

Sylvia's Lovers — Volume 3 eBook

Sylvia's Lovers — Volume 3 by Elizabeth Gaskell

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HAPPY DAYS

And now Philip seemed as prosperous as his heart could desire. The business flourished, and money beyond his moderate wants came in. As for himself he required very little; but he had always looked forward to placing his idol in a befitting shrine; and means for this were now furnished to him. The dress, the comforts, the position he had desired for Sylvia were all hers. She did not need to do a stroke of household work if she preferred to 'sit in her parlour and sew up a seam'. Indeed Phoebe resented any interference in the domestic labour, which she had performed so long, that she looked upon the kitchen as a private empire of her own. 'Mrs Hepburn' (as Sylvia was now termed) had a good dark silk gown-piece in her drawers, as well as the poor dove-coloured, against the day when she chose to leave off mourning; and stuff for either gray or scarlet cloaks was hers at her bidding.

What she cared for far more were the comforts with which it was in her power to surround her mother. In this Philip vied with her; for besides his old love, and new pity for his aunt Bell, he never forgot how she had welcomed him to Haytersbank, and favoured his love to Sylvia, in the yearning days when he little hoped he should ever win his cousin to be his wife. But even if he had not had these grateful and affectionate feelings towards the poor woman, he would have done much for her if only to gain the sweet, rare smiles which his wife never bestowed upon him so freely as when she saw him attending to 'mother,' for so both of them now called Bell. For her creature comforts, her silk gowns, and her humble luxury, Sylvia did not care; Philip was almost annoyed at the indifference she often manifested to all his efforts to surround her with such things. It was even a hardship to her to leave off her country dress, her uncovered hair, her linsey petticoat, and loose bed-gown, and to don a stiff and stately gown for her morning dress. Sitting in the dark parlour at the back of the shop, and doing 'white work,' was much more wearying to her than running out into the fields to bring up the cows, or spinning wool, or making up butter. She sometimes thought to herself that it was a strange kind of life where there were no out-door animals to look after; the 'ox and the ass' had hitherto come into all her ideas of humanity; and her care and gentleness had made the dumb creatures round her father's home into mute friends with loving eyes, looking at her as if wistful to speak in words the grateful regard that she could read without the poor expression of language.

She missed the free open air, the great dome of sky above the fields; she rebelled against the necessity of 'dressing' (as she called it) to go out, although she acknowledged that it was a necessity where the first step beyond the threshold must be into a populous street.



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It is possible that Philip was right at one time when he had thought to win her by material advantages; but the old vanities had been burnt out of her by the hot iron of acute suffering. A great deal of passionate feeling still existed, concealed and latent; but at this period it appeared as though she were indifferent to most things, and had lost the power of either hoping or fearing much. She was stunned into a sort of temporary numbness on most points; those on which she was sensitive being such as referred to the injustice and oppression of her father's death, or anything that concerned her mother.

She was quiet even to passiveness in all her dealings with Philip; he would have given not a little for some of the old bursts of impatience, the old pettishness, which, naughty as they were, had gone to form his idea of the former Sylvia. Once or twice he was almost vexed with her for her docility; he wanted her so much to have a will of her own, if only that he might know how to rouse her to pleasure by gratifying it. Indeed he seldom fell asleep at nights without his last thoughts being devoted to some little plan for the morrow, that he fancied she would like; and when he wakened in the early dawn he looked to see if she were indeed sleeping by his side, or whether it was not all a dream that he called Sylvia 'wife.'

He was aware that her affection for him was not to be spoken of in the same way as his for her, but he found much happiness in only being allowed to love and cherish her; and with the patient perseverance that was one remarkable feature in his character, he went on striving to deepen and increase her love when most other men would have given up the endeavour, made themselves content with half a heart, and turned to some other object of attainment. All this time Philip was troubled by a dream that recurred whenever he was over-fatigued, or otherwise not in perfect health. Over and over again in this first year of married life he dreamt this dream; perhaps as many as eight or nine times, and it never varied. It was always of Kinraid's return; Kinraid was full of life in Philip's dream, though in his waking hours he could and did convince himself by all the laws of probability that his rival was dead. He never remembered the exact sequence of events in that terrible dream after he had roused himself, with a fight and a struggle, from his feverish slumbers. He was generally sitting up in bed when he found himself conscious, his heart beating wildly, with a conviction of Kinraid's living presence somewhere near him in the darkness. Occasionally Sylvia was disturbed by his agitation, and would question him about his dreams, having, like most of her class at that time, great faith in their prophetic interpretation; but Philip never gave her any truth in his reply.

After all, and though he did not acknowledge it even to himself, the long-desired happiness was not so delicious and perfect as he had anticipated. Many have felt the same in their first year of married life; but the faithful, patient nature that still works on, striving to gain love, and capable itself of steady love all the while, is a gift not given to all.

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For many weeks after their wedding, Kester never came near them: a chance word or two from Sylvia showed Philip that she had noticed this and regretted it; and, accordingly, he made it his business at the next leisure opportunity to go to Haytersbank (never saying a word to his wife of his purpose), and seek out Kester.

All the whole place was altered! It was new white-washed, new thatched: the patches of colour in the surrounding ground were changed with altered tillage; the great geraniums were gone from the window, and instead, was a smart knitted blind. Children played before the house-door; a dog lying on the step flew at Philip; all was so strange, that it was even the strangest thing of all for Kester to appear where everything else was so altered!

Philip had to put up with a good deal of crabbed behaviour on the part of the latter before he could induce Kester to promise to come down into the town and see Sylvia in her new home.

Somehow, the visit when paid was but a failure; at least, it seemed so at the time, though probably it broke the ice of restraint which was forming over the familiar intercourse between Kester and Sylvia. The old servant was daunted by seeing Sylvia in a strange place, and stood, sleeking his hair down, and furtively looking about him, instead of seating himself on the chair Sylvia had so eagerly brought forward for him.

Then his sense of the estrangement caused by their new positions infected her, and she began to cry pitifully, saying,—

'Oh, Kester! Kester! tell me about Haytersbank! Is it just as it used to be in feyther's days?'

'Well, a cannot say as it is,' said Kester, thankful to have a subject started. 'They'n pleughed up t' oud pasture-field, and are settin' it for 'taters. They're not for much cattle, isn't Higginses. They'll be for corn in t' next year, a reckon, and they'll just ha' their pains for their payment. But they're allays so pig-headed, is folk fra' a distance.'

So they went on discoursing on Haytersbank and the old days, till Bell Robson, having finished her afternoon nap, came slowly down-stairs to join them; and after that the conversation became so broken up, from the desire of the other two to attend and reply as best they could to her fragmentary and disjointed talk, that Kester took his leave before long; falling, as he did so, into the formal and unnaturally respectful manner which he had adopted on first coming in.

But Sylvia ran after him, and brought him back from the door.

'To think of thy going away, Kester, without either bit or drink; nay, come back wi' thee, and taste wine and cake.'



Kester stood at the door, half shy, half pleased, while Sylvia, in all the glow and hurry of a young housekeeper's hospitality, sought for the decanter of wine, and a wine-glass in the corner cupboard, and hastily cut an immense wedge of cake, which she crammed into his hand in spite of his remonstrances; and then she poured him out an overflowing glass of wine, which Kester would far rather have gone without, as he knew manners too well to suppose that he might taste it without having gone through the preliminary ceremony of wishing the donor health and happiness. He stood red and half smiling, with his cake in one hand, his wine in the other, and then began,—



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'Long may ye live,
Happy may ye be,
And blest with a num'rous
Pro-ge-ny.'

'Theere, that's po'try for yo' as I larnt i' my youth. But there's a deal to be said as cannot be put int' po'try, an' yet a cannot say it, somehow. It 'd tax a parson t' say a' as a've gotten i' my mind. It's like a heap o' woo' just after shearin' time; it's worth a deal, but it tak's a vast o' combin', an' cardin', an' spinnin' afore it can be made use on. If a were up to t' use o' words, a could say a mighty deal; but somehow a'm tongue-teed when a come to want my words most, so a'll only just mak' bold t' say as a think yo've done pretty well for yo'rsel', gotten a house-full o' furniture' (looking around him as he said this), 'an' vittle an' clothin' for t' axing, belike, an' a home for t' missus in her time o' need; an' mebbe not such a bad husband as a once thought yon man 'ud mak'; a'm not above sayin' as he's, mebbe, better nor a took him for;—so here's to ye both, and wishin' ye health and happiness, ay, and money to buy yo' another, as country folk say.'

Having ended his oration, much to his own satisfaction, Kester tossed off his glass of wine, smacked his lips, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, pocketed his cake, and made off.

That night Sylvia spoke of his visit to her husband. Philip never said how he himself had brought it to pass, nor did he name the fact that he had heard the old man come in just as he himself had intended going into the parlour for tea, but had kept away, as he thought Sylvia and Kester would most enjoy their interview undisturbed. And Sylvia felt as if her husband's silence was unsympathizing, and shut up the feelings that were just beginning to expand towards him. She sank again into the listless state of indifference from which nothing but some reference to former days, or present consideration for her mother, could rouse her.

Hester was almost surprised at Sylvia's evident liking for her. By slow degrees Hester was learning to love the woman, whose position as Philip's wife she would have envied so keenly had she not been so truly good and pious. But Sylvia seemed as though she had given Hester her whole affection all at once. Hester could not understand this, while she was touched and melted by the trust it implied. For one thing Sylvia remembered and regretted—her harsh treatment of Hester the rainy, stormy night on which the latter had come to Haytersbank to seek her and her mother, and bring them into Monkshaven to see the imprisoned father and husband. Sylvia had been struck with Hester's patient endurance of her rudeness, a rudeness which she was conscious that she herself should have immediately and vehemently resented. Sylvia did not understand how a totally different character from hers might immediately forgive the anger she could not forget; and because Hester had been so meek at the time, Sylvia, who knew how passing and transitory was her own anger, thought that all was forgotten; while Hester believed that the words, which she herself could not have uttered except

under deep provocation, meant much more than they did, and admired and wondered at Sylvia for having so entirely conquered her anger against her.

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Again, the two different women were divergently affected by the extreme fondness which Bell had shown towards Hester ever since Sylvia's wedding-day. Sylvia, who had always received more love from others than she knew what to do with, had the most entire faith in her own supremacy in her mother's heart, though at times Hester would do certain things more to the poor old woman's satisfaction. Hester, who had craved for the affection which had been withheld from her, and had from that one circumstance become distrustful of her own power of inspiring regard, while she exaggerated the delight of being beloved, feared lest Sylvia should become jealous of her mother's open display of great attachment and occasional preference for Hester. But such a thought never entered Sylvia's mind. She was more thankful than she knew how to express towards any one who made her mother happy; as has been already said, the contributing to Bell Robson's pleasures earned Philip more of his wife's smiles than anything else. And Sylvia threw her whole heart into the words and caresses she lavished on Hester whenever poor Mrs. Robson spoke of the goodness and kindness of the latter. Hester attributed more virtue to these sweet words and deeds of gratitude than they deserved; they did not imply in Sylvia any victory over evil temptation, as they would have done in Hester.

It seemed to be Sylvia's fate to captivate more people than she cared to like back again. She turned the heads of John and Jeremiah Foster, who could hardly congratulate Philip enough on his choice of a wife.

