soothing in the contemplation of the ponderous cliff that faced unmoved the most violent storms and all the vicissitudes of the years. Cold as it was

Nancy sat down on a rock beside the stream, and the rippling water, murmuring like an infant on its mother's lap, turned her thoughts in another direction and brought the hot blush to her cheeks.

Raising her eyes she became conscious that a man was descending the lower slope a hundred yards away, and her face lost its colour as she recognised Jagger, and saw that she was unobserved. She was not afraid to encounter him, though they had not met in privacy before since her marriage, and had exchanged scarcely a dozen words; rather, her senses were numbed and she watched him incuriously, as if he had been a bird that had dropped down to the river to drink; and when she saw him bend his head and stand motionless, though she knew what his thoughts must be, no emotion of pity or contempt disturbed her, and she experienced no desire to steal away and escape his notice. Her feelings were turned to stone, like the man who stood as rigid as the boulders at his feet.

Even when he wheeled round and came towards her with his eyes still on the ground; when she knew that she must inevitably be discovered, her pulse beat no more quickly; but when he brushed against her dress, and uttered a startled exclamation of recognition as his eyes leaped to her face she smiled.

"I've been watching you this last five minutes," she said in a calm voice, but with the weary intonation of a care-worn woman.

He was much more at a loss for words than she, yet he recovered his self-possession in a moment.

"I've never been here since that day," he began; and the girl nodded.

"Nor me, neither," she said; "but I'm glad I came."

"Are you? I was wondering if I hadn't better have stayed away; if I hadn't better cross t' Cove off t' map and have done with it. It hurts, Nancy! It'll always hurt!"

"Hurts!" she answered with an emphasis of mockery. "Your hurt is just an empty place, a bit of an ache, same as when you've fasted too long. *My* hurt is a serpent 'at I've taken of my own free will and pressed to my bosom, and it bites deeper every day."

The despair in her voice moved him strongly but hardly more than her calmness. There was no flash in her spirit; but there was strength and a certain stern attractiveness, as there is in the bog; and his heart ached with a sore longing.

"He isn't unkind to you, is he?" he forced himself to ask, and she laughed contemptuously.

"Unkind? What is it to be unkind?" She looked down contemplatively, as if the question interested her. "Is he unkind?" she repeated in a low voice. "I never thought of that. He doesn't beat me, if that's what you mean, except now and again with his

tongue and his looks; and two can play at that game.”

“Beat you!” The man’s lips tightened and he spoke through his teeth; “t’ first time ’at I hear ’at he’s laid hands on you I’ll do him in! Beat you! Devil as he is he isn’t black-hearted enough for that!”

“I don’t know that he is a devil,” she replied listlessly; “but he knows how to raise one, and he’s so cold and sure of himself that he makes me scream inside, though he’s never heard me and never will. I’m afraid of him; but he doesn’t know it, and I’m not whining; I’m just telling you how I feel. I’m like a baby in his hands. He’s a man who gets what he wants *always*. He wanted my money so he took me, same as you must take t’ purse with what’s inside it. And he perhaps wanted a woman, too, and one’s as good as another to such as him.”

“And now he shoves you on one side; makes dirt of you,” said Jagger bitterly. “Can’t I see it in his face? And he’ll take a pride in doing it, and more by half if he thinks it ’ud hurt me, and that you’d care. But that’s more’n I ought to have said.”

“More than I ought to let you say,” she replied, “but for this once you shall say what you like and that must end it. It was here we fell out, and it’s here I’ll tell you that I know it was my fault. I meant to make it up with you; I’d thought about nothing else for hours on end; but there’s something—I don’t know what it is, if it isn’t fate—that pulls one way when we pull another, and pulls harder than us. And then I was mad with you because you took me at my word; and *he* came along and I married him whilst I was sore—married him at a Registry; no service or anything.”

He had never taken his eyes from her face; never sought to interrupt her during this recital. One foot he had raised and placed on the rock where she was sitting; and pity softened the deep lines on his forehead as the evening light mellows the harsh brows of Gordel.

“Nay, Nancy,” he said sorrowfully; and at the sound of her name, or perhaps at the tender note in his voice, the blood surged to her face again; “you mustn’t blame yourself, or anyway you mustn’t take all the blame. Father warned me, but I was too big a fool to heed him. I came that afternoon on purpose to make friends wi’ you, and it wasn’t fate but just hot temper ’at ruined all. It’s changed my nature, Nancy. When father brought word ’at you were married something fell like a thunderbolt i’ my head and has rested on my heart ever since; but I’m a different man—whether I’m better or worse I don’t fairly know.”

“Yes, you’re changed,” she said, “and so am I; but the thunderbolt that fells one tree lets more air in for that next to it. It’s me that’s crushed, not you. You’ll make your way, I can see, for this mishap has put ginger into you, and I shall be glad to see you get on. But James’ll move heaven and earth to ruin you: there’s naught so sure

as that; and he's a cleverer headpiece than you, Jagger."

"He can soon have that," said Jagger with a new note of modesty that was entirely free from sulkiness; "but he's welcome to do his worst as far as I'm concerned. What's it matter to me what he does? When we opened t' new shop I was all for making money; but I've learned a hard lesson since then, and I know now 'at money can't buy t' best things. I don't care whether we get on or we don't so long as we can pay our way, and there's little fear o' that; but work's life, and good work's luxury—all t' luxury I care about now, and Inman can't ruin a man 'at builds on them foundations."

"He'll try to," she answered.

"Let him try!" he answered. "He can shove as he likes but he'll never shift t' Cove—there's some things too strong even for him. I'm on t' old man's side, Nancy, though I'm only a watcher. It's a game between God and t' devil; and as long as my father lives I'll back 'at Inman doesn't come out on top. Anyway, I'm walking t' straight road, and he's welcome to do his worst."

"You sound like Hannah!"

She looked up as she spoke, and the sorrow he saw in her eyes—a sorrow shot through with yearning and pain—stabbed him to the heart and caused him to lose control. Before she could guess his purpose he had stooped and kissed her on the lips, and for a moment or two she yielded without protest. The next she rose to her feet and pushed him gently away.

"You shouldn't have done that," she said. "If he knew he'd kill you; but whether he knows or he doesn't it isn't walking t' straight road that you talk about. But it's the first and last time, and there's been nobody to see and tell tales, so there's no harm done. Only, never again, remember! I'm his wife, and I'll be no other man's sweetheart."

He bent his head at the rebuke; and she brightened as love and pity stirred in her heart at the sight of his face.

"Tell your father I miss him, Jagger; and grannie too. I could like to call in and see 'em; but it wouldn't do. There's no man's word has the same weight with me as your father's, and you can tell him I took his advice and bought stock with most o' the money I had with Uncle John. Baldwin doesn't know because uncle made me promise not to tell him. It was easier than I'd thought on to get round uncle, but I've always been able to manage him better'n most folks, and he's paid me out bit by bit until I haven't above five hundred with him now, and I'm letting that stop."

"Father's never said aught o' this to me," said Jagger. "Was he uneasy about the money, or what?"

“Not that I know of; but he knew I was. I can’t tell how it is; but I’ve never been quite comfortable about Uncle John myself. There seems to be money enough, and yet he always looks worried.”

“It’s a funny thing,” said Jagger, “‘at them ’at have too much seem as badly worried as them ’at have too little. I’ll tell father what you say.”

“And Jagger! Ask Hannah to come to see me, I know she’ll scorn me; but she’s a good heart and when she knows mine’s nearly broken she’ll not bear malice. Tell her I want a friend and I haven’t one.”

“Yes, you have,” he said, “you’ve *that*, anyway!”

“Poor Jagger!” she replied in a low voice. “What a mess we’ve made of it! I’m going now. Don’t follow till I’m out of sight.”

She turned away as she spoke and walked quickly up the hill with the darkness gathering around her, and never once looked back. When she had passed through the gate on to the road Jagger also moved away, but in the other direction. Until his form mingled with the shadows on the hillside there was silence in the glen; then a young girl rose cautiously on the farther side of the wall and looked round before she sought the path Nancy had taken.

It was Polly Marsden—Swithin’s granddaughter who had been there all the time, disappointed of the company she had expected.

“It wasn’t my fault if I heard ’em,” she said to herself, perhaps to quieten the too rapid beating of her heart. “What are ears for if not to hear with?”

## CHAPTER XIII

IN WHICH INMAN PROVES HIMSELF COMPETENT

NANCY'S mood alternated between a strange sense of peacefulness and extreme depression all that evening. Cold as it was she shut herself up in the parlour, away from Baldwin's snappy ill-temper and Keturah's tearful peevishness, and busied herself with that kind of sewing which raises in the breast of most young wives a tumult of hopes and fears. At intervals she let the little garment fall to her knee, and gazed long and steadily at the window, as if in the pale light that was upon the hills she would find healing for her soul's sores. How often she had climbed old Cawden by moonlight in Jagger's company! She had never doubted that they would one day marry and live happily together; it had seemed as inevitable as that Gordale beck should merge its waters with the stream that flowed from the Cove, and when memory reproduced the vivid pictures of the past, flooding the shadows with excess of light, her spirits became tranquillised and she would smile.

But an anodyne is not a cure; and when her eyes fell to her lap and her fingers took up again the work on which she was engaged, bitterness returned to her heart, and the weary way that stretched its interminable length before her was sunless as the Psalmist's shadowed valley. Yet—Jagger loved her still, and she——!

Nancy merely skirted the borders of that forbidden ground, but to peep into a paradise that is closed to us is to invite a vision of hell, and the periods of depression grew longer and more painful, until she could endure the parlour no longer, and attributing to her head the ache that was at her heart, went early and supperless to bed.

It was not yet dark, and through her window she could see a couple of curlews wheeling in the air; their wild cries rang pleasantly in her ears; their free, erratic movements interested and amused her, now that sleep refused its office. She felt a sense of oneness with them and with the wild, untameable moor on which they rested, and she gave fancy its fling and let it sweep or hover where it would! She cherished no hopes, dreamed no false dreams; but between sleeping and waking dropped a curtain on the sombre present and walked in the sunlit past.

She was still dozing, still ruminating, when the clock downstairs struck one, and the sound had hardly died away when a handful of gravel was thrown against the window. Instantly she was out of bed. It was by this time very dark but she went confidently forward and put out her hand, conscious as she did so that one of her bare feet had been cut by a sharp fragment of spar. A voice from below that she recognised as her husband's bade her steal down silently and open the door.



“Don’t bring a light,” he whispered. “They mustn’t see me; and take care how you draw back the bolts.”

She made no reply but fumbled for her slippers and dressing-gown and put them on. Why there should be all this need of secrecy she never asked herself, but she walked quietly and trapped her finger in trying to steady the big bolt as she drew it back—it was rusty and not easy to move.

“Shove this under the bed,” he said in a low voice as he pushed a small cigar box into her hands; “I’ll follow you in a minute when I’ve locked up.”

Without a word she obeyed, and not until he joined her and lit the candle, having first drawn down the blind, did she open her lips.

“I didn’t expect you to-night,” she said.

“I’ve walked from Kepton,” he replied. “I’m dead beat. It isn’t that the box is over heavy, though there’s five hundred pounds in gold there. Baldwin mustn’t know a word about it—nobody must. It’s yours. Your Uncle——”

He stopped, and Nancy saw that his face was grey and his breath coming in deep heaves.

“Wait a minute,” she said. “The whisky-bottle’s in the sideboard. I’ll get you a drop.”

She took the tumbler, and stole downstairs again, whilst Inman bent his head between his knees. In a minute or two she was back with the drink, and she locked the door behind her.

“That’s right,” said Inman when he had gulped the dose. “It’s a long walk, and I hurried more than I need have done; but I like a woman who keeps her head, and you’ll need to keep yours with that suspicious old devil nosing round. I don’t mind him knowing I’ve got back—the old fool’ll think I’ve rushed home to please him, but he mustn’t smoke the swag or the game’s up; he’s a scent for brass like a terrier for rats.”

Nancy was listening quite unmoved. Her foot and her finger were causing her pain; but she paid them no heed for her eyes were on her husband and she was trying to surmise what deep game he was playing.

“You’d better tell me all about it,” she said with a coldness he either did not notice or chose to ignore.

“So I will,” he replied, “but first, is there anywhere that we can lock up that box—any place Keturah doesn’t get her fingers in?”

She shook her head; then bethought herself. “What about that old portmanteau of yours. It’s on the top o’ the closet. Doesn’t it lock?”

“The very thing!” he exclaimed; and he climbed up and brought it down. Then,

having fitted a key to it from a bunch he took from his pocket, he put the box inside and returned it to its place.

“That’s better!” he said in a tone of relief. “It’s safe there till we get it away, bit by bit.”

Still Nancy said nothing, but the look of inquiry in her eyes was not unmixed with suspicion, and Inman laughed.

“Your face is a picture, Nancy. Afraid I’ve turned highwayman, I suppose? You needn’t worry; there’s nobody after me, not even Uncle John. Get into bed, child; you’re shivering!”

She was too proud to examine the wound on her foot; too much afraid that he should think she was inviting his sympathy. She therefore drew on her stockings with the muttered explanation that her feet were like ice, and returned to bed.

Five minutes later Inman unfolded his story.

“The old boy’s pretty well on his last legs, or I’m no judge. What ails him? Oh, his health’s all right; don’t you trouble your head about that—in fact, don’t trouble it about anything whilst you have me to look after you. It’s Uncle John’s business, not his body, that’s tottering. He’s had a jolly good run for his money; but the weasels are after him now, and they’ll have their teeth in his neck before three months are up, mark my words!”

Nancy’s heart sank. Uncle John had always been too absorbed in his account books to have time to spare for strengthening family ties,—a duty which he would have regarded, if he had ever given it a moment’s thought, as falling within the province of his wife and daughter; but he had been kind in his own off-hand way, and he was her father’s brother; it was impossible to view his impending ruin with unconcern. Moreover, her husband’s jaunty, well-satisfied tone grated on her ears.

“He’s sailed as near the wind as any man I’ve ever known, this last ten years,” continued Inman, with a change of voice that was as noticeable as the change of metaphor. “The cutest old money-grubber in Airlee, bar none. A man who kept his conscience in his pew at church alongside his Prayer Book, and never missed it when he sat at his desk. If there’s been one man more than another that I’ve looked up to it’s been John Clegg. But he’s gone on too fast and too far—that’s where your uncle’s made his mistake. If he’d sold out five years since—but then a man like him couldn’t stop, no more’n an engine that’s jammed its brakes and is running at full steam.”

“I don’t suppose you can imagine that all this is very agreeable to me,” interposed Nancy wearily. “If Uncle John is ruined a good many other people must be ruined with him; and poor Aunt Ann and Jennie——”

Inman gave a short sneering laugh.

“You needn’t lose any sleep over your Aunt Ann and Jennie. A man who’ll provide for his loving niece’ll have a little nest egg hidden away somewhere for self and family, you bet. Your uncle’s no fool, my lass! Not that he got on his knees exactly, to ask me to bring your bit away. He’d have given you a three months’ bill or something o’ that sort if yours truly had been willing, but that wheeze didn’t work. To tell you the truth there was a time when I’d hold the stick over him; but when he saw he’d met his match he turned quite pleasant, and we parted the best o’ friends.”

“And you’ve brought all my money back with you?” Nancy asked.

“If I’d dropped it in the river you couldn’t talk grumpier,” Inman replied coldly “This is what I get for grabbing five hundred pounds out o’ the ruins!”

“Nay, I’m glad enough it’s saved, if what you say is true,” Nancy said; but still without enthusiasm. “Was that what you went for? and—what about Baldwin?”

The thought of his participation in the looked-for catastrophe had been slow to reach her, as the startled note in her voice evidenced. Inman laughed and lowered his voice still more.

“Yes, that’s what I went for; but Baldwin mustn’t guess it. He thinks, and he’s got to go on thinking, that I went to pull *his* chestnuts out o’ the fire; but he’ll have to be satisfied with fair words and promises. He’ll be pleased, you’ll see, with what I’ve done; or, anyway, *I* shall see it, for he’ll none talk about it till we get into the office—but——”

He said no more, and Nancy could not see the smile that curved about his lips: the grim smile of the fisherman who feels the line jerk and is confident that the hook has held.

“But what——?” inquired Nancy.

“I was thinking what a good motto that of his is—‘all for my-sen’”; said her husband grimly.

“What do you think will happen to Uncle John?” Nancy inquired. “I can’t help being anxious about him. He’s always treated me well, and you too.”

“Oh, he may pull through,” he replied indifferently. “There’s a thousand-to-one-chance, of course; and if he doesn’t I suppose he’ll make an arrangement with his creditors; they’re mostly widows and simple sort o’ folks with no fight in ’em, poor devils; folks that snapped at seven per cent. interest and asked no questions. Your uncle’ll be right enough. Let’s drop him now, and get to sleep; but remember you don’t know anything; *not anything*, if they try to pump you.”

He turned over on his side and was breathing heavily in a few minutes; but Nancy lay awake for another hour at least, weighing the situation and balancing her

love of money with sympathy for her aunt and cousin, and compassion for the poor investors who were to lose their savings.

“My bit ’ud only be a drop in a bucket, anyhow,” she said to herself; and found some ease in the reflection; “I wonder what Maniwel ’ud think of it—and Jagger?”

At breakfast Baldwin could not conceal his satisfaction at Inman’s prompt return; but muttered that what had to be said would keep, and went on with his meal, stealing a glance at his foreman’s face when he thought himself unobserved, as if he would read there the result of his mission. Inman, however, gave nothing away, though he followed promptly when his master rose and left the kitchen.

“Well?” said Baldwin in the aggressive tone anxiety always put into his voice, when the office door closed upon them; “Have you wasted your journey, or were you as clever as you made out you’d be? Has he climbed down, or what?”

His eyebrows stood out fiercely; but there was fear at the man’s heart, and Inman knew it and was pleased.

“I don’t think it’s been altogether wasted,” he replied with studied hesitation, “though I could have liked to come back with an easier mind——”

“Be hanged to your easier mind!” spluttered Baldwin. “Is he going to let us have t’ brass, or isn’t he?—that’s t’ question I want answering. Are we to be shamed wi’ wer creditors, or aren’t we? I’ve no time to stand here while you’re raking your mind ower to find fine words.”

Inman looked at him steadily but gave no other sign of impatience.

“I think he’ll let you have the money,” he said calmly. “He’ll do his level best, anyway, and he’s promised not to pay Drakes or anyone till you’ve had what you want.”

“That’s what I’m waiting to get at,” growled Baldwin; “only I don’t like that word ‘think.’ If I’d ha’ gone I’d ha’ known; I wouldn’t ha’ thought; and John ’ud ha’ heard a piece o’ my mind into t’ bargain.”

“I was man, not master,” Inman explained, “that was why I should have liked it better if you’d gone yourself. I said all I dare say, seeing that I wasn’t boss; and I’d all my work cut out, I can tell you, to get him to promise.”

“It was a try-on, that’s what it was!” Angry as Baldwin showed himself there was a note of relief in his voice, and Inman knew that his master’s greatest care now was to conceal his satisfaction. “He can’t bear to part. T’ more he has and t’ more he wants,—the selfish devil. That’s one good thing you’ve worked anyway. I’ll bet he won’t try t’ same game on wi’ me again for a long time. There’s naught like letting ’em see ’at you can put your foot down.”

Inman made no comment, but looked steadily at his boots. He was skilled in all

the cunning of face language; and though Baldwin had little of that lore he would have been a fool if he had not realised that his ambassador was holding something back.

“You look glum enough for a burying, spite o’ all your cleverness wi’ John,” he sneered. “What ails you?”

Inman appeared to rouse himself, but he spoke with unusual hesitation.

“Nay, it’s naught but an uneasy feeling.... It isn’t that there’s exactly aught to go by; but....”

“But what? Get it out, man, can’t you? The devil take you and your uneasy feelings! John Clegg’s safe as t’ Bank of England, I tell you. If he doesn’t die worth his hundred-thousand I’m no prophet; and he’ll ha’ scraped it up wi’ a bit o’ interest here and a bit there, where mugs have been silly enough to let him, to say naught of his money-lending, and he won’t ha’ worked *that* at a loss, no fear.”

Inman allowed a look of relief to creep into his expression, and a more hopeful tone sounded in his voice as he said:

“Well, certainly he ought to have made money and I always reckoned him to be very well off—not a hundred-thousand man, maybe; I wouldn’t have gone so far; but comfortable. It was just that I didn’t altogether like the look of things; and if he isn’t badly worried he’s a good play-actor. But you’re likely to know better’n me; and as I’ve naught fairly to go by, no more’n what I’ve told you, we can leave it at that.”

Baldwin frowned; and a smile developed in Inman’s eyes as he removed his coat and walked over to the bench where his work awaited him. He had dropped his seed carefully—a seed of suggestion, of suspicion, that was sure to germinate and torment his master’s soul as it grew; but he had not committed himself, and if events should shape badly, as was inevitable, he would always be able to claim that his mouth had been stopped by his master. Which was just what he had intended.

After dinner Baldwin took Inman aside out of earshot of the other men who were lounging about, waiting for the hour to strike.

“What did John say about Maniwel?” he asked. “Are you sure they’ll not get their brass when t’ time comes?”

“I’m certain of it,” Inman replied confidently. “They wouldn’t have got it in any case, if his word’s to be trusted; but they’d very likely have had part—something to be going on with. I spiked that gun, if I did naught else, and Drake’ll have to whistle for his money.”

“But what did he say about ’em starting up in opposition to Nancy, as you may say?” persisted Baldwin.

“He didn’t speak for a while, but just tapped his desk, and then he said a curious thing,” Inman replied with his eyes on his master’s face. “He said, ‘Well, he’s a right to start for himself if he wants, I reckon, and I’ve a notion that he’ll get on. I never thought myself that our Tom treated him fairly, and when a man bides his time and goes straight I’ve noticed he often gets the upper hand at the finish. He’ll perhaps sell Baldwin a pennorth yet.’ That’s pretty nearly word for word what he said.”

The older man’s face was a picture during this recital, and his eyes blazed as he turned to Inman, whose own features were almost expressionless.

“Sell me a pennorth, will he? And John Clegg could bring his-self to say that again’ a man ’at has his thousands wi’ him! I’ll give him six months notice to pay back every blessed ha’penny! I’ll see him rot afore he shall have my brass to lend to Maniwel Drake to set him on his feet. As like as not that’s what he is doing. And to have it thrown i’ one’s face ’at Maniwel wasn’t treated fair! I must say you’ve got it off very glib, young man, and’ll have turned it over i’ your mouth like a’ acid drop, I don’t doubt——”

“Mr. Briggs,” Inman interrupted quickly. “I’m Nancy’s husband, and you don’t need to be told I’m no friend of Drake’s. It’s a poor return for what I did yesterday to be bullyragged same as if I was your enemy.”

“Well, well,” said Baldwin with an impatient toss of the head; “it’s enough to make any man talk a bit wild. You’d better blow t’ whistle. It’s gone one!”

## CHAPTER XIV

IN WHICH JOHN CLEGG IS "WANTED" AND MANIWEL ISN'T

IT was exactly a month later, towards the end of the merry month of May and within a week of Baldwin's pay-day that news reached Mawm that John Clegg was "wanted" by the police. No merrier day had been known that year. Before the cocks awoke to their trumpeting a cuckoo had proclaimed the dawn, and had continued to obtrude its strange call upon the air that vibrated all day with the music of more melodious songsters. Curlews, black-headed gulls and lapwings, wheeling and crying as they felt the sweep of the mountain breeze, had brought life and action to the desolate moors, where the pink flowers of the bilberry washed whole tracts with sunset tints that deepened as the day advanced. One or two swallows had been seen above the river when the sun was hottest, but had soon flown south again leaving behind them the hope of summer. On every hand such stunted trees as the uplands could boast were either thick with foliage or at least bursting into leaf, and the meadows and pastures were spangled with gay spring flowers. The merry day had ended merrily; and when the sun went down to his couch in the west he flung his rich trappings to the sky which let them fall upon the mountain tops, where they lay until night cast her shadows over them.

No man from his well-padded seat in the theatre ever watched the play with keener enjoyment than Maniwel this entertainment of Nature's providing, though his chair was the hard stone parapet of the bridge beside his cottage. All through the day his soul had responded to the call of spring, to the warm grasp of the sun. The somewhat melancholy chanting of the moor birds had quickened his pulse; had stirred up memories of youth and youth's ambitions; and he had discussed the future with Jagger in a spirit of breezy optimism that had fired the younger man. In another week their little capital would be in their own hands—it was not so very little after all for people in a small way. With one or two necessary machines and a supply of loose cash they would soon get into their stride, after which it was just a question of steadiness and hard, good work.

Maniwel had dismissed business from his thoughts, as a man must who would enjoy the play, and was feasting his senses on the scene before him when a motor-car, easily recognisable as the squire's, sped up the road from the valley, and a hand beckoned him to approach.

Maniwel obeyed the summons and was greeted by Mr. Harris in a voice that was lowered so that the chauffeur would not hear.

"I say, Drake; hasn't Nancy Clegg an Uncle John of that name in Airlee?"

“She has, sir,” he replied. “John and Tom were brothers, you’ll remember; and it’s John he always banked with, same as Baldwin does to this day.”

Mr. Harris looked with grave eyes into the other’s face.

“I’m afraid it’s a bad look-out, in that case, for Briggs,” he said; “and I suppose for Nancy, too. John Clegg has absconded, and the police have possession of his office!”

He put the evening paper into Maniwel’s hand as he spoke; but the joiner thrust it into his pocket without looking at it; and though his face expressed concern it remained calm.

“Dear! dear! that’s a bad job, that is,” he said. “I’m thinking Nancy’ll be hard hit, poor lass, not so much by t’ loss of her money as by t’ disgrace ’at’ll come to t’ name. It’ll be a sad blow for Baldwin. You weren’t thinking of calling and telling him t’ news, were you, sir?”

The squire smiled. “I’m not one to play on the hole of the asp, Drake,” he said. “I don’t envy the lot of the man who tells Briggs. If you keep it quiet it’s not likely that anyone else will hear of it, and to-morrow morning’s paper will be the best messenger.”

Maniwel’s face showed that he was thinking deeply. “I’m not worried about Nancy,” he said. “I believe it isn’t a vast deal ’at she’ll have left wi’ her uncle; but Baldwin——! It’ll be like to crush him, will this; and to come on him all of a sudden ——!”

He looked into the squire’s eyes; but Mr. Harris remained silent, and Maniwel continued:

“I doubt if he’s a friend i’ t’ village. There was a time when I wouldn’t ha’ thought twice about going; but now he’d happen look at it in a wrong light. All t’ same if there’s no other way I think it ’ud only be neighbourly to step across and soften t’ news a bit.”

“As you like, Drake,” replied the squire as he tucked the rug about his knees. “I think myself you’ll be seeking trouble instead of softening it. But I admire your spirit, and if you had been in Briggs’ place I should have reminded you of the saying of the old Roman—‘Fortune can take away riches but not courage.’ I’m afraid it would be lost on Briggs.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Maniwel; “Jagger and me’ll maybe need to remember it, for we’d a little matter of three hundred pounds wi’ him ourselves ’at we were expecting to draw t’ first o’ next month. But that’s neither here nor there. T’ loss of it is bad to bide; but it leaves us just where we were, you see, whereas wi’ Baldwin it means all t’ difference i’ t’ world.”



The squire held out his hand and grasped Maniwel's.

"I'm sorry, Drake, very sorry——" He seemed about to say more but checked himself. "Tell Jagger to keep his heart up! I don't need to tell you."

"Thank you, sir," said the other smiling. "I'll match my Jew again' your Roman —'Be of good cheer!' He said when they were distressed by t' waves; and t' boat got safe to land, you'll recollect. I shall lose no sleep over t' job."

The squire pressed his hand again and the car moved rapidly away, whilst Maniwel went indoors to make himself acquainted with the story of the disaster.

When he had read the columns twice over he sought his son. Jagger was still working in the shop where the light was dim, and he scarcely raised his head when his father entered.

"There's bad news, lad!" said Maniwel abruptly; "—news you'd never guess."

"Nought to do wi' John Clegg, has it?" asked Jagger, straightening himself from the bench.

"That's a good shot, lad! He's run away; cleared off wi' every penny he could lay his hands on! I thank God from my heart 'at you an' me hasn't a sin o' that sort on our souls. There's hundreds ruined, according to t' paper."

Jagger had not moved. His hands still grasped the plane where his eyes also rested.

"It's naught but what I've expected," he said in a hard voice. "I've dreamt night after night 'at t' money was lost, and someway I've never built on it. We lose fifteen pound a year interest, and we're where we were before—on t' Street called Straight."

It was almost a sneer; but it was instantly atoned for, and with a quick glance at his father's face he went on:

"Nay, I'll say naught about it. T' devil's won that trick, but t' game isn't finished yet. I care naught about t' money now 'at Nancy's——"

He stopped as comprehension widened, and a new light came into his eyes.

"By Jove, it's worth it! I never thought about Baldwin! T' devil's trumped after all, for Baldwin'll be floored. I'd ha' paid three hundred pounds wi' pleasure to ha' floored Baldwin!"

He chuckled with satisfaction, but the smile faded when he caught sight of his father's face.

"Jagger!" said Maniwel almost sternly. "I'm sorry to hear a son o' mine talk like a child o' the devil. 'Satan hath desired to have thee, that he may sift thee like wheat.' But you're a beginner, and you've a deal to learn. If Baldwin was to fall down Gordel and break his leg you'd none let him lie to crawl home by himself; and

I'm off there now to talk things over wi' him, if so be as he'll let me."

"You are?" said Jagger, with closed teeth.

"I'm off there now," repeated his father.

"Then there's no more to be said"; and Jagger turned to his work.

Keturah had just lit the lamp when Maniwel knocked at the door and raised the latch in the familiar fashion of the country. Baldwin was sitting by the hearth smoking the one pipe in which he indulged himself of an evening. His eyebrows met in a scowl as he recognised his visitor and the tone in which he bade him enter was anything but cordial.

"It's thee, is it? It's long since tha was i' this house afore."

Involuntarily his speech broadened into the homelier dialect which both men had used to employ with each other in former days, and Maniwel followed suit.

"Aye," he replied, "and I don't know 'at I durst ha' come, Baldwin, if it hadn't been 'at I wor thrussen. But it's a saying 'at trouble makes strange bedmates, and there's trouble for both on us, lad. I' one way happen it's worse for me nor what it is for thee, for I stand to lose all I've saved; but I'm flayed tha'll find it harder to bide, for tha drops from a bigger height."

Whilst Maniwel was speaking a grey shade had spread over Baldwin's face, though it was the tone in which the words were spoken rather than the words themselves that sent a chill to his heart. The scowl left his brow and his eyes widened, like the mouth that no longer offered its hospitality to the long, black clay, and he was dumb; unable to swear at the intruder or to bid him quicken his explanation—dumb with a foreboding that left him sick and helpless in the presence of his enemy.

"It's all in t' *Evening Post*," Maniwel went on. He had not seated himself, but leaned against the dresser as if his stay was likely to be short; and Keturah was too concerned at the sight of her brother to remember the duties of hostess—"John Clegg's made off, taking all wi' him, and there's a warrant out for his arrest——"

The cold statement of fact broke the spell like the touch of a fairy's wand, and Baldwin jumped to his feet and snatched the paper from Maniwel's hand.

"Tha'rt a liar!" he shouted. "—— tha for bringing thy black lies into my house! I won't believe it if I see it i' print——!" He was tearing the paper open as he spoke and his eyes fell at once upon the record that ran in heavy type across two columns.

**"WELL-KNOWN MONEY-LENDER ABSCONDS!**

**IMMENSE LIABILITIES"**

It was enough. The name of John Clegg met his gaze on the first line and he threw the paper from him and sank back into his chair with a groan. Keturah's apron was to her eyes and she was weeping volubly when the door of the parlour opened and Nancy appeared.

Before she had time to speak Baldwin turned round and vented his wrath upon her.

"Curse you and all your —— lot!" he said savagely. "Thieves and robbers, that's what you are! You might well pay your brass into t' bank, you sly ratten—when you knew your uncle was naught no better nor a pick-purse. Honour among thieves! I don't doubt but what he warned you, —— him..."

Keturah had sunk into a chair and was holding her apron to her ears in the usual way, but Nancy turned her white face away from the angry man and moved towards the table where the paper was lying. All the time a torrent of coarse abuse which nobody heeded was pouring from Baldwin's lips.

Maniwel laid his hand on the paper.

"Wait a minute, lass," he said kindly. "There's news there 'at'll cut you like a knife. Your uncle John's missing, and things look black again' him there's no denying. But it'll happen all turn out better than like, and anyway it's not for us to judge him over hard 'at doesn't know all. There's One above 'at'll judge both him and us."

"And you've lost all?" she said calmly, though her hands shook and her face was colourless.

"We shall see," he replied soothingly. "It's early days yet to talk about 'all'. That's what I want to say to Baldwin." He turned his head in the direction of the fireplace again. "We've got to keep up wer hearts and wer heads, and see 'at we make t' best of a bad job. There'll be summat left to share out, surely."

Another volley of coarse abuse from Baldwin was the only reply he received. Nancy was reading the report,—steadily—but with mouth firmly closed; and Keturah had covered her head and was rocking her chair, consoling herself with groans. Maniwel went over to the hearth where Baldwin's feet were on the ruins of his pipe.