They had been prepared to be critical on one who had interfered with their favourite project of a marriage between Philip and Hester; and, though full of compassion for the cruelty of Daniel Robson's fate, they were too completely men of business not to have some apprehension that the connection of Philip Hepburn with the daughter of a man who was hanged, might injure the shop over which both his and their name appeared. But all the possible proprieties demanded that they should pay attention to the bride of their former shopman and present successor; and the very first visitors whom Sylvia had received after her marriage had been John and Jeremiah Foster, in their sabbath-day clothes. They found her in the parlour (so familiar to both of them!) clear-starching her mother's caps, which had to be got up in some particular fashion that Sylvia was afraid of dictating to Phoebe.

She was a little disturbed at her visitors discovering her at this employment; but she was on her own ground, and that gave her self-possession; and she welcomed the two old men so sweetly and modestly, and looked so pretty and feminine, and, besides, so notable in her handiwork, that she conquered all their prejudices at one blow; and their first thought on leaving the shop was how to do her honour, by inviting her to a supper party at Jeremiah Foster's house.

Sylvia was dismayed when she was bidden to this wedding feast, and Philip had to use all his authority, though tenderly, to make her consent to go at all. She had been to

merry country parties like the Corneys', and to bright haymaking romps in the open air; but never to a set stately party at a friend's house.



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She would fain have made attendance on her mother an excuse; but Philip knew he must not listen to any such plea, and applied to Hester in the dilemma, asking her to remain with Mrs. Robson while he and Sylvia went out visiting; and Hester had willingly, nay, eagerly consented—it was much more to her taste than going out.

So Philip and Sylvia set out, arm-in-arm, down Bridge Street, across the bridge, and then clambered up the hill. On the way he gave her the directions she asked for about her behaviour as bride and most honoured guest; and altogether succeeded, against his intention and will, in frightening her so completely as to the grandeur and importance of the occasion, and the necessity of remembering certain set rules, and making certain set speeches and attending to them when the right time came, that, if any one so naturally graceful could have been awkward, Sylvia would have been so that night.

As it was, she sat, pale and weary-looking, on the very edge of her chair; she uttered the formal words which Philip had told her were appropriate to the occasion, and she heartily wished herself safe at home and in bed. Yet she left but one unanimous impression on the company when she went away, namely, that she was the prettiest and best-behaved woman they had ever seen, and that Philip Hepburn had done well in choosing her, felon's daughter though she might be.

Both the hosts had followed her into the lobby to help Philip in cloaking her, and putting on her pattens. They were full of old-fashioned compliments and good wishes; one speech of theirs came up to her memory in future years:—

'Now, Sylvia Hepburn,' said Jeremiah, 'I've known thy husband long, and I don't say but what thou hast done well in choosing him; but if he ever neglects or ill-uses thee, come to me, and I'll give him a sound lecture on his conduct. Mind, I'm thy friend from this day forrards, and ready to take thy part against him!'

Philip smiled as if the day would never come when he should neglect or ill-use his darling; Sylvia smiled a little, without much attending to, or caring for, the words that were detaining her, tired as she was; John and Jeremiah chuckled over the joke; but the words came up again in after days, as words idly spoken sometimes do.

Before the end of that first year, Philip had learnt to be jealous of his wife's new love for Hester. To the latter, Sylvia gave the free confidence on many things which Philip fancied she withheld from him. A suspicion crossed his mind, from time to time, that Sylvia might speak of her former lover to Hester. It would be not unnatural, he thought, if she did so, believing him to be dead; but the idea irritated him.

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He was entirely mistaken, however; Sylvia, with all her apparent frankness, kept her deep sorrows to herself. She never mentioned her father's name, though he was continually present to her mind. Nor did she speak of Kinraid to human being, though, for his sake, her voice softened when, by chance, she spoke to a passing sailor; and for his sake her eyes lingered on such men longer than on others, trying to discover in them something of the old familiar gait; and partly for his dead sake, and partly because of the freedom of the outlook and the freshness of the air, she was glad occasionally to escape from the comfortable imprisonment of her 'parlour', and the close streets around the market-place, and to mount the cliffs and sit on the turf, gazing abroad over the wide still expanse of the open sea; for, at that height, even breaking waves only looked like broken lines of white foam on the blue watery plain.

She did not want any companion on these rambles, which had somewhat of the delight of stolen pleasures; for all the other respectable matrons and town-dwellers whom she knew were content to have always a business object for their walk, or else to stop at home in their own households; and Sylvia was rather ashamed of her own yearnings for solitude and open air, and the sight and sound of the mother-like sea. She used to take off her hat, and sit there, her hands clasping her knees, the salt air lifting her bright curls, gazing at the distant horizon over the sea, in a sad dreaminess of thought; if she had been asked on what she meditated, she could not have told you.

But, by-and-by, the time came when she was a prisoner in the house; a prisoner in her room, lying in bed with a little baby by her side—her child, Philip's child. His pride, his delight knew no bounds; this was a new fast tie between them; this would reconcile her to the kind of life that, with all its respectability and comfort, was so different from what she had lived before, and which Philip had often perceived that she felt to be dull and restraining. He already began to trace in the little girl, only a few days old, the lovely curves that he knew so well by heart in the mother's face. Sylvia, too, pale, still, and weak, was very happy; yes, really happy for the first time since her irrevocable marriage. For its irrevocableness had weighed much upon her with a sense of dull hopelessness; she felt all Philip's kindness, she was grateful to him for his tender regard towards her mother, she was learning to love him as well as to like and respect him. She did not know what else she could have done but marry so true a friend, and she and her mother so friendless; but, at the same time, it was like lead on her morning spirits when she awoke and remembered that the decision was made, the deed was done, the choice taken which comes to most people but once in their lives. Now the little baby came in upon this state of mind like a ray of sunlight into a gloomy room.



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Even her mother was rejoiced and proud; even with her crazed brain and broken heart, the sight of sweet, peaceful infancy brought light to her. All the old ways of holding a baby, of hushing it to sleep, of tenderly guarding its little limbs from injury, came back, like the habits of her youth, to Bell; and she was never so happy or so easy in her mind, or so sensible and connected in her ideas, as when she had Sylvia's baby in her arms.

It was a pretty sight to see, however familiar to all of us such things may be—the pale, worn old woman, in her quaint, old-fashioned country dress, holding the little infant on her knees, looking at its open, unspeculative eyes, and talking the little language to it as though it could understand; the father on his knees, kept prisoner by a small, small finger curled round his strong and sinewy one, and gazing at the tiny creature with wondering idolatry; the young mother, fair, pale, and smiling, propped up on pillows in order that she, too, might see the wonderful babe; it was astonishing how the doctor could come and go without being drawn into the admiring vortex, and look at this baby just as if babies came into the world every day.

'Philip,' said Sylvia, one night, as he sate as still as a mouse in her room, imagining her to be asleep. He was by her bed-side in a moment.

'I've been thinking what she's to be called. Isabella, after mother; and what were yo'r mother's name?'

'Margaret,' said he.

'Margaret Isabella; Isabella Margaret. Mother's called Bell. She might be called Bella.'

'I could ha' wished her to be called after thee.'

She made a little impatient movement.

'Nay; Sylvia's not a lucky name. Best be called after thy mother and mine. And I want for to ask Hester to be godmother.'

'Anything thou likes, sweetheart. Shall we call her Rose, after Hester Rose?'

'No, no!' said Sylvia; 'she mun be called after my mother, or thine, or both. I should like her to be called Bella, after mother, because she's so fond of baby.'

'Anything to please thee, darling.'

'Don't say that as if it didn't signify; there's a deal in having a pretty name,' said Sylvia, a little annoyed. 'I ha' allays hated being called Sylvia. It were after father's mother, Sylvia Steele.'



'I niver thought any name in a' the world so sweet and pretty as Sylvia,' said Philip, fondly; but she was too much absorbed in her own thoughts to notice either his manner or his words.

'There, yo'll not mind if it is Bella, because yo' see my mother is alive to be pleased by its being named after her, and Hester may be godmother, and I'll ha' t' dove-coloured silk as yo' gave me afore we were married made up into a cloak for it to go to church in.'

'I got it for thee,' said Philip, a little disappointed. 'It'll be too good for the baby.'

'Eh! but I'm so careless, I should be spilling something on it? But if thou got it for me I cannot find i' my heart for t' wear it on baby, and I'll have it made into a christening gown for mysel'. But I'll niver feel at my ease in it, for fear of spoiling it.'



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'Well! an' if thou does spoil it, love, I'll get thee another. I make account of riches only for thee; that I may be able to get thee whatever thou's a fancy for, for either thysel', or thy mother.'

She lifted her pale face from her pillow, and put up her lips to kiss him for these words.

Perhaps on that day Philip reached the zenith of his life's happiness.

CHAPTER XXXI

EVIL OMENS

The first step in Philip's declension happened in this way. Sylvia had made rapid progress in her recovery; but now she seemed at a stationary point of weakness; wakeful nights succeeding to languid days. Occasionally she caught a little sleep in the afternoons, but she usually awoke startled and feverish.

One afternoon Philip had stolen upstairs to look at her and his child; but the efforts he made at careful noiselessness made the door creak on its hinges as he opened it. The woman employed to nurse her had taken the baby into another room that no sound might rouse her from her slumber; and Philip would probably have been warned against entering the chamber where his wife lay sleeping had he been perceived by the nurse. As it was, he opened the door, made a noise, and Sylvia started up, her face all one flush, her eyes wild and uncertain; she looked about her as if she did not know where she was; pushed the hair off her hot forehead; all which actions Philip saw, dismayed and regretful. But he kept still, hoping that she would lie down and compose herself. Instead she stretched out her arms imploringly, and said, in a voice full of yearning and tears,—

'Oh! Charley! come to me—come to me!' and then as she more fully became aware of the place where she was, her actual situation, she sank back and feebly began to cry. Philip's heart boiled within him; any man's would under the circumstances, but he had the sense of guilty concealment to aggravate the intensity of his feelings. Her weak cry after another man, too, irritated him, partly through his anxious love, which made him wise to know how much physical harm she was doing herself. At this moment he stirred, or unintentionally made some sound: she started up afresh, and called out,—

'Oh, who's there? Do, for God's sake, tell me who yo' are!'

'It's me,' said Philip, coming forwards, striving to keep down the miserable complication of love and jealousy, and remorse and anger, that made his heart beat so wildly, and almost took him out of himself. Indeed, he must have been quite beside himself for the time, or he could never have gone on to utter the unwise, cruel words he did. But she spoke first, in a distressed and plaintive tone of voice.



'Oh, Philip, I've been asleep, and yet I think I was awake! And I saw Charley Kinraid as plain as iver I see thee now, and he wasn't drowned at all. I'm sure he's alive somewheere; he were so clear and life-like. Oh! what shall I do? what shall I do?'



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She wrung her hands in feverish distress. Urged by passionate feelings of various kinds, and also by his desire to quench the agitation which was doing her harm, Philip spoke, hardly knowing what he said.

'Kinraid's dead, I tell yo', Sylvie! And what kind of a woman are yo' to go dreaming of another man i' this way, and taking on so about him, when yo're a wedded wife, with a child as yo've borne to another man?'

In a moment he could have bitten out his tongue. She looked at him with the mute reproach which some of us see (God help us!) in the eyes of the dead, as they come before our sad memories in the night-season; looked at him with such a solemn, searching look, never saying a word of reply or defence. Then she lay down, motionless and silent. He had been instantly stung with remorse for his speech; the words were not beyond his lips when an agony had entered his heart; but her steady, dilated eyes had kept him dumb and motionless as if by a spell.