"What a man says in his temper is easy forgi'en, Baldwin," he said. His eyes were almost woman-like in their tenderness, but the firmness in the voice was that of a man and a strong man. "It's bound to be a sad blow for tha, but t' ship isn't allus wrecked when it strikes a rock, and if there's owt I can do to help tha tha's nobbut to speak t' word and we'll put wer heads together——"

"If tha'll be good enough to take thy-sen off, Maniwel Drake, tha'll be doing me t' only service I ask of tha," said Baldwin, his voice trembling with the passion he

was endeavouring to restrain. “Tha’s had what tha come for—t’ pleasure o’ seeing me knocked off o’ my feet wi’ t’ news tha brought; tha can get thee gone now and tell t’ funny tale to Jagger. Put wer heads together, will we? Let me tell tha Baldwin Briggs’s none done yet; and there’s a lad’ll put his head alongside mine ’at’s worth all t’ Drake fam’ly rolled into one. He seed this coming; and if I’d ta’en a bit o’ notice tha’d happen ha’ had less ’casion to make game o’ me.”

“You’re out of your mind——” began Nancy hotly; and it was not the anger that flashed into Baldwin’s eyes that stopped her; but the hand Maniwel laid on her arm.

“The lass is right,” he said sternly; “—tha’rt out o’ thy mind, or tha’d shame to say such things to a man’s ’at’s wanted to be thi friend. But it’s out o’ t’ abundance o’ t’ heart ’at t’ mouth speaks, and thi heart’s so full o’ muck ’at no clean thought can get either in or out. When a man walks crook’d he sees crook’d; and there’ll come a time when tha’ll know what it is to lack a friend. If Nancy’s husband can help tha, well and good; I’m glad on’t. If tha’s laid up treasure i’ any man’s heart it’s more than tha’s ever done afore sin’ I knew tha—nay, tha’s no ’casion to grind thi teeth; lame as I am I could throw tha on t’ fire-back wi’ my one hand, but there’s better fuel i’ t’ bucket. I’m going now; but I’ve one thing more to say t’ first. Tha’rt as miserable a soul as ever drew breath, and if tha loses thi brass tha can’ scarce be more miserable. Tha’s made it harder for me to offer tha help another time; but what I call tha I call tha to thi face and not behind thi back, and if tha finds ’at t’ stick tha’s trusting to fails tha, remember tha’s still a friend i’ Maniwel Drake—tha hears me?”

“I’ll see tha blaze before I’ll ask thy help!” Baldwin almost hissed.

“Tha’s seen me blaze just now,” returned Maniwel calmly; “or anyway tha’s heard t’ crackle. If a man doesn’t blaze i’ thi comp’ny it isn’t for lack o’ kindling. I’m going now; but I’m sorry for tha from my soul, and tha knows where to turn when tha comes to t’ far end.”

He let his eyes rest for a moment on Baldwin who spat disgustedly into the fire, and with a word of farewell to Nancy left the house.

On his way home he met Inman returning from the inn.

“I fancy you’re wanted,” he said pausing in his walk. “Baldwin’s i’ trouble.”

Inman raised his eyebrows, nodded, and sauntered on.

## CHAPTER XV

### IN WHICH THE VILLAGERS DISCUSS THE DISASTER

NEVER had an unfortunate business man more alert and resourceful adviser than Baldwin found in Inman at this crisis. Promptly, yet with no lessening of deference—nay, with a greater show of it—the mate became captain of the ship and held the helm with a master's hand. In the inn and elsewhere Inman made light of the disaster. It was hard luck, he admitted; but when a man had plenty left, and had always lived and was content to live, as if he had nothing, there was no need to make a fuss about the loss of a thousand or two.

"It's his heirs who may pull long faces," he explained lightly; "and he damns them with a good grace, and doesn't seem quite to know who they are."

Baldwin himself kept indoors, and only his workpeople saw his face and heard his voice, and if both were a trifle sourer the difference was not very marked.

Inman, on the other hand, was friendlier and more approachable. He walked with a lighter step, and whistled softly as he worked, to the satisfaction of his master who looked upon these proceedings as a deliberate act of policy on his astute subordinate's part; and also of the men, who appreciated anything that lightened and sweetened the usually sultry atmosphere of the shop. There was another reason for the master's gratification, though it was one that was carefully hidden from everybody else, in the circumstance that his foreman's energies were employed, and with apparently equal zeal, in two directions, one of which was to save the business from wreckage and the other to ensure the discomfiture of the Drakes. This latter object he pursued with an ingenuity and relentless determination that seemed almost superhuman to the slow-witted master, who never chuckled now except when news was brought that another scheme for his competitors' downfall had hatched out successfully.

"He's nowt i' my line, isn't t' lad," said Swithin; "and never has been from t' first night when he stole Jagger's job fro' him; but one thing I say and that I stand tul, 'at he's turned out a rare friend for Baldwin in his time o' trouble."

"Mebbee, mebbe," Ambrose's thin voice broke in; and from the look on the others' faces it was evident the two disputants were having the field to themselves. "A hungry dog is fain of a dirty pudden,' as t' t'owd speyk puts it, and this young fella gives him summat he hasn't wit enough to get for his-sen. But when a man's gifted same as I've been, and partic'lar when he's lived to my years, Swith'n there's things he can see wi' his een shut; and I can see Baldwin harvestin' trouble by t' peck 'at this young fella's scattered for seeds o' kindness."

The old man's words carried conviction and Swithin himself felt their force.

"There's no man can say I'm a friend to either on 'em, Ambrus, and I'm not one to deny 'at you've t' gift o' seeing farther nor most folk——"

"It wor born in me, Swithin, same as t' talent to make verses," broke in Ambrose in a pleased voice. "They both run together, as you may say, and I take no credit for't."

"But I gie you credit for't," returned Swithin, stoutly, "and I don't match my-sen alongside o' you, Ambrus; not for a minute, when it comes to seeing what's i' folks' minds. I've never ta'en to t' lad, and I shouldn't wonder if there isn't a deal o' trewth i' what you say. T' more I dwell on't, and t' less I like t' lewk on't, I will admit. They say he's lent Baldwin all his own brass to tide him over while he can turn his-sen round; and if all's to be believed 'at's tell'd he got Keturah to put her bit in when Baldwin couldn't move her. Now you heard what t' lad said for his-sen that first night when he come into t' bar and crushed t' life out o' t' spider: 'there's no mercy i' Natur' he said, 'for the man what stands i' t' way o' progress,' I ask you if them wasn't his varry words; and now I'm asking my-sen, if he's having mercy on Baldwin, *what's he doin' it for?*"

"Aye, and I'll ask you something," interposed the same young man who had defied Inman to his face on one occasion;—"he's got Baldwin to sell all his property; turned every stick and stone into brass to save t' business, so they say; *but who's bought all t' property?* Now, can any of you tell me that?"

He looked round upon the faces of those whose eyes were turned inquiringly towards him; but there was no answer to be read on any of them. Only old Ambrose replied:

"T' farm our Robin leases wor bought in by some lawyer chap; but who he was I can't bethink me, though I seed it i' t' paper."

"Aye, we've all seen it i' t' paper," Jack went on savagely; "t' first lot was bought by this lawyer from Airlee; t' next it was a' auctioneer from Airlee; them three cottages went to another man from Airlee, and that other man was a clerk i' t' same lawyer's office, and t' same lawyer's name is on t' bottom of all t' auctioneer's bills. If you can't smoke aught after that, I'll help you; but them 'at's both years and wisdom'll happen put two and two together."

Swithin was eyeing the speaker unkindly, as he did any young man who promised to score at the expense of his elders; but Ambrose was less sensitive.

"You'll be meanin' I reckon 'at all t' property has gotten into t' same hands? Well, it's a sayin' 'at all things has a' end and a pudden has two; but what end there is i' cloakin' a thing up so as you don't know whose brass is payin' for t' property I

don't see just at this minute. But it's trew enough 'at

'There's things out o' seet  
What'll come to the leet  
If we nobbut have patience, and bide.'

as I once wrote when I was in my gifted mood. There was three more lines, but they've clean gone out o' my mind, and I don't know 'at it matters——”

“You were never more gifted nor when you made that verse, Ambrus,” interrupted Jack; “and if we all live to see t' end we shall see what a cunning devil this Inman is. It's naught to none of us who t' property belongs to; but I can tell you who t' lawyer is 'at's bought it——”

“We know who he is, so you're telling us nowt, Swithin broke in derisively; and Jack turned upon him with a note in his voice that the remark hardly accounted for.

“I'm telling you what none of you's had wit to pick out for yourselves; 'at it's Inman's lawyer—him 'at he's recommended to Baldwin for this John Clegg business,—'at's bought up all t' property. *Now* do I let a bit o' daylight in?”

From the expression on the men's faces it was evident that he had; but the operation was not one that Swithin approved when he was not the operator, and he frowned on the young man as he said:

“You've gone round and round, Jack, same as a pegged goat; but you've just brought us back to t' point I left off at—‘What's he doing it for?’ That's what you haven't tell'd us, and that's what I ask?”

“Aye, there's lots of things you can ask,” answered Jack hotly, whilst a red flush overspread his face and his brow grew black. “I could ask what he's doing it for when he meets your Polly first i' one place then i' another, but always where he thinks they won't be seen. ‘There's no mercy i' Nature!’ No, by gen, there's none in his; and one o' these days you'll be finding it out i' your house to your sorrow.”

Without waiting to see the effect of this outburst—perhaps because he was too ashamed of what it revealed—he pulled forward his cap and left the assembly. Swithin's mouth was wide open; but except for a furtive glance none of the men dared to look at him, save only old Ambrose.

“It's t' way o' Natur', Swithin——” he began; but by this time the other had found his breath, and he broke forth:

“T' way o' Natur'; If he hurts our Polly——! but I don't believe a word on't, and I'll break yon Jack Pearce his neck for him! She's more sense nor to let such as Inman go near her. Why, bless her, it 'ud kill her mother if owt happened t' lass!”

“Don't ye be too sure, Swithin, 'at there's naught in it,” one of the older men

interposed quickly. "My missus has heard t' tale, and there's more nor one has seen 'em together. It's all round t' village, anyway; if you start a scandal it doesn't go on crutches, you know—t' women see to that."

"There's happen nowt in it," another added. "Jack's a bit touchy, you see. He's been spreading t' net his-self for Polly, and he's like to be jealous."

The younger men laughed and Swithin experienced a sense of relief.

"I'll net him!" he muttered; "spreading his rotten lies through all t' village."

"All t' same," said old Ambrose; "when a wed man smirks on a young lass he owt to be watched. It's a trew word 'at there's nivver a foul face but there's a foul fancy to match it; and a foul face that lad has, wi' mischief written deep. And when a man's all for his-sen, even though it's i' t' way o' Natur', a lass's mother counts for nowt."

Swithin shifted uneasily on his seat; and the landlord, who had heard most of the triologue, but had been too busy to take part, now tried to divert the conversation into another channel.

"I feel sorry for yon two," he said, indicating the Drakes' dwelling with a jerk of his head. "What they've had to put up with sin' they started 'ud try the patience o' Job, for there's been nasty underhanded tricks played on 'em 'at 'ud ha' driven some men out o' t' village. If you take pleasure i' smartness there's no question but what Inman's smart, and keeps himself inside o' t' law into t' bargain."

"Aye, aye, Albert; but you're nobbut a young man and hasn't got your second sight yet," said Ambrose knowingly. "A man 'at laiks wi' a rope round his neck may last for a while but he'll be throttled at t' finish. There's a sayin' about a green bay-tree 'at I can't call to mind—whether it's i' t' Bible or one o' my verses I couldn't just say. I've lost a deal wi' being a poor scholar, and it grieves me to think 'at if I'd nobbut—but I've lost t' track o' what I was sayin', for owd age sets my head a-hummin' like a top."

"It caps me," said Albert when the weak voice quavered to a standstill, "'at Maniwel takes it all so pleasant-like; and as for Jagger, I can't reckon him up noway. I believe if they were to rive his shop down he'd nayther swear nor laugh; but just set to work and build it up again."

"He cares nowt about owt sin' Inman wed Nancy," commented Swithin. "That explains Jagger, and there's no more to be said."

"Nay, there's more nor that, Swithin," said Ambrose. "You can judge t' foal better when you know it's sire, and Maniwel explains Jagger. T' lad's been a bit slow at findin' his feet, but there's nowt like a storm for drivin' a man to t' rock, and Jagger frames to follow after his fayther."



“He mud do worse,” said some man whom Ambrose could not see.

“And that’s a trew word,” said Swithin, still gloomily, for his thoughts were divided.

“Right enough,” the landlord admitted; “but whether it’s a fault or a merit for Maniwel to take things so calm-like is a thing ’at a man can’t easy settle in his mind. Baldwin’s spread tales about ’em while there’s scarce a timber-yard i’ t’ country ’at’ll give ’em credit. They’ve clipped Joe his wings so as he dursn’t carry for ’em. Any man ’at supplies Maniwel is crossed off Baldwin’s books; and even them ’at’s given him a bit o’ work has been warned ’at if they go there for t’ little jobs they needn’t turn to Baldwin for them ’at’s too big for Maniwel to tackle. And now ’at he’s lost his brass, be it much or little, what chance has he?”

Most of those present shook their heads in reluctant agreement with the landlord, but Swithin turned so that he could look Albert in the face, and snapped an aggressive—“Well?”

“I was only meaning,” the landlord explained, “at it doesn’t seem sort o’ natural for a man to be so cheerful i’ them circumstances, and to bear no grudge——”

“Well, ’cos why is he cheerful and doesn’t bear no grudge?” questioned Swithin, whose manner in this examination was anything but cheerful, and who seemed to be seeking a vent for his over-charged feelings. “I’ll tell you ’cos why! Have you never heard tell o’ God’s will? Well, Maniwel believes ’at there’s a power at t’ back o’ that man ’at goes straight and tries to do his duty by his neighbour ’at not all the devils i’ hell can stand again’, let alone such little devils as this Inman.”

His head fell as he mentioned the name, and not one of the company needed to be told that the seed Jack Pearce had dropped was already germinating.

Old Ambrose knew it; but his soul had been fired by this new thought, and he broke out eagerly:

“Aye, you’ve hit t’ nail fair on t’ head this time, Swith’n. I couldn’t ha’ put it better my-sen—not when I was i’ my gifted prime, and I shouldn’t wonder if it comes o’ you goin’ to t’ chapil, if not reg’lar, a toathri times i’ t’ year. I was a chapil-goer my-sen when I was a young fella and I call to mind a famous sermon by an owd man called Laycock—he was a local, but a grander preycher nor some ’at wore white chokers. It was i’ t’ days when they didn’t watter t’ Gospil down same as they do now, when they’re flayed o’ callin’ t’ devil hard names chance he happens to hear ’em. Owd Laycock pictur’d him as a bull in a mad hig ’at no man could stand up again’. But he tewk both t’ man and t’ bull down to t’ railway; and he set t’ man on t’ Scotchman and t’ bull atween t’ lines; and he opened t’ Scotchman’s throttle up yonder aboon t’ Junction; and eh, dear, there wasn’t as much wind left i’

that bull when t' train had passed as there is i' my poor bellowses at this minute. I made a set o' grand verses, but they're clean gone. It seems a sad waste o' good stuff."

"It was a sadder waste of a good bull," murmured one of the company whose business made him a judge of such matters.

"T' bull 'ud ha' made a sad waste of a good man, wouldn't it?" snapped Swithin.

"It was only what you mud call a parribble—this o' owd Laycock's," Ambrose explained soothingly. "But what caps me is 'at Maniwel hasn't so much as a foul look for t' bull—meanin' by that word both Baldwin and Nancy's husband; but contraireywise 'ud go out of his road to do 'em a kindness."

Before he could complete his observation, a shower that had been threatening for some time began to fall heavily, and the company dispersed—some to their homes and others to the parlour of the inn where the entrance of Inman prevented any continuation of the discussion.

Jealousy is a good stone on which to sharpen a man's wits; but there was another in the village, in whom that trait was entirely wanting, who was watching the course of events with a quick intelligence that read into every move of Inman's its proper significance. In one matter Maniwel was misled, for Nancy's name figured in the list of creditors with the sum of £500 against it, and he was thankful that the girl's loss was no larger. To what extent she was still interested in the joinery business he could not be sure; but he knew that by the terms of her father's will Baldwin had the option to reduce his indebtedness, and from the known fact that the machinery was Baldwin's own he concluded that little of the original loan was now owing.

Baldwin's name figured high up in the list of creditors; and the outlook in his case was dark as the realisable assets were small, and it seemed likely that they would be absorbed in their entirety by the expense of collection.

Although Maniwel was naturally magnanimous, and less ready than most to attribute selfish motives to Inman, he was too shrewd an observer to overlook the evidences of duplicity that multiplied as the days went by; for it is a mistake to suppose that a large heart can be indulged only at the expense of a small brain. The wisdom of the serpent may be usefully combined with the harmlessness of the dove, and Maniwel had long ago reached the conclusion that Inman was working for his own ends and hoodwinking the master who regarded him as his only friend. He was convinced that Inman was the purchaser of all Baldwin's property, and he shared his convictions with his own family but with no one else.

Jagger was indifferent. The money had been Nancy's to start with—why

shouldn't it return to her? As for a double-dyed rascal like Inman—well, such men were apt to over-reach themselves and he could afford to wait. Meantime, any stick, however crooked, was good enough to beat such a dog as Baldwin with, and the harder Inman laid it on the better he would be pleased.

Hannah's pity was reserved for Nancy, whose miseries had earned her forgiveness long ago. As for Grannie, she shook her head mournfully and said:

“Didn't I tell you—

‘A Clegg wife  
And it's trouble or strife.’

“He comes off a black moor, does her husband. Wasn't it there where t' bog slid down and sought to drown 'em off t' face o' t' earth, they was that wicked, same as Sodom and Gomorrah? A race o' cut-throats and kidnappers, I've heard my father tell, where t' men was rakes and t' sons o' rakes, and t' women a set o' trollops. What was she doing, I wonder, to mate wi' such-like? But sorrow was written on t' lass' face, as I've tell'd you many a time.”

“Never heed t' old tales, mother,” Maniwel would say, as he saw the seamed face grow troubled. “There's good, bad and middling on them moors same as there is on these. You may be thankful 'at he can't do us no damage, choose how bad he is——!”

“Can't he!” commented Jagger.

“No!” continued Maniwel. “I said us. I don't deny 'at he can put a toathri obstacles i' t' way o' t' business; but I reckon naught o' that. When I was a young man I didn't set much store by flat-racing; but if there was a hurdle race you couldn't ha' held me back. They put a bit o' spice into life, does obstacles; and there's one thing I will say: there isn't much chance, o' sleeping i' t' daytime when Inman's planking down his hurdles i' t' road, but I lose no sleep at nights.”

## CHAPTER XVI

### IN WHICH INMAN SHOWS THE SUBTLETY OF A VERY VENOMOUS SERPENT

**D**URING these fateful weeks Nancy's aversion to her husband settled into a milder form of repugnance as she thought she recognised on his part a warmer feeling towards herself. The reason for this increase of amiability she might easily have surmised if she had been acquainted with all the facts, which was far from being the case, for Inman told her just as much as he wished her to know. One might have thought that his affability would have aroused suspicion: that she might have realised that there is no need for the highwayman to waste powder and shot when a smile, which costs nothing, will serve his turn as well. But Nancy was in no mood for analysing motives, and was only too thankful that a protector was at hand to stand between her and the ill-temper which Baldwin expended upon her with a savage coarseness that exceeded anything she had previously experienced. The very sight of her, reminding him as it did of the man who had robbed him, and of her better fortune—for what was a paltry five hundred to one with her means?—goaded him to vulgar reproaches and accusations which Nancy would have found intolerable if it had not been for the knowledge that her husband was only waiting his time. Inman was not always present on these occasions; but when he was he would let his eyes rest on her with a meaning look, and she knew that he was conveying the message he had spoken in private a hundred times.

“Have patience, lass! It'll be your turn after a while! I'm booking it all down!”

In reality, of course, she was mistress of the situation, with the key at her girdle, and she was quite aware of it. Baldwin's resources were almost exhausted and Inman's savings she guessed were inconsiderable. She was the only capitalist of the three, and if Baldwin had been wise he would have made her his friend, in which case she might not have acquiesced so carelessly in the use of her money for the appropriation of his property. As it was, he alienated her sympathy and made her hostile.

She seldom replied to any of his taunts, and was even silent when her husband encouraged her, contenting herself with a shrug and an expression of weary indifference, and Inman would continue:

“You're safe enough in my hands. Leave it to me, and don't worry your head over whys and wherefores. Your interests are mine, and I'll steer the ship into calm waters, you'll see; but it won't be Baldwin Briggs who'll be master when it gets there.”

He always laughed as he ended, and Nancy sometimes smiled. His strong self-confidence struck a chord in her nature that responded readily. She did not love him; she did not even respect him; sometimes when she happened to touch him as they lay side by side in bed she would shiver and draw back as if he had been some loathsome animal; but he was the only protector she had, and he saved her the trouble of thinking for herself at a time when she found it difficult to think. That is why she acquiesced without question, and with a dull glow of satisfaction at her heart and the beginnings of a sense of triumph, when Inman told her what he had planned regarding the purchase of Baldwin's property.

"It'll tide him over for a bit," he said, "but it's a plank and not a jolly-boat, and he's bound to go under."

His eyes smiled into Nancy's as he said it; but the rest of his face was passive.

"He doesn't seem to think so," said Nancy.

"No," remarked her husband grimly; "he feels safe because my arm's round him; but the time will come when——"

He opened his hands and flung his arms wide—a significant completion of the sentence; and seeing his wife's eyes soften he added with a laugh:

"Then, maybe, we'll save him and make him galley-slave, the foul-mouthed devil."

When the report spread round the neighbourhood that Inman was the purchaser that astute individual only stared. Once, when he was directly challenged, he replied that he didn't discuss business matters except with principals, and added:

"Lies are as thick on the ground as weeds. He's a fool who wastes his time stubbing 'em up!"

"Doesn't Baldwin guess?" Nancy asked, when he was relating this encounter.

"All Baldwin does is to curse to all eternity those who've bought at half value," laughed her husband. "There's no wonder you look worn and withered, Nancy!—he's blasted you! Let him guess! Let 'em all guess! Priestley's a safe lawyer, and'll give naught away."

This was only one move in the game and a legitimate one; there were others, more devilish, that required a clear head, infinite patience and the unscrupulous use of means which Inman judged it prudent to conceal from Nancy's eyes. Every evening when the men had gone Baldwin and Inman would return to the office and discuss the situation out of earshot of the women. On one of the earliest of these occasions Inman had produced from a cupboard of which he had been given the key a bottle of whisky and a single tumbler.

"You don't touch this stuff?" he said. "You were a wise man not to begin it, for

it's a habit 'at isn't easy dropped. I wish I could do without it; but I've always found in my case that a drop of whisky's a help when I'm hard pushed, and gingers me up a bit. I don't recommend it, mind you, all the same, to them that aren't used to it."

He was mixing himself a glass as he spoke, with a veiled eye on his master who looked as if he was going to forbid the indulgence. Inman, however, took no notice.

"A cup of coffee or a bottle o' bitters might get you to the same place in time," he said; "but this lands you there quicker, and time's money just now. It gives your brain a spurt and comforts your heart, *I* find; but those who haven't begun it had better keep off it."

He turned a deaf ear to Baldwin's mutterings, and from that moment showed himself unusually resourceful. No actor on the stage of a crowded theatre who was drawing the plaudits of his audience that night was playing his part more admirably than Inman to this company of one. He had no great liking for spirits, and he was on ordinary occasions studiously abstemious; but he could drink hard on occasion and be little the worse for it, and he counted on this capability now, when he had an object in view—the object of guiding a pair of unaccustomed feet into the perilous groves of Bacchus.

Midway in the course of their deliberations on that first occasion he had stretched out his hand for the bottle again and had checked himself.

"That won't do!" he said with a laugh; "—too much is as bad as too little," and he had risen and returned the bottle and tumbler to the cupboard, putting the key in his pocket—an action which had made the desired impression on Baldwin.

For a time the ingenious and infernal scheme seemed likely to fail; but if his hopes were disappointed Inman continued the same tactics and displayed no hurry. At one time he would leave the bottle untouched until the ineffectiveness of his suggestions led Baldwin to bring down his hand upon the table with a hot recommendation that the condemned stuff should be fetched out and his counsellor should get a move on. At another he would profess physical weariness and depression, and would refuse almost angrily to drink on the ground that a man might go too far in drowning sorrow. On such an occasion Baldwin might storm as he liked and Inman would remain unmoved.

"We'll leave it over till to-morrow. You wouldn't have a man do what you've too much sense to do yourself?"

The subtle poison worked slowly, but still it worked. One night, when he had been more than usually harassed because the bank at Keepton where he had opened an account had definitely refused an overdraft on the ground that the security he was able to offer was insufficient, and Inman's ingenuity had been unequal to the

task of raising money in any other direction, Baldwin sat in the kitchen, brooding over his misfortunes, long after the others had gone to bed. He was weighted with care and dreaded the sleepless hours that stretched in front of him.

After a while he went out and quietly entered the office. It would not have surprised Inman to know that the duplicate of the key that locked his cupboard was in the master's bunch; it might not have surprised him, but it would certainly have gratified him, if he could have seen the door unlocked and the whisky bottle produced. Baldwin had only a vague idea of proportions, but he followed his foreman's example and mixed himself a stiff glass. That night he slept heavily and was untroubled by dreams. Thereafter the two men drank together, not without protest on Inman's part, and Baldwin soon outdistanced his teacher. Then Inman knew that the game was won.

All the village was aware that Baldwin was drinking heavily before the news reached the ears of Keturah and Nancy.

Although it had been planned with that object Inman professed great annoyance when he found that the confidence he had reposed in Albert (very sympathetic confidence) had been abused; and his frowning silence when the matter was mentioned in his hearing was sufficient confirmation of the truth of the report. It was Hannah who told Nancy. Her kindly heart had been touched by the message Jagger had brought her; and knowing that Nancy's condition caused her to stand in special need of a friend in whom she could confide and who could be of service to her in a hundred ways she determined that nothing short of actual prohibition by Inman himself should keep her away.

Hannah was a woman of action; a woman for an emergency; and though sharp-spoken, a healer of breaches rather than a maker of them. Inman gave her a keen glance when he found the two together; said "How d'ye do?" in acknowledgement of her nod; and so tacitly recognised the friendship. It was the first real crumb of comfort Nancy had tasted since her marriage.

"You know he's taken to drink, I suppose?"

"Who? James?" inquired Nancy, not wholly indifferent to what this might portend.

Hannah shook her head. "Nay, I mean Baldwin. It's all over t' place 'at he goes to bed drunk night after night."

It was on Nancy's lips to deny it; but one or two suspicious circumstances she had observed held back the contradiction.

"James has never said aught," she remarked hesitatingly.

"Maybe not," replied Hannah, who was careful not to make mischief between

husband and wife. "They say your husband's done his level best to keep him off it,—locked t' drink up, and Baldwin broke t' lock, he was that mad for't. But I've happen done wrong to tell you, for you'll be safe enough with your husband in t' house. All t' same when you're as you are it's as well to know."

"Yes, I'm glad you've told me," Nancy said. "I daresay folks are making a deal out o' very little; but I'll keep my eyes open and say naught."

When Keturah heard of it she was at first tearfully indignant, but it was her nature to believe the worst, and her sense of helplessness led her to patch up a kind of peace with Nancy upon whom she was ready to lean now that the only prop she had known was likely to fail her. Later, when Baldwin was at no pains to conceal his condition, fear dried her tears, and drove her into a mood of despondency that left her limp and unequal to the strain of her ordinary household duties.

The seeds thus sown bore the crop of results Inman had foreseen, and hearing of Baldwin's moral wreckage, the firms that had continued to give him credit now withheld it, whilst others gambled with the risk by charging higher prices. It was in vain that Inman interviewed and pleaded with them, for he was always forced to admit reluctantly in the end that in their place he would have done the same.

"The business is sound enough," he would say; "but of course I'm not master and Mr. Briggs is. It's a sad pity that trouble's driven him to this; but we've to take facts as they are and I can't blame you, though I wish you could see your way just this once——"

"Would you, if you were in my place?"

Inman hesitated. In conducting these negotiations he gave the impression of a man whose inflexible loyalty was baffled by a strict conscientiousness.

"If I could be absolutely sure that he would allow me to guide him, I would say yes. So far he has done so on most occasions. Once or twice lately—but he wasn't master of himself then, and I'm hoping he'll pull himself together."

"Find somebody to guarantee the account, Mr. Inman, and you shall have the old terms with pleasure. What about your wife?" Everybody knew by this time that Nancy had ample means.

Inman shook his head. "I've tried my best, but you know what timid creatures women are; and my wife's as far in as she cares to be."

"That's exactly our position, Mr. Inman."

This was how it always ended, and Inman would shake hands with a downcast expression on his honest face, and a note of regret in his voice as he assured the principal that he couldn't blame him.

One man in the village refused to join in the general chorus of condemnation.



There is a variation of a familiar proverb that reads: "A friend loveth at all times, and is born as a brother for adversity." Maniwel Drake was such a friend.

He had been having a hard struggle in his business as we have seen; but so far his shoulders had been broad enough for the burdens they had had to carry, and his heart had always been light. Since Jagger's "conversion" he had scarcely had a care in the world; for the loss of his little capital had left him unmoved, and it is true to say that the contemplation of Baldwin's misfortune had given him more sorrow than anything he had experienced since the death of his wife. It afforded him little satisfaction to realise that as Baldwin's embarrassments increased his own diminished; that the "hurdles" were being removed one by one out of his path; and that a moderate prosperity was opening out before him.

It was not until Baldwin took to drink that Maniwel allowed himself to give way to depression, however, and when he found that his son received the news with an indifference that was not far removed from satisfaction his wrath was aroused.

"If there's rejoicing in the presence o' the angels of God over a sinner 'at repenteth," he said, "there's like to be rejoicing amongst t'other sort over one 'at sinks deeper into t' mire; but I should grieve for a son o' mine to join in such a devil-dance! I'm for lending Baldwin a hand if it can be done at all. He's both ox and ass, is Baldwin; and if he can be got out o' t' pit it's our duty to do it."

"And have your labour for your pains," commented Jagger.

"It won't be t' first time I've worked for naught, and been no worse for't," replied Maniwel.

He chose his opportunity when he had seen Inman pass on his way to the station, and early in the afternoon he walked up to Baldwin's workshop. There was no one downstairs and all was quiet above, but when he reached the next storey he heard a sound in Baldwin's office and went in, as he had always done—as everybody did—without waiting for an answer to his knock.

There was a bottle on the table and a glass half full of spirits was in Baldwin's hand. He set it down angrily when he recognised his visitor, and with a curse bade him begone.

"I neither know nor care what brings tha!" he shouted. "Get outside, afore I help tha down!"

"Baldwin!" said Maniwel in a firm but kindly tone; "there never was a time, lad, when tha needed a friend more than tha does now, and I doubt if tha has one i' t' world, barring my-sen. I've come as a friend——"

"I won't listen to tha," shouted the infuriated man, who had already had drink enough to inflame his passion. "I tell tha I'll do tha an injury if tha doesn't take thi-

sen off! Damn tha! Isn't it enough 'at tha's ruined me; thee and thy son——!"

"God help tha, lad!" broke in Maniwel; "tha can't do me half as big an injury as tha's doing thi-sen, and I'm flayed them 'at's advising tha is doing tha no good."

His eye had fallen on the second glass in the cupboard, and his voice became more pleading. "Don't thee pin thi faith to Inman, lad. I'd do no man a wrong; but it's borne in on me 'at that lad's working for his own ends, and when he's finished wi' tha he'll toss tha on t' midden same as an old shoe! Cannot tha trust me, lad? Tha's never known Maniwel Drake go back on his word, and I promise tha I'll help tha, if I have to suffer for't."

Baldwin's anger had made him impotent, but at these words he drained his glass and then dashed it at Maniwel's feet where it lay broken in a thousand fragments. Curse followed curse as he refused his old mate's offer and threatened him with mischief. Maniwel went a step forward and laid his hand on the other's arm.

"I'll go, lad. It's ill trying to reason wi' a man 'at's i' drink; but just try to let this one word get through t' drink to thi memory. When tha comes to thi-sen and wants a friend, tha'll find him where he's always been—at Maniwel Drake's."

With these words and without a backward glance, he left the room, and returned home.

## CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH NANCY'S BABY IS BORN AND JAGGER LOSES  
HIS TEMPER

THERE are some men who take an almost scientific interest in compassing the ruin of others. Along certain channels the current of humane and kindly feeling may flow as with other men, but let some particular individual injure them, or stand in the way of their advancement, and their conduct becomes inhuman; and they will watch the sufferings they produce with something of the detached and impersonal interest of the chemist who expects that his mixture of chemicals must ultimately shatter the vessel that contains it, and whose only care is to safeguard himself from injury in the process.

Inman was of this class. It afforded him positive pleasure to see how the coils he wound so cunningly tightened about his unsuspecting victim. The knowledge that he was unsuspected added to his enjoyment; tickled his sense of humour. He believed with all his soul that Baldwin's motto—"all for my-sen" could not be bettered; it was the view of life held by all healthy animals—by the cross-grained buck-rabbit as much as by the stoat; and the game of stalking the stalker was one that afforded him endless amusement.

It gratified him too to realise that he was succeeding in another direction: that the villagers were looking upon him with a less unfriendly eye as Baldwin's increasing demoralisation and coarseness of language cooled their already luke-warm sympathies. It was to the man's credit, they said, that he should keep his head and his temper, and work industriously and cleverly in his master's interests, when everybody knew what provocation to wrath the master offered. Inman never manifested ill-temper; never advanced beyond a half-humorous sneer; maybe (they argued) he showed his worst side to the world, as the men of his wild country were said to do. There were others, however, who shook their heads meaningly, and kept firm hold of their distrust.

Meantime Inman's grip upon his master tightened, and a more domineering note crept into his voice when he addressed him; but only when they were alone; only when evening brought them to the council-room and the bottle.

"I tell you," said Inman, "Nancy's gone as far as she will go. If you think you can do better than I've done, try her yourself—I'm willing. I daresay in spite of all your foul language and black looks she loves you as much as she does me." There was a harder note than usual in his voice, as if his patience was almost exhausted, and his lip took an ugly curve as he spoke of Nancy's love, for she had been irritable of late,

and once or twice hot words had passed between them.

They were sitting at the table in the dimly-lit office, each with a glass in front of him; but Inman was making a mere pretence of drinking.

“You’ve taught her her lesson too well for her to forget it,” he continued as Baldwin merely sent Nancy to an unknown destination.

“She says a man who’s all for himself isn’t to be trusted without security, and what can I say? *You* wouldn’t do it if you were in her place.”

Baldwin scowled and said nothing that could be distinguished.

“There’s one way out and only one, that I can see; but I’ve mentioned it till I’m tired. *I’ll* lend you five hundred;—it’s all I can lay my hands on; but five hundred’ll see you out o’ the ditch; five hundred’ll put you on your feet. And what do I ask for it? Five per cent., that’s all; just what you pay Nancy; and you boggle at it!”

“I do naught o’ t’ sort,” flashed Baldwin fiercely. “I’ll pay you ten; I’ll pay you a damned sight more’n you’ll get anywhere else; but I’ll see you blaze before I’ll give you a bill o’ sale; so there you have it!”

Inman turned on his seat with a gesture of restrained impatience.

“You’d sooner sink in the bog than clutch a dirty rope and be saved! It’s damned folly! I don’t like bills o’ sale, who does? But if you think I’m going to lend my money for your creditors to grab if the worst comes to the worst, you’re mistaken. I can save the business yet; but I’m man and not master, and may be sacked at a minute’s notice, same as you sacked Jagger. It’s either a bill o’ sale, or we flounder on for another month or so and then—”

He shrugged his shoulders; but Baldwin was not looking. He had emptied his glass and the bottle and his eyes were on the table. Inman watched him, and a smile, that was nearly as ugly as the frown it replaced, spread over his face.

“What objection is there to it?” he went on with less heat. “I only want it for security; it isn’t same as I was taking aught from you. Has to be registered, you say? Well, you’ll be registered a deal more in another month or two if you don’t do it. And that’ll go against the grain when the *Herald* and all the other papers have you listed as bankrupt.”

The other’s face became distorted with passion, but the oaths he poured out left Inman unmoved.

“I’m trying to save you, aren’t I?” he continued; “but you’re same as a man that’s drowning; you kick and struggle till you’d pull a strong swimmer down with you, and I’m not having any. Will five hundred set you on your feet? Are you sober enough to answer me that?”

It was the first time that he had adopted this tone with his victim, but he had

measured his distance and knew how far he could go.

"I'm as sober as you," the other growled thickly. "Five hundred 'ud pull me through; but I tell you I'll see you hanged before I'll give you that bill!"

"Very well," said Inman calmly. "Perhaps before we separate you'll tell me why, and what you propose to do instead. My money's right where it is even if it doesn't bring in five per cent."

Baldwin said nothing; and Inman regarded him for quite a minute in silence. He then remarked:

"I've finished with that suggestion now. Next time it's mentioned it'll come from you; but there's one thing I want to point out. These folk you've dealt with all these years aren't willing to do much for you now 'at you're down; and you've no bank to give you a helping hand. Suppose you had to come to grief in the end what harm would it do you if I was to get the machinery, and leave the other creditors to whistle for their brass? What have they done for you that you've to consider them?"

He looked at his watch, and without waiting for an answer rose and went out, turning his steps towards the moors, where there was other game to be snared; and Baldwin sat on, staring moodily at the chair his foreman had vacated.

An hour later Nancy's baby was born and news spread through the village that the mother's life was despaired of. The event had not been expected so soon, but there was plenty of competent help available, and it was not the midwife's inefficiency that caused the old doctor, who had been summoned by telegraph, to shake his head.

"Where's the father?" he inquired. "Tell him I want him, sharp."

Keturah hastened to the workshop, but found only Baldwin whom she could not waken from a drunken sleep. Hannah ran home to ask her brother to seek him.

"He's not in t' 'Packhorse,'" she gasped. "Go fetch him, lad. It's for poor Nancy's sake!"

"And bridle your tongue and temper!" said Maniwel. "If you'll take the moor road, I'll walk down Kirkby way."

Just beyond Baldwin's workshop Jack Pearce caught Jagger's arm.

"Are you after Inman?" he asked; and putting his lips to the other's ear whispered something that caused Jagger to fling off the detaining hand and clench his fists.

"Are you sure, Jack? As certain as there's a God in heaven if I catch him at that game I'll lay him out!"

"I'd like to help you at that job," said Jack; "but I'm best away. I'm dirt in her eyes. If I caught 'em together there'd be murder done, though he could pay me wi'

one hand.”

“He can’t me!” said Jagger grimly; and he strode away into the darkness.

It was not really dark, for in September day lingers on the uplands to chat with night; but there are gloomy places in the shadows of the great hills which those who love the light are careful to avoid. It was towards one of these that Jagger hurried with a fierce anger at his heart that made him oblivious of everything except his mission, and even that was obscured by the deeper purpose of punishment.

Of punishment—not revenge. Nancy lay dying, perhaps by this time was already dead; and the man who ought to have been at hand in the emergency: the man whose quick brain might have suggested something, however impossible or futile: the father of the child who was to lose its mother; was indulging in an amour with another woman—a child whose hair until a few months ago was hanging down her back.

Mountain linnets rose from their nests in alarm as his feet crunched the stiff grass. A couple of gulls wheeled over his head. Even in the dim light the moor was rich in colour, and the mantle night had thrown down upon it could not wholly hide the madder-brown of the soil that peeped out in patches from amidst the orange and crimson bushes, the russet-red fronds of dead bracken, and the sober array of grasses, straw-coloured and green. If this riot of subdued colour failed to reach Jagger’s perceptions it was because a warmer tint was before his eyes—he was “seeing red.”

Strangely enough, when he stumbled upon the guilty pair and found that he had been observed, although too late for escape or concealment, he held himself well in hand. Like a voice by telephone his father’s words vibrated on his brain—“Bridle your tongue and temper!” Until that moment he had given them no second thought; reaching him now by that mysterious wireless that baffles explanation they served to bring him to his senses and to push Nancy’s need into the forefront of his thoughts.

Polly had released herself from Inman’s arms and stood by, half-tearful, half-defiant, looking on Jagger whose stern eyes had never once been turned to her face. Inman, with an uneasy sneer upon his lips, had thrust his hands deep into his pockets and was putting on a front of dare-devilry and scorn.

“I’m seeking you, Inman,” Jagger began. He had walked hotly and was a little out of breath, but the words came steadily enough.

“Your baby’s come, and Nancy’s dying—maybe dead. Get away down, as straight as you can go, and I’ll see Polly safe.”

The girl gave a startled gasp, and shrunk farther back into the deeper shadows of the rock that overhung them. Inman’s face lost its look of disdain and for once the

man found himself at a loss for words.

“Do you hear me?” continued Jagger, speaking in a low passionless voice that ought to have warned the other of danger. “Why don’t you go? Haven’t I told you your wife’s dying? For her sake—at any rate until t’ sod covers her,—I’ll say naught about what I’ve seen. Get you gone!”

“All in good time!” replied Inman in a cold voice as he recovered himself. “You’ve delivered your message, and there’s no need for you to stop any longer. I’ll go down when it suits me, but not at your bidding.”

The look of a madman was in Jagger’s eyes, and a madman’s unreasoning anger was in his heart. His father’s warning slipped into the background, yet his voice remained low as he said:

“So you’ll stop up here, you dirty blackguard with your light o’ love, while the wife you stole lies dying! If I served you as you deserve I’d kick you every step o’ t’ way home; but I’d be doing her a better turn to lay you out here on t’ hillside, and leave t’ crows to pick your stinking bones.”

He paid the penalty of his violence the next moment, and though anger now blazed in Inman’s eyes it was not he, but Polly, who turned the tables upon him. Her white face quivered with passion as she left Inman’s side and confronted Jagger.

“Light o’ love, am I? Then whose light o’ love is Nancy, I’d like to know? Who is it goes kissing and cuddling i’ t’ Cove of a night, Jagger Drake? It’s *you* ’at ’ud better be by her bed-side, if so be ’at she’s dying; *you*, ’at she’s rued she didn’t wed, and gives her kisses to! T’ pot might well call t’ pan, Jagger Drake!”

“Is this true, Polly?” said Inman, seizing the girl by the shoulders and looking into her face.

“I’ve seen ’em with these eyes and heard ’em with these ears!” she replied. “I wasn’t spying on ’em neither. They were one side o’ t’ wall and me t’ other.”

“And you never told me!” he went on, tightening his grasp on her shoulder until the pain made her wince.

“And I never would ha’ done,” she answered doggedly. “It was six o’ one and half-a-dozen o’ t’ other”; and she began to sob.

He pushed her away roughly and turned to Jagger, who was standing utterly crestfallen and unhinged, deprived of the power of thought and action by this unexpected development.

“I could be almost glad of this,” said Inman, as he bent forward until his face approached his opponent’s; “but I’ve got to thrash you for it. Strip!”

“Aye, by gen I will!” A fierce joy arose in Jagger’s heart. The sense of discomfiture and humiliation fled like the gloom of night at a clear daybreak. His coat

was instantly on the ground and he was rolling up his sleeves. "But there's one thing I'll say to you first, chance you don't live to hear it after, or me to tell it. I never wronged you but wi' one kiss, and it wasn't Nancy's wish. She's always walked t' straight road, and barring that one time so have I. Now I'm ready for you!"

The fight had not been in progress a minute before Polly covered her eyes with her hands and ran away screaming. They were both strong and powerful men; and if Jagger had attacked in the heat of his anger it might have gone badly with him, for Inman's passion never suffered him to lose his self-control. Now, however, the one was no whit cooler than the other, and the result was not long in doubt. No boxer or wrestler on the moor could stand up to Jagger Drake with any hope of success. Every native for miles round knew it; but Inman was not a native, and the fact was unknown to him; at the same time the knowledge would probably have made no difference, for cowardice was not among the number of his vices. He got in a few heavy blows whilst Jagger awaited his opportunity, and the seeming ineffectiveness of his opponent perhaps threw him off his guard, for the first knock he received on the jaw sent him like a log to the ground.

His white face looked ghastly in the darkness as Jagger bent over it. He was unconscious, but Jagger's practised eye and ear told him there was no danger; and moistening his handkerchief in a near-by runnel he bathed the prostrate man's brow until the quivering of the eyelids showed that sense was returning.

A little later Inman sat up. "Pass me my coat," he said; and Jagger handed it to him without a word.

"You're a better man than me with your fists," he continued, as he looked up with proud defiance into the other's set face. "You know how to hit, and where. *So do I*. I'll hit where it'll hurt, you bet; where it'll hurt till hell 'ud be a picnic. I'm no saint, and I neither forget nor forgive. You needn't wait, Mr. Drake. I'll come down at my leisure."

"Very good!" said Jagger contemptuously. "Get on with your hitting!" and turned away.

"If it was only me," he said to himself as he walked slowly towards the village, "I daresay he'd find a way to ruin me, for he's the devil himself; but he can't hurt father."

He was thinking of the business; but the business had not been in Inman's thoughts.



## CHAPTER XVIII

IN WHICH BALDWIN ALLOWS AN OPPORTUNITY TO  
SLIP

HANNAH was bending over the fire stirring something in a pan when Inman entered the kitchen, and he went straight up to her and laying a hand on her shoulder said:

“Keturah’ll manage that, whatever it is; and if she can’t I’ll pay somebody else to do it. Get you off home and bandage your brother; and never set foot in this house again while I’m its master.”

Hannah flashed round, and though her eyes widened at the sight of his swollen face she was not cowed.

“There’s work been done while you’ve been fighting,” she said; “and there’s work yet to be done if your wife’s life is to be saved; and work ’at only women can do——”

“Have done, woman!” he commanded, “and get your things on, if you have any. I don’t want to lay my hands on you; but, by my soul if you aren’t out of this house in another minute I’ll throw you out!”

“Lord save us!” ejaculated Keturah, who had been frightened into silence by Inman’s look and voice. “This is what comes o’ whisky-drinking. Eh, dear! Eh, dear! and Nancy on her dying bed at this minute!”

“Take t’ spoon, Keturah,” said Hannah, as Inman uttered an impatient exclamation. “We mustn’t have a row i’ t’ house, choose what else we have. I’ll go, seeing as I must; and I hope an’ trust ’at t’ worst is over and Nancy’ll pull through now. Maybe you’ll find time to run across and bring me word.”

“It’s come to a bonny pass,” wailed Keturah with a spark of spirit, as she took up the spoon and Hannah’s work; “when we’ve to be at t’ beck and call of a man nob’dy’d set eyes on this time was a twelve-month, and ordered about same as we was slaves, and he’d use t’ whip to wer backs——”

“And so I would for two pins,” Inman broke in sharply. “Shut your mouth, woman! It’s a sick house,” he added with a sneer—“and we must have quiet! Tell your brother,” he said to Hannah as he held open the door for her to pass out, “that I shall begin the treatment I spoke of this very night, and he can have that thought to sleep on. And don’t forget that this door’s closed to you!”

He went upstairs without returning to the kitchen and Keturah heard his voice on the landing in conversation with the doctor. By and by the two men came down together and passed into the parlour.

“I care nothing about the child’s life,” Inman said in a tone that was strange to Keturah; “but I hope you’ll not let the mother slip through your fingers. You don’t often hear a man talk of disappointments at a time like this I daresay, but it’ll be a big disappointment to me if she dies. If there’s anything else to be done; any other man you think could help——”

“It will be settled one way or the other, my lad, before any other man could get here,” interposed the doctor. “She’s putting up a better fight now than I gave her credit for, and I wouldn’t say that she hasn’t a chance. No! no! not for me,” he added as Inman produced a bottle and a couple of tumblers. “A drop before I go to bed, maybe; but never whilst there’s work to be done.”

“Then I ought to sign off the stuff for a month or two,” said Inman with a hard laugh, “for I’ve work to do that I’d be sorry to spoil.”

The doctor looked up at him curiously and his eyes rested on Inman’s swollen and discoloured face.

“You’ve been in the wars yourself, I see,” he remarked. “That’s a nasty bruise you’ve got!”

“Yes,” said Inman, “it is”; and vouchsafed no other reply.

When he left his shake-down in the parlour the next morning he found the doctor drinking a cup of tea in the kitchen. The old man’s eyes were tired and he looked weary; but his voice was cheery as he said:

“I must get away for a few hours. There are others who must be seen; but though your wife isn’t out of the wood yet, we have not worked all night for nothing. I’ll be round again at noon.”

“I’m much obliged to you,” said Inman calmly. “I wouldn’t have her die for the world. I want her to get well and strong—aye, by Jove, and to have her feelings. She hasn’t been out of my thoughts all night.”

The doctor stared at him. “Very natural, of course,” he said. He was thinking to himself that he would never have expected this reserved, obstinate-looking young fellow to be so deeply affected by the anxiety that throws some men off their balance at these times.

Baldwin was unbearable that morning and for once Inman was not conciliatory. Both men felt that they were objects of interest to the others and both knew that their affairs would have been discussed in the public-house the night before; but whereas Baldwin was too muddled by drink and worry to pay any attention to the idle talk of his neighbours Inman was chafing under a sense of deep humiliation; and his ill-temper which he had carefully cloaked from the men, found an outlet when he was summoned to the office just before noon.

No sooner was the door closed than Baldwin let loose a flood of coarse language on which the information he intended to impart was carried in disjointed fragments that told Inman nothing.

“Look here, Mr. Briggs!” he said, so sharply that Baldwin stopped with an abruptness that proved his astonishment. “If you’ve anything to say get it said, and don’t unload all your foul talk on to me. Why the devil should I have my ears turned into sewers for all your filth? The post can have brought you naught you haven’t expected. If you want my help, get to the point, and if you don’t I’ll go back. I’m in a mood to jack the whole thing up this morning, and let you go to hell your own way.”

His tone was so surly and menacing that Baldwin, who had dropped into a chair and was staring at him with blinking eyes that had something of fear in them as well as wonder, found himself without words.

“If you’ve aught to say to me about the shop—aught ’at either I or the other chaps have got to do, I’ll take your instructions. If it’s your business affairs you’re troubled with you must fight ’em out yourself, I’ve said all I can say.”

“Oh, you have, have you? And I must, must I?”—the spark of life in Baldwin’s spirit manifested itself in one last kick against this unwelcome dictatorship; but his dependence on the other’s strength made actual opposition impossible, and the defiant tone ended in a surly whine.

“You’ll be same as all t’ rest, I reckon. When t’ old dog’s teeth are gone and there’s naught left but its bark, every cur’ll snap at it.”

“Every dog has its day,” commented Inman cynically. “I’ve offered to prolong yours, and these writs you are talking about needn’t have worried you. I can say no more.”

Baldwin’s eyes rested wearily upon the letters that strewed the table in front of him. For a moment or two he said nothing; but his brow bent more and more until tiny drops of moisture appeared above the coarse pepper-coloured hairs which bristled like those of a wild boar. Inman watched him in silence.

“Have you that brass handy?” The eyes were not raised from the table, and the voice was a hollow echo of Baldwin’s.

“You can have it as soon as the document’s ready.”

“Then get t’ document, and be hanged to you!”

Baldwin rose and went over to the cupboard; but Inman interposed.

“There’s nothing there; you finished it last night, and it’s perhaps as well. You’d best keep sober this afternoon and think the matter over. If you’re in the same mind to-morrow morning I’ll go over to Keepton and fix the thing up. I’m not going to

have it said 'at I took advantage of you. It wouldn't take two straws to make me back out altogether, for I tell you straight I don't care to trust a man who drinks himself blind every night."

Without waiting to see what effect these words had upon his master, Inman turned upon his heel and went out; but when Baldwin joined him at the dinner table a few minutes later the storm—if storm there had been—had spent itself, and both men recovered themselves a little during the meal.

Somewhat late in the evening the nurse asked Inman if he would keep an eye on his wife and child for a few minutes as Keturah was in the village, and he found an opportunity he had been seeking.

They were both asleep when he entered the room, the child's head resting in the hollow of the mother's arm where she had asked for it to be laid. The most dangerous crisis was past and the doctor now thought that Nancy would pull through. Inman just glanced at the pair, and though emotion shone in his eyes it was not that of tenderness. When he had satisfied himself that his wife's slumber was real he bestowed no further thought upon her, but quietly mounted a chair and lifted down his bag from the top of the cupboard and placed it on the dark landing, whence he removed it to the parlour when the nurse relieved him a few minutes later.

Keturah had not returned and the transaction had passed unobserved by anyone. Inman smiled his self-congratulations as he slung the bag over the moulding of the old-fashioned bookcase, where it raised a cloud of dust that assured him the place of concealment was well-chosen. When Keturah came hurrying in he was standing in the kitchen with his back to the fire.

Baldwin looked up when supper was over. He had not tasted drink that day and his mood had changed since morning.

"Maniwel's got that job we've been after up at Far Tarn," he began when Inman accepted his suggestion that they should return to the office.

"Has he?" Inman replied indifferently.

Baldwin surveyed him with something of his old fierceness; and the look of premature superciliousness that he thought he saw in his foreman's face combined with the tone of contemptuous unconcern, led to a result which neither man had anticipated a moment before.

"I'll do without your brass," he said in one of his old gusts of anger that quickly brought Inman to his senses again. "It's plain to see who's to be t' boss when you've 'commodated me wi' your five hundred, for you're holding your head already, both i' t' house and t' shop, as if you were gaffer. You may take yourself off to another market, young man, and as soon as you like. There's been naught but mischief i' t'

place ever sin' you set your foot in't, and I'll try if getting rid o' t' Jonah'll save t' ship. If it doesn't we can but sink and ha' done wi't."

It would be difficult to say which of the two men was the more surprised by this deliverance. Baldwin had invited Inman to accompany him to the office with the express object of accepting the unwelcome terms. He had, indeed, dwelt upon the alternatives so long that the terms had almost ceased to be unwelcome, and he had persuaded himself that with this relief he would soon be able to find his feet again, when it would be no great matter to get rid of the yoke that was so galling to his pride, and consign the bill of sale to those blazes that were so often on his tongue.

Inman, too, without the effort of conscious thought, had known that his master was about to bend his head to the yoke; had been so convinced of it from reliable inward witness that he had allowed his whole manner to forestall the consummation and thereby jeopardise it. Even now, so accustomed had he become to the foretaste of success and the realisation of his strength, he hardly troubled to stoop to conciliate, choosing to regard the outburst as a mere ebullition of temper that would expend itself as quickly as a child's squib.

"I meant no offence," he said without warmth; "and of course you can please yourself about the money."

"Can I?" interrupted Baldwin, in quite his old style. He was surprised at his own boldness, but was aware of an exhilaration to which he had been a stranger for some weeks. It was as though some force outside his own volition was egging him on to resist the cynical adviser, and abide by the threat he had expressed to get rid of him. It was seldom that his brain evolved a metaphor; but that of Jonah which had flashed across his mind like an inspiration held him with a force that seemed to him almost supernatural and that gave him new courage.

"Can I?" he repeated, frowning portentously at his companion. "I can please myself! Well, that's something to be thankful for, choose how!"—his slow wits were still turning over the image that had startled them—"I reckon I'm master o' t' ship even if t' ship is sinking, and I can chuck Jonah overboard if I like——" He was trying to hold the conversation and examine this new thought at the same time, and he found the task beyond his powers. The suggestion that he should dismiss Inman—send him about his business as abruptly as he had engaged him—was clamouring for acceptance, and he was trying to weigh it, instead of risking the hazard. "Every bit o' ill-luck there's been came wi' you; and I'm hanged if I've a spoon 'at's long enough to sup wi' t' devil. You can clear out, I tell you, wi' your 'cans' and your 'please yourselves,' and I'll go see Green and a toathri more myself and maybe patch matters up wi' 'em. I've been a damned fool 'at I haven't done it afore."

Why the thought of Maniwel insisted on obtruding itself Baldwin could not explain, but so it was. The fact irritated him with the vague feeling that it had a meaning he could not interpret.

The long and hesitating harangue had not been unwelcome to Inman, who had been sending out thought-scouts in all directions during its progress, and had determined on his line of action.

“I suppose I’m a damned fool too,” he said cunningly, and with no sudden change of tone to quicken the other’s suspicions. “What with the worry of the business and anxiety over Nancy——” the softening of voice that the mention of his wife’s name occasioned could not be misunderstood—“to say nothing of the row I had with Jagger only last night ’ud drive most men off their heads, let alone making ’em a bit ill-tempered.”

“What occasion had you to fall out wi’ Jagger?” snapped Baldwin, whose curiosity allowed him to be side-tracked. “It’s no sort of a game to go about trying to bash other men their heads in——”

“That’s so,” replied Inman, with studied calm, “but when a man’s been interfering with your wife and admits it——! However, that’s between him and Nancy and me, and I’m not wanting a scandal made of it. All I say is ’at it isn’t to be wondered at if I don’t speak as civil as I ought to do. Maybe I’ve been a fool to meddle with your business at all. I ought to ha’ remembered it was none o’ mine, and wouldn’t put a penny in my pocket whichever way it went.”

He both sounded and looked dejected, and Baldwin, however suspicious by nature, was too simple to realise that all this was consummately clever acting, and he began to soften. Yet the taste of power was pleasant; and he could not forget that strange sense of guidance which had impelled him to send Inman about his business, putting thoughts into his mind which he had never framed, and ascribing his misfortunes to the man who had seemed to be his one friend and deliverer.

It was all very puzzling and he took refuge in silence and a heavy scowl. The desk was littered with papers, and he turned and rummaged amongst them as if the clue by which he might release himself was to be found there. Inman waited; and Baldwin never guessed how the cast-down eyes searched his face in an endeavour to read the thoughts it indexed. The attempt was less successful than usual and Inman cursed himself inwardly for his precipitancy. Was he to lose everything, just when it had been in his grasp? The sigh that escaped him was not entirely theatrical.

Baldwin looked up and signified with a motion of the head that Inman might leave; and when the sign was ignored stormed out in the familiar way.

“I beg your pardon,” said Inman; “I didn’t understand you. Am I to take it that

I'm sacked?"

"You're to take yourself out o' my sight," snapped his master. "I'll say naught no more while I've slept on't."

Baldwin glanced at the clock when he found himself alone. A strong impulse bade him swallow his pride and go down to see Maniwel; but instead of yielding to it he began to reason. It was after ten, and Maniwel went to bed in good time—it was Jagger who sat up late. Besides, what good would it do? Maniwel was at his wits' end for money—must be; he would sympathise no doubt; but an overdraft at the bank was the sort of sympathy he wanted and Maniwel could not get one himself. "Go!" said the persuasive voice. "To the man who's stealing your business from you?" another voice questioned. Baldwin listened and hesitated until the hands of the clock pointed to eleven, and then went to bed.

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In his cottage by the bridge Maniwel sat over the fire alone. The Bible was open on the table behind him, and he was thinking of the passage he had read before the others went upstairs—"if he shall hear thee thou hast gained thy brother."

Jagger had been very elated at securing the contract for the work at Far Tarn and at the accommodating attitude of the timber-merchants who were to supply the material.

"That'll be one in the eye for Inman," he had said exultingly.

"Get off to bed, lad! You've to be up early to-morrow!" was all his father had replied.

"Thou hast gained thy brother!" Maniwel's thoughts worked upon that short sentence for an hour and brought both Baldwin and Inman within their scope. It was not to be wondered at that his first concern was for his old workmate.

"I doubt that young man's working tha harm, lad," he said aloud, but in a low voice, as if Baldwin had been seated in grannie's chair where his eyes were resting. "Tha played me a fouler trick than anyone knows on and was fain to be rid of me; but I'm grieved, lad, to see tha brought so low."

Again he fixed his eyes on the fire, and again his lips began to move.

"I happen did wrong to leave tha; though, right enough, tha never asked me to stop, and I know I should ha' been i' thi way. I fear tha'rt going t' wrong road, lad,—body and soul; and this young fellow's helping tha. The Lord deliver tha from him, and all such like! I'd give my other hand to save tha, for it's a sad thing when a man loses his brass, but it's a sadder when he loses his soul!"

There was a longer pause this time before he continued:

"It 'ud be no good going up to see tha again. It's turned ten, and tha'll be ower

drunk, poor lad, to be talked to. I'd like to warn tha again' Inman, for it's borne in on me 'at he's working thi ruin o' set purpose, and maybe if we were to put wer heads together we could pull through. I'd give aught for an hour's talk wi' tha, lad, i' thi right mind; but when drink's in, wit's out——”

He continued in this strain until nearly midnight, and then went sorrowfully to bed.



## CHAPTER XIX

### IN WHICH THE BILL OF SALE IS COMPLETED

THE golden moment passed and did not return. The next morning found Baldwin ill and depressed, with a great craving for the bottle his weak mind had forsworn the night before, and a foreboding that he had made a fool of himself and an enemy of Inman. That crafty individual, however, was in chastened mood and more than ordinarily patient and thoughtful. A full whisky-bottle had replaced the empty one in the office cupboard; but the foreman busied himself in the workshop and never turned his head in that direction the whole day. Once, when a question was asked him relating to some work that could not be completed for some considerable time, he appeared to hesitate and referred the questioner to Mr. Briggs, with the quiet explanation that he might have left before then; a remark that infuriated the master, who called upon the devil to witness that he did not know what Inman was talking about.

During the morning Maniwel, who had tormented himself with reproaches during the night, sent up word that he would like to speak with Baldwin, who dictated the surly reply that he had no time to waste. Repulsed by the master, Maniwel next turned to the man, and waylaid Inman the same evening as he walked home from the hotel, to which he had now transferred his custom.

“I would like a word wi’ you, my lad,” he began with characteristic directness, “about my old mate, Baldwin. It isn’t i’ t’ nature o’ things ’at you should be over friendly wi’ me, I know, but I can’t see a man going down t’ hill as fast as Baldwin’s going without asking if there’s naught can be done to steady him.”

“And what gives me the honour of being picked out for your questions?” Inman inquired with cold sarcasm. “Am I to understand ’at you think I’m responsible, or what?”

“I’ve said naught o’ t’ sort,” Maniwel replied gently. “Most o’ what I’ve heard has been t’other way about, and they say you’ve done your best to check him. I’ve lived long enough to know ’at a man’ll fly to t’ bottle when he’s i’ trouble without help from nob’dy. Nay, it’s because I hear he sets a deal o’ store by you, and’ll let you guide him when he’ll listen to nob’dy else, ’at I thought I’d like to say ’at if there was ought I could do——”

“If you’ll give me a turn, old man,” Inman broke in with an icy passion that told Maniwel there was nothing good to be expected there, “I’ll save you any further waste o’ breath. Sanctimonious sermons are naught i’ my line, and you’d do better to let charity begin at home and get Jagger to hearken. He’ll happen tell you which o’

t' Ten Commandments he's been breaking!

"But there's one thing I will say: if I'd been minded to put the brake on before you spoke, and try to hold Baldwin back, I wouldn't now—I'd push him forward wi' both hands sooner than give you pleasure, you canting old humbug. So you can get back home and see what good your damned interference has done your old mate!"

He had advanced his face close to Maniwel's as he hissed out the closing words, but the action had not the effect he expected.

"Then God forgi'e you, my lad!" said Maniwel sadly, "and save you from having a man's blood required at your hands. But I won't believe aught as bad of you; nobbut I'll say this one thing: the devil's a master that pays poor wages, and when a man has his feet on t' slippery road 'at leads to t' pit it doesn't take both hands to push him forrad."

"I'll keep my feet without your help, old man," Inman replied sneeringly, "but heark ye! I'll bring you and your precious Jagger to your knees yet; I'll——"

"That's true, lad! and you couldn't bring us to a better place." There was a half-humorous sternness in Maniwel's voice now. "You and Baldwin have brought me to my knees long sin', and I shall get there again, I warrant. More'n that neither you nor your master can do! But I'm sorry if I've done harm where I meant good, and I leave it wi' you."

Inman went straight to the office where Baldwin was seated with his glass before him, and helped himself liberally.

"The devil take all hypocrites!" he said.

Baldwin's brow twisted into a note of sullen interrogation.

"Maniwel Drake wants me to get you to kneel at the penitent form," he explained. "I've just sent him home with a flea in his ear."

Baldwin's voice was thick, but he was understood to consign Maniwel and all his house to a place where fleas would lose their power to torment, and he asked no further questions.

October passed and with the garnering of the bracken harvest the last of the summer feathered visitors took their leave of the moors and winter residents arrived daily. A Saint Luke's summer had brought a succession of warm sunny days, which splashed the bramble leaves with wonderful colourings of crimson and orange, and stained the leaves of Herb Robert with the blood of the dying year.

Nancy, pacing painfully her bedroom floor for a short time each day, looked out upon the hills that were scorched to varied tints of copper and gold, and drank in courage from the sight. Every evening a robin came and sang for her before it turned

in for the night. Once or twice she had seen a woodcock frolicking in the dim light of early dawn and had known by that sign that autumn had come. She would have given much to be as free; but for her freedom was far behind, a mere dream, a memory. She stretched out her arm and touched the sleeping infant—the only link of the fetter she did not hate to contemplate—and wondered what of solace or misery was wrapped up for her in that little bundle of life. He had his father's features; there was no mistaking the nose and jaw; yet he was hers, and to bring him into the world she had almost given her life. For his sake, she sometimes told herself, she had paid an even bigger price, for she had fought against death.

Inman hated her. How she knew it she could not have explained, for until the boy came he had been always endurable though he spared her the pretence of affection. The first time her eyes fell upon him after the severity of the crisis was over, she knew that he hated her and that he wished her to know it. Lazily, she had wondered what had happened to effect the change when she had given him a son; but no disappointment mixed with the curiosity, for her feeling towards him was colder and more colourless than hatred, being just elementary indifference and there was no fear, for the indifference extended to her own safety.

It interested her to note that none of the women who visited her spoke ill of her husband, though they referred to Baldwin's downward course with many a gloomy anticipation of quick disaster. Even Keturah appeared to find him tolerable, and shared the general opinion that it was he who kept the ship afloat, and would save it if salvation was still possible. Nancy smiled and said nothing, waiting the development of events with a strange incuriosity that was the result of her slack hold on life.

Since the nurse's departure Nancy and Keturah had slept together, and except at meal times, whole days passed when husband and wife never saw each other. Occasionally a day would end without the interchange of a spoken word. She was therefore surprised when he entered the parlour one evening in November when the two women were sitting together in the firelight, and with an authoritative movement of the head bade Keturah withdraw.

"I suppose you don't need to be told," he said in a hard voice into which he tried to impart sufficient warmth for his purpose, "that Baldwin's on his last legs?"

"It's what you've led me to expect," she replied listlessly.

"You take it coolly," he replied with ill-suppressed irritation.

"Why shouldn't I?" she answered. "It's what you've been looking for, isn't it?—what you've been working for?"

He uttered an angry exclamation, and sat down beside her, putting his face close

to hers and speaking in a low voice. He was obviously holding himself under restraint with some difficulty.

“Listen!” he said. “I’m inclined to save him, if he can be saved. It’ll come to the same thing in the end, but I see no other way of becoming top dog than by giving him a lift for a few months. You wouldn’t understand if I was to explain——”

“Then tell me what you want of me,” she said wearily. “There’s something you want me to do or you wouldn’t have come—I’ve wit enough to understand that. It’s money, I suppose?”

“It’s money,” he admitted sullenly; “but it isn’t money *you* can lend. You’re in with him already, and if the business fell to pieces you’d be in no better position than any other creditor. They’d try their best to make out ’at you were a partner——”

“Now you’re explaining,” she interrupted with a smile, “and you’ve already told me I shan’t understand.”