Now he rushed to the bed on which she lay, and half knelt, half threw himself upon it, imploring her to forgive him; regardless for the time of any evil consequences to her, it seemed as if he must have her pardon—her relenting—at any price, even if they both died in the act of reconciliation. But she lay speechless, and, as far as she could be, motionless, the bed trembling under her with the quivering she could not still.

Philip's wild tones caught the nurse's ears, and she entered full of the dignified indignation of wisdom.

'Are yo' for killing yo'r wife, measter?' she asked. 'She's noane so strong as she can bear flytin' and scoldin', nor will she be for many a week to come. Go down wi' ye, and leave her i' peace if yo're a man as can be called a man!'

Her anger was rising as she caught sight of Sylvia's averted face. It was flushed crimson, her eyes full of intense emotion of some kind, her lips compressed; but an involuntary twitching overmastering her resolute stillness from time to time. Philip, who did not see the averted face, nor understand the real danger in which he was placing his wife, felt as though he must have one word, one responsive touch of the hand which lay passive in his, which was not even drawn away from the kisses with which he covered it, any more than if it had been an impassive stone. The nurse had fairly to take him by the shoulders, and turn him out of the room.

In half an hour the doctor had to be summoned. Of course, the nurse gave him her version of the events of the afternoon, with much *animus* against Philip; and the doctor thought it his duty to have some very serious conversation with him.



'I do assure you, Mr. Hepburn, that, in the state your wife has been in for some days, it was little less than madness on your part to speak to her about anything that could give rise to strong emotion.'

'It was madness, sir!' replied Philip, in a low, miserable tone of voice. The doctor's heart was touched, in spite of the nurse's accusations against the scolding husband. Yet the danger was now too serious for him to mince matters.



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'I must tell you that I cannot answer for her life, unless the greatest precautions are taken on your part, and unless the measures I shall use have the effect I wish for in the next twenty-four hours. She is on the verge of a brain fever. Any allusion to the subject which has been the final cause of the state in which she now is must be most cautiously avoided, even to a chance word which may bring it to her memory.'

And so on; but Philip seemed to hear only this: then he might not express contrition, or sue for pardon, he must go on unforgiven through all this stress of anxiety; and even if she recovered the doctor warned him of the undesirableness of recurring to what had passed!

Heavy miserable times of endurance and waiting have to be passed through by all during the course of their lives; and Philip had had his share of such seasons, when the heart, and the will, and the speech, and the limbs, must be bound down with strong resolution to patience.

For many days, nay, for weeks, he was forbidden to see Sylvia, as the very sound of his footstep brought on a recurrence of the fever and convulsive movement. Yet she seemed, from questions she feebly asked the nurse, to have forgotten all that had happened on the day of her attack from the time when she dropped off to sleep. But how much she remembered of after occurrences no one could ascertain. She was quiet enough when, at length, Philip was allowed to see her. But he was half jealous of his child, when he watched how she could smile at it, while she never changed a muscle of her face at all he could do or say.

And of a piece with this extreme quietude and reserve was her behaviour to him when at length she had fully recovered, and was able to go about the house again. Philip thought many a time of the words she had used long before—before their marriage. Ominous words they were.

'It's not in me to forgive; I sometimes think it's not in me to forget.'

Philip was tender even to humility in his conduct towards her. But nothing stirred her from her fortress of reserve. And he knew she was so different; he knew how loving, nay, passionate, was her nature—vehement, demonstrative—oh! how could he stir her once more into expression, even if the first show or speech she made was of anger? Then he tried being angry with her himself; he was sometimes unjust to her consciously and of a purpose, in order to provoke her into defending herself, and appealing against his unkindness. He only seemed to drive her love away still more.

If any one had known all that was passing in that household, while yet the story of it was not ended, nor, indeed, come to its crisis, their hearts would have been sorry for the man who lingered long at the door of the room in which his wife sate cooing and talking to her baby, and sometimes laughing back to it, or who was soothing the querulousness



of failing age with every possible patience of love; sorry for the poor listener who was
hungering for the profusion of tenderness thus scattered on the senseless air, yet only
by stealth caught the echoes of what ought to have been his.



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It was so difficult to complain, too; impossible, in fact. Everything that a wife could do from duty she did; but the love seemed to have fled, and, in such cases, no reproaches or complaints can avail to bring it back. So reason outsiders, and are convinced of the result before the experiment is made. But Philip could not reason, or could not yield to reason; and so he complained and reproached. She did not much answer him; but he thought that her eyes expressed the old words,-

'It's not in me to forgive; I sometimes think it's not in me to forget.'

However, it is an old story, an ascertained fact, that, even in the most tender and stable masculine natures, at the supremest season of their lives, there is room for other thoughts and passions than such as are connected with love. Even with the most domestic and affectionate men, their emotions seem to be kept in a cell distinct and away from their actual lives. Philip had other thoughts and other occupations than those connected with his wife during all this time.

An uncle of his mother's, a Cumberland 'statesman', of whose existence he was barely conscious, died about this time, leaving to his unknown great-nephew four or five hundred pounds, which put him at once in a different position with regard to his business. Henceforward his ambition was roused,—such humble ambition as befitted a shop-keeper in a country town sixty or seventy years ago. To be respected by the men around him had always been an object with him, and was, perhaps, becoming more so than ever now, as a sort of refuge from his deep, sorrowful mortification in other directions. He was greatly pleased at being made a sidesman; and, in preparation for the further honour of being churchwarden, he went regularly twice a day to church on Sundays. There was enough religious feeling in him to make him disguise the worldly reason for such conduct from himself. He believed that he went because he thought it right to attend public worship in the parish church whenever it was offered up; but it may be questioned of him, as of many others, how far he would have been as regular in attendance in a place where he was not known. With this, however, we have nothing to do. The fact was that he went regularly to church, and he wished his wife to accompany him to the pew, newly painted, with his name on the door, where he sate in full sight of the clergyman and congregation.

Sylvia had never been in the habit of such regular church-going, and she felt it as a hardship, and slipped out of the duty as often as ever she could. In her unmarried days, she and her parents had gone annually to the mother-church of the parish in which Haytersbank was situated: on the Monday succeeding the Sunday next after the Romish Saint's Day, to whom the church was dedicated, there was a great feast or wake held; and, on the Sunday, all the parishioners came to church from far and near. Frequently, too, in the course of the year, Sylvia would accompany one or other of her parents to Scarby Moorside afternoon service,—when the hay was got in, and the corn not ready for cutting, or the cows were dry and there was no afternoon milking. Many

clergymen were languid in those days, and did not too curiously inquire into the reasons which gave them such small congregations in country parishes.

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Now she was married, this weekly church-going which Philip seemed to expect from her, became a tie and a small hardship, which connected itself with her life of respectability and prosperity. 'A crust of bread and liberty' was much more accordant to Sylvia's nature than plenty of creature comforts and many restraints. Another wish of Philip's, against which she said no word, but constantly rebelled in thought and deed, was his desire that the servant he had engaged during the time of her illness to take charge of the baby, should always carry it whenever it was taken out for a walk. Sylvia often felt, now she was strong, as if she would far rather have been without the responsibility of having this nursemaid, of whom she was, in reality, rather afraid. The good side of it was that it set her at liberty to attend to her mother at times when she would have been otherwise occupied with her baby; but Bell required very little from any one: she was easily pleased, unexact, and methodical even in her dotage; preserving the quiet, undemonstrative habits of her earlier life now that the faculty of reason, which had been at the basis of the formation of such habits, was gone. She took great delight in watching the baby, and was pleased to have it in her care for a short time; but she dozed so much that it prevented her having any strong wish on the subject.

So Sylvia contrived to get her baby as much as possible to herself, in spite of the nursemaid; and, above all, she would carry it out, softly cradled in her arms, warm pillowed on her breast, and bear it to the freedom and solitude of the sea-shore on the west side of the town where the cliffs were not so high, and there was a good space of sand and shingle at all low tides.

Once here, she was as happy as she ever expected to be in this world. The fresh sea-breeze restored something of the colour of former days to her cheeks, the old buoyancy to her spirits; here she might talk her heart-full of loving nonsense to her baby; here it was all her own; no father to share in it, no nursemaid to dispute the wisdom of anything she did with it. She sang to it, she tossed it; it crowed and it laughed back again, till both were weary; and then she would sit down on a broken piece of rock, and fall to gazing on the advancing waves catching the sunlight on their crests, advancing, receding, for ever and for ever, as they had done all her life long—as they did when she had walked with them that once by the side of Kinraid; those cruel waves that, forgetful of the happy lovers' talk by the side of their waters, had carried one away, and drowned him deep till he was dead. Every time she sate down to look at the sea, this process of thought was gone through up to this point; the next step would, she knew, bring her to the question she dared not, must not ask. He was dead; he must be dead; for was she not Philip's wife? Then came up the recollection of Philip's speech, never forgotten,



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only buried out of sight: 'What kind of a woman are yo' to go on dreaming of another man, and yo' a wedded wife?' She used to shudder as if cold steel had been plunged into her warm, living body as she remembered these words; cruel words, harmlessly provoked. They were too much associated with physical pains to be dwelt upon; only their memory was always there. She paid for these happy rambles with her baby by the depression which awaited her on her re-entrance into the dark, confined house that was her home; its very fulness of comfort was an oppression. Then, when her husband saw her pale and fatigued, he was annoyed, and sometimes upbraided her for doing what was so unnecessary as to load herself with her child. She knew full well it was not that that caused her weariness. By-and-by, when he inquired and discovered that all these walks were taken in one direction, out towards the sea, he grew jealous of her love for the inanimate ocean. Was it connected in her mind with the thought of Kinraid? Why did she so perseveringly, in wind or cold, go out to the sea-shore; the western side, too, where, if she went but far enough, she would come upon the mouth of the Haytersbank gully, the point at which she had last seen Kinraid? Such fancies haunted Philip's mind for hours after she had acknowledged the direction of her walks. But he never said a word that could distinctly tell her he disliked her going to the sea, otherwise she would have obeyed him in this, as in everything else; for absolute obedience to her husband seemed to be her rule of life at this period—obedience to him who would so gladly have obeyed her smallest wish had she but expressed it! She never knew that Philip had any painful association with the particular point on the sea-shore that she instinctively avoided, both from a consciousness of wifely duty, and also because the sight of it brought up so much sharp pain.

Philip used to wonder if the dream that preceded her illness was the suggestive cause that drew her so often to the shore. Her illness consequent upon that dream had filled his mind, so that for many months he himself had had no haunting vision of Kinraid to disturb his slumbers. But now the old dream of Kinraid's actual presence by Philip's bedside began to return with fearful vividness. Night after night it recurred; each time with some new touch of reality, and close approach; till it was as if the fate that overtakes all men were then, even then, knocking at his door.

In his business Philip prospered. Men praised him because he did well to himself. He had the perseverance, the capability for head-work and calculation, the steadiness and general forethought which might have made him a great merchant if he had lived in a large city. Without any effort of his own, almost, too, without Coulson's being aware of it, Philip was now in the position of superior partner; the one to suggest and arrange, while Coulson only carried out the plans that emanated from Philip. The whole



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work of life was suited to the man: he did not aspire to any different position, only to the full development of the capabilities of that which he already held. He had originated several fresh schemes with regard to the traffic of the shop; and his old masters, with all their love of tried ways, and distrust of everything new, had been candid enough to confess that their successors' plans had resulted in success. 'Their successors.' Philip was content with having the power when the exercise of it was required, and never named his own important share in the new improvements. Possibly, if he had, Coulson's vanity might have taken the alarm, and he might not have been so acquiescent for the future. As it was, he forgot his own subordinate share, and always used the imperial 'we', 'we thought', 'it struck us,' &c.