He again made a gesture of impatience—and again controlled himself.

“If *I* could lend him the money it ’ud be different,” he went on. “He’d give me what they call a bill of sale, and I should come in before the other creditors when he crashed——”

Nancy smiled, and the frown deepened on Inman’s face as he observed it.

“Now we’re coming to it,” she said. “You want me to give *you* a cheque, I suppose?”

He shook his head. “That wouldn’t do; it ’ud be too patent. Baldwin thinks I’ve five hundred o’ my own—my life’s savings!” he added with a short laugh, looking meaningly into Nancy’s face.

She knew at once what he meant, though she had forgotten all about the hidden store; but she purposely held her peace.

“There’s that five hunderd in the bag,” he whispered. “It ’ud be better out o’ the way. Nobody but us two knows it’s there, and it ’ud be gaol for us both if they did ——”

“You want me to let you have it to lend Baldwin?” she asked. “You’re welcome to it for aught I care, and him too.”

It was the answer he had led up to; but the note of unconcern stirred his anger. He knew why she was so listless; it was because Jagger was lost to her, of course, and he added this to the list of memories that he was keeping green for the hour of vengeance.

With a curt acknowledgment he went away and sought his master. He would have taken the money without his wife’s leave if it had seemed to be the better course; but there was a certain satisfaction in making her accessory to the fact—one

never knew that it might not prove convenient. Baldwin had swallowed his gruel at last, and the bill of sale had been prepared and was in the safe. All that was necessary now was to produce the money and complete the transaction, and for that purpose a clerk from the lawyer's office in Airlee was to attend the next day.

"It'll be in gold," he said to Baldwin, as he sat down in the spare chair and half filled his glass with whisky and water. "Gold tells no tales and leaves no traces, but it had best be banked sharp."

Baldwin looked up stupidly.

"Who're you learning their business?" he asked savagely. "Do you think I was born in a frost?"

"Of course not," returned Inman humbly, for he was not to be caught off his guard this time; "but it's a lot o' money to have lying about in cash, and I should be easier in my mind to know it was banked before I went to Hull."

Baldwin consigned man and gold to an entirely different port and Inman refrained from further recommendations.

During the night winter got a grip of the moor, and when morning came the ground was hard and there was the promise of snow. A bitter wind was blowing from the north, and Inman listened to its weird piping with feelings of annoyance and apprehension that revealed themselves in an air of thoughtfulness and a puckered brow.

"Confound it all!" he muttered as he turned away from the window and went downstairs.

There was no one in the kitchen and after he had visited the sideboard in the parlour and concealed a bottle beneath his coat, he passed out and entered the shop, the door of which was unlocked, though it was too early for any of the men to have arrived. When he reached the upper floor the sound of stertorous breathing furnished the explanation—the master had not been a-bed, and was sleeping off his drunken fit in the office. Inman glanced at the unpleasant picture and then turned away contemptuously.

"You've finished the whisky, I see," he muttered. "'All for my-sen,' as usual! But I'll return good for evil—you shall have a change this time. You'll want a friend before the day's out." Whereupon he opened his coat and deposited the new bottle upon the shelf in the cupboard.

Baldwin was far from sober when he awoke, and curtly refused his breakfast; but he consented to drink the cup of coffee Inman brought him, though not until a liberal measure of rum had been mixed with it. After that he brightened, but had more sense than to attempt to leave the office, and he had not moved from his chair

when the lawyer's clerk arrived close on noon.

The transaction was completed in a few minutes; the gold counted by Baldwin and the clerk, and locked up in the safe. Then Inman drew himself erect and threw back his shoulders, but seeing himself observed by his master hid the satisfaction he felt, and said:

"I wish it had been in a cheque; but I've had to gather it together from here and there, you see. I want Mr. Briggs to take it over to Kepton to-day and bank it, or else let me go earlier and break my journey."

He turned his eyes on his master as he spoke and contrived to allow a doubt of Baldwin's ability to journey anywhere appear in them. Instantly there was a flash.

"I daresay I can manage to mind my own business," Mr. Briggs snapped. "Some folks is a damned sight too ready to put their fillings in. If *I* take it I shall know where it is!"

Mr. Jones laughed and Inman allowed himself to smile.

"If you don't get it in to-day, Mr. Briggs—though I think you'd do well to take Mr. Inman's advice—you'd better sleep with the safe key under your pillow," remarked the clerk facetiously.

"I'm much obliged to both of you," he replied with rising temper as he saw the humour on both faces and interpreted it to his disadvantage. "I can mebbe attend to my own business now 'at I reckon you'll ha' finished yours."

Mr. Jones recognised his mistake and at once resumed his professional air.

"I am sure you can," he said, as he closed his case and looked round for his hat. "Lawyers think it necessary to caution their clients, but of course, in your case it's a mere formality. I wish you good-morning, Mr. Briggs."

"Take him down to t' pub and give him his dinner before he goes," said Baldwin, as he let his hand fall into the one the clerk proffered him.

"A cold spot this!" said Mr. Jones as the two walked down the street. "Feels like snow, too; and, by Jove, looks like it!"

Inman grunted assent. The sky was leaden-coloured, and a few light flakes had already fallen, as he knew.

"I hope it holds off. I've to travel to Hull through the night," he said. "We've opened a new account there that'll make us independent of these local fellows who've cut up so rough."

"Why the dickens must you go through the night, this weather? Won't it run to an hotel bill?" Mr. Jones inquired.

"You've hit it exactly," Inman replied caustically. "Mr. Briggs doesn't believe in his men wasting either time or money."

“Will he pull through now?” the clerk asked, lowering his voice to a confidential whisper.

“If he keeps off the drink—yes,” replied Inman. “That’s my only anxiety. It wouldn’t surprise me to find the money still in the safe when I get back.”

“Well, it won’t run away,” laughed the other, and Inman shrugged his shoulders.

“If he wasn’t too fuddled to do it, *he* might,” he answered.

They parted at the door of the hotel and Inman returned slowly to the shop with his eyes fixed thoughtfully on the ground. There was no spring in his step, no brighter light in his eye, but rather a look of increased anxiety. With some men the effort to over-reach and cheat their fellows is such an ordinary and natural act that its successful accomplishment affords them no more than an ordinary and unemotional satisfaction, allowing no exhilaration of spirit or relaxation of strain. Inman was of this number, and now that he had reached this advanced point in the ascent of the difficult Hill of Fortune he found his only pleasure in forming his plans for the conquest of the summit and bending his energies to the final struggle.

He entered the office to find Baldwin asleep again, and without saying a word to the men who turned away their heads significantly when he glanced in their direction he went downstairs and sought Keturah.

“Is Nancy about?” he asked.

“Nay, she’s one of her bad girds on, and is lying down,” she replied.

“Mr. Briggs hasn’t been down to his dinner, I suppose?” he inquired more mildly than was his wont.

“What we’re all coming to I don’t know,” she replied, ignoring the direct question; “but I see naught before us but t’ poor-house”; and she threw her apron over her head and gave way to tears.

Inman had never treated her less roughly. “Keturah,” he said, “put your apron down and listen to me. I’m not one to shove my worries on to other folks, and particularly on to women, but I’m in the devil of a hole, and you’re Baldwin’s sister. If I wasn’t going to be away for a day or two I wouldn’t trouble you; but what am I to do? Now can you follow me?”

The quietness of his voice calmed and yet frightened her, as bullying would never have done; and she turned her worn face to his and bade him proceed.

“You’re right about the poor-house,” he said with an emphasis that struck a chill to the woman’s heart; “and I’m beginning to wonder if I can save you from it. I’ve lent him five hundred pounds of my own savings this morning, which he knows ought to go to the bank this afternoon, and he’s too drunk to take it.”

“Eh, dear! eh, dear!” Keturah sank into a chair and began to sob, but Inman

checked her.

“Stop that baby work! If Nancy was able to go about she’d act for me, but as she isn’t there is only you.”

“Aye, more’s the pity!” wailed Keturah. “Nancy’s more in her nor me, and ’ud know what to do.”

“I’m going to tell you what to do,” Inman replied firmly. “You must get him to bed to-night at all costs and keep the drink away from him. There’s no more in the cupboard and no one must fetch him any. If he’s allowed to sleep in his chair again it’s a thousand to one he chokes. I don’t want to alarm you, but it’s a fact that his face was blue when I roused him this morning.”

“The Lord save us!” ejaculated Keturah, “and you going to be away all t’ night!”

“Get him to bed,” continued Inman, “and you’ll be able to talk to him to-morrow morning. Then you must tell him that I left word that he was not to forget the bank. You’ll remember!”

Keturah sighed and clasped her hands helplessly.

“Aye, I’ll think on hard enough, but what am I to do if he won’t come? I can’t lug him in!”

“I’ve thought of that,” Inman replied, and his unaccustomed gentleness gave Keturah the first ray of hope she had had for many a day. “I’ll see him last thing and try to get him in; but if I fail, and he doesn’t come of his own accord by bedtime, you must get the men to carry him in and lay him down. We mustn’t have him die in the office.”

“The Lord help us!” Keturah wailed again; “to think it’s come to this pass, and him ’at never used to touch t’ stuff. Eh, dear! I’m sure it’s enough to drive a woman off her head!”

Inman said nothing and she saw him no more until he came in for his tea, when his face was still gloomy.

“I’ve done my best,” he said, “but he won’t budge. However, the booze is all done and I’ve put the lamp and matches out of his way. In another hour or two he’ll either be more reasonable or too drunk to know what’s happening, and you can then have him carried in. I’ve mentioned it to Frank and he’ll step round about nine.”

It was after six when he left the house and was driven off to catch the slow train for Airlee, where he would have to spend two or three hours before the mail left for Hull. During the long drive he spoke only once to the stable boy who drove him, when he remarked that it was a wild, black night and would snow before morning.

“Ending up wi’ ‘Damn it!’” the youthful Jehu remarked to the equally youthful porter at the station, as the two watched the train bear Inman away. “I’d as soon



drive Old Nick his-self as yon!”

Meantime, no sooner had the lights of the trap disappeared round the bend in the road than Keturah made her way to Nancy and reported the position of affairs.

“Run across and ask Hannah to come!” said Nancy.

“Aye, t’ cat’s away, is it?” commented Keturah. “However, I’ve no objection, I’m sure. We can do wi’ somebody i’ t’ house ’at has a headpiece on her shoulders!”

## CHAPTER XX

### IN WHICH THERE IS A SENSATIONAL ROBBERY

BALDWIN woke at the hour custom had made mechanical and lay for a while trying to recollect how he had got to bed. As a matter of fact he had stumbled indoors of his own accord during the evening, and had made his way upstairs without asking for supper; so that when Frank came round there had been no need for his services, and in the relief both experienced neither he nor Keturah had thought of examining the workshop door, which was consequently left unlocked.

With her mind eased of this anxiety Keturah had slept soundly and only Nancy knew with what force the wind had swept down from the moor. It had been so strong that she had been compelled to rise before midnight and close her window, after which she fell asleep for an hour or two. When she next woke the panes were covered with snow, and the storm was still raging. By the time Keturah went downstairs the gale had abated but snow was still falling heavily and lay several inches thick upon the roadway.

It was not until they were seated together at breakfast that Keturah ventured to deliver herself of Inman's reminder. Baldwin was morose, but not unusually so, and he merely growled the reply that when he wanted a woman to nurse him he'd let her know, whereupon Keturah subsided, well content to have come off so lightly. Ten minutes later he returned to the shop, and within a quarter-hour staggered home again, his face the colour of ashes.

"Robbed!" he gasped as he sank into a chair and let his hands fall to his sides. He was the picture of hopeless despair, and his head sank upon his breast as though every muscle had lost its power to serve. "Robbed!" he groaned again. "T' safe prised open and every penny ta'en! Every penny! Every penny!"

In the moment of his utter wretchedness he forgot to swear, and could only groan; but as Keturah screamed and put her hand to her side he raised his head and looked at her.

"Every penny, Keturah!" he groaned, holding out his trembling arms to his sister like a troubled child who seeks the refuge of its mother's breast. "They've robbed me of every penny! Five hunderd golden sovereigns gone—clean gone!"

Roused by the shrill scream Nancy came downstairs. The sense of what seemed to Keturah an overwhelming disaster had wiped out all the antipathies of past weeks and dried up tears and reproaches alike, and she was kneeling on the rug with her arm on her brother's shoulders, crooning into ears that were deaf to all she said, meaningless assurances that all would yet be well.

Baldwin's face showed that he was insensible to all that was passing and conscious only of one great fact.

"Robbed, lass!" he repeated, gazing vacantly into Nancy's eyes. "Every penny's ta'en——!"

Nancy waited for nothing more; but hastened into the shop, and finding that the men assembled there knew nothing, despatched Frank for the policeman.

The "Packhorse" was uncomfortably full that evening but nobody complained of inconvenience or overcrowding, though there were those there whose faces were seldom seen in that company, and some who had walked through deep snowdrifts and past other houses of entertainment in order to be present. Albert was doing a roaring trade but found time to drop an observation from time to time as he moved about.

"In Hull, you say?" Swithin inquired. "And what time might he ha' gone to Hull?"

"Our Jackie drave him down for t' eight train," the speaker replied, "and wor fain to see t' last on him, for he wor as glum as a slug all t' road, and never gave t' lad a copper for his-sen, same as most of 'em does."

"And they sent him a telegraph to come back, say ye?" pursued Swithin whose duties had kept him out of the village all day so that he had some leeway to make up.

"Before ten i' t' morning," another volunteered. "Our Frank handed it in. 'E were to 'ave 'elped to get Baldwin to bed by Inman's orders, if so be 'at 'e 'adn't been able to 'elp 'is-self. 'Owsomever 'e'd gotten to bed when Frank got there; an' seemin'ly 'e 'adn't locked t' shop door; but that wor nowt out o' t' common, an' nob'dy noticed nowt amiss till Baldwin went to t' safe——"

"Aye, aye, we've heard that before," Swithin broke in. "We know 'at t' safe worn't locked for all there wor five hunderd pound in it and at t' drawer wor prized open—it's Inman's doings I'm wanting to get at."

"'E wired back by eleven," the other went on, "but he couldn't get here afore five. They stopped t' Scotchman for him, same as he'd been t' squire his-self, and t' inspector wor waitin' down at t' station wi' a motor-car. Ah seed 'em pass my-self, an' no notice ta'en o' speed-limits seemin'ly."

Swithin's eyes rested on the speaker with such concentration that the man became uneasy and Ambrose noticed it.

"Tha's no 'casion to fidget, lad," he piped; "Swith'n noan suspicions thee o' steylin' t' brass; but he's a fearful cute hand at puttin' two an' two together, when he sets his-sen, and he's seein' summat 'at's hid from ordinary een. It's a gift wi' some men. A far-seein' man was his fayther afore him, as noan on ye'll recollect; but Swith'n's as like him as if he'd been spit out of his mouth."

“What I see and what I say, Ambrus, is two different things,” returned Swithin who was obviously pleased by the old man’s compliment. “There’s a time to speak your thoughts and a time to bottle ’em; but what I’ve seen I’ve seen, let any man deny it ’at will.”

He looked round at the company defiantly; but meeting with nothing that could be regarded as a challenge: indeed with nothing but eager interest, he first lifted his pot to his lips and then continued, with his eyes on Ambrose.

“Two and two together I *can* put, Ambrus; but when it’s two and a nowt, where are you then? If Inman hadn’t ha’ been i’ Hull mebbe I’d ha’ had summat to say ’at ’ud ha’ made some folks’ hair stand on end; but seeing as he *wor* in Hull there’s an end on’t.”

With this enigmatical statement he returned to his ale, and Ambrose signalled to the company to keep silence.

“He’s in labour, as you may put it,” he whispered confidentially to his neighbour; “and mun hev his time.”

Whether or no this remark helped to speedy parturition may not be easily determined; but at any rate Swithin was at that moment delivered; and after looking round to make sure that he had the ears of all present said, in the formal voice of a constable who is giving evidence on oath—

“It was t’ards midnight, or mebbe a piece after, ’at I turned out o’ t’ shippen i’ t’ long close to straighten my back and get a breath o’ air. Crumple wor late wi’ her cawving, and I dursn’t leave her for more’n a minute or two at a time; but straighten my back I felt I must, and so stood at t’ door.

“It wor black as coal, an’ a gale o’ wind blowing fit to shift t’ shippen into t’ beck, but I reckoned nowt o’ that so long as t’ snaw held off; and wor just about to turn in again when a heap o’ stones came tumbling down off o’ t’ wall not five yards away.

“That’s nowt!’ ye’ll say; ‘a strong breeze’ll oft fetch a dry wall down’, and that I’ll take tul; but a strong breeze doesn’t say ‘Damn it!’—no, not t’ strongest breeze ’at ’ivver blew over Mawm!”

He paused, whilst his eyes slowly swept the company to see what effect this communication had produced, but when two or three voices broke in with questions he raised his hand in deprecation and continued—

“Not knowing who it mud be ’at was prowling round t’ shippen at that time o’ night I stepped inside for a fork; but I nayther saw nor heard naught no more though I searched round wi’ t’ lantern. A piece after, Crumple’s time come, and I’d summat else to do nor think o’ boggarts.”

Nobody spoke, though there was now ample opportunity, and when Albert had replenished his pot Swithin fixed his eyes on Ambrose and said—

“Now if any man among t’ lot of ye can put two and two together, ye’re welcome; but I call it two and a nowt.”

“There’s nob’dy i’ this neighbourhood, Swith’n,” returned the old man, “but what’s as well-known to ye as soil to t’ sexton—are ye tellin’ us ’at ye couldn’t reckonize t’ voice?”

“I *thought* I reckonized t’ voice, Ambrus, but I wor mista’en; and that’s why i’stead o’ putting two and two together I call it two and a nowt. More’n that I won’t say.”

“But whoever t’ chap was,” said Albert, “he were a long way wide o’ Baldwin’s shop if he were i’ t’ long close. A fellow running away wi’ brass in his pocket ’ud be on t’ road to nowhere down there; whereas if a tramp were coming from t’ Gordel end—from Girston, happen—he’d mebbe be tempted to cut across t’ fields to save a mile or so on his way to t’ main road. Or, as like as not, he was for finding a bed i’ t’ shippen, till he saw t’ glimmer o’ your lantern.”

This commonplace solution of the mystery, whilst it pleased none of the company whose thirst for sensation was even greater than that for liquor, offended Swithin, who took refuge in silence after he had remarked that there were evidently those present who could put two and two together to their own satisfaction though, thank God, every man had a right to his own thoughts.

“If you ask me,” Jack Pearce broke in with some heat, “I don’t believe there’s been any robbery. Where’s Inman got his five hunderd quid from? ‘Had it by him,’ they say; as if folks kept bags o’ gold i’ t’ long drawer wi’ their spare shirts! It’s ridic’lous! and naught but a put-up job, to my thinking!”

All eyes now fixed themselves upon the young man whose flushed face revealed the angry state of his feelings; but it was a cold and even hostile gaze, for thrills were uncommon experiences in Mawm, and to be robbed of one of this magnitude was an unfriendly act, on a par with that which they were gathered to discuss. Jack felt this and stood upon his defence.

“He’s as cute and slippy as the Old Lad himself, is Inman, and I’ll bet my last dollar it’s all a made up dodge to gain a bit o’ time for Baldwin. Who’s seen t’ colour o’ t’ brass, I’d like to know? He lives by his wits, does Inman, more’n by joinering.”

“Whisht, lad! Whisht!” said the landlord, who alone had any sympathy for the hot-tempered youth. “You may think what you like but you mustn’t speak it out loud, for t’law’s again’ it!”

“Tha’s gotten thi knife into Inman,” said Frank’s father, “and we all know why.

He's no friend o' any of us 'at I know on, but they aren't all thieves 'at dogs bark at, and choose where he got t' brass from, get it he did, for our Frank not only 'eard t' chink on't, but saw it wi' his own eyes. Aye, and I'll tell you more—he saw it after Inman had gone and so did t'others, for they pept through a crack i' t' boards and saw Baldwin bring it out o' t' safe and frame to count it, but he were ower far gone, and so put it back."

"Then I'm glad I don't work for Baldwin," said Jack sullenly, and with a significance there was no mistaking.

"And so you may be," continued the other. "But Frank's tell'd t' police all he knows, and they don't suspicion any o' t' men—anyway they've found nowt so far to warrant owt o' t' sort."

"Well, come now," said the landlord, who was anxious to prevent the conversation from becoming acrimonious; "Jack meant naught wrong, so there's no harm done. And as to any i' t' village having ta'en t' brass I'd pledge my living again' it. I make no charge again' nob'dy, but there was a stranger having a snack in t' 'Royal' at same time as Inman and t' lawyer, and whether or no they dropped ought 'at they shouldn't isn't to be known; but as Swithin says, we've a right to wer own thoughts."

Conversation at this point became general as each man advanced a theory based upon the information that had been given, or asked a question of his neighbour preparatory to forming one. Silence, however, fell upon the company again when during a lull Ambrose was heard to say—

"—and, if so be as they don't lay their hands on t' thief and get hold o' t' brass, it's like to go hard wi' Baldwin, for if all's trew 'at's tell'd, he wor at t' last gasp, as you may put it, and could get no more credit. I'm flayed t' ship'll land on t' ass-midden this time, Swith'n."

"That's a trew word, Ambrus," the other replied, "and if so be as Inman lands alongside him I don't know 'at there'll be any pity wasted. Not but what he's worked hard for Baldwin, for you mun give t' devil his due; and for a man to lose t' lump, and be beggared as you may say, all in a minute, is broth 'at none of us 'ud like to sup."

"And do you mean to tell me," Jack exclaimed with a return of temper, "'at Inman'll have lent all this brass and not be covered for't?" He snapped his fingers contemptuously, as he asked the question. "You can tell that tale to t' infant-class! What was it Ambrose said, not above a month back, when Inman caught his breeches on that nail i' Jane Wilki'son's gateway and made her pay t' price of a new pair, ommost; and her a widow? I ask you, what did Ambrose say? Wasn't it, 'at

he'd nails 'at 'ud scratch his grannie out of her grave? And d'you think a man like that'll put down a penny and not pick up tuppence? He's no such blamed fool!"

The sense of the company was with Jack this time, and even Swithin had nothing to say in reply. As for Ambrose, the quotation from his past pronouncement tickled his vanity, and he nodded his head approvingly as he remarked:—

"I did say it, lad, though it had slipped my mem'ry. There wor a time when I wor full o' wise sayin's o' that sort, and took a pleasure i' shapin' 'em; but I've gotten ower old now and it's only odd 'uns that come back to me. A robbery now 'ud ha' been a godsend when I wor i' my gifted prime; but we'd nowt o' that sort—nowt nobbut a toathri apples missin' and t' like o' that, 'at wor just marlackin', as you mud say. But it's gettin' late, neebours; and I'm a bit shakken wi' what we've been going' through. I'll be shapin' for home."

## CHAPTER XXI

### IN WHICH EVENTS MOVE QUICKLY

WHEN Inman entered the kitchen and saw Baldwin seated in his chair upon the hearth—a whipped, miserable dog with no spirit left in him—his anger blazed forth with such sudden fierceness that the inspector, who had found him cool and level-headed as they discussed the disaster on the journey home, opened his eyes in amazement; and the detective, a shrewd, kindly-looking man with little of the official about him, observed the newcomer with keen professional interest.

Sobered and at the same time stunned by the magnitude of the disaster that had overtaken him, Baldwin had remained all day in his chair upon the hearth, oblivious for the most part to what was taking place around him, and requiring to be roused like a dazed and drunken man when the police plied him with questions.

Neither food nor drink had passed his lips since breakfast, though Nancy's heart had softened at sight of his dejection and she had made him a cup of tea, and set it upon the grate at his side. It was there still, untouched, an hour later, and Nancy sat and watched him, with her baby on her knee, too humane and sympathetic to return to her room and leave Keturah to face the trouble alone, for though the older woman's eyes were now dry they were red and swollen with the waters that had passed over them before the fountain became exhausted.

At first sight of the pitiable, abject figure a black scowl leaped to Inman's brow and he crossed over to the rug and in a voice of carefully-suppressed passion exclaimed:

"So this is what comes of your whisky-drinking, you drunken brute! You've ruined me as well as yourself, foul-mouthed devil that you are!"

Baldwin raised his eyes but there was no sense of fear or resentment to be seen in them, only hopeless misery. He was too utterly prostrated, too benumbed by this culminating stroke of fate to feel the lash of Inman's tongue, much less to writhe under it, and all he could say was:

"Every penny ta'en! Every penny!"

"And whose fault is that?" Inman almost hissed. "Whose fault is it that it wasn't banked yesterday? Didn't I warn you? Didn't Jones? But you were master and I was man, and there was that cursed bottle of rum to finish! It serves me right for being fool enough to lend my money to a drunken sot like you. I might as well have dropped three hundred pounds down the drain, for your miserable bits o' scrap metal'll never fetch two hundred!"

"Who's ta'en it, I can't think," the other soliloquised wearily with his eyes on



Inman; “but every penny’s gone!”

Inman turned away with an impatient exclamation, and seeing the detective, growled an apology for his outburst.

The man with the keen, kindly eyes was looking on him with what appeared to be mild curiosity.

“I should like a few words with you in the office,” he said, and the three men left the house.

“Yon man hasn’t much to learn from you and me, Harker,” said the inspector, as the two officials motored back to headquarters a couple of hours later. “The way he pumped those two women would have done credit to a K.C.; and as for the old man—there won’t be much blood left in him, I fancy, when that chap’s finished squeezing.”

“It strikes me *we’ve* a deal to learn from this manager, or what he calls himself,” said Mr. Harker dryly. He had made very few remarks so far, though he had asked many questions.

“He’s evidently inclined to suspect this young fellow with the peculiar handle to his name,” continued the inspector.

“Or, anyhow, very anxious that other people should suspect him!” From Mr. Harker’s caustic tone it was easy to infer that Inman’s zeal had left no favourable impression. “But he’s wasting his powder and shot. The two men aren’t on good terms. Inman married this Jagger Drake’s sweetheart, and it hasn’t turned out a love match, I understand. Since then Jagger has thrashed our friend, and he’s still sore about it. There’s more life in a hole like this than most folk think, Martin. All the same, Jagger Drake hasn’t helped himself to this swag!”

It was evident that Detective Harker had been making good use of his opportunities.

“Have you formed a theory?”

“Not a workable one, so far. To be quite frank, I could think the business had been cooked, but I can’t at present see why or how. If I’m right there’s only one man who can throw light on the subject, and he won’t.”

“Meaning Inman?” The inspector’s voice betrayed quite as much scepticism as interest.

“That man is one of the finest actors I’ve ever met,” the detective answered quietly. “I should have suspected collusion between him and his master; but that’s out of the question—the old man is no actor. This job interests me, but it’ll have to be worked carefully. He’s a smart man who’s helped himself to this rhino, whoever he is. I expect his smartness’ll trip him up if we give him time.”

“They’re all a lot o’ bungling idiots,” Inman remarked to Nancy as the car moved away. “They see what you tell ’em and what can’t be missed. That Harker is half asleep. I suggested a Scotland Yard man to the inspector, but he seemed huffed, so I dropped it.”

His tone was surly, but Nancy distinguished another note in it that she did not quite understand; something between satisfaction and relief or a mixture of both; something infinitely less harsh than she had expected. She had been bracing herself for an angry encounter with her husband, for there had been no mistaking the look he shot her when his minute inquiries elicited the information that Hannah had spent the evening with her. It had been a silent promissory-note for settlement at the earliest opportunity, and had been accepted as such. Now that the favourable moment had come, she was surprised and also relieved to find that her husband’s mood had changed.

Inman had not forgotten, but it was his constant fate to be compelled by considerations of what was prudent in his own interests to defer the settlements from which he promised himself so much satisfaction. To hurt his wife and through her sufferings to cut her lover to the quick was one of the two absorbing passions that occupied his thoughts by day and night. But when he was about to strike, self-interest always held his arm. He had been sorely vexed that hitherto his threat to injure Jagger had come to naught; it humiliated him to think that his rival was laughing in his sleeve at the emptiness of the warning; but what could he do so long as the two passions were at variance? Nancy held the purse and the purse was deep. Until that had changed hands he was not master of the situation; revenge must be deferred.

It may be questioned whether the prospect of vengeance does not afford as great satisfaction as its accomplishment; it is at any rate certain that Inman’s soul nourished itself upon foretastes and that the kindlier note in his voice was the traitorous servant of his ill-intent.

There was a fire in the parlour and he took Nancy there, bidding Keturah get Baldwin off to bed. The baby was sleeping on the sofa, and Inman closed the door and stood with his back to the mantelpiece.

“What the deuce made you tell Hannah about the money?” he began. “I should have expected you to have more sense.”

“I didn’t; she told me!” Nancy looked up from her sewing to see what effect the denial had upon her husband.

“She told you!” The voice was incredulous, yet in spite of himself he believed her, knowing that Nancy would never purchase pardon with a lie.

“All the village knew it,” she repeated quietly.

He stared at the head that was bent down again upon her work, and turned over this new information in his mind.

“Then the devil must have been playing with the brass whilst I was at the ‘Royal!’”

She said neither yes nor no, and his mouth tightened. He would have liked to seize her by the shoulders and shake her out of her cold complacency. The entire absence of any sense of fear, of any apprehension of danger, stung him almost beyond his power of endurance; but once again the stronger passion of greed held him in check.

“Haven’t they found any clue?” Nancy asked, when there had been silence between them for some moments.

“*They* haven’t,” he answered suggestively. “They haven’t an idea between them. A set o’ wooden skittles, bowled over by any bungling prentice that tries his hand at burglary—that’s what *they* are. What clue there is they won’t see when it’s pointed out to ’em. At any rate, that fool of a detective won’t.”

“Then there *is* a clue?” she asked, and the hot blood rushed to her cheeks the more violently when she tried to restrain it. Her quick wit told her that it was Jagger whom he suspected; and indignant words were not far from her lips when her husband spoke.

“Whatever I think I’m not thinking out loud. If I hadn’t had so much sense before, what’s just happened ’ud have taught me. Somebody who knew it was there took it, that’s clear enough; and there are certain people who are going to be watched.”

She was very angry, yet common-sense came to her help and warned her that she would do well to restrain herself. After all, Jagger would easily free himself of such a ridiculous suspicion; and for her to show resentment would do him no good.

Inman guessed what was passing in his wife’s mind and added the incident to the other stored-up memories which rankled in his mind and punished him sorely; but for the moment nothing but gentleness could serve his purpose, and he went on in a softer tone.

“Let it drop, lass. If I’m wronging anybody in my thoughts it’ll do ’em no harm. There may be naught in it, but it’s my duty to you as well as myself to look round and try to find a key ’at’ll fit t’ lock.

“But we’ll put it o’ one side; there’s other things have to be thought about, and you and me’ll have to make our minds up. Baldwin’ll be made bankrupt, that’s certain, but the shop’s yours, and the machinery’ll be mine—ours, I should say; what are we going to do about it?”

She glanced up questioningly. This tone of sympathetic plain speaking appealed to the best in her nature and partially deceived her. Like a flash the suggestion presented itself that life with this man need not after all be the intolerable burden she had feared, even though love might be wanting; that she had perhaps mistaken anxiety for coldness and absence of mind for callousness.

“Is it too late to save him?” she asked.

She looked up quickly as she spoke, and the sight of her husband’s face dismissed at once all her mocking fancies.

“To save——?” Inman’s mouth opened in astonishment; but immediately took on curves of disdain as he replied:

“Don’t talk like a fool, Nancy! We’ve thrown enough into that muck-heap, and now we’ve got to think about ourselves. Baldwin wouldn’t have considered twice about sending you to the devil—let him go there himself! He’ll be made bankrupt, I tell you, and there won’t be more’n a few shillings in the pound for his creditors. The question is, am I to take the business over, or what?”

He played with his silver watch-chain, waiting for an answer, but not looking into his wife’s face, and Nancy speedily made up her mind.

For better or worse she had tied herself to the man, and whatever his qualities as a husband, there could be no question of his business ability. If she were to thwart him by withholding her money, what purpose would she serve? Would she not indeed be sowing for herself the seeds of certain trouble? The more time her husband devoted to business the less there would be to spend with her. Let the machinery be kept running there, and the wheels of their domestic life would probably run smoothly.

“I don’t doubt but what you’ll make things hum,” she said, and although there was no enthusiasm in the tone, a look of satisfaction came into Inman’s eyes as he recognised the implication of the tense she had employed.

“Lend me the money,” he replied, “and I’ll make this the best country business in Craven. I’ll——But it’s no use dreaming dreams; I’ve thought this thing out and I know what I can do. I can make you rich in a few years, Nancy!”

“Can you?” Nancy had better have withheld the exclamation or have uttered it with less meaning, for its weary note told a story with which Inman was already too familiar; but the contraction of brow was only momentary, and he forced himself to laugh.

“Never mind! You shall see! And you shall have five per cent. for pin money as we go along.”

Nancy smiled, not realising what damage that runaway sigh had done her, not

suspecting the volcanic anger that was hidden beneath her husband's smooth words.

"Do as you like," she said. "Leave me a couple of hundreds in the bank and you can have the rest."

It was better than he had expected, but he veiled his gratification and appeared to hesitate.

"I shall be able to manage," he said finally. "I should like to launch out, but we'll talk it over again when I've had a chat with the bank manager. It 'ud pay you to sell your investments; but there's always the property for additional security, of course. Besides, I'm not captain yet. Baldwin's still on the bridge."

He laughed and stretched himself. Nancy wondered if he would kiss her if only on the forehead, as he had been wont to do when she had happened to please him, though not since his child had come. She half hoped he would not; yet when he left the room with no word of farewell her spirits sank.

"He *does* hate me," she said to herself. "Well, after all, it makes no difference. We must live as well as we can!"

A month later the business became Inman's. He had not spared his master in the evidence he had been called upon to give, and Baldwin had been severely lectured by Registrar, Official Receiver and various crabbed lawyers, each of whom was at pains to point out that by refusing to take the advice of such a counsellor as his foreman—a counsellor, who, as the Official Receiver remarked, had been a veritable god-out-of-the-machine if Baldwin had not been too pig-headed and intemperate to make use of him—he had brought himself and his creditors into this unenviable position. The Registrar complimented Inman on his devotion to duty and expressed his sympathy with him in the loss of so much of his savings. It was true, he said, that bills of sale were not regarded with favour by the Court, but he quite recognised that in this case it had been regarded more or less as a formality, and the readiest, if not the only method of partially securing the loan.

Baldwin, too broken already on the wheel of fortune to suffer any further pain from the hard blow he received, left the Court an undischarged bankrupt, and Inman by arrangement with the Official Receiver, obtained the goodwill of the business at a merely nominal figure, and the goodwill of the unsecured creditors for nothing at all.

It was the afternoon of Christmas Eve before the last formality was completed that left Inman master of the wrecked ship, and he hurried home to deal promptly with his predecessor.

The evening meal was being cleared away when he got down from the trap in which he had been driven from the station and strode into the kitchen. Nancy rose in order to brew some fresh tea, and he recognised her purpose.

“Sit still, Nancy,” he said. There was a changed note in his voice that only Baldwin failed to recognise. “Keturah’ll have to work for her living if she stops on here, and there’s no need for my wife to bark if we keep a dog. Get up, Keturah, and mash my tea.”

“I’ll make it myself, James,” said Nancy, as Keturah seemed paralysed by this unexpected attack; but Inman bade her be seated.

“Keturah’ll either do as she’s told,” he said, with an ugly look about his mouth and an ominous glitter in his eyes; “or she’ll find fresh lodgings along with her brother. Baldwin leaves here to-night, and I’m not very particular if Keturah goes with him—they’ve both eaten the bread o’ idleness long enough at my expense. You needn’t open your mouth, Nancy,” he went on with a rough composure that was more discomfiting than anger. “I’m master here, and master I’m going to be. Keturah can stop, I say, if she likes, and I’ll pay her wages; but she stops as servant. There’ll be no more whining and crying about ‘fine ladies’—I’ll see to that. Baldwin finds fresh quarters and finds ’em to-night. I’ve no use for him.”

Keturah’s apron was over her face by this time, but harsh words and hard looks put new spirit into Baldwin, who for the first time in all these weeks rose to his feet in a passion and called to his help the oaths he had neglected in his dejection.

It was to no purpose. Inman pushed him from him with a rough touch that was almost a blow.

“Carry your dirty talk outside, you hound!” he said. Then with a sneer that disfigured his face, he added: “I’ve taken over your motto with the business, Baldwin—‘all for my-sen.’ Both the motto and the business are good, but they’ve got to be worked with gumption, d’you see? And they’re going to be. You’re in my way now, and you’ve got to get out. I’m going to do by you what you’d ha’ done by me. Does that get past your thick skull?”

Keturah was wailing aloud, and he turned on her fiercely and bade her be silent. Nancy, white, and with lips tightly compressed, was gripping the sides of her chair, her eyes fixed on her husband, her brain busily employed in considering what was best to be done, and reaching no conclusion.

Baldwin’s rebellion had been a mere gust, and the storm subsided as quickly as it had arisen.

“Where can I go?” he faltered, as he looked dully into the eyes that were turned contemptuously upon him.

“To hell—or the Union! Who else’ll have you?”

“James!” Nancy faced her husband with hot indignation flashing from the eyes that looked fearlessly into his. “How can you say such things, and on Christmas Eve,

too! You've punished him enough—only a brute 'ud kick a man so hard when he's down!"

She turned to Baldwin, and laid a reassuring hand on his shoulder. "Take no notice of him," said she soothingly. "He doesn't mean it! He's just getting a bit of his own back!"

"Don't I?" said her husband, as he disengaged her hand with a grip that hurt. "I'll show you whether I mean it or not. Get away to the other baby and leave the brute to his work—get away, I say!"

She had clenched her free fist and beaten the hand that held her; but she was powerless, and he raised her from her feet and almost flung her into the parlour.

"I'm master here," he said. "There isn't room for two. You'd better shut yourself in for your own comfort."

A little while later Baldwin knocked timidly at Maniwel's door.

## CHAPTER XXII

### IN WHICH BALDWIN FINDS NEW LODGINGS

THE cottage by the bridge contrasted strongly with Nancy's home. Two or three gaily coloured mottoes suitable to the season had been tacked to the wall, and a couple of attractive almanacks recently distributed by enterprising tradesmen in advance of the New Year, bore them company, and diverted attention from the framed funeral cards which grannie regarded with an owner's mournful pride, and Hannah with an impatient contempt that was manifested every time she dusted them. Sprigs of holly, bright with scarlet berries, peeped from the vases on the mantelpiece, lay between the plates and dishes on the rack above the dresser, and were wreathed about the faded face of the grandfather's clock in the corner. Grandfather's? Great-great-grandfather's, grannie would have told you, for it had ticked away in her grandsire's time, and even then the cow upon the dial (which was now a mere ghost of a cow, and a badly dismembered ghost, too!) was losing its horns and tail. There were other sprigs upon the window-ledge but these could not be seen because the blind was drawn. There was, however, no mistletoe, for Hannah was thirty-one and the "baleful plant" was among the childish things she had put away.

Because it was Christmas Eve, Maniwel and Jagger had knocked off work at five o'clock, although business was brisk, and the younger man made it his only recreation, rarely leaving the shop until the supper-hour struck. Even now, as he sat with his head in his hands at the table, he was studying plans, and Hannah looked across at her father, who was deep in a book, and then turned to grannie.

"I wish to goodness t' Sperrit 'ud move someb'dy to talk!" she said. "I should be fain of a few more young'uns to sing for us, for all they bring a lot o' muck in. It's fair wearisome sitting by t' hour together, same as we were a lot o' mutes."

"Nay, I don't know about that, lass," replied the old woman. "I was never one for a deal o' chattering myself, and there's awlus a deal to think about. I can pass my time nicely wi' them 'at's gone, for they were a better breed i' my young days nor what we've gotten now."

"And whose fault is that?" inquired Maniwel, who had not been too absorbed in his book to overhear what was said. "Who brought these we've got now into t' world? There's a bit i' t' Book 'at you must ha' missed, where it reads 'at we're not to talk about t' former days being better than our own, 'cause there's no sense in it. What about t' mischief nights 'at father used to tell about, when they lifted t' gates off o' their hinges, and stole t' goose out o' t' larder, and such like tricks at Christmas time? You'd look well if they were to fetch to-morrow's dinner while you were



abed, mother.”

“I should happen miss it less nor some,” replied the old woman placidly. “I reckon naught o’ bits o’ marlacks same as them. Lads is lads, and mischief comes nat’ral to ’em; and if there’s less on’t now it’s ’cos they haven’t t’ sperrit they used to have, let t’ Book say what it will.”

Maniwel looked across at his mother with great good-humour. He knew that her grumblings were not very sincere, and that she was probably happier than she had been in the old days that had been drab enough until the sunset tints of life’s eventide fell upon them. She spent the greater part of her time now dreaming dreams, and it pleased him to rouse her, and see the light of battle shine feebly in her eye again.

“Nay, mother,” he said; “you’ll wriggle loose choose how fast we tie you up. I never saw such a woman—why you’re as slippery as an eel. When there’s a bit o’ mischief goes on i’ t’ village you shake your head and think t’ Owd Lad’s got us on his fork; and when there isn’t, you say ’at we’re short o’ sperrit and t’ world’s going back’ards way! It’s heads win and tails loses every time!”

“I say grannie’s right!” Jagger had turned on his chair and was stretching out his long legs on the rug. He was a different man from the one who had sat there so disconsolately twelve months before. Little by little he had shaken off the melancholy that had enwrapped him and had clothed himself in his father’s mantle of tranquillity. But even yet the garment lacked the trimmings that beautified the older man’s and made it conspicuous—cheerfulness and breezy optimism were missing. In their stead was a fixed determination to take things quietly as they came, and to push vigorously along the path he had mapped out for himself. The encounter with Inman which had been deplored by the father as a mistake in tactics as well as an evidence of the existence of “old Adam” had given the son much satisfaction. Inman might sneer as he liked—everybody for miles round knew that he had been laid out by his rival, and the defeated man had no sympathisers. Jagger felt that it was good for his self-respect to have that victory to his account, and he had held himself more erect and viewed the world more hopefully ever since.

“I say grannie’s right!” he said. “Shifting gates once a year, and lifting a goose or two for a lark, are just lads’ tricks—mischief ’at means naught. But when grown men plan out Mischief Nights a toathri times a month it looks as if the Old Lad *had* somebody on his fork, and if I could just catch him I’d shove t’ fork that far in he wouldn’t get off again easy!”

“I’ll warrant you, lad,” said his father, and the two men’s eyes met. “I’d like to see you with a grip on his collar myself.”

“It wouldn’t take long neither,” returned Jagger significantly. “There’s only one in

this village 'at's as clever as the devil himself, and as black-hearted; but he'll go a step too far one o' these days."

"Sure enough! Them 'at dig pits are like to fall in 'em. If it goes on much longer, lad, we shall have to watch."

"Aye, but it's more'n a man can do to work all t' day and watch all t' night. Let him be!" Jagger spoke as if the anticipated pleasure of seeing Nemesis at work outweighed all the grievous afflictions which were but for a moment.

Certainly the succession of trifling mishaps that had at first half-amused, half-enraged the village and had latterly aroused a large measure of resentment, had been conceived and carried out with such impish ingenuity as to convince a small minority that the culprit must be one of a gang of rough lads from Kirkby Mawm who were well-known to belong to the devil's household brigade of mischief-makers. It was hard to believe that any grown man would take pleasure in changing the labels on the Drakes' oil-cans as they stood on the cart in the carrier's shed ready for despatch, so that the man who was waiting for boiled oil found himself supplied with linseed, and the farmwife whose stock of paraffin had run out stamped her foot in wrath when thick lubricating oil began to pour from the neck of the tin. After that, of course, the carrier boarded up his shed; but he might have saved himself the expense for the rascal was too wise to return upon his tracks.

It looked a lad's trick, too, when the door at the Grange which Maniwel had painted white was seen in the morning to be covered with soot and the sweep's bag lying on the ground a few yards away: when Farmer Lambert's new cart was dragged from the Drakes' painting shed during the night and its coat of gorgeous scarlet ruined by the rain which had fallen in torrents. There was some division of opinion, I repeat, on the question of authorship; but there was none on the market value of Police Constable Stalker as an officer of the law, which it was unanimously agreed could hardly be lower.

Whether or no Inman was aware that he was regarded with suspicion by any of his neighbours he bore himself at this time with a detached and contemptuous air that was his best defence; and he offered a simple explanation of each mishap as it occurred that always drew a waverer or two to his side.

"Just another piece of blooming carelessness," he would say with a shrug of the shoulders. "They're both of 'em half-asleep most o' their time."

The subtle poison worked, if only slowly; and even those who were well-disposed to the Drakes and ready to lay the charge at Inman's door began to wonder if it was quite safe to entrust their jobs to a firm whose operations were attended with such bad luck. Fortunately Mr. Harris remained their constant friend,

and work had never yet been scant.

In the policeman Inman found a staunch ally. Every hint that was dropped by the crafty plotter with a sportive humour that concealed itself behind a mask of cynical unconcern was accepted and acted upon by Stalker as if it had been a divine revelation. Nothing, of course, could have served Inman's purpose better; and he controlled the constable's movements to an extent that would have surprised the sergeant, who was kept in blissful ignorance of these trifling occurrences. Stalker had no qualms of conscience because he was quite certain that he was on the track of a criminal, and that with Inman's unobtrusive help he would one day lay his hands upon him. For this reason the coldness or abuse of the villagers made as little impression upon him as their scorn. He was a dull and easily-befooled officer; but he had learned that if the law moved slowly, it also moved majestically, and he could bide his time. He accepted the suggestion of his prompter that these mishaps to the Drakes were all arranged by Jagger himself to throw dust in his eyes and divert his attention from the weightier matter of the robbery; and he was determined to take good care that the device should not succeed.

All this, of course, was not known to the Drakes; but both father and son had a shrewd suspicion of how matters stood, though their attitude towards the suspect differed materially. When Jagger said, therefore: "Let him be!" the look that accompanied the injunction was more expressive than the words.

"Twelve months since," said Hannah with sisterly satisfaction, "you'd ha' been ready to creep into your grave over t' job. It isn't all to t' bad."

"Not by a long way," added the father. "I'm o' Jagger's way o' thinking, and I lay all t' blame for this mischief on yon lad; but choose what harm he's done he's made a man o' Jagger, so we've no 'casion to be over hard on him. He'll tire o' these kids' tricks i' time, and maybe repent on 'em. As for getting hold of his throttle, it 'ud suit me better to get hold of his 'at has him on t' fork."

"There isn't a ha'porth o' difference between 'em," said Jagger emphatically.

"Yes, there's this much," corrected his father; "'at t' Old Lad's i' t' sperrit and t' young lad's i' t' flesh, and while a man's i' t' flesh there's hope for him; and I'd sooner break t' lad off his bad ways than I'd break his back for him. T' devil knows a good hammer when he sees it, and a good hammer's a good friend if we could steal it away. I could like to do that bit o' thieving."

"They've black hearts that comes off o' that black moor," said grannie, shaking her head in deprecation of her son's optimism; but he laughed the implication away.

"There's few black hearts 'at's fast dye, mother. They'll wash clean, and if we could get t' sun to 'em they'd maybe bleach."

It was uneven warfare, for they were all against him. Grannie shook her head and muttered to herself; Hannah told her father he didn't know his man, and proceeded to enlighten him by recalling incidents which she assumed he had forgotten and Jagger listened with an expression of tolerant amusement until his sister had finished, when he said—

“It's Christmas time, Hannah. There's to be peace and goodwill, you understand! a sort of a truce: God and t' devil sitting down at one table!”

He spoke in a tone of good-tempered derision, but avoided his father's eye in which he would have seen an unexpected look of humour.

“Now, that's smart, isn't it? You've wiped the floor wi' your old dad this time! I suppose you never heard o' God and t' devil sitting down together? Reach t' Book across, Hannah!”

He found at once the passage he wanted and read—

“Jesus answered them. Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? He spake of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray Him, being one of the twelve.”

He paused and glanced across at his son; but meeting with no response, turned over the leaves of the Book and read again—

“And when He had dipped the sop He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon.”

He handed the book back to Hannah, and gazed steadily at Jagger.

“That was t' last time, lad. How oft do you think He'd supped wi' him before?”

“He didn't cure him,” said Jagger who was secretly proud of his father's ready wit, though not willing to acknowledge defeat; “Judas was a rank wrong 'un, same as Inman: one o' them you can't cure.”

“I don't know whether He cured him or He didn't,” replied Maniwel; “but I've always had an idea 'at Judas rued when he found 'at he'd gone ower far, and there's never no telling what drove him to put t' rope round his neck.”

“I could wish Inman 'ud get as far as that,” said Jagger flippantly.

“If I thought you weren't lying, lad,” Maniwel replied sternly after looking at him searchingly for a moment; “I should be ashamed of you. The Lord pity you if it's true!”

Jagger flushed and Hannah took up arms in his defence.

“You must remember what he's had to put up with, father; more'n you and me. There isn't many 'ud have taken it so quietly!”

“That may be, lass, and I'm not denying it; but it 'ud grieve me to think 'at Jagger was a murderer in his heart—”

“Sure-ly there’s someb’dy knocking!” said grannie whose head had been bent towards the door during this admonition.

“I heard naught,” said Hannah, but she rose and went to the door. “There is someb’dy!” she said as she raised the latch and opened it; “Why, it’s Mr. Briggs!”

“Baldwin!” Maniwel was on his feet in an instant—“Bring him in, lass!”

It was a scared and pitiable figure that stepped hesitatingly into the cheerful light, and leaned against the dresser. An old workshop cap remained forgotten on his head, and the worn coat was that in which he had been accustomed to do his roughest work. Very old and frail he looked as his dull eyes fixed themselves on Maniwel, and the hands that hung straight down moved tremulously.

“He’s turned me out, Maniwel!”

It was almost a cry: it was certainly an appeal, though the words were not so eloquent as the eyes.

“Turned tha out!” repeated Maniwel incredulously. “What does tha mean Inman?”

Hannah was still holding the door ajar; but catching her brother’s eye she closed it. Jagger had risen too, and was standing with his back to the fire, a frown overspreading his face.

“Turned me out, Maniwel, to fend for my-sen! I mud go to t’ Union, he said, or to t’ devil!”

“Tha did right to come here, lad,” said Maniwel, unconscious of any humour in the remark. “You’ve been having a toathri words I reckon. He’ll come round, tha’ll see, after a bit. Come and sit tha down by t’ fire and tha shalt have a bit o’ supper wi’ us.”

Baldwin did not move. His eyes wandering vacantly round the room had found Jagger and were resting there with no change of expression, but with a fixity that made the young man uncomfortable.

“Take your cap off, Mr. Briggs, and come nearer t’ fire,” said Hannah—though she anticipated the action by removing it herself. “Why, you’re fair dithering wi’ cold! Come now, t’ kettle’s on t’ boil, and I’ll soon have a cup o’ tea ready.”

He suffered her to lead him to the hearth and to place him in her father’s chair; but he still stared at Jagger as if something beneath his consciousness was seeking to determine whether the young man was to be regarded as friend or foe.

Grannie looked across and smiled, for she was old enough to forget readily grievances that were not her own.

“Nay, Baldwin,” she said; “this is like owd times!”

“So it is, mother,” said her son heartily. “He’s a bit upset just now, and his

breath's been ta'en; but when he's swallowed a drink o' tea he'll feel himself, you'll see!"

Baldwin removed his eyes to Maniwel's face, and a look of returning intelligence appeared there.

"We've had no words, lad," he said. "He's gotten t' business, that's all, so I've to shift—at my age, and it'll be Christmas to-morrow. Damn him, Maniwel!"

"Nay, lad," said the other sadly, "neither thee nor me's no 'casion to do that, for he's damning himself, I'm flayed. We'll see what he's like i' t' morning: we're none that short o' room but what we can put tha up for a night; aye, and for good, if it comes to that. Tha needn't dream about t' Union, Baldwin, nor t' devil, neither. What say you, Jagger?"

"He can stay for aught I care," replied his son, though the concession lacked graciousness.

"You hear that!" Maniwel dulled his perceptions to the want of warmth. "My bed'll hold two, but tha'll happen sleep better by thiself, and t' sofa'll hold me nicely...."

"He'll have my bed," said Jagger, "so that's settled." Then he went over to his father and looked hard in his face.

"Didn't I tell you he was a devil?" he said; and Maniwel did not find the inquiry ambiguous.

## CHAPTER XXIII

IN WHICH NANCY IS OVERWHELMED

ALTHOUGH the excitements of a moorland village are ordinarily few in number and mild in quality they are of sturdy habit when they do occur, and too well cared for to die of inanition like the starved and overcrowded sensations of the towns.

Rumour which flies on swift wing in the busy centres and is quickly chased away by denial, finds a comfortable breeding-ground in the lonely places, and is cherished by the natives, who regard it as a veritable bird of paradise with a voice of which only the echo is heard.

Moreover a village is not as accommodating as a town; and the farther it is removed from industrial influences the less likely is it to view any sudden change with the philosophic calm which lowers its voice to whisper "The King is dead!" and forthwith raises it to shout "Long live the King!"

Mawm furnished an illustration of both these facts. Baldwin Briggs had been a fixture in the village: a piece of grit hewn out of the side of their own bleak hills and therefore naturally rough and unyielding—even coarse. Nobody had cared for him very much, for there had been in his nature none of the kindness that either begets or responds to kindness; yet there had been no marked aversion on the part of his neighbours, who were aware that all sorts of natures like all sorts of rock enter into the composition of a world.

If the truth may be told most of his acquaintances were secretly pleased when news came that Baldwin had lost a considerable portion of his money; and even when it was seen that the disaster was of greater magnitude than they had realised their attitude suffered little change. He had always made them uneasily conscious of his superiority as a man of means; the crash brought down the millstone grit from its proud position among the clouds to the level of the humbler and commoner limestone, and gave to every villager whom he had cursed or snubbed a comfortable sense of nearer equality. Providence was avenging these insults: it was not for them to find fault with Providence.

When, however, the shock developed into an earthquake: when Providence took the unwelcome shape of this foreigner, Inman; Mawm scowled and muttered. To be driven from the devil he knew to the deep sea he distrusted was an experience no man had bargained for; and when the devil was such a broken-spirited boggart as Baldwin, the villagers' sympathies warmed towards the man who was bone of their bone; for after all there is a vast difference between a devil and a poor devil.

Baldwin, then, found not only Maniwel, but the bulk of his neighbours well-disposed when with the foundering of his ship he lost all that he had, and was so utterly beggared that even heart and hope—salvage which many ship-wrecked souls manage to bear away with them, and with which they find life still worth living—went with the rest. They greeted him in friendly fashion when they met (which was indeed seldom for he shunned society) but he responded with a scarcely perceptible nod and kept his eyes on the ground until they had passed.

“It’ll go agen t’ grain, having to take his orders thro’ Maniwel and Jagger, an’ living on their charity, as you mud say?”—this was the universal opinion, freely expressed and with much wise head-shaking: a very natural conclusion.

It was incorrect. In the hour of his calamity Baldwin came to himself and clung with a pitiful and almost childish sense of security to the friend of his youth. Like the seeds in Arctic soil which have been quickened into life by the warmth of some explorer’s camp fire and have forced their tender shoots through the hard crust of earth, an unsuspected virtue quickened in Baldwin, who by his actions—for words failed him—showed himself grateful.

The dog-like look in his eyes made Maniwel uneasy and Jagger irritable.

“Come, come!” the father would say, “Tha owes us naught! Tha’rt working for thi’ living, aren’t tha?” and the young man would growl out that it pleased him to think they had taken the wind out of “yon beggar’s” sails.

It was indeed a thought that comforted Jagger and compensated for much that was not agreeable, that by his ungenerous and even brutal action Inman had overreached himself, alienating the sympathies of those who had been growing more favourably disposed towards him and deepening the dislike of the rest, so that he was left for a while almost without customers. Inman himself recognised his mistake, and was vexed and disconcerted, though he turned an unperturbed face to the world, saving his ill-humour for his wife, whom he made to suffer vicariously for this cunning move of Maniwel’s as he chose to regard it.

He was not the man, however, to be disheartened by one repulse, and he had sufficient knowledge of human nature to realise that the coolness of his neighbours would gradually disappear as they accustomed themselves to the changed conditions, and that the best way to secure their trade was to make adequate preparations for turning out good and expeditious work. None of the workpeople had left him and he made it his first business to secure their favour by treating them well. The interval of stagnation was filled by painting the premises and making improvements in the shop. Within a fortnight a new machine was installed; before a month had passed two others followed; and everybody knew that the new



proprietor was going to make a bid for trade on a large scale. Little wonder if, with such ample stores of warp and woof to draw upon, report and rumour worked as busily as a weaver's shuttle, and produced a pile of material which the villagers cut and shaped according to their skill and judgment.

This, however, was not all. The sensation caused by the robbery and its dramatic sequel in Baldwin's downfall was still keen when a new crop of rumours arose simultaneously with a change in the weather. Up to now the landscape had been wrapped in its thick warm mantle of snow, and for weeks on end the occupants of the scattered farms on the uplands had been compelled to shut themselves up in their snug kitchens and turn over and over again such scraps of spirit-stirring news as reached them from the throbbing centre of their world—this moorland metropolis of Mawm.

It was towards the middle of January that the weather broke, and a rapid thaw was followed by torrential rains and wild winds that swept over the moors from the south-west and washed every secret crevice of the Pennines.

On one of the wildest and darkest of these nights a man of the far moors whose thirst for good ale and good company had kept him at the "Packhorse" until closing-time, and who had then accepted Swithin's invitation to accompany him to the shippen in the Long Close where he had a heifer to dispose of, had an experience on his homeward journey that sent him down to the inn again the next night, and made him for a short time the most important figure upon the stage.

Briefly the story he told was this.

As he was making his way over the fields in the direction of Gordel and the Girston road he "plumped fair into a fellow" who was walking towards him, and who uttered an impatient exclamation at the encounter. Job wished to know what the hangment he was doing there at that time of night; but received no answer, unless a suggestion that the questioner should betake himself to the devil could be regarded in that light. As the stranger was in Job's words, "a likelier-looking chap" than himself and might for anything he knew be armed, as ill-disposed night prowlers were reported to be, he thought it prudent not to continue longer than was necessary in the man's company, so wished him "Good night" as a measure of precaution and made his way as quickly as possible to the road.

Arrived there curiosity got the better of other impulses and he stood and looked over the Close; and as sure as he was sitting on the bench of that bar-parlour a glimmer of light had caught his eye in the distance: a light that had moved up and down in the neighbourhood of the shippen for about a quarter of an hour and had then disappeared.

Job, like the rest of the company, was hopeful that Swithin would be able to put two and two together.

Swithin, however, was unfriendly and discouraging.

“I saw nowt o’ no tramp,” he replied. “Job found a mare’s nest. Some fella’ll ha’ been taking a short cut to t’ high road, and Job’ll ha’ seen t’ light of my lantern through a chink i’ t’ shippen.”

“Chinks doesn’t move up and down an’ back’ards an’ forrads same as a chap was seeking his gallus button,” returned Job doggedly: and Swithin turned on him with a fierceness that seemed out of all proportion to the occasion.

“His gallus button! What does tha mean?” he asked almost menacingly.

“It was only a figger o’ speech,” Job answered surlily; at a loss to know how he had aroused the old man’s ire.

“Then keep your figgers o’ speech and your daft boggart tales to yourself,” growled Swithin.

“You’ve no ’casion to cut up so rough ’cos I didn’t fancy t’ heifer,” said Job hotly; and disappointed that his communication had been received so coolly, he soon took his departure.

The report spread, rumour companied with it; statements credible and incredible multiplied; a mysterious stranger of sinister appearance who lurked in the shadows and was never seen by day was believed in by every villager except Inman and Swithin. The old man was particularly incredulous and aggravatingly sarcastic. The word “daft” was always on his lips; but the evidence of things not seen was good enough for the generality, and faith in the obscure alien was almost universal.

Police Constable Stalker was not numbered with the believers. Whether it was that Inman’s scepticism had influenced him or that the evidence was not of the kind that is accepted in a police-court, he remained as scornful and sceptical as Swithin himself. When his detractors ventured to suggest that it was his business to lay the ghost or lay hands on it he had one ready reply that reduced them to silence—

“A man can’t be everywhere at once!” he said. “We shall have to see if we can’t arrange for a few ‘specials!’”

It was not until January had usurped February’s prerogative by filling the dykes to overflowing that the weather moderated. Three days of brilliant sunshine ushered in the year’s second month: three spring-like days when the grass beside the swollen river lost its grey winterly look and lay yellow-green in the warm sunlight.

Nancy, her well-shawled baby in her arms, left her home in the early afternoon to walk for a while in the crisp, sweetly-scented air. The footbridge near the house was under water so she turned down the road and crossed the green in front of the

“Packhorse,” at that hour deserted of customers. From the doorway of the inn Albert threw her a pleasant greeting.

“A grand day, Nancy! It’s good to see you about again. Have you ought i’ your poke you want to sell?”

“You haven’t money enough to buy, Albert,” she replied readily.

“Is that so?” he went on with affected astonishment. “These pedigree pups does cost a sight o’ brass, I know!”

She smiled and passed on; but the words in their careless humour had struck her heart like a blow. “These pedigree pups!” What was her child’s pedigree? “By James Inman ex Nancy Clegg!” The burden she was carrying that had been so light a moment or so before grew suddenly heavy, and she was conscious of an aching arm. The sunshine that had shed its radiance upon her spirits was blotted out by this leaden cloud, and she was conscious of an aching heart. The wild grandeur of nature, the wind-swept hills that she had thought to look upon with so much pleasure, mocked her with a sense of harshness and stony indifference. They were old—hoary with age: of what concern to them were the sorrows of the puny mortals who came and went in the grey hamlet that sheltered at their feet, and who were soon buried in the earth and forgotten? With what fervent heat she had loved them! how cold they were to her!

Mechanically she drew the knitted wrap further across the sleeping child’s face—in order to protect it from the frost the action said; but as her heart told her, so that she might not see her husband’s features reproduced on a smaller scale.

Her heart spoke and she listened. Immediately there came a revulsion of feeling as sudden and tempestuous as the gales that leap full-grown from the secret places of the mountains, and she pulled the wrap back and raised the little head to her lips.

“My precious!” she said.

He opened his eyes and smiled into hers, gurgling his appreciation of the light that shone there and the comfort of her arms; and not a shadow lingered on her face. All the optimism of mother-love, all the brave predictions that a woman associates with her first-born boy helped to drive the black mood back. The child was her one comfort: the bow God’s mercy had set in the cloud to show that her sinful folly had not doomed her to utter despair. He was hers to mould and train as she would, for her husband cared nothing for him,—she could almost thank God that it was so—and they two would be companions in the days that lay ahead, roaming the wild moors together and climbing to the very summits of the mountains. She laughed aloud as in fancy she heard his laugh—the laugh of the agile lad who makes fun of his mother’s tardiness; she lived in a paradise of the future: a paradise ready-made on

those bleak, grey uplands, which were no longer frosty and heartless and old, but young and bright as the spring-time....

She had gone far enough along the Tarn road—too far, indeed, for her strength—and she turned back. The baby river, a good distance below, seemed to her unusually loud and boisterous. The noise of its roaring echoed strangely from the sides of old Cawden on whose lower slopes the path she was treading ran. She would have noticed it more if her forehead had not been buried so often against the soft flesh of her baby's neck. It was not until she reached the point where the Tarn road joins that from Gordel that she became aware that the sound of rushing water came not from the river below but from the hill above.

I have said already that the neighbourhood of Mawm is famous for its natural curiosities; but of all the phenomena connected with it there is none more remarkable than that which is associated with the hamlet's guardian hill.

At irregular intervals (for the action is uncertain and governed by undiscovered causes) there pours from the foot of Cawden and from a usually dry outlet a flood of water which has cut a deep channel at the foot of the somewhat steep bank that flanks one side of the Gordel road at this point. The bank shelves down to the Tarn road, and there the torrent discharges itself upon the roadway, raging along its improvised bed on its mad rush to the river with such force that the road is not infrequently washed bare to the rock. For several hours the flood may continue, and subside as quickly as it arose; and years may elapse before there is any return of the eruption.

It was one of these capricious outbursts with which Nancy was now confronted, and her passage was stopped by the sheet of water that spread over the junction of the two roads for a considerable area and was of uncertain depth. One glance told her that she must not attempt to ford the stream there, and a second showed her that there was an easy alternative. She had only to walk a few steps up the green and it would be a simple matter to leap from the bank to the road, for the water was still confined to its deep but narrow channel.

Not a soul was in sight though she heard men's voices not far away. No anticipation of difficulty troubled her, however; she could almost stride across such an insignificant chasm; and she quickened her steps in order to accomplish the movement before those who were approaching should be at hand to poke fun at her.

That unnecessary haste was fatal. The bank was soft and muddy, and her shoe caught in it as she jumped. She reached the other side but fell back, and the baby was swept from her arms....

They carried her home, senseless: some said dead, like the infant which Jagger

bore in his arms. It was he and Jack Pearce whose voices Nancy had heard. It was he who ran and seized the child but could not save its fragile life. When they reached the village women pressed forward to look on the white face of the mother, but gave no thought to the bairn which might have been sleeping, for aught they knew, on Jagger's breast.

The whole place was astir by the time they came to the bridge, and as the procession of bearers and followers passed up the street Inman was seen striding towards it. At sight of him Jagger hurried forward.

"Nancy's stunned!" he explained. "She fell crossing t' stream up above yonder. She may ha' hurt her head; but I doubt it isn't that—t' baby's dead: drowned!"

Without a word Inman took the child upon his own arm and turned homewards. Jagger hesitated. A few yards separated them from the nearest of the crowd.

"I'm downright sorry, lad!" he said with an effort.

"To the devil with your sorrow!" Inman answered; and Jagger left him.

## CHAPTER XXIV

IN WHICH INMAN'S POPULARITY IS SEEN TO WAVER

THERE were those in Mawm who said that with the death of his child Inman experienced a change of heart, but what really happened was that he seized the occasion when the sympathies of his neighbours were yet warm towards him to ingratiate himself with them by an appearance of thankfulness and goodwill. He was, as the clear-sighted detective had decided, a superb actor; and he was quick to perceive that in this misfortune there was a providential opportunity for the display of his gifts, and that it had come in the nick of time to restore him to the favour of the community. For the community as a body of people he cared not one jot, it was for customers, and for them only, that he played his part. For their sake—that is to say for his own—he composed his features, whenever he was likely to be observed, into an expression of resigned melancholy, that served its purpose with an unemotional but not unkindly people, who admired, too, the way in which he put aside his personal sorrow and interested himself in their business affairs.

It was the same in the workshop and in the home. If some subliminal sense kept Frank and the rest from liking him, they began to recognise his good qualities, and found life under his stern but orderly mastership a good deal more tolerable than it had been with the looser administration of Baldwin. Instinctively each man felt that the business was going to prosper, and that though he was only a cog in the machine he would be well cared for because the cog was an essential part of the whole.