CHAPTER XXXII

RESCUED FROM THE WAVES

Meanwhile Hester came and went as usual; in so quiet and methodical a way, with so even and undisturbed a temper, that she was almost forgotten when everything went well in the shop or household. She was a star, the brightness of which was only recognized in times of darkness. She herself was almost surprised at her own increasing regard for Sylvia. She had not thought she should ever be able to love the woman who had been such a laggard in acknowledging Philip's merits; and from all she had ever heard of Sylvia before she came to know her, from the angry words with which Sylvia had received her when she had first gone to Haytersbank Farm, Hester had intended to remain on friendly terms, but to avoid intimacy. But her kindness to Bell Robson had won both the mother's and daughter's hearts; and in spite of herself, certainly against her own mother's advice, she had become the familiar friend and welcome guest of the household.

Now the very change in Sylvia's whole manner and ways, which grieved and vexed Philip, made his wife the more attractive to Hester. Brought up among Quakers, although not one herself, she admired and respected the staidness and outward peacefulness common amongst the young women of that sect. Sylvia, whom she had expected to find volatile, talkative, vain, and wilful, was quiet and still, as if she had been born a Friend: she seemed to have no will of her own; she served her mother and child for love; she obeyed her husband in all things, and never appeared to pine after gaiety or pleasure. And yet at times Hester thought, or rather a flash came across her mind, as if all things were not as right as they seemed. Philip looked older, more care-worn; nay, even Hester was obliged to allow to herself that she had heard him speak to his wife in sharp, aggrieved tones. Innocent Hester! she could not understand how the very qualities she so admired in Sylvia were just what were so foreign to her nature that the husband, who had known her from a child, felt what an unnatural restraint she was

putting upon herself, and would have hailed petulant words or wilful actions with an unspeakable thankfulness for relief.



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One day—it was in the spring of 1798—Hester was engaged to stay to tea with the Hepburns, in order that after that early meal she might set to again in helping Philip and Coulson to pack away the winter cloths and flannels, for which there was no longer any use. The tea-time was half-past four; about four o'clock a heavy April shower came on, the hail pattering against the window-panes so as to awaken Mrs. Robson from her afternoon's nap. She came down the corkscrew stairs, and found Phoebe in the parlour arranging the tea-things.

Phoebe and Mrs. Robson were better friends than Phoebe and her young mistress; and so they began to talk a little together in a comfortable, familiar way. Once or twice Philip looked in, as if he would be glad to see the tea-table in readiness; and then Phoebe would put on a spurt of busy bustle, which ceased almost as soon as his back was turned, so eager was she to obtain Mrs. Robson's sympathy in some little dispute that had occurred between her and the nurse-maid. The latter had misappropriated some hot water, prepared and required by Phoebe, to the washing of the baby's clothes; it was a long story, and would have tired the patience of any one in full possession of their senses; but the details were just within poor Bell's comprehension, and she was listening with the greatest sympathy. Both the women were unaware of the lapse of time; but it was of consequence to Philip, as the extra labour was not to be begun until after tea, and the daylight hours were precious.

At a quarter to five Hester and he came in, and then Phoebe began to hurry. Hester went up to sit by Bell and talk to her. Philip spoke to Phoebe in the familiar words of country-folk. Indeed, until his marriage, Phoebe had always called him by his Christian name, and had found it very difficult to change it into 'master.'

'Where's Sylvie?' said he.

'Gone out wi' t' babby,' replied Phoebe.

'Why can't Nancy carry it out?' asked Philip.

It was touching on the old grievance: he was tired, and he spoke with sharp annoyance. Phoebe might easily have told him the real state of the case; Nancy was busy at her washing, which would have been reason enough. But the nursemaid had vexed her, and she did not like Philip's sharpness, so she only said,—

'It's noane o' my business; it's yo' t' look after yo'r own wife and child; but yo'r but a lad after a.'

This was not conciliatory speech, and just put the last stroke to Philip's fit of ill-temper.



'I'm not for my tea to-night,' said he, to Hester, when all was ready. 'Sylvie's not here, and nothing is nice, or as it should be. I'll go and set to on t' stock-taking. Don't yo' hurry, Hester; stop and chat a bit with th' old lady.'

'Nay, Philip,' said Hester, 'thou's sadly tired; just take this cup o' tea; Sylvia 'll be grieved if yo' haven't something.'

'Sylvia doesn't care whether I'm full or fasting,' replied he, impatiently putting aside the cup. 'If she did she'd ha' taken care to be in, and ha' seen to things being as I like them.'



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Now in general Philip was the least particular of men about meals; and to do Sylvia justice, she was scrupulously attentive to every household duty in which old Phoebe would allow her to meddle, and always careful to see after her husband's comforts. But Philip was too vexed at her absence to perceive the injustice of what he was saying, nor was he aware how Bell Robson had been attending to what he said. But she was sadly discomfited by it, understanding just enough of the grievance in hand to think that her daughter was neglectful of those duties which she herself had always regarded as paramount to all others; nor could Hester convince her that Philip had not meant what he said; neither could she turn the poor old woman's thoughts from the words which had caused her distress.

Presently Sylvia came in, bright and cheerful, although breathless with hurry.

'Oh,' said she, taking off her wet shawl, 'we've had to shelter from such a storm of rain, baby and me—but see! she's none the worse for it, as bonny as iver, bless her.'

Hester began some speech of admiration for the child in order to prevent Bell from delivering the lecture she felt sure was coming down on the unsuspecting Sylvia; but all in vain.

'Philip's been complaining on thee, Sylvie,' said Bell, in the way in which she had spoken to her daughter when she was a little child; grave and severe in tone and look, more than in words. 'I forget justly what about, but he spoke on thy neglecting him continual. It's not right, my lass, it's not right; a woman should—but my head's very tired, and all I can think on to say is, it's not right.'

'Philip been complaining of me, and to mother!' said Sylvia, ready to burst into tears, so grieved and angry was she.

'No!' said Hester, 'thy mother has taken it a little too strong; he were vexed like at his tea not being ready.'

Sylvia said no more, but the bright colour faded from her cheek, and the contraction of care returned to her brow. She occupied herself with taking off her baby's walking things. Hester lingered, anxious to soothe and make peace; she was looking sorrowfully at Sylvia, when she saw tears dropping on the baby's cloak, and then it seemed as if she must speak a word of comfort before going to the shop-work, where she knew she was expected by both Philip and Coulson. She poured out a cup of tea, and coming close up to Sylvia, and kneeling down by her, she whispered,—

'Just take him this into t' ware-room; it'll put all to rights if thou'll take it to him wi' thy own hands.'



Sylvia looked up, and Hester then more fully saw how she had been crying. She whispered in reply, for fear of disturbing her mother,—

'I don't mind anything but his speaking ill on me to mother. I know I'm for iver trying and trying to be a good wife to him, an' it's very dull work; harder than yo' think on, Hester, —an' I would ha' been home for tea to-night only I was afeared of baby getting wet wi' t' storm o' hail as we had down on t' shore; and we sheltered under a rock. It's a weary coming home to this dark place, and to find my own mother set against me.'



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'Take him his tea, like a good lassie. I'll answer for it he'll be all right. A man takes it hardly when he comes in tired, a-thinking his wife '11 be there to cheer him up a bit, to find her off, and niver know nought of t' reason why.'

'I'm glad enough I've gotten a baby,' said Sylvia, 'but for aught else I wish I'd niver been married, I do!'

'Hush thee, lass!' said Hester, rising up indignant; 'now that is a sin. Eh! if thou only knew the lot o' some folk. But let's talk no more on that, that cannot be helped; go, take him his tea, for it's a sad thing to think on him fasting all this time.'

Hester's voice was raised by the simple fact of her change of position; and the word fasting caught Mrs. Robson's ear, as she sate at her knitting by the chimney-corner.

'Fasting? he said thou didn't care if he were full or fasting. Lassie! it's not right in thee, I say; go, take him his tea at once.'

Sylvia rose, and gave up the baby, which she had been suckling, to Nancy, who having done her washing, had come for her charge, to put it to bed. Sylvia kissed it fondly, making a little moan of sad, passionate tenderness as she did so. Then she took the cup of tea; but she said, rather defiantly, to Hester,—

'I'll go to him with it, because mother bids me, and it'll ease her mind.'

Then louder to her mother, she added,—

'Mother, I'll take him his tea, though I couldn't help the being out.'

If the act itself was conciliatory, the spirit in which she was going to do it was the reverse. Hester followed her slowly into the ware-room, with intentional delay, thinking that her presence might be an obstacle to their mutually understanding one another. Sylvia held the cup and plate of bread and butter out to Philip, but avoided meeting his eye, and said not a word of explanation, or regret, or self-justification. If she had spoken, though ever so crossly, Philip would have been relieved, and would have preferred it to her silence. He wanted to provoke her to speech, but did not know how to begin.

'Thou's been out again wandering on that sea-shore!' said he. She did not answer him. 'I cannot think what's always taking thee there, when one would ha' thought a walk up to Esdale would be far more sheltered, both for thee and baby in such weather as this. Thou'll be having that baby ill some of these days.'

At this, she looked up at him, and her lips moved as though she were going to say something. Oh, how he wished she would, that they might come to a wholesome quarrel, and a making friends again, and a tender kissing, in which he might whisper



penitence for all his hasty words, or unreasonable vexation. But she had come resolved not to speak, for fear of showing too much passion, too much emotion. Only as she was going away she turned and said,—

'Philip, mother hasn't many more years to live; dunnot grieve her, and set her again' me by finding fault wi' me afore her. Our being wed were a great mistake; but before t' poor old widow woman let us make as if we were happy.'



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'Sylvie! Sylvie!' he called after her. She must have heard, but she did not turn. He went after her, and seized her by the arm rather roughly; she had stung him to the heart with her calm words, which seemed to reveal a long-formed conviction.

'Sylvie!' said he, almost fiercely, 'what do yo' mean by what you've said? Speak! I will have an answer.'

He almost shook her: she was half frightened by his vehemence of behaviour, which she took for pure anger, while it was the outburst of agonized and unrequited love.

'Let me go! Oh, Philip, yo' hurt me!'

Just at this moment Hester came up; Philip was ashamed of his passionate ways in her serene presence, and loosened his grasp of his wife, and she ran away; ran into her mother's empty room, as to a solitary place, and there burst into that sobbing, miserable crying which we instinctively know is too surely lessening the length of our days on earth to be indulged in often.

When she had exhausted that first burst and lay weak and quiet for a time, she listened in dreading expectation of the sound of his footstep coming in search of her to make friends. But he was detained below on business, and never came. Instead, her mother came clambering up the stairs; she was now in the habit of going to bed between seven and eight, and to-night she was retiring at even an earlier hour.

Sylvia sprang up and drew down the window-blind, and made her face and manner as composed as possible, in order to soothe and comfort her mother's last waking hours. She helped her to bed with gentle patience; the restraint imposed upon her by her tender filial love was good for her, though all the time she was longing to be alone to have another wild outburst. When her mother was going off to sleep, Sylvia went to look at her baby, also in a soft sleep. Then she gazed out at the evening sky, high above the tiled roofs of the opposite houses, and the longing to be out under the peaceful heavens took possession of her once more.

'It's my only comfort,' said she to herself; 'and there's no earthly harm in it. I would ha' been at home to his tea, if I could; but when he doesn't want me, and mother doesn't want me, and baby is either in my arms or asleep; why, I'll go any cry my fill out under yon great quiet sky. I cannot stay in t' house to be choked up wi' my tears, nor yet to have him coming about me either for scolding or peace-making.'