In the home Keturah suddenly found the roughness smoothed out of the hard voice, and herself addressed in kindlier fashion than she had experienced since Nancy's marriage. Could she be blamed, if she thanked the impersonal and hazy being who stood for her God, that the child had been "ta'en?" After all, at her time of life, children running about the house and "mucking it up" were a scarcely tolerable nuisance.

Altogether then, the first two weeks of February saw Inman's position strengthened. Unemotional themselves, the villagers were favourably disposed towards a man who could "sup his gruel and say nowt." The more fickle remembered that Baldwin had always been a cross-grained and surly fellow, and told themselves that he might have given Inman more cause for resentment than outsiders could be aware of. It was with Inman as with Gordel, when thin watery mists soften the cragged outlines and veil its threatening features—he was no longer "fearsome" and forbidding: he was even attractive in his own way.

There were those who held contrary opinions: stubborn souls who refused to

trim their sails to the prevailing breeze and continued to regard Inman with a suspicion they could not justify; but there was one who knew the truth: who knew that if the man's heart was changed it was not the angels who had cause to rejoice.

All the bitterness he was compelled to dissemble, all the contempt he felt but must not show, Inman unloaded on his wife when they were alone. As he had stood by her side, waiting for her to show signs of returning consciousness, he had prayed that her life might be spared: that he might not be robbed of the vengeance he had promised himself. That the prayer was addressed to nobody in particular does not matter.

It seemed for a time as if the petition would be denied him, for Nancy rallied from one swoon to fall into another; but she was young and strong and her body resisted death's claim. In a fortnight she was sitting up in her room, and her husband's brow was black.

"What are you whining for?" he asked her, when she looked up into his face and cried, the first time they were alone;—"If you hadn't been so busy sweet-hearting your eyes and ears 'ud have been open! You've got what you deserved!"

The tears dried on Nancy's cheeks, and the feeling of pity for the father who had been bereaved like herself gave place to a nausea that was too physical to be called hate. She did not tell him the insinuation was a lie, but knocked for Keturah, and fell into her arms when she came, deathly sick. From that moment Inman had persecuted her, assuming her guilt from the slender evidence that it was Jagger who had recovered the child, and her own confusion, but making no inquiries lest his suspicion should be removed, and as she grew stronger the hatred he took no trouble to conceal spread to her own heart and revealed itself in her face. There was then open war between them, carefully concealed, however, from everyone but themselves.

One circumstance gave Nancy satisfaction. Her husband showed no disposition to share her room.

"You may stay where you are!" he said to Keturah when she suggested that Nancy no longer required her services: "I'm going to stop where I am."

It was at this time that the Drakes experienced a more serious mishap than had hitherto befallen them. On reaching their work at a building which was being erected at some little distance from the village, they found one morning to their dismay that the stays to the roof principals had been removed, and that the whole superstructure had fallen, doing much damage.

Father and son looked at each other in silence. Each knew that this was a serious disaster.

"It's no accident, father!" said Jagger, speaking through closed teeth.

"It's no accident, lad! Them stays has been ta'en down since we left!"

"*He'll* give it out 'at they weren't right fixed," continued Jagger;—"at we're too damned careless to be trusted to knock a soap-box together. Look what he said when he set t' timber loose!"

He referred to an occasion when timber, which they had set in the stream to season had been found farther down the river when daylight came, and Inman had said with a sneer that the Drakes were too damned careless to tie a knot in a rope.

"I've watched his house for two nights and he never left it," Jagger went on. "Stalker saw me t' second time and didn't seem to like it. He said he was down on fellows 'at were hiding behind walls at two o'clock i' t' morning when there was so much mischief afloat. I could ha' knocked his head off! a chap 'at can neither collar t' rascal himself nor let other folks have a try."

Maniwel looked grave. "Does he know 'at we suspect Inman?"

"Course he does. But Inman's thrown him t' sop, and Stalker can see naught wrong in him. I could almost think he'd set him on to watch *me*."

"It's a mess, lad! He plays a deep game and he's ommost over clever for you and me. He'll do us a bigger mischief if he can, you'll see, especially now 'at we've ta'en on Baldwin. There's a few deep ruts i' t' Straight Road."

Though his face and voice were both sober there was a twinkle in the eyes he turned to his son.

"T' game isn't ended yet. Bide your time!"

Jagger's teeth were still closed and his face was set and stern; but there was no sound of discouragement in the voice and Maniwel's own features relaxed.

"Aye, we'll bide our time. 'In quietness and confidence'—that's a good motto and it'll see us through. What had best be our next move, think you?"

"T' next move," replied his son, "is to get to work and do this job over again. You'd better go down and bring one or two back with you. I shame for anybody to see it, but that can't be helped. It's his trick."

He had taken off his coat as he spoke and was folding up his sleeves. "I wish I had him here," he continued grimly as he bent his arm and doubled his fist. "T' next trick 'ud be mine. If I'd a fair chance I'd make t' lion lie down so as t' lamb 'ud be safe enough: I would that!"

The disaster was discussed at length the same evening in the bar parlour of the "Packhorse" where until the entrance of Frank's father opinion was fairly evenly divided, the older men being warm in their assertions of foul play, but some of the younger ones inclining to the theory that Jagger's workmanship must be unsound.



“You’ll have heard, I reckon, ’at t’ new boss has lamed his-self?”

Bill Holmes delivered himself of the inquiry the moment he was seated, with the air of a man who feels sure he is imparting brand-new information. The silence of the company whose eyes fixed themselves upon him interrogatively, confirmed this belief, and he lit his pipe with provoking deliberation.

“We’ve heard nowt o’ t’ sort,” said Swithin, as Bill professed to find difficulties in making his pipe draw; “but I for one aren’t capped. What sort of a accident is it ’at he’s happened?”

“I thowt you’d mebbe ha’ ’eard tell,” said Bill, who was elated to find himself for once on the parliamentary front-bench and was determined to make the most of his opportunity.

“He sent for our Frank into t’ house and telled ’im to keep ’is mouth shut: ’at he’d fallen ’ard on t’ road when he wor goin’ into t’ shop afore dayleet and twisted ’is ankle beside ’urtin’ his knee-cap.”

Swithin sat back in his chair, a look of satisfaction on his face, and several of the others, including some of Inman’s defenders, exchanged significant glances.

“There wor a black frost, reyt eniff, first thing,” said Ambrose. “It’s hard weather, and that slippy i’ places I thowt once ower I should ha’ to bide at home—”

“It is slippy, Ambrose,” Swithin broke in. He was never happier than when circumstances allowed him to adopt the tone and manner of an examining counsel, and he looked round upon the company with the same glance of command that always brought his dogs to attention when sheep were to be shepherded. “We’re all aware o’ that fact. But I’ve a question or two I want to put to Bill if so be ’at he’s a mind to answer ’em.” He cleared his throat, and fixed the witness with his eye. “If Frank had to keep his mouth shut how comes it ’at he’s opened it?”

“Cos Inman’s lowsened him,” replied Bill. “He sees it’s goin’ to keep him laid up for a day or two, so it’s n’ewse tryin’ to ’ide it.”

“I thowt as much! He didn’t leet to say, I reckon, what made him so partic’lar to keep it quiet at first?”

“He was ’opin’ it wor nowt much,” replied Bill; “but he’s war hurt nor he thowt on, so t’ tale wor like to come out onnyway.”

Swithin had bent forward to catch the reply; but he again sat back and allowed his features to express his satisfaction.

“You’ve been putting two and two together, Swith’n, that’s easy seen,” said Ambrose admiringly. “Them een o’ yours has scanned t’ moor for stray sheep while you can see beyond ord’nary. It’s a gift ’at you’ve made t’ most on.”

“A child ’ud put two and two together i’ this case, Ambrus,” returned the other,

“but there’s grown men ’at willn’t see what’s straight i’ front o’ their noses, and willn’t believe when they’re tell’d. You’ll ha’ gotten a glimmer yoursen, I’m thinking?”

Ambrose summoned a wise look and nodded his head in a knowing way, replying craftily—

“Owd fowk is far’er sighted nor t’ young’uns, Swith’n. Put it into words for t’ benefit o’ t’ comp’ny.”

“I will!” said Swithin; but he drained his mug before undertaking the task.

“Suppose a man slips on his doorst’n and hurts his-sen—I put it to you as man to man: is there owt to be ashamed on, and to hold back? Is there owt to make a man say ’at you mun keep your mouth shut ower t’ job? Why t’ king his-sen could happen a’ accident o’ that sort!

“But, I’ll put it to you another way: supposing a man had been where he’d no business i’ t’ night-time, and had caught his foot i’ t’ trap he wor setting for someb’dy else (and that’s a figger o’ speech as Job ’ud say, for there’s things ’at it’s best not to put into words) wouldn’t it be his first thowt to keep mum about t’ accident, till he fun owt ’at it couldn’t be done? I’m putting two and two together, Ambrus, but you may do t’ sum for yoursens.”

“You’re in your gifted mood at this minute, Swith’n,” the old man replied with ungrudging admiration, “and well we all see it.”

“It’s mebbe lucky for some folks,” continued Swithin, “at they can crawl home wi’ a sore foot, and not be pinned to t’ ground wi’ a beam on their belly. It’ll happen be a lesson to ’em, but I doubt there’s worse to come.”

“I’ll say ‘Amen’ to that, Swith’n,” said Ambrose, “but you munnot brade o’ t’ cat and start licking your mouth afore t’ trap’s opened.”

Before Swithin could reply Bill Holmes, who had more than once sought an opportunity to edge in another word, remarked in an aggrieved tone—

“If you weren’t all i’ such a hurry to put your own fillin’s in I sud a’ finished my tale. Swithin isn’t t’ only one ’at can put two and two together. Our Frank picked it out ’at it wor a lame tale, for when he went tul ’is work t’ shop wor locked up, and Keturah ’ad to tak’ t’ bolt an’ chain off t’ ’ouse door afore she could ’and ’im t’ key. Mebbe there’s more nor Swithin can say what that points tul.”

“It points to this,” said Swithin who evidently interpreted the feelings of all present, “at Inman’s a liar when he says he fell on his way tul his work; and if Jagger’s owt about him he’ll set t’ police agate ower t’ top o’ Stalker’s head.”

Ambrose shook his head slowly, though the movement was not intended to indicate his personal disapproval.

“Maniwel ’ud be again’ you, Swith’n. They say Jagger was as mad as if he’d sat

on a nettle; but his fayther's all for killing fowk wi' kindness. There's Baldwin, for a case i' point. Him and Maniwel's as thick as two thieves, and they tell me they cahr ower t' hearthst'n of a night, crackin' o' owd times, till it's a picter. I made a wonderful grand verse about it i' my head when I wor waiting for sleep i' t' night-time, and I thowt for sure I should call it to mind i' t' mornin' but when I woke it wor as clean gone as Baldwin's gowden sovrens. My memory's nowt no better nor a riddle, neebours, now 'at I've gotten into years."

"It's little use Baldwin is to Jagger," added one of the company. "By all 'at's said he doesn't earn his keep by a long way. He's goin' down t' hill fast, if you ask me."

"It's a true word, Sam," replied Swithin. "Baldwin's marked for Kingdom Come, onnybody may see; and t' sooner they 'liver him his papers t' better for him and iwerybody else. Inman sent him tul his long home when he put him to t' door, though reyt eniff he wor on t' road ivver after t' robbery. It worn't kindness 'at killed *him*, Ambrus."

"Nay, but it wor kindness 'at killed t' devil in him," persisted the old man. "A bairn could handle him now."

"Softenin' o' t' brain, Ambrose, more nor softenin' o' t' 'eart," said Sam.

"Be that as it may," returned Ambrose, "he's gotten his mouth sponged clean and that's a merricle—"

At this moment the landlord, who had been summoned from the room whilst the conversation was in progress, put his head in at the door.

"Swithin!" he said in such a strange voice that all present turned to look at him and saw a look of consternation on his face, "you're wanted at once."

Swithin looked startled; but rose painfully and having knocked the ashes out of his pipe went over to the landlord.

"Who is it wants me?" he asked.

"Jack Pearce!" Albert answered. "He's just outside."

He closed the door behind the old man and turned to the company.

"Their Polly's made away wi' herself, poor lass! She couldn't stand t' shame on't; and there's Jack Pearce swearing he'll swing for Inman!"

## CHAPTER XXV

IN WHICH NANCY DISCUSSES THE SITUATION WITH  
JAGGER

IN hamlets like Mawm, which are familiarised with nothing except the commonplace (for even the natural phenomena which arouse the wonder and admiration of every visitor are just ordinary features of the landscape to those who have looked upon them from their birth) an occasional episode is welcomed as a spice that gives an agreeable flavouring to life; but a succession of episodes, like an over-measure of spice, soon creates distaste and even revulsion. Ever from the date of the robbery startling events had succeeded each other with such rapidity that the villagers were stupefied by the unaccustomed whirligig. It was as if the earth which had always been so substantial and secure had become subject to sudden tremors and upheavals, which had already wrought the ruin of some familiar structures, and might for anything they knew bring the solid mass of the mountains down upon their heads.

Swithin Marsden and Jack Pearce, drawn together at last by the strong twofold cord of a common sorrow and a common hate, took care that the community should trace these disturbing occurrences and disasters to their origin in Inman, and that astute man's star set as quickly as it had risen. When the mourners returned from following Polly Marsden's body to its resting place at Kirkby Mawm it is doubtful if the man had more than one staunch adherent in the whole neighbourhood.

One, however, there was. Police-Constable Stalker, all the more because public opinion was now ranged definitely on the other side, persisted that Inman was an injured man; and he set aside the wrong done to Swithin's granddaughter as a venial offence which many of the master-carpenter's critics had good reason for condoning if they would but examine their own secret records. The suggestion that the Drakes owed their troubles to the same agency he dismissed with the cryptic assertion that "them 'at lives t' longest'll see t' most;" and he allowed it to be understood that he was devising a trap which would provide the neighbourhood with a climax in sensations if all went well.

The accident which meanwhile kept Inman a prisoner was a misfortune that individual heartily cursed. The extent of it nobody knew but himself, for his wife's offer of help was refused with an emphasis that forbade repetition. In plain words she was told to keep away from his room, and even Keturah's ministrations were declined.

"He's damaged his leg; that's what he's done," said the woman. "He can hardly

shift himself off o' t' bed. It caps me he doesn't send for t' doctor."

Nancy was indifferent. Although she was moving about again she was still weak, and too dispirited to concern herself over the ailment or attitude of a man who hated her. His rough dismissal had been, indeed, a relief, and afforded her a sense of freedom and an opportunity for its enjoyment which were as welcome as they were unexpected.

Her baby's death had left her without an interest in life, and it had done more: it had half-persuaded her that it was useless to fight against fate.

"A Clegg wife  
And it's sorrow or strife!"

In her case the burden was double-weighted: it was sorrow and strife. Well, she was young, and by and by would be herself again; if sorrow was to be her lot she would bear it without complaining, and if strife—she would not be trodden on by any man.

She was young and she was also strong; and with the coming of the bright cold days, when the frost silvered the landscape until the warm sun swept the white dust away into the shadows Nancy's limbs regained their vigour though her spirits remained low. Keturah would have kept her from Polly's funeral if she could; but Nancy's mind was made up.

"I wonder you can shame to go," the older woman said, "and your own husband, more's the pity, t' cause of all t' trouble. I should want to hide my head i' my apron if it was me."

"I'll go *because* he's my husband," Nancy replied. "They all know me, and they knew he married me for my money. If poor Polly had had money he'd never have looked my way, and it might have saved us both. If only I could have seen the road that lay before me she could have had mine and welcome."

She had made no change of dress for her baby; but she now removed the flowers from a black hat and went to the house where the mourners were assembled, passing through the crowd at the door, and entering the room where the mother was sitting in her garments of heavy crêpe with the other members of the family about her. A look of astonishment came into the woman's eyes as she held her handkerchief away for a moment; but there was no animosity there, and when Nancy stooped and kissed her forehead she said—

"Eh, lass, but my heart aches for ye!"

"And mine for you!" returned Nancy. "If I could change places with Polly, I

would!”

She looked at nobody else; but in the little passage outside the room Hannah put her arm on her shoulder.

“You shall go home with me when they leave,” she said; and careless of her husband’s disapproval she went.

It was then that she heard for the first time the full story of her husband’s crimes and suspected crimes. It was then that she learned how Jagger had punished Inman when he found him with Polly on the night Nancy’s baby was born. Hannah’s anger was burning fiercely and Nancy’s wrongs added fresh fuel to the flames. No sense of delicacy led her to hide anything from her friend; and when Nancy went home she understood why her husband hated her, and she became conscious of a change of spirit; of a strange exhilaration that left life no longer colourless or purposeless. From that moment her wits began to work with a cautious intelligence that would have surprised her husband, and the Drakes had a very alert agent within the enemy’s camp.

One afternoon of the same week she climbed the Cove road with the deliberate intention to intercept Jagger on his homeward journey, though a visit to Far Tarn farm was the avowed object of the journey. Her departure was well timed, and they met at the junction of the roads where their paths would diverge. Though both hearts were beating more quickly than usual there was nothing lover-like in their greeting, and Nancy speedily made known her business.

“I came on purpose to meet you, Jagger,” she said, “and there’s no time to be lost, because though there isn’t a soul to be seen there’s never no telling who’ll come along—and carry tales.”

Jagger nodded. “I’d say, let ’em come, if it was only me; but you’re right, Nancy. There’s no sense in making trouble.”

“It’s a plan I’ve got in my head,” she said. “Hannah’s told me all about James, and the low tricks he’s always playing on you; and how sometimes you stay up most o’ t’ night to try to catch him at it. You won’t manage it, Jagger! He’s too fly for you! He’s hobbled just now, of course; but he’s mending fast—he was in the shop all the morning—and he’ll soon be about again. I want you to lie low and leave me to do the watching!”

Her eyes were bright; but there was no other sign of excitement, and the lips closed resolutely. Jagger, however, shook his head.

“Nay, nay, Nancy, that ’ud never do! He’s the dad of all for cunning and mischief, and if he finds you at that game he’ll make you smart for it. It’s no woman’s work, this. Jack Pearce has promised to share wi’ me, so it’ll not come that hard on

either of us to lose a night's sleep now and then. Leave it to us, and get your rest. I'm sorry he's who he is, Nancy; but I won't have you dragged into it."

"Listen, Jagger!" said Nancy earnestly. "He's got Stalker on his side and they've always their heads together. Stalker's soft as putty and James keeps him oiled and shapes him as he likes. He's made him believe you're a wrong un—that much I found out, for I've listened: it's a nasty, low-down trick, but I did it, and I'll do it again. I couldn't hear much, for James talks low; but I got enough to know that Stalker is keeping his eye on you and what can you do when you're handicapped like that?"

Something like a smile came into Jagger's eyes, though the face that was upturned to his was white and anxious.

"Twelve months since, Nancy, I should have had t' blue devils with all this: I should have laid down and let trouble roll over me; but now I'm hanged if I don't find a pleasure in it. It's same as when you hold t' axe to t' grunston'—rough treatment, and brings t' fire out of you at t' time; but brightens you up and sharpens you wonderful. There's a vast difference between father and me—for he's *over* soft, and 'ud give his other hand to save Inman's soul, where I'd lend him a rope to hang himself with;—but he's smittled me i' one or two ways, and I'm sticking to t' Straight Road; for whether there's ought watches over me or no I'm certain sure there's something watches over him and we shall come out on top."

Nancy had glanced round the moor apprehensively more than once during this long declaration; but finding nothing to arouse her fears was not unwilling to prolong the conversation.

"It's made a man of you, Jagger," she said. "It's naught no more than a game with you, same as your boxing. James may fell you once or twice or a dozen times, but you're always looking forward to t' time when it'll be your turn, and he'll be counted out. I know you; and I'm glad to see it in a way; though it's a poor thought that if I hadn't married James maybe you'd never have made much out."

She ended so wearily that Jagger's face saddened, and his voice lost its note of defiance and became troubled like her own.

"It won't bide thinking about, Nancy; better leave it. Maybe I *do* make a game of it; but it was either that or going to t' dogs—"

"I'm glad you didn't do that, Jagger!" she broke in hastily. "Once over, when I came to myself, I wondered if you would, and I fret and prayed about it. Oh—if you knew how often I've thanked God that I hadn't *that*, on my conscience! If I'd seen you go wrong—! But we won't talk about it, only, it isn't a game to *me*; it's just a dragging on, with naught but a weary, miserable life stretching away, year in year out,

as flat and drab as the moor, till one or both of us drop into our graves.”

She repented the words the moment they were uttered, for the expression on Jagger’s face told her how deeply they had sunk; but it was too late.

“Nancy, lass! you’re breaking your heart; or I’ve broken it for you!”

His voice thrilled with the sorrow and bitterness that struggled to find expression; and he would have put his arms around her with a man’s instinctive eagerness to protect and comfort the woman he loves; but Nancy shrank back, and relieved the strain by changing the tone of her voice and forcing a laugh.

Her wit was more subtle than his, which would have mistaken a sedative for a cure. His clumsy efforts would have extended the wound he was wishful to close: she intuitively chose the remedy that would both soothe and heal; yet her love was as strong as his, and her heart ached for the clasp of his arms.

“It’s same as a play, isn’t it? We shall be talking about running away together next, same as they do in books; but there’s naught o’ that sort on the Straight Road. Eh, Jagger; you thought I was whining like a baby!”

His face was still clouded and she rallied him upon his gloom.

“I wondered if you were as grand as you thought you were!” she lied. “It didn’t need as much as a tear to damp all the sparks out of your axe when it ran against a woman’s grindstone! You ought to have known that I should never think the moor drab. Look at it, man!”

He raised his eyes, following the direction of her arm as it swept a half circle over the landscape. The light was yellow, for it was towards sunset, and the moor stretched its great length before them like burnished metal—brass and copper. The greens were washed over with gold: there was gold in the russets, gold on the pale straws, and the trailing roads were no longer white but faintly yellow. On the western horizon there was a slight haze, delicately pink; and clouds of a deeper hue slashed the blue of the sky.

“Drab!” Nancy laughed mock-mirthfully. “It’s as good as a rainbow, Jagger! I’m like you: when trouble comes I make a game of it: I won’t be beaten! Maybe, somewhere on ahead, life’ll be pink, like that. We’ve got to jog on when it’s stormy and keep smiling!”

“You’re a wonder, Nancy!” said Jagger; and the cloud that still lingered over his eyes had itself caught the sunset tints.

“I’m a fool!” she replied. “I’m wasting time and running risks instead of saying my say and getting on with my business. Let’s leave all this nonsense and get back to where we started. I’m going to watch James instead of you. Let Stalker think you’ve given it up. Make out that you’re tired of watching and finding nothing, and then



when I've aught to tell you they'll be off their guard. You aren't deep enough for James."

"Happen not," he assented grudgingly; "but t' pace is too hot to last. He'll trip before long, you'll see. I don't like t' thought of you being mixed up with it, Nancy. If he was to pick it out he'd raise hell, and if he was to touch you—"

"If he was to touch me," she said proudly, "he'd know about it, but I doubt if he will. He's all for himself, Jagger, and his skin's dear to him. He'd like to, well enough, I daresay; but he dursn't. Don't you worry about me. I was born on the moor."

She saw the danger light return to his eyes and at that signal changed her tone.

"Get you gone!" she said quietly; "we've stood three times too long already. I'll find ways and means of letting you know if there's aught to tell."

She moved away as she spoke, without a word of farewell, and never once turned her head, so that she did not see how he stood, shading his eyes with his hand, watching her figure grow smaller and less distinct as the distance between them increased.

All the man's complacency had been shattered by the interview, and he knew that the anodyne of hard work had left the sore in his heart untouched: that the hours he had crowded with plans and projects in the hope of obliterating thoughts of what might have been had been to that extent hours wasted. Yet, though he knew himself maimed and marred by this severance from the woman he loved: though the look in her eyes and the tone of her voice had inflamed every spirit-nerve until the sense of pain was intolerable, he was conscious at the same time of a kind of fierce satisfaction because the pain could not make him writhe. Whatever Nancy had withheld from him she had at any rate given him manliness; and he could hold up his head among other men and walk unashamed.

When he could no longer see her he walked smartly homewards, busying his thoughts with the subject that was never far from them, of Inman's enmity and Stalker's attitude of hostility. He had said nothing when Nancy spoke of the conference between her husband and the policeman because there had been nothing to say. Everybody knew that they were taking place, just as everybody knew that Jagger was suspected by the two of knowing more than any other living soul about the robbery. The suspicion was too ridiculous to afford him a moment's uneasiness. Why should he worry when he had the confidence and goodwill of his neighbours, every one of whom scouted the notion of his dishonesty as a conceit that only the brain of an unfriendly foreigner could entertain?

It puzzled Jagger that so little attention had been paid by the police to the occurrence, and he felt a sense of personal grievance, (though a keener sense of

amusement left the grievance without sting), at the thought that their lack of interest and enterprise kept an innocent man under suspicion. No doubt to these townspeople the loss of five hundred pounds was an event of no great moment, but Inman was not to be blamed if he refused to regard it with the same equanimity, and applied himself to the task of which the professional detectives appeared to have tired.

Jagger laughed to himself as these thoughts passed through his mind. “And whilst he’s following this false scent with his precious Stalker,” he said, “the real fox is getting away. The daft fools!”

Then a grimmer smile spread over his face. “He calls *me* a fool,” he muttered; “but he can’t have it both ways. If I took t’ money I’ve been too clever for them to find it. Seemingly, he thinks better of me than he’s willing to take to. Maybe, he’ll find ’at I’m cleverer than he thinks, for I’ll lay him by the heels yet. He’ll go a bit too far with his underhanded night jobs, I’ll warrant.”

Thus switched back to his own concerns his thoughts naturally returned to Nancy, and the shadow of uneasiness that had never entirely left his face deepened again.

“I’d rather she’d kept out of it,” he said, “but she’s bad to shift when she sets herself, same as most moor-folk; and she’s afraid o’ naught. However, she has her wits about her, and maybe she’ll pull it off.”

## CHAPTER XXVI

IN WHICH MANIWEL LETS JAGGER INTO A SECRET

“NOT so bad for an old man, Jagger!” said Maniwel, as he passed a rag with a few last caressing touches over the shining surface of a small bookcase:—“I say, not so bad for an old fellow wi’ one arm! Bear in mind, young gaffer, ’at I’ve glass-papered it, stained and polished it, on my lonesome; and you’ve never put finger to’t. Come over here, Baldwin, and tha shalt be t’ boss and pass t’ job!”

Jagger smiled and ungrudgingly admitted that he couldn’t have done better work himself, but Baldwin had to be summoned a second time before he approached.

“Does tha hear, Baldwin? I’m waiting to hear tha say it’ll do!”

The breezy, encouraging note in Maniwel’s voice brought Baldwin from the shadows.

“It ails naught ’at I see on,” he said; “but it’s making game o’ me to ask for my opinion, when you know better’n I do.”

There was a trace of peevishness in the reply, and he would have turned again to his work if Maniwel had not arrested him.

“Nay, that willn’t do, Baldwin! Tha’s none going to get out o’ thi responsibilities i’ that fashion. We’re a limited comp’ny o’ three and I brade o’ t’ parsons i’ thinking ’at three heads is better than two. I know there’s such things as figure-heads; but neither thee nor me is ornamental enough for that job. Now just cast thi eye over t’ job, same as if a ’prentice had done it and then speak thi mind.”

“There’s no sense i’ this sort o’ play-acting, Maniwel,” said Baldwin; but he bent forward and examined the work carefully.

“Tha’s missed a piece o’ t’ underside o’ this bit o’ moulding,” he remarked a moment or two later; “—there’s an inch or so wi’ no polish on’t.”

Jagger shot a glance at his father and caught the wink which was intended for him alone.

“Well, that licks all!” said Maniwel, when he had assured himself that the criticism was just. “I wouldn’t ha’ liked Mr. Harris to ha’ picked that out, and it’s a good job that eye o’ thine isn’t dimmed Baldwin. Is there aught else, thinks tha?”

Baldwin found nothing else and Maniwel picked up the rag again. After a while Baldwin left the shop and Jagger paused in his work.

“That was a bit o’ humbug: you left it on purpose for him to find. If his brain hadn’t been softening he’d ha’ known it.”

“His brain’s right enough,” Maniwel replied “He never had more than he could make use of, and what he had he didn’t work over hard. If it’s softening, a bit o’

exercise'll harden it. It's his self-respect he's been letting go and I'm wanting him to get it back, or we shall be having him on t' coffin-board before long."

If Jagger's thoughts could have been read it would possibly have been found that this prospect afforded him no great dissatisfaction, and it was thus that his father interpreted his silence.

"There's many a twisted bit o' timber can be put to good use if you'll study how to fit it in," he remarked. "A boss 'at's gifted wi' gumption'll see 'at naught's wasted, and turn t' rubbish into profit. I'm looking forward to Baldwin being a help to t' concern."

Jagger smiled and went on with his work, having learned by experience that there was nothing to be gained by disputing his father's philosophy, but after an interval of silence he again allowed his saw to remain suspended in mid-course.

"How much were you saying there is in t' bank?" he inquired.

"Above two hundred pound," replied Maniwel. "We've had a good friend i' t' squire, lad; a ready-money friend means a deal to them 'at's short o' brass."

"If we'd had a better shop," said Jagger contemptively, "we could ha' put in an engine before so long."

"Aye, aye, but we must be content to creep till we find we can walk. Steady does it, my lad! We're doing better than like."

Jagger's saw went on biting into the board, but before long it was allowed to rest again.

"What did you send Baldwin home for?"

Maniwel came forward and leaned against the bench where he could see his son's face and watch its expression.

"Cause I knew you'd something you wanted to say," he answered; "and there was naught partic'lar for him to do. He'll be company for grannie."

"Knew I'd something to say?" The question was intended for a denial; but Jagger's cheeks told another story.

"And I guessed," continued his father calmly; "'at it had something to do wi' him. Out wi't!"

"You beat all!" said Jagger in a tone that showed how admiration had conquered discomfiture. "It's as bad as having them X-rays you read about i' t' shop! A man may think what he isn't prepared to speak, and I don't know 'at I was going to say aught."

"When there's any bile about, whether on t' mind or t' stomach," said Maniwel dryly, "t' best way is to get shut on't. We shall none fall out if you speak your mind straight about Baldwin."

Now that the opportunity was afforded and his confidence invited it surprised Jagger to find how little there was to say, and how difficult it was to say that little. In the olden days he would probably have sought refuge in surly silence; but now he looked frankly into his father's face and blurted out—

“Home isn't t' same since Baldwin came into it. He'd choke t' song out of a throstle with his sour looks! It isn't 'at I grudge him bite and sup, and he's welcome to try to pick up a living alongside of us, but I can't bide a wet-blanket on our own hearthston', and I know Hannah feels t' same.”

“I'm not capped, lad; I feel t' same way myself, and if all for my-sen' was my motto I'd pay some decent body a toathri shillings a week to take him in and do for him—”

“If that was your motto,” interrupted Jagger, “you'd let him go to t' Union.”

“If you and Hannah says he musn't stop,” continued Maniwel ignoring the correction; “course he'll have to go, and we'll talk it over among ourselves and see what's best to be done. But I'll take to't 'at I could like to try a bit longer. He's lost his nasty tongue, and his temper's had most o' t' fizz ta'en out on't, and mebbe after a bit t' sun'll get through t' crust and he'll be more likeable. Now if you and Hannah could just bring yourselves to think 'at he's a millionaire uncle 'at's asked himself to stay wi' us for a bit....”—he looked slyly into his son's face and saw the mouth twist into a smile—“and 'at it 'ud happen pay you to put up wi' a bit o' discomfort for t' sake—”

“That'll do, father!” Jagger was laughing now. “I doubt if Hannah and me could manage as much as that. All we can expect Baldwin to leave us is his room, and that'll be welcome. But we'll say no more about it. If you feel t' same way as us and are willing to put up with it Hannah and me'll make t' best of it.”

“Nay, lad, we'll go on a piece further, now we've gotten started. You and me's partners and should know each other's minds; and I've something to tell you 'at I once thought to take wi' me to t' grave. You'll tell nob'dy else while either Baldwin or me's living and after we're gone there'll be no need to say aught. Sit you down, lad!”

There was an unaccustomed note of gravity in Maniwel's voice and a pained look in his eyes, which Jagger observed with surprise and uneasiness, but he made no remark and seated himself on a trestle where he could look into his father's face.

Maniwel had hoisted himself on to the bench, and his hand played among the loose shavings for a while before he lifted his head and spoke.

“You know what your grannie says about t' Briggses?—a black, bad lot, cursed wi' meanness and low, underhanded ways. It was so wi' Baldwin's father and his

father before him. There wasn't a fam'ly on t' moor 'at had a worse name than what they had, and it was t' lad's misfortun' mind you, not his fault, to be born into such a lot.

"Him an' me's of an age. We picked up a bit o' schooling together and we went marlocking together. I liked him as well as I liked Old Nick, but his folks were our nearest neighbours, and there wasn't so many lads to laik wi' up on t' moor so we were forced, as you may say, to be mates. We fell out many a time i' t' week, and fell in again. He took a delight i' torturing birds and animals, and I've thrashed him many a dozen times for't. He was awlus a coward and a sneak, and 'ud scream same as a rabbit wi' a weasel on its back t' minute he was touched. He was a dull lad at his books, barring 'at he was quick at figures same as all his lot; but he was a rare hand at a bargain, and beat his dad at being nippy—"

A humorous recollection brought a twinkle into Maniwel's eyes, and he went on

"We were biggish lads when I got stuck i' t' bog one day; and a rare mess I was in I can tell you. It wasn't oft 'at I was flayed; but t' sweat poured out o' me that time, and t' harder I struggled to get loose t' deeper I sunk. You may bet I hollered for Baldwin, and when he came up he stood on t' edge and says—"Now, tha's made a mullock on it! What is it worth to help tha out? Is it worth thi new knife?" He got t' knife, but I leathered him his jacket while he roared for mercy when I'd gotten my strength back."