So she put on her things and went out again; this time along the High Street, and up the long flights of steps towards the parish church, and there she stood and thought that here she had first met Kinraid, at Darley's burying, and she tried to recall the very look of all the sad, earnest faces round the open grave—the whole scene, in fact; and let herself give way to the miserable regrets she had so often tried to control. Then she



walked on, crying bitterly, almost unawares to herself; on through the high, bleak fields at the summit of the cliffs; fields bounded by loose stone fences, and far from all sight of the habitation of man. But, below, the sea rose and raged; it was high water at the highest tide, and the wind blew gustily from the land, vainly combating the great waves that came invincibly up with a roar and an impotent furious dash against the base of the cliffs below.



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Sylvia heard the sound of the passionate rush and rebound of many waters, like the shock of mighty guns, whenever the other sound of the blustering gusty wind was lulled for an instant. She was more quieted by this tempest of the elements than she would have been had all nature seemed as still as she had imagined it to be while she was yet in-doors and only saw a part of the serene sky.

She fixed on a certain point, in her own mind, which she would reach, and then turn back again. It was where the outline of the land curved inwards, dipping into a little bay. Here the field-path she had hitherto followed descended somewhat abruptly to a cluster of fishermen's cottages, hardly large enough to be called a village; and then the narrow roadway wound up the rising ground till it again reached the summit of the cliffs that stretched along the coast for many and many a mile.

Sylvia said to herself that she would turn homewards when she came within sight of this cove,—Headlington Cove, they called it. All the way along she had met no one since she had left the town, but just as she had got over the last stile, or ladder of stepping-stones, into the field from which the path descended, she came upon a number of people—quite a crowd, in fact; men moving forward in a steady line, hauling at a rope, a chain, or something of that kind; boys, children, and women holding babies in their arms, as if all were fain to come out and partake in some general interest.

They kept within a certain distance from the edge of the cliff, and Sylvia, advancing a little, now saw the reason why. The great cable the men held was attached to some part of a smack, which could now be seen by her in the waters below, half dismantled, and all but a wreck, yet with her deck covered with living men, as far as the waning light would allow her to see. The vessel strained to get free of the strong guiding cable; the tide was turning, the wind was blowing off shore, and Sylvia knew without being told, that almost parallel to this was a line of sunken rocks that had been fatal to many a ship before now, if she had tried to take the inner channel instead of keeping out to sea for miles, and then steering in straight for Monkshaven port. And the ships that had been thus lost had been in good plight and order compared to this vessel, which seemed nothing but a hull without mast or sail.

By this time, the crowd—the fishermen from the hamlet down below, with their wives and children—all had come but the bedridden—had reached the place where Sylvia stood. The women, in a state of wild excitement, rushed on, encouraging their husbands and sons by words, even while they hindered them by actions; and, from time to time, one of them would run to the edge of the cliff and shout out some brave words of hope in her shrill voice to the crew on the deck below. Whether these latter heard it or not, no one could tell; but it seemed as if all human voice must be lost in the tempestuous stun



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and tumult of wind and wave. It was generally a woman with a child in her arms who so employed herself. As the strain upon the cable became greater, and the ground on which they strove more uneven, every hand was needed to hold and push, and all those women who were unencumbered held by the dear rope on which so many lives were depending. On they came, a long line of human beings, black against the ruddy sunset sky. As they came near Sylvia, a woman cried out,—

'Dunnot stand idle, lass, but houd on wi' us; there's many a bonny life at stake, and many a mother's heart a-hangin' on this bit o' hemp. Tak' houd, lass, and give a firm grip, and God remember thee i' thy need.'

Sylvia needed no second word; a place was made for her, and in an instant more the rope was pulling against her hands till it seemed as though she was holding fire in her bare palms. Never a one of them thought of letting go for an instant, though when all was over many of their hands were raw and bleeding. Some strong, experienced fishermen passed a word along the line from time to time, giving directions as to how it should be held according to varying occasions; but few among the rest had breath or strength enough to speak. The women and children that accompanied them ran on before, breaking down the loose stone fences, so as to obviate delay or hindrance; they talked continually, exhorting, encouraging, explaining. From their many words and fragmentary sentences, Sylvia learnt that the vessel was supposed to be a Newcastle smack sailing from London, that had taken the dangerous inner channel to save time, and had been caught in the storm, which she was too crazy to withstand; and that if by some daring contrivance of the fishermen who had first seen her the cable had not been got ashore, she would have been cast upon the rocks before this, and 'all on board perished'.

'It were dayleet then,' quoth one woman; 'a could see their faces, they were so near. They were as pale as dead men, an' one was prayin' down on his knees. There was a king's officer aboard, for I saw t' gowd about him.'

'He'd maybe come from these hom'ard parts, and be comin' to see his own folk; else it's no common for king's officers to sail in aught but king's ships.'

'Eh! but it's gettin' dark! See there's t' leeghts in t' houses in t' New Town! T' grass is crispin' wi' t' white frost under out feet. It'll be a hard tug round t' point, and then she'll be gettin' into still waters.'

One more great push and mighty strain, and the danger was past; the vessel—or what remained of her—was in the harbour, among the lights and cheerful sounds of safety. The fishermen sprang down the cliff to the quay-side, anxious to see the men whose lives they had saved; the women, weary and over-excited, began to cry. Not Sylvia,



however; her fount of tears had been exhausted earlier in the day: her principal feeling was of gladness and high rejoicing that they were saved who had been so near to death not half an hour before.



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She would have liked to have seen the men, and shaken hands with them all round. But instead she must go home, and well would it be with her if she was in time for her husband's supper, and escaped any notice of her absence. So she separated herself from the groups of women who sate on the grass in the churchyard, awaiting the return of such of their husbands as could resist the fascinations of the Monkshaven public houses. As Sylvia went down the church steps, she came upon one of the fishermen who had helped to tow the vessel into port.

'There was seventeen men and boys aboard her, and a navy-lieutenant as had comed as passenger. It were a good job as we could manage her. Good-neet to thee, thou'll sleep all t' sounder for havin' lent a hand.'

The street air felt hot and close after the sharp keen atmosphere of the heights above; the decent shops and houses had all their shutters put up, and were preparing for their early bed-time. Already lights shone here and there in the upper chambers, and Sylvia scarcely met any one.

She went round up the passage from the quay-side, and in by the private door. All was still; the basins of bread and milk that she and her husband were in the habit of having for supper stood in the fender before the fire, each with a plate upon them. Nancy had gone to bed, Phoebe dozed in the kitchen; Philip was still in the ware-room, arranging goods and taking stock along with Coulson, for Hester had gone home to her mother.

Sylvia was not willing to go and seek out Philip, after the manner in which they had parted. All the despondency of her life became present to her again as she sate down within her home. She had forgotten it in her interest and excitement, but now it came back again.

Still she was hungry, and youthful, and tired. She took her basin up, and was eating her supper when she heard a cry of her baby upstairs, and ran away to attend to it. When it had been fed and hushed away to sleep, she went in to see her mother, attracted by some unusual noise in her room.

She found Mrs. Robson awake, and restless, and ailing; dwelling much on what Philip had said in his anger against Sylvia. It was really necessary for her daughter to remain with her; so Sylvia stole out, and went quickly down-stairs to Philip—now sitting tired and worn out, and eating his supper with little or no appetite—and told him she meant to pass the night with her mother.

His answer of acquiescence was so short and careless, or so it seemed to her, that she did not tell him any more of what she had done or seen that evening, or even dwell upon any details of her mother's indisposition.



As soon as she had left the room, Philip set down his half-finished basin of bread and milk, and sate long, his face hidden in his folded arms. The wick of the candle grew long and black, and fell, and sputtered, and guttered; he sate on, unheeding either it or the pale gray fire that was dying out—dead at last.



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CHAPTER XXXIII

AN APPARITION

Mrs. Robson was very poorly all night long. Uneasy thoughts seemed to haunt and perplex her brain, and she neither slept nor woke, but was restless and uneasy in her talk and movements.

Sylvia lay down by her, but got so little sleep, that at length she preferred sitting in the easy-chair by the bedside. Here she dropped off to slumber in spite of herself; the scene of the evening before seemed to be repeated; the cries of the many people, the heavy roar and dash of the threatening waves, were repeated in her ears; and something was said to her through all the conflicting noises,—what it was she could not catch, though she strained to hear the hoarse murmur that, in her dream, she believed to convey a meaning of the utmost importance to her.

This dream, that mysterious, only half-intelligible sound, recurred whenever she dozed, and her inability to hear the words uttered distressed her so much, that at length she sat bolt upright, resolved to sleep no more. Her mother was talking in a half-conscious way; Philip's speech of the evening before was evidently running in her mind.

'Sylvie, if thou're not a good wife to him, it'll just break my heart outright. A woman should obey her husband, and not go her own gait. I never leave the house wi'out telling father, and getting his leave.'

And then she began to cry pitifully, and to say unconnected things, till Sylvia, to soothe her, took her hand, and promised never to leave the house without asking her husband's permission, though in making this promise, she felt as if she were sacrificing her last pleasure to her mother's wish; for she knew well enough that Philip would always raise objections to the rambles which reminded her of her old free open-air life.

But to comfort and cherish her mother she would have done anything; yet this very morning that was dawning, she must go and ask his permission for a simple errand, or break her word.

She knew from experience that nothing quieted her mother so well as balm-tea; it might be that the herb really possessed some sedative power; it might be only early faith, and often repeated experience, but it had always had a tranquillizing effect; and more than once, during the restless hours of the night, Mrs. Robson had asked for it; but Sylvia's stock of last year's dead leaves was exhausted. Still she knew where a plant of balm grew in the sheltered corner of Haytersbank Farm garden; she knew that the tenants who had succeeded them in the occupation of the farm had had to leave it in consequence of a death, and that the place was unoccupied; and in the darkness she had planned that if she could leave her mother after the dawn came, and she had



attended to her baby, she would walk quickly to the old garden, and gather the tender sprigs which she was sure to find there.

Now she must go and ask Philip; and till she held her baby to her breast, she bitterly wished that she were free from the duties and chains of matrimony. But the touch of its waxen fingers, the hold of its little mouth, made her relax into docility and gentleness. She gave it back to Nancy to be dressed, and softly opened the door of Philip's bedroom.



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'Philip!' said she, gently. 'Philip!'

He started up from dreams of her; of her, angry. He saw her there, rather pale with her night's watch and anxiety, but looking meek, and a little beseeching.

'Mother has had such a bad night! she fancied once as some balm-tea would do her good—it allays used to: but my dried balm is all gone, and I thought there'd be sure to be some in t' old garden at Haytersbank. Feyther planted a bush just for mother, where it allays came up early, nigh t' old elder-tree; and if yo'd not mind, I could run there while she sleeps, and be back again in an hour, and it's not seven now.'

'Thou's not wear thyself out with running, Sylvie,' said Philip, eagerly; 'I'll get up and go myself, or, perhaps,' continued he, catching the shadow that was coming over her face, 'thou'd rather go thyself: it's only that I'm so afraid of thy tiring thyself.'

'It'll not tire me,' said Sylvia. 'Afore I was married, I was out often far farther than that, afield to fetch up t' kine, before my breakfast.'

'Well, go if thou will,' said Philip. 'But get somewhat to eat first, and don't hurry; there's no need for that.'