Jagger's face was hard and his father laughed.

"I could tell you more tales o' t' same sort, but that'll do for a sample. When t' time come for us to leave school we were both 'prenticed at t' same time to Tom Clegg, and we worked side by side for many a year as you know. Tom was a queer 'un, wi' a heap o' funny notions in his noddle, but he kept a firm grip on t' shop as long as he'd his health, and Baldwin and me were his main hands. He liked me t' best o' t' two, I know; but he saw how keen Baldwin was, and he thought he got more work out o' t' men than what I did. Happen he did, for he was awlus a driver, and as long as he could squeeze a bit more brass out o' Tom for his-self he was ready enough to squeeze a bit more work out o' t' men.

"Well, Tom was ta'en badly as you know, and when he couldn't get t' price he wanted for his business he let on that scheme 'at put it i' t' long run into Baldwin's hands. It's trewth I'm telling you when I say 'at he'd made dead certain 'at I should get it, for he knew I'd a better headpiece than Baldwin; but he reckoned to want what he called 'fairation' so he gave us both the same chance.

"I'm coming now to t' point I set out for. Baldwin did well; but I should ha'

beaten him hand over hand if I hadn't happened my accident, and Baldwin saw it. That accident, lad, was planned for me——!"

Jagger uttered an exclamation of dismay and rose from his seat, with anger flashing from his eyes. Maniwel's voice had been quite calm and low, and he did not raise it now.

"Sit down, lad, and keep your hand on t' brake! Remember, what I'm telling you now is a trust. Twelve months since you'd have been t' last I should ha' spoken to, for this meat's over strong for babes; but you're a man now.

"I say it was planned, and that's all I'm going to tell you, and it's all you need to know. He isn't aware 'at I fun him out, and he isn't going to be tell'd. He's hugged his sin about wi' him all these years, and nob'dy knows but his-self what he's suffered."

"Suffered!" Jagger's tone was as low as his father's, but charged with unbelief and contempt. "It's *you* that's suffered, you and us,—aye—and Nancy too! I could screw the dirty devil his neck round when I look at that empty sleeve! You shouldn't ha' told me if you want me to keep my hands off him!"

"When you've finished blowing t' steam off I'll go on," said his father. "I reckoned I should upset you a bit, and it's naught but nat'ral, but you must hear me out. I *know* he's suffered—why, he turned again' me from that very moment and couldn't bide me in his sight; and though he couldn't fashion but take you on it must ha' cost him summat to see you i' your father's place. Them at wrote t' Owd Book knew what they were talking about, lad. They didn't say 'at sin was sure to be fun out; but 'be sure your sin'll find *you* out!' and you may bet on't 'at Baldwin's fun *him* out long sin'."

Jagger grunted, and his father smiled.

"There's one thing 'at shames me," he continued, "and that's seeming to make it out 'at I'm better than other folks. I'm no saint, as I happen needn't tell them 'at lives wi' me; but I reckoned things up when I was a young man and I come to t' conclusion 'at there must be a better way o' living than most folks followed, and I said to myself 'at I'd give t' Owd Book a fair trial and see if there was aught in it. I read there 'at t' best way to get on i' t' world was to put t' cart before t' horse, by doing good to them 'at hate you and praying for them 'at despitefully use you and persecute you. It's a queer sort o' teaching when you come to think on't, but I threshed it out i' my mind and fun it was right. *There's no other way 'at pays.* That's why I lost naught but my arm when I happened my accident—neither my peace o' mind nor my goodwill to Baldwin; and that's why you and Hannah's had no 'casion to grumble about wet blankets all these years. I've waited a long while for

my revenge on Baldwin; but you see I've gotten it at last: 'If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink'. What think you, lad?"

He raised his eyes as he asked the question, and the look on his son's face disappointed him. Instead of understanding there was bitterness and resentment: the hot indignation of a loyal and straight-dealing son against the treachery of a false friend. A smile spread slowly over the father's features as he saw that no reply was forthcoming.

"T' meat's a bit over strong, is it?" he went on. "Chew it, lad, while you get t' taste on't; and just think on 'at if you'd been Baldwin's son i'stead o' mine it's a thousand to one you'd ha' been born wi' his sperrit. Baldwin has no childer—him and Keturah's t' last o' their race, and it's happen as well—but when t' time comes 'at he has to hand in his last time-sheet I could like to think it 'ud be a clean 'un. So I'm for giving him a leg up, d'ye see?"

"What have you told me this story for?" Jagger asked. His father's calmness had affected him and he now had his feelings under control, though he was not yet appeased. "He's paid for all t' dirty tricks he's played *me*, and I'd rubbed t' reckoning off t' slate; but I'm hanged if I can forgive him that empty sleeve."

"This empty sleeve," said Maniwel, "is t' price I've paid for t' man. Say no more about it—I'm satisfied. I've tell'd you for two reasons. One on 'em's this: mebbe Baldwin'll feel called on to tell you his-self one o' these days, and I'd like him to know 'at you knew. It 'ud help him and it'll save you from saying or doing aught you'd have to rue.

"But there's another thing 'at's weighed wi' me: you've gotten a worse enemy than ever I had. Yon Inman is plotting again' you, and you're plotting again' him, and it means naught but trouble. When you've gotten used to t' thought I could like you to try my plan o' getting rid of a' enemy."

"Happen I will," said Jagger grimly, "when I see him beggared same as Baldwin."

"If he'd ha' let me, I'd ha' tried to save Baldwin from beggary," replied his father with a calm dignity that showed he had understood the implication.

Jagger flushed hotly. "I didn't mean that," he protested and Maniwel said—"Right, lad; there's no bones broken."

"Then would you have me let Inman go his own way, and play any devil's trick he likes on us?" said Jagger, and his father shook his head.

"Nay, lad," he said with greater animation; "watch him and best him! You can't please me better than by showing him you're t' best man o' t' two, so long as you keep on t' Straight Road. But spare him a bit o' pity, for hate's same as a knife 'at



lacks a haft—a tool 'at hurts him 'at tries to stab wi't."

"It's a bit too tough for my teeth, is your meat," said Jagger.

"Then just swallow t' juice," said his father, as a smile spread over his face and twinkled in his eyes; "and put t' rest on't out. Come lad; we'll go in and see how t' blanket's going on."

## CHAPTER XXVII

IN WHICH NANCY PLAYS THE PART OF DETECTIVE

A MILE away from the village the traveller on the Girston Road may pass a solitary and substantial farm and never know that he is within a field-length of the most alluring and perhaps the greatest of Mawm's natural wonders.

There is nothing in the configuration of the landscape that suggests the extraordinary. Low-lying hills on the right slope gently down to grey-green pastures which have been wrested from the moors. The road itself, hemmed in by loosely-built limestone walls, is little better than a cart-track, and runs out upon the moor when it reaches the last gaunt farm, a mile or two farther on. The hills on the left are loftier, but no less kindly in their sober green homespun, and the brook that tumbles over its rocky bed and roars beneath the bridge is not more boisterous than many another moorland stream.

If, however, curiosity should cause you to leave the road at the stile, or if ignoring that provision for shortening your journey you pass through the yard at the back of the farm, and with the stream for your guide make your way up the narrowing valley, you will by and by acquaint yourself with the stupendous spectacle of Gordale Scar, a chasm

“——terrific as the lair,  
Where the young lions couch.”

It is at a sudden bend in the hills that you come unawares upon the astonishing vision, but before you reach that point the landscape clothes itself in sack-cloth and throws ashes on its head as if it realised that the green pastures were to end in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and it must drape itself seemly. In winter especially there is a look of Sodom and Gomorrah about the place—a charred, lifeless look that is weird and depressing. On the one hand the slender stems of ash and hazel, rising grey from the grey hill-slope, seem as though some storm of fire had swept them. Here and there a dead tree, stripped of its bark, still mocks the power of the wild winds that are forcing it earthwards. On the left the cragged hill sweeps round in a quick semi-circle to shut in the valley. Like ragged ramparts its serrated, rocky outline shows crisp against the sky; screes of loose stone, from which here and there a huge boulder uprears its bulk, cover the sides; and other boulders, hurled down by successive avalanches, line the bank of the stream.

This, however, is only the cheerless bodement of what is beyond. When the sweep of the semi-circle forces you round the curve of the hill the vision of stern

grandeur and majesty may well rob you of speech.

The hills have drawn together until they almost meet, but they are no longer hills—they are stupendous, unscaleable precipices of rock, three hundred feet high. Grim and forbidding—black rather than grey—they offer no hospitality to the foot of man; but jackdaws and ravens make their home there, and birds of prey may sometimes be seen perching on the crags.

Into this roofless cavern—for there is evidence that the beetling rocks that project overhead once met in a great arch—the stream projects itself by a series of waterfalls which roar in time of flood like the “young lions” of Wordsworth’s fancy, and rushes along its stony channel scattering white foam upon the piled-up boulders that almost fill the floor of the chasm and make progress difficult. Steps have been cut in the rock beside the lower waterfall so that even the inexpert may climb to the “upper air,” and on their way to the higher reaches of the stream may trace out for themselves the course of the great convulsions that gave to Mawm its wonderland. Level with the summit of the cliffs is the moor with its far-stretching fissured platforms of grey limestone.

Awe-inspiring even in brilliant sunshine the chasm is really “terrific” at night. Then the frowning cliffs roof themselves in with blackness and the roar of the Stygian stream is direful. Man shuns it, and the birds that shriek and chatter there are birds of ill-omen.

Between the hours of twelve and one on a dark night in the last week of March when yet the faint crescent of a new moon gave a glimmer of light, a man made his way stealthily across the field, and in the shadow of the high walls, towards the Scar. When he reached the entrance he sat down on a rock with his back to the cliff, and for the space of ten minutes remained absolutely motionless. But though his body was still, his intelligence was alert, and his senses were scouting for him. He was accustoming himself to the sounds that become easily distinguishable when one listens intently; and training his eyes to penetrate the darkness. Directly opposite to where he sat the ravine touched hands with the valley; the frowning western cliff ran out upon the moor and became dismembered; the upper part falling back from the lower. On the intervening space a portion of the steep slope was carpeted with green; but the greater part was covered with a thick deposit of loose shingle, the plunder snatched by wild free-booting storms from the rocks overhead. Below there was another wall of rock of no great height above the stream that raged at its base.

Inman—for the nocturnal visitor was he—rose at last, and as if satisfied that no further precautions of an elaborate nature were necessary, crossed the stream and set himself to scale the rock. Apparently he was familiar with his task, for he climbed

confidently and before long had his feet upon the shingle. It was here that the more serious part of the adventure began, and from the hesitating way in which he set out upon the second part of his journey it was evident that he regarded it with some distaste.

Every movement of his feet sent a mass of loose stones hurtling down the slope, and he made slow progress. To his sensitive ears the noise was appalling, for the air was still and sound travelled far. In the distance a dog began to bark, and kept on barking loudly and uneasily, but although Inman cursed it in his heart he did not allow it to affect his movements. Helping himself forward with his hands, he had almost reached the stretch of green at which he was aiming when a too eager step set the unstable track in motion; and in spite of his efforts—it may be even because of them—he was carried with ever-accelerating speed down the precipitous incline and only saved himself at the very edge of the low cliff.

For some minutes he lay prone, thinking deeply, whilst the shingle continued to roll past him. After a while it ceased to fall, and he had just determined to rise and make a second attempt when he became convinced that the dog was loose and coming in his direction, whereupon panic seized him, and having groped with his toes until he found a crevice in the rock, he lowered himself to the ground.

Arrived there, he listened again and was satisfied the barking was nearer, so instead of returning by the fields which would almost certainly have meant an encounter with the dog, he made his way to the foot of the waterfall, and by means of the steps cut in the face of the rock reached the hazardous path that led to the moors.

He was now safe from pursuit by any dog; but imagination was by this time active, and a movement that he thought he heard in the ravine below checked the impulse to stay, and he hurried on. Angry disappointment at the failure of his enterprise filled his thoughts with bitterness, and his brow was black as Gordale itself as he strode over the moor. To severe mental disturbance there was also added physical discomfort, for rain began to fall heavily, and he was soon very wet. By the time he reached the road he was in a disagreeable mood; but his spirits revived somewhat when he found himself on his own doorstep and reflected that he had reached home unobserved.

“The usual Inman luck!” he said to himself with gloomy satisfaction.

He was of a different mind the next moment, for the new Chubb lock he had fixed failed to respond to the demand of the key and he found himself locked out. Very stealthily he raised the latch and put his knee to the door. It was secured by the heavy lock, and the latch of the Chubb was evidently pegged back. Someone had

tampered with it in his absence!

The frown deepened on his face, but he did not lose his self-command, and having looked cautiously round he struck a match, and shading it with his hands stooped down and examined the flagstone in front of the door. Satisfied with what he saw, he turned and entered his workshop, where he made his way to the office, but sleep was far from his eyes and thoughts, and he was conscious of no lack. When day came stealing down the moors, he went out and tried the latchlock on the house-door again. This time it responded at once, and he nodded his head slowly as if a hypothesis had received support, and went upstairs to his room.

When he heard Keturah bustling about in the kitchen he went across the landing into his wife's room. Nancy, in bed and awake, looked up in surprise when Inman came and stood beside her.

“What ails you?” she asked.

For a moment he allowed his stern eyes to be his sole weapon of attack, but when her face remained fearless he began to speak.

“Innocent child!” he sneered; “innocent lamb! What a pity your husband isn't simple and innocent too! Then you could play with his hair, and coo him to sleep with nice little songs, and sell him to his enemies, like the painted woman in the Bible!”

“Have you lost your reason, James, or are you drunk?”

Though a savage gleam was replacing the sneer in the cold eyes she thrust back fear and spoke quite calmly.

“You devil!” he replied without opening his teeth. “I could find it in my heart to admire your pluck and your cunning if it wasn't too dangerous. You're playing your part well, but your acting's thrown away on me, my lass. Your lip trembles at the corners and your heart's sinking in spite of your bold face. You know you're found out, and will have to be punished; you hell-spawn, you!”

His coolness and the note of concentrated hate and power in his voice chilled Nancy's heart, and made her conscious that unless he was conciliated her husband was in a mood to torture her; but she was never less disposed to conciliate; on the contrary, she experienced a reckless desire to laugh and risk the consequences; and when she spoke her voice was charged with contemptuous and half-amused defiance.

“God knows what you're getting at! If you've anything to say, get it said like a man, and don't think you can frighten me out o' my wits by glowering at me as if I'd turned street-walker——”

As she uttered the word she knew by the look that leaped to his eyes that she

had given him his opportunity, and she stopped involuntarily.

“That pulls you up, does it?” he asked. “As *if* you’d turned street-walker, you say! That reminds me, I’ve a little visit of inspection to make to your wardrobe.”

He turned as he spoke and walked over to the recess where her clothes were hanging and she raised herself on her elbow and watched him.

“If you’re seeking the coat and skirt I wore this morning,” she said, “you might have seen that they’re hanging over the chair to dry on this side of the bed. I don’t put my things away wet.”

“Then you admit you were out this morning?” He wheeled round as he asked the question, and his eyes blazed.

“And why not?” she answered. “If you’d been awake you’d have heard me go. There’s no law against a woman going out if she can’t sleep, is there? What’s all the fuss about?”

Not a line of the man’s expression changed.

“Tell me truly why you went,” he demanded, striding up to the bed again, and looking into her face with a threatening scowl.

“Tell me!” he repeated, and seizing her wrist in his strong palm he twisted it roughly.

“I have told you already!” she replied, and set her teeth to hold back an exclamation of pain.

“I’ll have the truth if I murder you!” he said, bending her arm until the pain brought unwilling tears to her eyes.

Still she was silent, and her lips closed firmly, whereupon the tiger in the man conquered his self-control, and in a sudden gust of rage he seized her by the throat, and as he tightened his grip upon it, hissed:

“Then listen and I’ll tell *you*! You spied on me, you she-devil! Whether you’d any other motive than curiosity I don’t know, but you’ve got to tell me everything or I’ll choke the life out of you. Now speak!”

He widened his fingers, but still kept them on her throat, and she never raised her hands in what must have been a vain effort to free herself, but kept them tightly clasped on her breast.

“Do your worst!” she said hoarsely. “Brute and coward! Kill me, if you like, and hang for me! Do you think it’s any catch to live tied to a man like you? I wouldn’t say a word to save you from hell!”

Strangely, her boldness sobered him, and he threw her head back on the pillow with a movement that was almost a blow, and walked over to the window. In less than a minute he turned and spoke from that position.

“Is it me or yon rake-hell of a Jagger you’re after? Answer me that!”

Scorn flashed from the dark eyes at the inquiry, but there was no other reply.

“Will you give me your word not to leave the house again at night?”

“I’m not your slave!” she answered. “You’ve called me devil and threatened to kill me—I’ll promise you nothing!”

“Then you’re a prisoner in this room,” he said. “You can get up or not, just as you please, but here you’ll remain until I release you”; and with these words he left the room, locking the door behind him.

Nancy made no attempt to rise, but leaned back on her pillows and considered the situation. She realised at once what must have happened; that in the interval between her reaching her room and the moment, nearly an hour later, when she remembered she had turned the lock in the outer door and omitted to drop the latch, her husband had returned and made his deductions.

“He would see my footmarks, too, if he sought for them,” she reflected. “What a stupid mess I made of it!”

Though he had treated her so roughly she was surprised to find herself thinking of her husband without resentment. A bracelet of red on her wrist showed with what merciless force he had gripped her, and her arm and shoulder ached as with the gnawing pain of a bared nerve; but to a woman of her hard race these things were trifles, and less than might have been expected from a man of Inman’s breed. She even excused him, realising the mortification he must feel at the suspicion that his own wife was plotting against him. It was a game they were playing, and she had made a wrong move—a pitifully careless move which well merited punishment; but he had nothing more than inference to go upon when he charged her with spying, and the game was not over.

She rose and dressed, made the bed and tidied the room, and finally seated herself by the open window. The moors lay warm in the embrace of the sunshine and unseen birds were chirping their grace for the bounties of the moistened earth. Nancy wondered if she was to be left breakfastless, but she was not hungry enough to be concerned. “They say fasting sharpens the wits,” she reflected.

What was the meaning of the Gordale adventure? All the night through she had puzzled her brains and found no answer. She had feared to follow when she saw her husband pass over the stile that led to the Scar; but curiosity had got the better of nervousness and she had gone round by the farm, forgetting the watch-dog in the yard whose noisy greeting drove her back to the roadway. Eventually she had climbed the wall some distance away, and reached the chasm when the rumbling of the stones was just beginning. Fascinated by what her senses told her was

proceeding, she had taken up her position behind a rock and awaited results.

The barking of the dog had given her no concern, though she was surprised that it was continued so long; and when the catastrophe occurred and Inman found himself on comparatively level ground again, she had been unable to account for the speed with which he left the gorge and for his choice of that inconvenient exit. It had, however, put pursuit out of the question, and she had returned home by the much shorter field-path, arriving a full half hour before Inman. She had fastened back the latch before leaving and locked the door with the big key, as she had felt certain that her husband's project would enable her to return first, and it was preoccupied thoughts and the force of habit that had led her to secure the door in the old familiar way, by which unfortunate blunder she was now finding herself thwarted.

She was thinking about it, but making no progress towards a solution of the mystery when Inman entered with her breakfast.

"Close that window!" he commanded, as he set down the tray on the bed.

"I prefer it open," she replied. "Even prisoners are allowed air."

He made no reply but left the room, returning a minute later with screws and screwdriver, by means of which he made the window secure. Neither of the two spoke until the work was finished, and Nancy poured out her tea with a steady hand.

"Hadn't you better board it up?" she asked as he put the screwdriver in his pocket. "What's to hinder me from breaking the window?"

"The thought that I'll break your neck!" he replied grimly.

She laughed mockingly, all the moorwoman in her roused to defy him.

"You dursn't!" she said. "You're all for yourself, James, and a man who's all for himself isn't for doing the hangman a good turn! Your mind's willing enough, I daresay, but putting me out o' my misery wouldn't help your game."

"That's true!" he replied, with a calmness equal to her own. "You've beaten me so far, but I'll find a way of hurting you, my lass. I'll squeeze the blood from your heart drop by drop before I've done! Aye, and from that pet-rabbit of yours, too! He'll scream when the weasel gets his teeth in his neck! There'll be no mercy then!"

"You can't hurt him!" she said proudly. "He's too big and good for you!"

She thought he would have struck her, but he restrained himself and left the room without a word, locking the door behind him; and for a moment Nancy's heart sank. She was thinking not of herself but of Jagger.

"He can't hurt him," she repeated. "Maniwel'll see to that!"

Subconsciously there was the feeling that Maniwel was in favour with the high court of Heaven, and that his influence would shield his son.



“I must get word to Jagger somehow,” she said to herself. “What James is up to I can’t think; but he’ll finish the job to-night if I’m out o’ the way, and he ought to be watched.

“He’s locked me up, has he?” she went on a moment later, as a faint smile overspread her face “Love laughs at locksmiths and so does hate.”

## CHAPTER XXVIII

IN WHICH MANIWEL AND JAGGER JOIN IN THE GAME

IMMAN'S mind took holiday from the work on which his hands were employed that day, and busied itself in shaping a course of action that would meet the requirements of the moment. He was disturbed to find that the machinery was not adequate to its task, that it moved slowly and during long periods was entirely unproductive.

Nancy's attitude puzzled him, but it did more: it gave him greater concern than the circumstances, as he construed them, warranted. Not for one moment would he allow himself to believe that she had followed him to Gordale, for he was of that number of men, themselves superior to superstitious fears and unafraid of the terror by night in its most gruesome forms or haunts, who assume that all women are cowards in the dark and the ready prey of silly fears; and hold them to be constitutionally incapable of adventuring alone in Erebus.

There were moments when he persuaded himself that her own simple explanation was the right one, and she had been merely restless, and then he cursed himself for having shown his hand. But his reason, as well as prejudice and apprehension, refused to entertain the thought long; her eyes had given the lie to her lips. He dismissed, too, though less quickly, the reflection that mere curiosity, the very natural desire of a wife to discover what takes her husband abroad at night, had led her to follow him. His lip curled with something like satisfaction as it occurred to him that she perhaps suspected another intrigue!

But the revolution of the machine always brought back his thoughts to Jagger. It was for her lover she was working—the lover whom he had injured but neither disheartened nor destroyed, and who no doubt found means of pouring his complaints into her sympathetic ears. It was intuition rather than reason that led him to the right conclusion, and told him that though he might throw dust in Stalker's eyes and make that credulous fool drunk with flattery and greed, he could not deceive his wife. She knew both husband and lover too well to misjudge either.

It was characteristic of the man that in the course of his reflections it never once crossed his mind that his policy had been mistaken. Far-sighted as he thought himself, he was incapable of understanding how the loyalty of a woman like Nancy would have kept her from abusing her husband's confidences, if they had been offered her, however distasteful his projects might have been to her judgment and heart. He was naturally secretive and distrustful; and like all men who scheme only for themselves, suspicious of everybody. His cleverness was cunning; there was

always the danger that he might over-reach himself—in the common expression he was “too clever by half.” His greatest fault was precipitancy; he had to struggle hard against the temptation to stand beside the snares he set in order that he might see the prey enter. The Wise Man asserts that “he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be unpunished.” He might have added that the punishment was likely to be self-administered; a man cannot spur himself fiercely and constantly and escape wounds!

Inman’s success so far had been quick and gratifying, but he was not satisfied, and the greatest obstacles in the path of his contentment were the Drakes—father and son. The old man he disliked not because he was a competitor (for competition was in the nature of things and not to be avoided), but because of his air of cheerful assurance, because of his frank, fearless eye and the reproach of his unfailing goodwill. The younger he hated, and with just cause (as he thought) on account of his continued intimacy with Nancy. That a single kiss had been the extent of their illicit connection his prurient mind rejected as incredible; and he was like the rest of his kind in regarding as unpardonable in the wife what was venial in the husband.

His mind had been undecided, and therefore he had locked Nancy in her bedroom, just as he might have locked a dangerous weapon in a drawer—to keep her from doing any mischief until the opportunity should have passed.

There remained Keturah. Despite her tearful peevishness there was a grain of obstinacy in the woman’s nature which made her hardly manageable, and might prove awkward if Nancy should gain her ear and sympathies. His quick judgment decided that she must be got out of the way for a day or two; and when the morning post brought her a letter that opened the floodgates wide he became inwardly elated.

“This is what Maniwel would call an answer to prayer,” he said to himself. “My luck’s changed, I shall go on all right now.”

To Keturah he turned a gloomy face.

“Ill, is she? And what’s Nancy to do if you go traipsing off to nurse another woman?”

“I wouldn’t ha’ cared,” wailed Keturah, “if there’d been anyone near-hand to do for her; but to be on her back and not a soul i’ t’ house if her girds come on——! It caps me what’s ta’en Nancy. She was right enough when she went to bed.”

“I suppose we should be able to manage,” he conceded with lessened gruffness. “Get upstairs and put your things on, and see you don’t disturb Nancy. You’ll not be more than two or three days, I reckon?”

“But I’d best just have a word with her before I go?” she protested.

“You’d best do as I tell you,” he snapped, “or you won’t go at all!”

It was not much better than prison fare that Inman took upstairs during the day,

and he was content with simple meals himself. When night fell he set an inch or two of candle on the dressing table, with the curt recommendation to get to bed and make up for the previous night's loss of sleep, to which she made no reply.

No sooner had the sound of his footsteps on the stairs ceased than a change came over her. She rose with alacrity, drew down the blind and lit the candle, after which she went up to the door and secured it on the inside with the bolt Inman had fixed as a measure of precaution when he had brought home Nancy's money. A smile was in her eyes but her mouth was determined. "What a clever fool he is!" she said to herself, "and how thoughtful of him to send Keturah away. Every plan he makes fails!"

The recess beside the fireplace had been made into a closet which served the purpose of a wardrobe, and was filled with Nancy's clothes. A shelf ran across the upper portion, filled with hat boxes and the like, and the various skirts and coats which concealed the background were themselves screened by similar garments that were suspended from hooks affixed to the shelf.

This outer layer of everyday apparel Nancy proceeded to remove, together with one or two others from the row behind. It was then possible to see that the back of the recess was composed of a door of plain boards and ancient workmanship which had at one time afforded a means of communication with the next apartment.

Treading cautiously, she crossed the strip of carpet and stepped out on to the landing. Her husband was still in the house, for she could hear his voice below in conversation with another, which she recognised as Stalker's, and she had to wait awhile before the two men came out and stood in the passage.

"I shall be back i' t' village by twelve at t' latest," the policeman was saying. "I reckon t' sergeant'll meet me down Kirkby way somewhere about eleven. I'll be back afore Drake gets stirring—if he stirs at all."

"Then you think he's given the job up?" Inman asked.

"He knows I've my eye on him," the other replied. "Whether he's stalled or no time'll tell."

"I've to see Tom Horton at Kirkby," Inman remarked. "He sits up late, does Tom, and if I walk down with you we can talk things over as we go along. When I get back I'll keep an eye on the Drakes' house for a bit."

The outer door closed, and from the window Nancy saw their shadowy forms disappear round the corner of the road. Without a moment's hesitation she went downstairs and unbarring the kitchen window, climbed out, and having closed the sash behind her sped towards the beck and across the green to the Drakes' house. The retreating forms of her husband and his companion could just be discerned in

the faint moonlight far down the road as she knocked at the door.

“Is Jagger in?” she whispered when Hannah came. “Tell him I want him—at once—and come you with him.”

“Come where?” asked Hannah, in astonishment.

“Here!” said Nancy impatiently. “Bring him out and shut the door. There’s no time to lose!”

She had one eye on the road as she spoke, and she kept it there when Hannah and Jagger joined her; but however apprehensive she may have been of her husband’s return, she told her story clearly and concisely.

“What’ll you do?” she asked when Jagger made no immediate comment. “I can’t make head or tail of it.”

“I’ll go see what I can make on’t,” he said, “before he gets a chance to get there. It’s a rum do!”

“And if he finds you there?” she asked.

“If he finds me there, there’ll happen be trouble,” he replied; “but I’ve t’ same right to be i’ Gordel that he has. Anyway, I’m going.”

“Will you take Jack with you?” she asked anxiously. “James’ll do you a mischief if he can.”

“Aye, take Jack,” said Hannah. “It’s as well to be on t’ safe side.”

“Two ’ud happen bungle it,” he said. “I’m a match for Jim Inman any day. I’ll go now, before either of ’em gets back.”

Nancy returned home, and the gloom of Gordel settled on her spirits as she bolted herself into her prison-house again. The candle had set fire to its paper packing and burnt itself out; but when she drew up the blind a gleam of light entered from the sky and she had no difficulty in replacing the garments on their hooks. When the work was finished she did not undress. A sense of weariness and hopelessness crushed her. Her husband would know that she had tricked him and would make her pay the penalty. What would it be? How long would this sort of thing continue? The long vista of the road she was destined to travel with a husband who hated her and whom she despised spread itself before her. She was afraid, too, for Jagger, and a hundred times over upbraided herself for having sent him into danger, without adequate cause; a hundred times over lamented the curiosity that had moved her to do it. Once or twice it crossed her mind that it would have been better to have seen Maniwel instead of Jagger; he was so sane and strong and dependable—so safe, too; for Nancy shared the prevalent belief or superstition that no real harm could befall Maniwel Drake; but another inward counsellor brushed the suggestion aside.

“He’d say, ‘What business is it of ours? Let him go his own gait; and get you up to bed!’”

Troubled as she was, Nancy smiled, for the voice told her that curiosity was stronger than reason, and that at heart it pleased her to know that Jagger would not shirk the adventure. A moment later a shiver ran through her, and her heart beat painfully as she pictured a struggle between two strong men in that lonely ravine. A bank of clouds quenched the light of the young moon, and with her imagination quickened by the darkness that wrapped her round, the vision became so real that she almost screamed, and the sound in her throat roused her.

“You silly fool!” she said aloud. “You’re getting hysterical. Stir yourself!”

She went over to the window and endeavoured to look out, but there was little to be seen except a few faint stars and the black outline of earth that touched the sky.

“I’ll have it out with him,” she determined. “I’ll tell him we’d better separate. He’s got most of the money, and that’s all he cares about. It’ll be a relief to us both!”

The decision steadied her.

“I may as well go to bed,” she continued, “but I’ll keep the bolt on the door. He’ll be fit to choke me when he comes home if he’s happened across Jagger!”

Meantime Jagger, having taken rapid counsel with himself and Hannah, had determined to consult his father, who had already gone upstairs and was ready for bed.

“I thought I heard voices beneath t’ window,” he remarked when Jagger had told his story. “And what do you reckon to make out o’ t’ job?”

“I make naught out,” he replied firmly, “but I’ll go and see what’s to be made out on t’ spot.”

“Then you’ve no theory?” Maniwel was drawing on his trousers as he spoke; and instead of answering Jagger inquired what his father was dressing for.

“Cause I’m going wi’ you,” he replied; “and it’s as Nancy says, there’s no time to lose.”

“*You* going?” Jagger asked in amazement. “What call is there for you to go? You don’t think I’m afraid o’ t’ chap, do you? I shall be easier i’ my mind if you’re safe i’ bed.”

“I’m going wi’ you,” his father repeated. “There’s things to be said ’at it’ll save time to say on t’ road.”

“But——” began Jagger. He was uneasy at the thought of leaving his father below whilst he climbed the rocks.

“There’s no ‘buts’ about it, lad. You ought to know by this time ’at your father’s

bad to shift when he's made his mind up. You'll maybe none be sorry 'at t' old man went wi' you before t' night's out!"

Jagger made no further remonstrance, and a few minutes later the two men left the house, after instructing Hannah to keep a light in the kitchen for another half hour and then go to bed. The door-key Maniwel put in his pocket.

"Then you can't fairly reckon t' job up?" he asked again when the last house on the Gordel Road had been left behind.

"Can you?" Jagger replied.

"Well, I don't hardly know whether I've got t' right pig by t' ear," said his father slowly; "but I've a sort of a notion. Happen there's naught in it, but that's to be tried for. Did you ever climb t' shingle at t' spot Nancy tells about?"

"I can't say 'at I ever did," he replied. "I don't know 'at I've taken much notice of t' place."

"Me and Baldwin's been up many a time when we were lads. It isn't easy, but there's ways o' getting up 'at isn't *that* hard, and a chap might light o' one by chance and think it was a soft job, then t' next time he tried he might find his-self bested. If Inman's aiming to get up it's 'cause he's been there before, you mark my words, and he's desp'rate anxious to get there again."

"But what can he want up t' cliff side?" inquired Jagger; "it's that 'at puzzles me. A man doesn't go bird-nesting in t' dark."

"That depends, my lad, on what sort o' eggs there may happen to be i' t' nest. Suppose, now, he's made a nest of his own i' one o' t' hidey-holes aboon t' shingle, and wants t' eggs in his pocket! It's nobbut a notion I've gotten in my noddle, lad, but I'm going to tell you how to scam'le up, and where to look."

"Something o' t' same sort was at t' back o' my mind," said Jagger, "but it licks me what he could want to hide up there."

"I'm saying naught," returned his father, "'cause I've naught but a notion to go by. I'm same as I've fun a lock that's short of a key. You'll see what you make out, lad, but it wouldn't cap me if you were to find summat 'at'll make your eyes bulge."

He refused to say any more, and they crossed the fields to the ravine in silence until Jagger laid his hand on his father's arm.

"I could ha' thought there was somebody i' front of us," he said. "Hark you!"

They were at the very entrance to the chasm and at the foot of the rocks with the screes above them. Both men listened intently, but there was no sound except the flapping of a bird's wings high above.