She had got her hat and shawl, and was off before he had finished his last words.

The long High Street was almost empty of people at that early hour; one side was entirely covered by the cool morning shadow which lay on the pavement, and crept up the opposite houses till only the topmost story caught the rosy sunlight. Up the hill-road, through the gap in the stone wall, across the dewy fields, Sylvia went by the very shortest path she knew.

She had only once been at Haytersbank since her wedding-day. On that occasion the place had seemed strangely and dissonantly changed by the numerous children who were diverting themselves before the open door, and whose playthings and clothes strewed the house-place, and made it one busy scene of confusion and untidiness, more like the Corneys' kitchen in former times, than her mother's orderly and quiet abode. Those little children were fatherless now; and the house was shut up, awaiting the entry of some new tenant. There were no shutters to shut; the long low window was blinking in the rays of the morning sun; the house and cow-house doors were closed, and no poultry wandered about the field in search of stray grains of corn, or early worms. It was a strange and unfamiliar silence, and struck solemnly on Sylvia's mind. Only a thrush in the old orchard down in the hollow, out of sight, whistled and gurgled with continual shrill melody.



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Sylvia went slowly past the house and down the path leading to the wild, deserted bit of garden. She saw that the last tenants had had a pump sunk for them, and resented the innovation, as though the well she was passing could feel the insult. Over it grew two hawthorn trees; on the bent trunk of one of them she used to sit, long ago: the charm of the position being enhanced by the possible danger of falling into the well and being drowned. The rusty unused chain was wound round the windlass; the bucket was falling to pieces from dryness. A lean cat came from some outhouse, and mewed pitifully with hunger; accompanying Sylvia to the garden, as if glad of some human companionship, yet refusing to allow itself to be touched. Primroses grew in the sheltered places, just as they formerly did; and made the uncultivated ground seem less deserted than the garden, where the last year's weeds were rotting away, and cumbering the ground.

Sylvia forced her way through the berry bushes to the herb-plot, and plucked the tender leaves she had come to seek; sighing a little all the time. Then she retraced her steps; paused softly before the house-door, and entered the porch and kissed the senseless wood.

She tried to tempt the poor gaunt cat into her arms, meaning to carry it home and befriend it; but it was scared by her endeavour and ran back to its home in the outhouse, making a green path across the white dew of the meadow. Then Sylvia began to hasten home, thinking, and remembering—at the stile that led into the road she was brought short up.

Some one stood in the lane just on the other side of the gap; his back was to the morning sun; all she saw at first was the uniform of a naval officer, so well known in Monkshaven in those days.

Sylvia went hurrying past him, not looking again, although her clothes almost brushed his, as he stood there still. She had not gone a yard—no, not half a yard—when her heart leaped up and fell again dead within her, as if she had been shot.

'Sylvia!' he said, in a voice tremulous with joy and passionate love. 'Sylvia!'

She looked round; he had turned a little, so that the light fell straight on his face. It was bronzed, and the lines were strengthened; but it was the same face she had last seen in Haytersbank Gully three long years ago, and had never thought to see in life again.

He was close to her and held out his fond arms; she went fluttering towards their embrace, as if drawn by the old fascination; but when she felt them close round her, she started away, and cried out with a great pitiful shriek, and put her hands up to her forehead as if trying to clear away some bewildering mist.

Then she looked at him once more, a terrible story in her eyes, if he could but have read it.

Twice she opened her stiff lips to speak, and twice the words were overwhelmed by the surges of her misery, which bore them back into the depths of her heart.

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He thought that he had come upon her too suddenly, and he attempted to soothe her with soft murmurs of love, and to woo her to his outstretched hungry arms once more. But when she saw this motion of his, she made a gesture as though pushing him away; and with an inarticulate moan of agony she put her hands to her head once more, and turning away began to run blindly towards the town for protection.

For a minute or so he was stunned with surprise at her behaviour; and then he thought it accounted for by the shock of his accost, and that she needed time to understand the unexpected joy. So he followed her swiftly, ever keeping her in view, but not trying to overtake her too speedily.

'I have frightened my poor love,' he kept thinking. And by this thought he tried to repress his impatience and check the speed he longed to use; yet he was always so near behind that her quickened sense heard his well-known footsteps following, and a mad notion flashed across her brain that she would go to the wide full river, and end the hopeless misery she felt enshrouding her. There was a sure hiding-place from all human reproach and heavy mortal woe beneath the rushing waters borne landwards by the morning tide.

No one can tell what changed her course; perhaps the thought of her sucking child; perhaps her mother; perhaps an angel of God; no one on earth knows, but as she ran along the quay-side she all at once turned up an entry, and through an open door.

He, following all the time, came into a quiet dark parlour, with a cloth and tea-things on the table ready for breakfast; the change from the bright sunny air out of doors to the deep shadow of this room made him think for the first moment that she had passed on, and that no one was there, and he stood for an instant baffled, and hearing no sound but the beating of his own heart; but an irrepressible sobbing gasp made him look round, and there he saw her cowered behind the door, her face covered tight up, and sharp shudders going through her whole frame.

'My love, my darling!' said he, going up to her, and trying to raise her, and to loosen her hands away from her face. 'I've been too sudden for thee: it was thoughtless in me; but I have so looked forward to this time, and seeing thee come along the field, and go past me, but I should ha' been more tender and careful of thee. Nay! let me have another look of thy sweet face.'

All this he whispered in the old tones of manoeuvring love, in that voice she had yearned and hungered to hear in life, and had not heard, for all her longing, save in her dreams.

She tried to crouch more and more into the corner, into the hidden shadow—to sink into the ground out of sight.



Once more he spoke, beseeching her to lift up her face, to let him hear her speak.

But she only moaned.

'Sylvia!' said he, thinking he could change his tactics, and pique her into speaking, that he would make a pretence of suspicion and offence.



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'Sylvia! one would think you weren't glad to see me back again at length. I only came in late last night, and my first thought on waking was of you; it has been ever since I left you.'

Sylvia took her hands away from her face; it was gray as the face of death; her awful eyes were passionless in her despair.

'Where have yo' been?' she asked, in slow, hoarse tones, as if her voice were half strangled within her.

'Been!' said he, a red light coming into his eyes, as he bent his looks upon her; now, indeed, a true and not an assumed suspicion entering his mind.

'Been!' he repeated; then, coming a step nearer to her, and taking her hand, not tenderly this time, but with a resolution to be satisfied.

'Did not your cousin—Hepburn, I mean—did not he tell you?—he saw the press-gang seize me,—I gave him a message to you—I bade you keep true to me as I would be to you.'

Between every clause of this speech he paused and gasped for her answer; but none came. Her eyes dilated and held his steady gaze prisoner as with a magical charm—neither could look away from the other's wild, searching gaze. When he had ended, she was silent for a moment, then she cried out, shrill and fierce,—

'Philip!' No answer.

Wilder and shriller still, 'Philip!' she cried.

He was in the distant ware-room completing the last night's work before the regular shop hours began; before breakfast, also, that his wife might not find him waiting and impatient.

He heard her cry; it cut through doors, and still air, and great bales of woollen stuff; he thought that she had hurt herself, that her mother was worse, that her baby was ill, and he hastened to the spot whence the cry proceeded.

On opening the door that separated the shop from the sitting-room, he saw the back of a naval officer, and his wife on the ground, huddled up in a heap; when she perceived him come in, she dragged herself up by means of a chair, groping like a blind person, and came and stood facing him.

The officer turned fiercely round, and would have come towards Philip, who was so bewildered by the scene that even yet he did not understand who the stranger was, did not perceive for an instant that he saw the realization of his greatest dread.



But Sylvia laid her hand on Kinraid's arm, and assumed to herself the right of speech. Philip did not know her voice, it was so changed.

'Philip,' she said, 'this is Kinraid come back again to wed me. He is alive; he has niver been dead, only taken by t' press-gang. And he says yo' saw it, and knew it all t' time. Speak, was it so?'

Philip knew not what to say, whither to turn, under what refuge of words or acts to shelter.

Sylvia's influence was keeping Kinraid silent, but he was rapidly passing beyond it.

'Speak!' he cried, loosening himself from Sylvia's light grasp, and coming towards Philip, with a threatening gesture. 'Did I not bid you tell her how it was? Did I not bid you say how I would be faithful to her, and she was to be faithful to me? Oh! you damned scoundrel! have you kept it from her all that time, and let her think me dead, or false? Take that!'



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His closed fist was up to strike the man, who hung his head with bitterest shame and miserable self-reproach; but Sylvia came swift between the blow and its victim.

'Charley, thou shan't strike him,' she said. 'He is a damned scoundrel' (this was said in the hardest, quietest tone) 'but he is my husband.'

'Oh! thou false heart!' exclaimed Kinraid, turning sharp on her. 'If ever I trusted woman, I trusted you, Sylvia Robson.'

He made as though throwing her from him, with a gesture of contempt that stung her to life.

'Oh, Charley!' she cried, springing to him, 'dunnot cut me to the quick; have pity on me, though he had none. I did so love thee; it was my very heart-strings as gave way when they told me thou was drowned—feyther, and th' Corneys, and all, iverybody. Thy hat and t' bit o' ribbon I gave thee were found drenched and dripping wi' sea-water; and I went mourning for thee all the day long—dunnot turn away from me; only hearken this once, and then kill me dead, and I'll bless yo',—and have niver been mysel' since; niver ceased to feel t' sun grow dark and th' air chill and dreary when I thought on t' time when thou was alive. I did, my Charley, my own love! And I thought thou was dead for iver, and I wished I were lying beside thee. Oh, Charley! Philip, there, where he stands, could tell yo' this was true. Philip, wasn't it so?'

'Would God I were dead!' moaned forth the unhappy, guilty man. But she had turned to Kinraid, and was speaking again to him, and neither of them heard or heeded him—they were drawing closer and closer together—she, with her cheeks and eyes aflame, talking eagerly.

'And feyther was taken up, and all for setting some free as t' press-gang had gotten by a foul trick; and he were put i' York prison, and tried, and hung!—hung! Charley!—good kind feyther was hung on a gallows; and mother lost her sense and grew silly in grief, and we were like to be turned out on t' wide world, and poor mother dateless—and I thought yo' were dead—oh! I thought yo' were dead, I did—oh, Charley, Charley!'

By this time they were in each other's arms, she with her head on his shoulder, crying as if her heart would break.

Philip came forwards and took hold of her to pull her away; but Charley held her tight, mutely defying Philip. Unconsciously she was Philip's protection, in that hour of danger, from a blow which might have been his death if strong will could have aided it to kill.

'Sylvie!' said he, grasping her tight. 'Listen to me. He didn't love yo' as I did. He had loved other women. I, yo'—yo' alone. He loved other girls before yo', and had left off loving 'em. I—I wish God would free my heart from the pang; but it will go on till I die,



whether yo' love me or not. And then—where was I? Oh! that very night that he was taken, I was a-thinking on yo' and on him; and I might ha' given yo' his message, but I heard them speaking of him as knew him well; talking of his false fickle ways. How was I to know he would keep true to thee? It might be a sin in me, I cannot say; my heart and my sense are gone dead within me. I know this, I've loved yo' as no man but me ever loved before. Have some pity and forgiveness on me, if it's only because I've been so tormented with my love.'



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He looked at her with feverish eager wistfulness; it faded away into despair as she made no sign of having even heard his words. He let go his hold of her, and his arm fell loosely by his side.

'I may die,' he said, 'for my life is ended!'