"It's been one o' t' daws you heard," said Maniwel.

"I didn't hear it exactly," replied Jagger; "I sensed it."

“You’re nervy, lad,” said his father. “It’s as well I came wi’ you. Now just take a bit o’ notice while I tell you which way to go.”

His voice sounded loud and Jagger remonstrated with him in a low voice, but Maniwel was unmoved.

“We’er doing naught to be ashamed on, lad, and there’s no ’casion to muffle t’ clappers. If you find aught ’at we’ve no concern wi’ you’ll leave it where it is; and if you chance across summat ’at doesn’t belong either to Inman or us you’ll bring it down and we’ll let t’ police have it. Put this box o’ matches i’ your pocket. You’ll mebbe want a light before you’ve finished, and I don’t know ’at it matters if anybody sees you.”

“I’m down about your being by yourself if Inman comes,” said Jagger.

“You’ve no ’casion to fret yourself,” replied his father. “I’ll cross t’ beck and get under t’ rock. We’re a bit ahead o’ his time, I reckon; but, anyway, I’ve a good stick i’ my hand. Now up wi’ you, lad, and think on o’ what I’ve tell’d you!”

Jagger was soon at the foot of the screes, and his father crossed the noisy stream and made his way to the densely-black shadows of the high cliff that overhung his head. The gloom of the ravine had no terrors for him, and he deliberately sought its darkest corner behind a projecting limb of the rock.

“It’ll be as snug a cubby-hole as a man need want,” he muttered, “and I can keep an eye both on Jagger and t’ field-path.”

Jagger was half-way up the screes by this time, and the shingle was giving away the secret of the ascent as it clattered down into the beck.

“He’s framing all right,” thought Maniwel, “but t’ job’s only just begun, and he’ll happen be there when t’other fellow comes. I’ll stand here and wait to see what turns up.”

He moved forward, and the same moment a hand was placed over his mouth, while a man’s low, firm voice said:

“Keep quite still! I shall do you no harm. My name is Harker and I’m a police officer!”



## CHAPTER XXIX

IN WHICH THE TABLES ARE TURNED MORE THAN ONCE

INMAN parted company with the policeman at Tom Morton's door; but his business with the man was concluded in five minutes and he then took a direction which would probably have astonished the constable, for instead of returning to Mawm by the high road, he went down to the river, and following its course upstream to the point where the Gordale beck joined it, made a bee-line for the ravine.

In doing this he had neither overlooked his expressed determination to keep a watchful eye on the Drakes' house, nor intentionally deceived Stalker; but had yielded to an imperative impulse which he did not stop to question. This was the more surprising because he was usually too logical and also too stubborn to be moved by those sudden mental thrusts to which many people yield so readily, and if he did so now it was because his mind was in a condition of excited eagerness that was not without a trace of panic.

Despite the coolness he had maintained in his wife's presence after he had conquered the first almost uncontrollable impulse to render her incapable of doing him further mischief he was at heart afraid of Nancy. There had always been about her something he had not understood; a suggestion of strength held in reserve—of that super-strength which we call fortitude, and he began to fear that her resourcefulness might match his own. His thoughts were full of her as he strode along in the darkness, and of the relations that must exist between them in the future when the successful issue of his present enterprise should enable him to settle down to the only important business of life—that of making money and piling it up. Once let him get into his stride, and nothing should hinder him from pushing on; as for the Drakes, they might go to the dogs or the devil, or potter along to the end of their journey, patching up poor men's fences and knocking together an occasional poor man's coffin. Henceforward they were beneath his contempt—

He paused there, knowing it was a lie; that though he had married Nancy for her money and for the opportunities the alliance would bring him; though he had himself been unfaithful to her and was unrepentant, he was bitterly jealous of Jagger. The difficulty he had never yet surmounted was how to hurt his enemy in a vital spot and escape injury himself; but he never lost hope. His attempt to throw suspicion for the theft of the money on Jagger had influenced nobody except Stalker, who was a gullible fool. That, too, would have hit Nancy hard; would have wounded her pride as well as her heart, but prudence suggested that it would be best henceforth to

imitate the police and let the matter drop. There would, however, be other openings. Life was long and full of snares, into which the wariest old bird might run. And he would be wealthy before many years had passed, and what was there money could not accomplish?

It was the one article in his short creed that he believed with all his soul, yet even as it crossed his mind he knew that it would never buy Nancy's love; but the thought brought a smile to his face. He could very well do without love; in that market tinsel had all the attractiveness of pure gold, and tinsel was cheap. A smooth tongue and a kiss or two could purchase it.

So his thoughts raced along, but always in a circle, for they inevitably brought him back to the point where a vague uneasiness clouded his satisfaction, and the sense of anxiety was somehow connected with his wife. What if she were free again?—but that was impossible.

Once or twice he wondered if there was no possibility of patching up a peace; but he knew in his heart that she was too straight to tolerate his methods, and he told himself it was a pity. With a nature like hers, if only it had not been spoiled by this unprofitable conscientiousness, what an admirable helpmate she might have been!

When he reached the Gordale road and climbed the stile into the pasture he dismissed these reflections, and concentrated his thoughts on the task that had baffled him the previous night. All was very still, but the darkness was not dense, for the sky was bright with stars as if frost was in the air. Suddenly, as he raised his eyes to the cliff that was his goal, he saw a faint light that flickered for a moment and then went out. A second or two later another appeared and was carried along the surface of the rock until its life, too, was spent.

Inman stood still, but his pulse raced. Someone had anticipated him. Someone was searching the crevices which held his secret, and the result was inevitable. The overthrow of his schemes, so utterly unexpected, fell upon him with the force of a cataclysm, sweeping him from his feet and producing for a moment or two real physical dizziness.

He recovered himself quickly, and as another light glimmered on the rock he hastened along, finding cover in the shadows of the high walls, though he felt sure the searcher was too busily engaged to discover his approach. By the time the next match was struck he was cowering behind a rock at the entrance to the ravine; and there was murder in his heart when he recognised the familiar form of Jagger Drake.

He had dreaded it all along, though he had slighted and pushed aside the suggestion. His wife had tracked him only too well and had betrayed him to the enemy. In the moment of realisation he became desperate and thought only of

vengeance, yet even so his mind set itself automatically and instantaneously to the work of counter-plotting. His fingers reached down and grasped a stone. There were few men whose aim was better than his; few whose right arm had more of weight and muscle in it. It was only necessary to stay there in hiding until the other's feet should be on that treacherous slope of loose shingle when he would be powerless to defend himself, and one or two shots would bring him headlong to the foot of the cliff with a broken neck. If he should not be dead it would be no hard task to lend nature a hand—almost as easy as to take away the treasure-trove before any other eye should see it—and the man's death would lie at his own door. Men would ask why the silly fool should have climbed the Scar at night. And it would be Nancy who had sent him to his fate!

These thoughts flashed across his mind; were examined and rejected in a moment, for they were speedily followed by a second and better suggestion. Before another minute had passed he was making his way back, at first cautiously, then with increasing speed to the high road and the village.

He had been gone a half-hour before the whistling cry of a curlew was heard from the cliff side, and the two men in hiding lifted up their heads and listened. A moment later it was repeated, more loudly and this time not so successfully, for there was something less of the bird and more of the schoolboy in it—a note of triumph that is missing from the bird's call.

“What is it?” the detective asked; and Maniwel replied with a similar reproduction of the moorbird's music.

“He's fun what he's after,” he replied. “We might as well get down.”

It was in a recess well above his head that Jagger had found the object of his search. Behind a clump of yew that had secured root-hold in a narrow crevice of the cliff and spread its foliage before a shallow opening in the rock, his hand had encountered something softer than stone or wood; something that proved to be a small leather bag.

It was heavy—eight or nine pounds he judged—and he had a little difficulty in transferring it to his pocket, for the toes of his boots had not much grip upon the inch-wide ledge of rock from which he was stretching upwards, but by and by he found himself on the turf again with the screes immediately below. He was so eager to be down that he sent the loose stones clattering to the river bed like a miniature avalanche, and his father could not forbear a warning cry.

“Steady, lad, steady! You'll hurt yourself if you fall to t' bottom!”

“No fear o' that,” replied Jagger, who was already on the edge of the lower cliff, making ready to descend. “By gen, father, we've dropped on it this time. It's a job

for t' police, right enough—a bag-full o' brass.”

He was too excited to moderate his voice, and when the old man bade him “Whisht!” he only laughed.

“I care for nobody,” he said. “He can come when he likes now. He’s a deep beggar, is Inman, but, by gen, he’s let himself in for’t this time! It’ll open Stalker’s eyes!”

“Don’t jaw so much!” an impatient and authoritative voice broke in, “but get down and let us see what you’ve found. Time’s precious!”

Jagger nearly overbalanced himself in his surprise.

“Who’ve you got with you?” he inquired suspiciously as he began the descent. For just a moment he thought it must be Inman himself, for the voice was half familiar, but when the detective replied, “You’ll know me when you see me. We’ve met before,” enlightenment came.

“It’s Mr. Harker!” he said. “This licks all!”

The bag was secured with string and Jagger struck a match whilst the officer untied it. But the sight of the contents was not really necessary to confirm what was already certain—that the missing gold was in their hands; and Mr. Harker tied it up again and pushed it along the table of rock towards Jagger.

“Now, listen to me,” he said. “You found the swag and you’ve got to deal with it exactly as you would have done if we hadn’t been here. I want to tell you what’ll happen. Stalker’ll arrest you and you’ll have to go with him!”

“Arrest me!” It was too dark to see the astonishment that spread over Jagger’s face; but it revealed itself in his voice.

“We’ve seen what you haven’t,” the detective proceeded quickly. “You haven’t been the only star on the stage. Inman’s been and caught you at the game; and it’s easy to guess what he hurried away for.”

“But why should he arrest me?” pursued Jagger, who had not anticipated any such untoward result of the enterprise. “I should hand t’ bag straight over to Stalker!”

“He’ll arrest you for having stolen property in your possession,” returned the officer, “and you’ll have to go down to Kepton; but you needn’t worry; you’ll have a front seat for the play, that’s all.”

Something in the detective’s tone raised Jagger’s spirits and he inquired more cheerfully:

“Then I’m to get away by myself, am I? What about father?”

“Your father’ll keep with me. Otherwise Stalker would arrest you both, as it would be his duty to do. If you don’t meet him you must follow your own course;

but let me see you stirring, or the other fellows will be here, if I'm not mistaken."

A grim smile was on Jagger's face now, and he moved away briskly, carrying the bag in his hand.

"He's not likely to show fight under provocation, is he?" the detective asked Maniwel, as they followed slowly a minute or two later. "I should imagine he might be a bit of a bruiser, and it would be a pity to give Stalker an excuse for putting the bracelets on him."

"Twelve months since I wouldn't ha' answered for him," the father replied; "but he'll keep himself in now, you'll see. What'll you do wi' Inman?"

"Leave that to me!" was the significant answer.

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Before Inman found Stalker he had so rehearsed and perfected his story that all apprehension of evil to himself had been dismissed from his mind, which was possessed with a fierce joy. It was worth the loss of the money to have Jagger shut up in prison and branded as a thief; it was a price he would willingly have pledged himself to pay at any time. From the moment he had set foot in the village on his return from Hull he had done his best to throw suspicion on his rival, and in all his consultations with Stalker he had taken care to keep the suggestion alive. The oil of flattery, applied with featherlike delicacy of touch, had made the slow-moving constable quick to discover guilt in actions and circumstances that could have had no relation to the crime apart from Inman's cunning inventiveness; and he had allowed himself to be persuaded that time and patience would give him his prisoner. The only cloud on his satisfaction, therefore, when Inman found him and hurried him along the Gordale Road was that the glory of having tracked the criminal should belong not to him but to his patron.

"I'll bet a hundred pounds to a penny he's hidden the plunder there," Inman said, as he tried to quicken the policeman's heavy pace. "My only fear is that he'll slip us, and perhaps hide it again nearer home. He was striking a match to look for it when I came away, and you took the deuce of a lot of finding."

The grumbling tone passed unnoticed by the policeman, who was thinking to himself that it was well for him that he was accompanied by a man of such strong determination and powerful physique, for Jagger's fame as a fighting man was proverbial in the hill-country, and he was not likely to "take his sops" without a struggle.

"Was he by himself?" he inquired.

"Yes," replied Inman, with a note of confidence.

The thought that Nancy might have guided her lover there had occurred to him

on his way back, but that fear (or hope, for he hardly knew in which light he regarded it) had been removed when he called at his home and satisfied himself by his wife's deep breathing that she was asleep in her room, with the door secured.

"A leather bag, did you say?" Stalker continued.

"Unless he's changed it," Inman replied impatiently. "You'll search him, I suppose? It isn't likely he'll be wearing it in his button-hole like a posy!"

They had reached the stile and were about to pass over when the policeman became aware that someone was approaching from the direction of the Scar, and he whispered an instruction to his companion to secrete himself on the farther side. When Jagger was descending into the road, Stalker stepped forward and swept the light of his bull's-eye upon him.

"I see you've gotten it with you, my lad!" he said. "I've waited a long time; but there's an end to t' longest road. I suppose you'll come along quietly?"

The suddenness of the encounter and the flash of the lamp startled Jagger; and his voice was not as steady as he had meant it to be when he replied:

"I've got it, right enough, and you'd have got it if you'd waited. I was on my way to find you; but I suppose those who hid it away picked it out 'at their game was up, and set you on my track to keep your nose off o' their trail."

"It wor very thoughtful on you," Stalker answered with pleasant sarcasm; "an' as you was to ha' left it wi' me I may as well take it. By gen, it's no light weight! Happen you'll take charge on't, Mr. Inman, while we get to t' village, and leave me my two hands free?"

Inman stepped forward and Jagger observed him for the first time.

"So you're there, are you?" he remarked. "I thought by this time you'd have put five miles o' moor between you and Mawm. *You* know who hid t' bag on t' Scar side, choose who you got to steal it."

"You are quite right," he answered with no emotion of any kind. "I've known all along both who stole it and who hid it; but the trouble was I didn't know where until I followed you. Stalker knows that I knew."

"That's all right, sir," said the constable, "and we needn't stop here i' t' lane arguing about it. We'll be stepping forrad, and t' least said'll be t' soonest mended, for it's my duty to warn you 'at aught you say may be used in evidence again' you."

Jagger made no reply, and walked between his two captors thinking his own thoughts. At intervals his companions exchanged a brief sentence, but for the most part the journey was continued in silence, so that when the outskirts of the village had been reached the sound of footsteps in the rear was clearly heard.

The constable gripped Jagger's sleeve. "If it's a rescue you're thinking on," he

said, "I shall have to put cuffs o' your wrists."

Jagger laughed, and his indifference surprised the constable and disturbed Inman.

Whoever was approaching was making good progress, and in a few moments a firm voice rang out the question:

"Is that you, Stalker, in front?"

"Yes, sir," replied the constable, who thought the sergeant must be again in the neighbourhood, and experienced a sense of relief at this unexpected lightening of his responsibilities.

He halted as he spoke, and Mr. Harker and Maniwel came up. At sight of them Inman's face dropped.

"I've arrested this man, sir," Stalker explained, "wi' the money 'at was stolen from Briggs in his possession on information laid by Mr. Inman."

"I know," the detective replied curtly; "and I've a warrant for the arrest of James Inman on the same charge. You can leave Drake to me, Stalker, and give your attention to the other prisoner. I've my car in a shed a hundred yards away, and we'll get down there at once and make our way to Kepton."

## CHAPTER XXX

### IN WHICH SWITHIN TELLS HIS STORY

IT was anything but a pleasant night, for a damp mist was clinging to the sides of the hills and condensing on the grey walls of the cottages, which looked as though some invisible hand was squeezing out a sponge upon them, yet the bar parlour of the "Packhorse" was uncomfortably crowded. On the other hand, that of the "Royal" was deserted, and the landlord might as well have closed his doors and gone across the green to the help of his competitor, whose legs and arms were kept in perpetual motion.

It was easy to see even at a glance who was monopolising the limelight on this occasion, for every chair was turned so that its occupant might catch a sight (albeit in some cases at the expense of an uncomfortable twisting of the neck) of Swithin's face.

He sat in his usual seat upon the hearth, with old Ambrose in the arm-chair on the other side, and wore the pleased and self-satisfied expression of the man whose ship has come into port at last, and who can proceed at his leisure to unload the cargo and reveal its treasures.

Again and again had the tale been told, but each batch of newcomers found it easy to draw forth a repetition, for Swithin was like a gramophone in his readiness to oblige the company; and as he fortunately lacked the mechanical precision of that instrument, even those who had heard the story more than once bent forward to listen to it again, being convinced that there would be variations in the treatment though not in the theme.

Never had Swithin shown himself to better advantage. The account that he had been required to give in Court had been prepared in advance during the long weeks that followed the hour of his enlightenment, when his faculty of putting two and two together had enabled him to see what the detective was "getting at," and made him that astute officer's confidant and ally. If he stood on stilts during the narration it was because he was even yet in spirit and imagination addressing the bench of magistrates who had complimented him on his evidence.

"'Suck-cink and to t' point,' the Chairman said, when he tell'd me I could stand down!" There could be no doubt that Swithin was immensely proud of that high-sounding commendation. Nobody present was familiar with the word the old man had rolled so appreciatively on his tongue, but what of that? It was manifestly an expression that was used by the lords of the land to the men they delighted to honour.



“It caps all ever I ’eard tell of; and to think ’at if it ’adn’t been for Swithin he might never ha’ been fun out!”

“Nay, to think ’at if it hadn’t ha’ been for Swithin, Jagger’d mebbe ha’ got five year!”

It was not honey to Swithin, for the old man cared nothing for such sickly sweetness, but it was beer and ’bacca in overflowing measure.

“Nay, nay,” he said in a protesting tone that invited contradiction; “it’s Detective-Sergeant Harker Jagger’s got to thank, not me. A fine chap you have there, neighbours. Before ever I tipped him t’ wink, as you may put it, he had t’ thief spotted—*nosed* him—that’s what it is wi’ such as Harker. T’ minute he set eyes on him and heard him bluster, says he to his-sen, ‘That’s my man!’ and there wor nowt to go by. Then I puts my bit in, on t’ quiet; and as sly as a couple of stoats we’ve worked together ever sin’; for there’s them at isn’t in t’ force, neighbours, ’at happen ought to ha’ been.”

“It’s a gift, Swith’n; it’s a gift, lad!” wheezed Ambrose.

“I’m not denying it, Ambrus,” replied Swithin modestly. “I says, ‘If it wasn’t Inman’s voice ’at cursed when he ran agen t’ wall that night ’at I wor waiting o’ Crumple to cauve you can call me a liar, says I, and have done wi’ ’t.’ And he just opened his note-book and put down all I tell’d him. Then when t’ snaw melted he fun t’ button, and that cooked Inman his goose.”

“Found what button?” inquired Job; who lived so far away that he had been one of the last to arrive.

“T’ button off Inman’ owercoat,” replied Swithin. “He fun it t’ same night you met him i’ t’ Long Close and suspicioned him for t’ thief and flayed me wi’ your talk about a gallus-button. Not ’at I’m blaming you for being on t’ wrong scent, ’cos we aren’t all born alike, and some’s bound to make fools o’ theirsels. It wor me ’at fun out for him ’at after that ’at Inman’s coat wor short o’ that button; but I’ll tak’ to’t, neighbours, ’at it wor Mr. Harker ’at guessed ’at he’d hid t’ money away i’ t’ Scar.”

This admission manifestly caused Swithin an effort; but he brightened again as he proceeded.

“T’ way he pieced it together caps all, and kep’ his-sen out o’ sight, so ’at Inman and Stalker thowt he’d dropped t’ business. They’d ha’ stared if they’d ha’ known ’at Detective Swith’n Marsdin was on t’ job!”

He broke off to hide a chuckle in his mug, but the company was too interested to smile.

“Detective Marsdin by day and Detective Harker by night,” he continued. “You should ha’ seen Inman’s face i’ t’ dock when he heard Harker putting two and two

together. He had it all as clean as a whistle fro' t' time Inman slammed t' carriage door tul. It seems t' train he travelled by wor pulled up by signal a few hunderd yards out o' t' station, and him having a carriage to his-sen there wor nowt easier nor for him to drop out. That wor t' first link i' t' chain."

Swithin paused and took a refresher.

"Number two! At three o'clock t' next morning a man summat after his build catches t' Scotchman at t' Junction, and lands i' Airlee i' time to get a' early train for Hull. That brings us to Number Three!

"T' ticket collector at Hull swears 'at a man wi' a brown owercoat 'at lacked a button passed t' barrier at nine i' t' morning, and t' same man passed back at two i' t' afternoon. He reckernized him by t' loose threads where t' button sud ha' been."

Again Swithin paused, and allowed his eyes to travel over the company and take toll of their appreciation. Again, too, he refreshed himself with a drink.

"We had t' job weighed up by this time," he went on; not thinking it necessary to inform his hearers that much of this information had reached his ears for the first time that morning; "but we hadn't fun where he'd hidden t' brass, and Harker wasn't for hurrying his-sen. When there wor no moon he left me i' charge, as you may say; but there worn't many nights i' t' month when he didn't turn up his-sen; and how many hours, neighbours, when you've been warm i' your beds that man's been shivering i' Gordel he could mebbe tell you better 'n me.

"T' first time he tracked him there, wor t' night Maniwel's roof-tree wor let down. Harker watched him do it, and then followed him across t' moor to t' Scar. But Inman wor ower quick for him, and Harker wor flayed o' making a noise when he were climbing down t' slippery rocks wi' so much loose stone about, so all he knew wor 'at Inman wor groaning and pitying his-sen on t' stones i' t' bottom. But by what he made out he'd slipped down t' cliff-side and hurt his knee-cap, and a bonny job he had to trail his-sen home. It wor me 'at let day-light into Harker when he tell'd me; and it wor me 'at showed him where he could hide his-sen and spy on him.

"He'd a bit to wait wol Inman's knee mended, but there came a darkish night when Inman turned up again, and a woman close on his heels. He guessed it wor Nancy, but he didn't follow ayther on 'em, flayed o' one or t'other of 'em picking him out. He always had a car and a bike i' our shed and kep' t' key in his pocket, so he could get off back before daylight. He knew Inman 'ud be sure to try agen t' next night, and t' rest you know as well as me."

"Well, this is a licker!" remarked Job; "but I'm one o' them 'at's heard nowt, Swithin, or next to nowt. They didn't keep Jagger, then?"

"Keep Jagger!" The contempt in the old man's voice was the most emphatic of

negatives. "Do you think, Job, wi' a man like Mr. Harris i' t' chair they wor likely to keep Jagger? And 'at after what Harker had to tell 'em?" "We're very much obliged to you, Mr. Drake," he says, smiling, "and hope you haven't been put to no inconvenience," he says. "It wor different wi' t'other, and there wor no smiles for him, I can tell you. He's got to go to t' 'Sizes."

"But they tell me Maniwel's bailin' him out," said Job incredulously.

"And it's trewth they tell you," returned Swithin, "'the trewth, the 'ole trewth, and nothing but the trewth,'" he added with fond reminiscence of his police-court experiences. "And that's where I part comp'ny wi' Maniwel, being what t' Scriptur' calls casting your pearls before swine."

"Hearken tul him!" interjected Ambrus, in a thin but decidedly approving voice. "He's in his gifted mood to-day, is Swith'n!"

"Two hunderd pound he has to lay down alongside two hunderd more 'at some Airlee fella offered; to say nowt o' t' three hunderd Inman has to find his-sen. Mr. Harris tell'd him to take his time and think it ower, and Jagger's face wor as black as a chimley; but there's no moving Maniwel when he sets his-sen; and Jagger stuck up for his dad as we come home i' t' train. He's a lad 'at's going to tak' a bit o' sizing up, is Jagger."

"It'll be a sad job, neebours," said Ambrose, "if so be as Maniwel loses his bits o' savings after all t' labour him and Jagger's put intul their business, and yon Inman's a lad 'at I'd trust as far as I could trace him. But it's allus been a sayin' o' Maniwel's 'at when a man's past mending he's past fending, and he's for casting out devils wi' fair-spokken words. Eh! neebours, but it grieves me to think 'at there's all these gurt happenin's i' t' village and my poor owd brain a-whirlin' round same as a lad's peg-top. If I'd ha' been i' my prime I could ha' made a set o' grand verses out on it all, but ivery dog has his day, and mine's near-hand ower. Hows'ever, I hope it'll be Maniwel, and not yon lad 'at'll see me put away."

"If you've to wait, Ambrose, while Inman puts you away," said Swithin when the old man's monody had ended, "you'll have a few years to live yet; and I should say my-sen 'at Mawm's finished wi' him. And good riddance to bad rubbish, says I, though I'm sorry for Nancy, poor lass!"

There were others who at that moment were thinking of Nancy. Maniwel and his family were taking counsel together, and even the father's brow was troubled.

"I never once gave her a thought, lad," he said, lifting his eyes to his son's face. "It's awk'ard."

"Awkward!" repeated Jagger. "What you've got to do is to say 'at you've thought better of it, and let him stop where he is. It was a mad idea to offer all t' bit

we have i' t' bank to bail out a scamp like him. I thought you must ha' lost your senses when I heard you."

"It seems such a shame after all t' mischief he's done you," said Hannah indignantly. "It isn't as if it 'ud make any difference either, 'cos there's naught so certain as 'at he'll get a long sentence at t' finish."

"Now, mother, it's your turn, and then we'll hear what Baldwin has to say."

"Nay," said Baldwin, with an emphatic movement of the head, "I'm saying naught; it's none o' my business."

"Then come, mother!" said Maniwel, with half-humorous encouragement.

"He comes off a black moor, Maniwel," said the old woman. "Them of his breed isn't to be trusted. They're slippy as eels, and cunning as foxes, and their heart's nowt but a bog. They're t' devil's own childer from t' start...!"

"Why, now, I think that's as far as we need go, mother," Maniwel interrupted with a twinkle in his eye; "for if we went further we could hardly fare worse. I reckon if he was t' devil's own bairn from t' start it's time he had a step-father, and as there's nob'dy else willing it'll ha' to be me.

"I may ha' been a bit hasty, Jagger, i' offering brass 'at didn't belong to me, but if we lose it I'll try to make it up to you, lad; and if I can't you'll none bear me a grudge. I can't fairly put into words what's at t' back o' my mind, but yon lad's nob'dy akin to him by what I can make out, and this is t' last chance there'll be for a good while o' showing him a kindness. He'll ha' lots o' time for reckoning things up after a bit, and I could like him to think 'at he'd a friend 'at 'ud give him a hand and help him to keep straight when he came out. I could like better still, lad, to think 'at he'd a houseful o' friends."

He looked hard at his son, who avoided the glance and still looked gloomy.

"There's some men kindness won't cure," he growled.

"That's true," his father replied, "but you never know who they are. You've got to go on trying, same as t' doctors, and it's capping what bad cases pull round sometimes, if you've a bit o' patience. Now come, lad! you wouldn't have me go to Inman and say, 'I've been thinking t' thing over, and we're flayed if we bring you home you'll nobbut get worse, and mebbe smittle someb'dy else into t' bargain, so we've decided to leave you to t' prison doctor?'"

With a hasty exclamation Baldwin pushed back his chair and went out of doors, and Hannah smiled.

"It was getting over warm for him i' front o' t' fire," she remarked caustically. "*He's pulling round very slow.*"

"He's none that bad," said her grandmother, with a note of defiance in her voice.

“He’s none that good, neither,” returned Hannah. “It’ll take a deal o’ father’s honey to sweeten him to my taste.”

“Shut up, Hannah,” said her brother, who seemed relieved now that Baldwin was not present. “He’s making himself useful i’ t’ shop, and his temper’s improving. He’ll be going back to Keturah, let’s hope, when Inman’s out o’ t’ road. It’s *him* I’m bothered about. It’s all very well experimenting on t’ devil wi’ kindness, but what about Nancy? He’ll kill her!”

“I’ll go see t’ lass,” said his father, “and talk it over. She’d best go away while after t’ trial, happen.”

“You’ve no ’casion to bother,” returned his son; “I’ve seen her myself and she won’t budge. She’s as bad to move as you.”

“But as I’ve gotten her into t’ mess I must try to get her out,” said Maniwel. “She’ll be blaming me, and no wonder; but I doubt if t’ lass ’ud have me go back o’ my word. I’ll step across.”

“Please yourself,” said Jagger, “but she’s made her mind up. She’s staying where she is, choose what happens. I said Hannah ’ud sleep wi’ her, but she shook her head. She’s got it fixed in her mind that he’s too fond of his skin to hurt her—‘all for my-sen doesn’t put his neck in a noose,’ she says. And she won’t blame you, you’ll see. As like as not she’ll thank you.”

“Then it’ll be summat fresh,” said Maniwel, “and a change is good for everybody. We shall find some way out between us, I’ll warrant.”

## CHAPTER XXXI

IN WHICH WE TAKE LEAVE OF THE MEN OF MAWM

WHETHER it was fate or providence that led Maniwel Drake to risk his savings in order to procure for his enemy a few weeks liberty, who shall determine? When men are the sport of circumstances they cry, "Who can control his fate?" When kindly breezes bring them into the haven where they would be they talk smoothly of Providence. Theologians and philosophers have disputed over the terms in all ages; but amidst the clash of argument one truth stands out clearly—that a man inevitably reaps what he sows. Within a month Maniwel had lost his money and Inman his life.

"It wor fated to be so," said old Ambrose; but Jagger regarded it as an act of Providence.

Inman came home, to the surprise of his wife, who had not believed that his pride would suffer him to face his neighbours; and in the language that was current "brazened it out." His features were impassive, and there was a stern repelling look in his eyes that made men chary of seeking his company. He had no doubt formed his plans from the first, but he masked his intentions with guile and succeeded in disarming suspicion. With the men of Mawm it was in his favour that he paid no lip-service to the Drakes for the kindness they had done him, and avoided all communication with them.

His business seemed to occupy all his thoughts; and the arrangements he made for its continuance during the three years his lawyer told him he might expect to be away lacked nothing in completeness. He sat for hours with Nancy and Frank, looking into accounts and discussing possibilities with something like subdued zest; but he never once referred to the subject of his arrest and the circumstances that had led up to it; and Nancy told herself that the silence was portentous. She took the precaution to bolt her bedroom door at night and slept little.

Several weeks before his liberty was to end he disappeared in circumstances that made pursuit impossible—that made even his flight doubtful.

It was a cold April day, fitfully bright, with frequent showers of sleet. Towards the middle of the afternoon the wind brought up great banks of leaden cloud which discharged themselves in snow. Before nightfall a blizzard was raging with a severity that even Mawm found exceptional, and for eighteen hours there was no cessation of its fury. Huge drifts, in some cases ten feet deep, made the roads impassable, and the farmers' faces were clouded, for scores of ewes had perished in the storm together with their lambs, and foxes were busy in the poultry houses.

Inman was seen in the street before the snow came, and not until his dead body was found a fortnight later was it known for certain that he had planned an escape. He had pledged his word not to leave the village, and Stalker's successor was supposed to keep an observant eye on him; but there had been no definition of boundaries, so that there was always the possibility that he had been cut off by the storm and had found shelter in some upland farm with which there was no present means of communication.

Maniwel cherished no such hope. "He's gone, lad," he said to Jagger, and his son nodded.

"It can't be helped," he replied.

A farmer, seeking his dead sheep, found him when the thaw came, in a shallow depression not two yards deep, into which he had stumbled as he walked, doubtless with his head bent to the challenge of the rising gale, across the moor.

There he had lain, stunned and with a broken leg, less than twenty feet from the path by which he had entered Mawm a year and a half before, and there death had overtaken him. On his body was the evidence of his intention—notes and gold to a large amount which he had brought from their hiding-place, and with which, no doubt, he had hoped to start life afresh.

The village of Mawm has still the carpenter's shop, and the business is prosperous in a moderate way. Baldwin Briggs has an interest in it, but the name upon the sign-board is "Drake and Son." Little new machinery has been added, for though capital was not entirely lacking the Drakes have the conservatism of the Yorkshire countryman, and are afraid of moving too fast. They have "made brass" but not piled it up very high; yet there is enough and a little to spare, and Nancy Drake is satisfied. She has two children, sturdy boys both of them, who are the pride of their grandfather's heart, and a husband who grows more like his father every day. So Swithin says, and now that Ambrose, like grannie, sleeps lower down the valley there is no greater authority in Mawm.

Hannah and her father occupy the old home, and there is a rumour in the village that Jack Pearce would like to share it with them, or alternatively to take Hannah to one of his providing.

Baldwin and Keturah, too, are in familiar quarters. Nancy was glad to get away when Jagger married her, and he rented a good, square house across the stream where there is a garden for the children.

Baldwin has aged very much, and his temper is still occasionally raspy, but if he gives trouble it is only Keturah who knows it, and she is certainly no more fretful than before; indeed, there are those who assert that the fountain of her tears is

almost dry.

Fate or Providence? “I was against it at t’ time,” says Jagger. “It seemed like a fool’s trick, and it was a lot o’ brass to lose; but it was a providence for all that.”

Nancy says nothing.

THE END





## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Obvious misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where more than one spelling occurs, the majority used word was applied but archaic spellings, if used, were maintained. Author's consistent use of "my-sen" versus Yorkshire use of "mi sen" has been maintained.

Inconsistencies in punctuation have been maintained.

The author's use of contractions has been maintained with spaces removed where appropriate to conform to Yorkshire dialect: "for 't" to "for't", "on 't" to "on't", "in 't" to "in't", "to 't" to "to't", "of 't" to "of't", "t' other" to "t'other", "more 'n" to "more'n", wi' 't to wi't and all "'ll" contractions have been joined including "at 'll" to "at'll".

[The end of *Men of Mawm* by W. (William) Riley]