'Sylvia!' spoke out Kinraid, bold and fervent, 'your marriage is no marriage. You were tricked into it. You are my wife, not his. I am your husband; we plighted each other our troth. See! here is my half of the sixpence.'

He pulled it out from his bosom, tied by a black ribbon round his neck.

'When they stripped me and searched me in th' French prison, I managed to keep this. No lies can break the oath we swore to each other. I can get your pretence of a marriage set aside. I'm in favour with my admiral, and he'll do a deal for me, and back me out. Come with me; your marriage shall be set aside, and we'll be married again, all square and above-board. Come away. Leave that damned fellow to repent of the trick he played an honest sailor; we'll be true, whatever has come and gone. Come, Sylvia.'

His arm was round her waist, and he was drawing her towards the door, his face all crimson with eagerness and hope. Just then the baby cried.

'Hark!' said she, starting away from Kinraid, 'baby's crying for me. His child—yes, it is his child—I'd forgotten that—forgotten all. I'll make my vow now, lest I lose myself again. I'll never forgive yon man, nor live with him as his wife again. All that's done and ended. He's spoilt my life,—he's spoilt it for as long as iver I live on this earth; but neither yo' nor him shall spoil my soul. It goes hard wi' me, Charley, it does indeed. I'll just give yo' one kiss—one little kiss—and then, so help me God, I'll niver see nor hear till—no, not that, not that is needed—I'll niver see—sure that's enough—I'll never see yo' again on this side heaven, so help me God! I'm bound and tied, but I've sworn my oath to him as well as yo': there's things I will do, and there's things I won't. Kiss me once more. God help me, he's gone!'

CHAPTER XXXIV

A RECKLESS RECRUIT

She lay across a chair, her arms helplessly stretched out, her face unseen. Every now and then a thrill ran through her body: she was talking to herself all the time with incessant low incontinence of words.

Philip stood near her, motionless: he did not know whether she was conscious of his presence; in fact, he knew nothing but that he and she were sundered for ever; he could only take in that one idea, and it numbed all other thought.



Once more her baby cried for the comfort she alone could give.

She rose to her feet, but staggered when she tried to walk; her glazed eyes fell upon Philip as he instinctively made a step to hold her steady. No light came into her eyes any more than if she had looked upon a perfect stranger; not even was there the contraction of dislike. Some other figure filled her mind, and she saw him no more than she saw the inanimate table. That way of looking at him withered him up more than any sign of aversion would have done.



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He watched her laboriously climb the stairs, and vanish out of sight; and sat down with a sudden feeling of extreme bodily weakness.

The door of communication between the parlour and the shop was opened. That was the first event of which Philip took note; but Phoebe had come in unawares to him, with the intention of removing the breakfast things on her return from market, and seeing them unused, and knowing that Sylvia had sate up all night with her mother, she had gone back to the kitchen. Philip had neither seen nor heard her.

Now Coulson came in, amazed at Hepburn's non-appearance in the shop.

'Why! Philip, what's ado? How ill yo' look, man!' exclaimed he, thoroughly alarmed by Philip's ghastly appearance. 'What's the matter?'

'I!' said Philip, slowly gathering his thoughts. 'Why should there be anything the matter?'

His instinct, quicker to act than his reason, made him shrink from his misery being noticed, much more made any subject for explanation or sympathy.

'There may be nothing the matter wi' thee,' said Coulson, 'but thou's the look of a corpse on thy face. I was afeared something was wrong, for it's half-past nine, and thee so punctual!'

He almost guarded Philip into the shop, and kept furtively watching him, and perplexing himself with Philip's odd, strange ways.

Hester, too, observed the heavy broken-down expression on Philip's ashen face, and her heart ached for him; but after that first glance, which told her so much, she avoided all appearance of noticing or watching. Only a shadow brooded over her sweet, calm face, and once or twice she sighed to herself.

It was market-day, and people came in and out, bringing their store of gossip from the country, or the town—from the farm or the quay-side.

Among the pieces of news, the rescue of the smack the night before furnished a large topic; and by-and-by Philip heard a name that startled him into attention.

The landlady of a small public-house much frequented by sailors was talking to Coulson.

'There was a sailor aboard of her as knowed Kinraid by sight, in Shields, years ago; and he called him by his name afore they were well out o' t' river. And Kinraid was no ways set up, for all his lieutenant's uniform (and eh! but they say he looks handsome in it!);



but he tells 'm all about it—how he was pressed aboard a man-o'-war, an' for his good conduct were made a warrant officer, boatswain, or something!

All the people in the shop were listening now; Philip alone seemed engrossed in folding up a piece of cloth, so as to leave no possible chance of creases in it; yet he lost not a syllable of the good woman's narration.

She, pleased with the enlarged audience her tale had attracted, went on with fresh vigour.



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'An' there's a gallant captain, one Sir Sidney Smith, and he'd a notion o' goin' smack into a French port, an' carryin' off a vessel from right under their very noses; an' says he, "Which of yo' British sailors 'll go along with me to death or glory?" So Kinraid stands up like a man, an' "I'll go with yo', captain," he says. So they, an' some others as brave, went off, an' did their work, an' choose whatever it was, they did it famously; but they got caught by them French, an' were clapped into prison i' France for iver so long; but at last one Philip—Philip somethin' (he were a Frenchman, I know)—helped 'em to escape, in a fishin'-boat. But they were welcomed by th' whole British squadron as was i' t' Channel for t' piece of daring they'd done i' cuttin' out t' ship from a French port; an' Captain Sir Sidney Smith was made an admiral, an' him as we used t' call Charley Kinraid, the specksioneer, is made a lieutenant, an' a commissioned officer i' t' King's service; and is come to great glory, and slep in my house this very blessed night as is just past!

A murmur of applause and interest and rejoicing buzzed all around Philip. All this was publicly known about Kinraid,—and how much more? All Monkshaven might hear tomorrow—nay, to-day—of Philip's treachery to the hero of the hour; how he had concealed his fate, and supplanted him in his love.

Philip shrank from the burst of popular indignation which he knew must follow. Any wrong done to one who stands on the pinnacle of the people's favour is resented by each individual as a personal injury; and among a primitive set of country-folk, who recognize the wild passion in love, as it exists untamed by the trammels of reason and self-restraint, any story of baulked affections, or treachery in such matters, spreads like wildfire.

Philip knew this quite well; his doom of disgrace lay plain before him, if only Kinraid spoke the word. His head was bent down while he thus listened and reflected. He half resolved on doing something; he lifted up his head, caught the reflection of his face in the little strip of glass on the opposite side, in which the women might look at themselves in their contemplated purchases, and quite resolved.

The sight he saw in the mirror was his own long, sad, pale face, made plainer and grayer by the heavy pressure of the morning's events. He saw his stooping figure, his rounded shoulders, with something like a feeling of disgust at his personal appearance as he remembered the square, upright build of Kinraid; his fine uniform, with epaulette and sword-belt; his handsome brown face; his dark eyes, splendid with the fire of passion and indignation; his white teeth, gleaming out with the terrible smile of scorn.

The comparison drove Philip from passive hopelessness to active despair.

He went abruptly from the crowded shop into the empty parlour, and on into the kitchen, where he took up a piece of bread, and heedless of Phoebe's look and words, began to eat it before he even left the place; for he needed the strength that food would give; he

needed it to carry him out of the sight and the knowledge of all who might hear what he had done, and point their fingers at him.



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He paused a moment in the parlour, and then, setting his teeth tight together, he went upstairs.

First of all he went into the bit of a room opening out of theirs, in which his baby slept. He dearly loved the child, and many a time would run in and play a while with it; and in such gambols he and Sylvia had passed their happiest moments of wedded life.

The little Bella was having her morning slumber; Nancy used to tell long afterwards how he knelt down by the side of her cot, and was so strange she thought he must have prayed, for all it was nigh upon eleven o'clock, and folk in their senses only said their prayers when they got up, and when they went to bed.

Then he rose, and stooped over, and gave the child a long, lingering, soft, fond kiss. And on tip-toe he passed away into the room where his aunt lay; his aunt who had been so true a friend to him! He was thankful to know that in her present state she was safe from the knowledge of what was past, safe from the sound of the shame to come.

He had not meant to see Sylvia again; he dreaded the look of her hatred, her scorn, but there, outside her mother's bed, she lay, apparently asleep. Mrs. Robson, too, was sleeping, her face towards the wall. Philip could not help it; he went to have one last look at his wife. She was turned towards her mother, her face averted from him; he could see the tear-stains, the swollen eyelids, the lips yet quivering: he stooped down, and bent to kiss the little hand that lay listless by her side. As his hot breath neared that hand it was twitched away, and a shiver ran through the whole prostrate body. And then he knew that she was not asleep, only worn out by her misery,—misery that he had caused.

He sighed heavily; but he went away, down-stairs, and away for ever. Only as he entered the parlour his eyes caught on two silhouettes, one of himself, one of Sylvia, done in the first month of their marriage, by some wandering artist, if so he could be called. They were hanging against the wall in little oval wooden frames; black profiles, with the lights done in gold; about as poor semblances of humanity as could be conceived; but Philip went up, and after looking for a minute or so at Sylvia's, he took it down, and buttoned his waistcoat over it.

It was the only thing he took away from his home.

He went down the entry on to the quay. The river was there, and waters, they say, have a luring power, and a weird promise of rest in their perpetual monotony of sound. But many people were there, if such a temptation presented itself to Philip's mind; the sight of his fellow-townsmen, perhaps of his acquaintances, drove him up another entry—the town is burrowed with such—back into the High Street, which he straightway crossed into a well-known court, out of which rough steps led to the summit of the hill, and on to the fells and moors beyond.



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He plunged and panted up this rough ascent. From the top he could look down on the whole town lying below, severed by the bright shining river into two parts. To the right lay the sea, shimmering and heaving; there were the cluster of masts rising out of the little port; the irregular roofs of the houses; which of them, thought he, as he carried his eye along the quay-side to the market-place, which of them was his? and he singled it out in its unfamiliar aspect, and saw the thin blue smoke rising from the kitchen chimney, where even now Phoebe was cooking the household meal that he never more must share.

Up at that thought and away, he knew not nor cared not whither. He went through the ploughed fields where the corn was newly springing; he came down upon the vast sunny sea, and turned his back upon it with loathing; he made his way inland to the high green pastures; the short upland turf above which the larks hung poised 'at heaven's gate'. He strode along, so straight and heedless of briar and bush, that the wild black cattle ceased from grazing, and looked after him with their great blank puzzled eyes.

He had passed all enclosures and stone fences now, and was fairly on the desolate brown moors; through the withered last year's ling and fern, through the prickly gorse, he tramped, crushing down the tender shoots of this year's growth, and heedless of the startled plover's cry, goaded by the furies. His only relief from thought, from the remembrance of Sylvia's looks and words, was in violent bodily action.

So he went on till evening shadows and ruddy evening lights came out upon the wild fells.

He had crossed roads and lanes, with a bitter avoidance of men's tracks; but now the strong instinct of self-preservation came out, and his aching limbs, his weary heart, giving great pants and beats for a time, and then ceasing altogether till a mist swam and quivered before his aching eyes, warned him that he must find some shelter and food, or lie down to die. He fell down now, often; stumbling over the slightest obstacle. He had passed the cattle pastures; he was among the black-faced sheep; and they, too, ceased nibbling, and looked after him, and somehow, in his poor wandering imagination, their silly faces turned to likenesses of Monkshaven people—people who ought to be far, far away.

'Thou'll be belated on these fells, if thou doesn't tak' heed,' shouted some one.

Philip looked abroad to see whence the voice proceeded.

An old stiff-legged shepherd, in a smock-frock, was within a couple of hundred yards. Philip did not answer, but staggered and stumbled towards him.

'Good lork!' said the man, 'where hast ta been? Thou's seen Oud Harry, I think, thou looks so scared.'



Philip rallied himself, and tried to speak up to the old standard of respectability; but the effort was pitiful to see, had any one been by, who could have understood the pain it caused to restrain cries of bodily and mental agony.



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'I've lost my way, that's all.'

"'Twould ha' been enough, too, I'm thinkin', if I hadn't come out after t' ewes. There's t' Three Griffins near at hand: a sup o' Hollands 'll set thee to reeghts.'

Philip followed faintly. He could not see before him, and was guided by the sound of footsteps rather than by the sight of the figure moving onwards. He kept stumbling; and he knew that the old shepherd swore at him; but he also knew such curses proceeded from no ill-will, only from annoyance at the delay in going and 'seem' after t' ewes.' But had the man's words conveyed the utmost expression of hatred, Philip would neither have wondered at them, nor resented them.

They came into a wild mountain road, unfenced from the fells. A hundred yards off, and there was a small public-house, with a broad ruddy oblong of firelight shining across the tract.

'Theere!' said the old man. 'Thee cannot well miss that. A dunno tho', thee bees sich a gawby.'

So he went on, and delivered Philip safely up to the landlord.

'Here's a felly as a fund on t' fell side, just as one as if he were drunk; but he's sober enough, a reckon, only summat's wrong i' his head, a'm thinkin'.'

'No!' said Philip, sitting down on the first chair he came to. 'I'm right enough; just fairly wearied out: lost my way,' and he fainted.

There was a recruiting sergeant of marines sitting in the house-place, drinking. He, too, like Philip, had lost his way; but was turning his blunder to account by telling all manner of wonderful stories to two or three rustics who had come in ready to drink on any pretence; especially if they could get good liquor without paying for it.

The sergeant rose as Philip fell back, and brought up his own mug of beer, into which a noggin of gin had been put (called in Yorkshire 'dog's-nose'). He partly poured and partly spilt some of this beverage on Philip's face; some drops went through the pale and parted lips, and with a start the worn-out man revived.

'Bring him some victual, landlord,' called out the recruiting sergeant. 'I'll stand shot.'

They brought some cold bacon and coarse oat-cake. The sergeant asked for pepper and salt; minced the food fine and made it savoury, and kept administering it by teaspoonfuls; urging Philip to drink from time to time from his own cup of dog's-nose.

A burning thirst, which needed no stimulant from either pepper or salt, took possession of Philip, and he drank freely, scarcely recognizing what he drank. It took effect on one



so habitually sober; and he was soon in that state when the imagination works wildly and freely.

He saw the sergeant before him, handsome, and bright, and active, in his gay red uniform, without a care, as it seemed to Philip, taking life lightly; admired and respected everywhere because of his cloth.

If Philip were gay, and brisk, well-dressed like him, returning with martial glory to Monkshaven, would not Sylvia love him once more? Could not he win her heart? He was brave by nature, and the prospect of danger did not daunt him, if ever it presented itself to his imagination.



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He thought he was cautious in entering on the subject of enlistment with his new friend, the sergeant; but the latter was twenty times as cunning as he, and knew by experience how to bait his hook.

Philip was older by some years than the regulation age; but, at that time of great demand for men, the question of age was lightly entertained. The sergeant was profuse in statements of the advantages presented to a man of education in his branch of the service; how such a one was sure to rise; in fact, it would have seemed from the sergeant's account, as though the difficulty consisted in remaining in the ranks.

Philip's dizzy head thought the subject over and over again, each time with failing power of reason.

At length, almost, as it would seem, by some sleight of hand, he found the fatal shilling in his palm, and had promised to go before the nearest magistrate to be sworn in as one of his Majesty's marines the next morning. And after that he remembered nothing more.

He wakened up in a little truckle-bed in the same room as the sergeant, who lay sleeping the sleep of full contentment; while gradually, drop by drop, the bitter recollections of the day before came, filling up Philip's cup of agony.

He knew that he had received the bounty-money; and though he was aware that he had been partly tricked into it, and had no hope, no care, indeed, for any of the advantages so liberally promised him the night before, yet he was resigned, with utterly despondent passiveness, to the fate to which he had pledged himself. Anything was welcome that severed him from his former life, that could make him forget it, if that were possible; and also welcome anything which increased the chances of death without the sinfulness of his own participation in the act. He found in the dark recess of his mind the dead body of his fancy of the previous night; that he might come home, handsome and glorious, to win the love that had never been his.

But he only sighed over it, and put it aside out of his sight—so full of despair was he. He could eat no breakfast, though the sergeant ordered of the best. The latter kept watching his new recruit out of the corner of his eye, expecting a remonstrance, or dreading a sudden bolt.

But Philip walked with him the two or three miles in the most submissive silence, never uttering a syllable of regret or repentance; and before Justice Cholmley, of Holm-Fell Hall, he was sworn into his Majesty's service, under the name of Stephen Freeman. With a new name, he began a new life. Alas! the old life lives for ever!

CHAPTER XXXV

THINGS UNUTTERABLE



After Philip had passed out of the room, Sylvia lay perfectly still, from very exhaustion. Her mother slept on, happily unconscious of all the turmoil that had taken place; yes, happily, though the heavy sleep was to end in death. But of this her daughter knew nothing, imagining that it was refreshing slumber, instead of an ebbing of life. Both mother and daughter lay motionless till Phoebe entered the room to tell Sylvia that dinner was on the table.



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Then Sylvia sat up, and put back her hair, bewildered and uncertain as to what was to be done next; how she should meet the husband to whom she had discarded all allegiance, repudiated the solemn promise of love and obedience which she had vowed.

Phoebe came into the room, with natural interest in the invalid, scarcely older than herself.

'How is t' old lady?' asked she, in a low voice.

Sylvia turned her head round to look; her mother had never moved, but was breathing in a loud uncomfortable manner, that made her stoop over her to see the averted face more nearly.

'Phoebe!' she cried, 'come here! She looks strange and odd; her eyes are open, but don't see me. Phoebe! Phoebe!'

'Sure enough, she's in a bad way!' said Phoebe, climbing stiffly on to the bed to have a nearer view. 'Hold her head a little up t' ease her breathin' while I go for master; he'll be for sendin' for t' doctor, I'll be bound.'

Sylvia took her mother's head and laid it fondly on her breast, speaking to her and trying to rouse her; but it was of no avail: the hard, stertorous breathing grew worse and worse.

Sylvia cried out for help; Nancy came, the baby in her arms. They had been in several times before that morning; and the child came smiling and crowing at its mother, who was supporting her own dying parent.

'Oh, Nancy!' said Sylvia; 'what is the matter with mother? yo' can see her face; tell me quick!'

Nancy set the baby on the bed for all reply, and ran out of the room, crying out,

'Master! master! Come quick! T' old missus is a-dying!'

This appeared to be no news to Sylvia, and yet the words came on her with a great shock, but for all that she could not cry; she was surprised herself at her own deadness of feeling.

Her baby crawled to her, and she had to hold and guard both her mother and her child. It seemed a long, long time before any one came, and then she heard muffled voices, and a heavy tramp: it was Phoebe leading the doctor upstairs, and Nancy creeping in behind to hear his opinion.



He did not ask many questions, and Phoebe replied more frequently to his inquiries than did Sylvia, who looked into his face with a blank, tearless, speechless despair, that gave him more pain than the sight of her dying mother.

The long decay of Mrs. Robson's faculties and health, of which he was well aware, had in a certain manner prepared him for some such sudden termination of the life whose duration was hardly desirable, although he gave several directions as to her treatment; but the white, pinched face, the great dilated eye, the slow comprehension of the younger woman, struck him with alarm; and he went on asking for various particulars, more with a view of rousing Sylvia, if even it were to tears, than for any other purpose that the information thus obtained could answer.

'You had best have pillows propped up behind her—it will not be for long; she does not know that you are holding her, and it is only tiring you to no purpose!'



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Sylvia's terrible stare continued: he put his advice into action, and gently tried to loosen her clasp, and tender hold. This she resisted; laying her cheek against her poor mother's unconscious face.

'Where is Hepburn?' said he. 'He ought to be here!'

Phoebe looked at Nancy, Nancy at Phoebe. It was the latter who replied,

'He's neither i' t' house nor i' t' shop. A seed him go past t' kitchen window better nor an hour ago; but neither William Coulson or Hester Rose knows where he's gone to.

Dr Morgan's lips were puckered up into a whistle, but he made no sound.

'Give me baby!' he said, suddenly. Nancy had taken her up off the bed where she had been sitting, encircled by her mother's arm. The nursemaid gave her to the doctor. He watched the mother's eye, it followed her child, and he was rejoiced. He gave a little pinch to the baby's soft flesh, and she cried out piteously; again the same action, the same result. Sylvia laid her mother down, and stretched out her arms for her child, hushing it, and moaning over it.

'So far so good!' said Dr Morgan to himself. 'But where is the husband? He ought to be here.' He went down-stairs to make inquiry for Philip; that poor young creature, about whose health he had never felt thoroughly satisfied since the fever after her confinement, was in an anxious condition, and with an inevitable shock awaiting her. Her husband ought to be with her, and supporting her to bear it.

Dr Morgan went into the shop. Hester alone was there. Coulson had gone to his comfortable dinner at his well-ordered house, with his common-place wife. If he had felt anxious about Philip's looks and strange disappearance, he had also managed to account for them in some indifferent way.

Hester was alone with the shop-boy; few people came in during the universal Monkshaven dinner-hour. She was resting her head on her hand, and puzzled and distressed about many things—all that was implied by the proceedings of the evening before between Philip and Sylvia; and that was confirmed by Philip's miserable looks and strange abstracted ways to-day. Oh! how easy Hester would have found it to make him happy! not merely how easy, but what happiness it would have been to her to merge her every wish into the one great object of fulfilling his will. To her, an on-looker, the course of married life, which should lead to perfect happiness, seemed to plain! Alas! it is often so! and the resisting forces which make all such harmony and delight impossible are not recognized by the bystanders, hardly by the actors. But if these resisting forces are only superficial, or constitutional, they are but the necessary discipline here, and do not radically affect the love which will make all things right in heaven.



Some glimmering of this latter comforting truth shed its light on Hester's troubled thoughts from time to time. But again, how easy would it have been to her to tread the maze that led to Philip's happiness; and how difficult it seemed to the wife he had chosen!



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She was aroused by Dr Morgan's voice.

'So both Coulson and Hepburn have left the shop to your care, Hester. I want Hepburn, though; his wife is in a very anxious state. Where is he? can you tell me?'

'Sylvia in an anxious state! I've not seen her to-day, but last night she looked as well as could be.'

'Ay, ay; but many a thing happens in four-and-twenty hours. Her mother is dying, may be dead by this time; and her husband should be there with her. Can't you send for him?'

'I don't know where he is,' said Hester. 'He went off from here all on a sudden, when there was all the market-folks in t' shop; I thought he'd maybe gone to John Foster's about th' money, for they was paying a deal in. I'll send there and inquire.'

No! the messenger brought back word that he had not been seen at their bank all morning. Further inquiries were made by the anxious Hester, by the doctor, by Coulson; all they could learn was that Phoebe had seen him pass the kitchen window about eleven o'clock, when she was peeling the potatoes for dinner; and two lads playing on the quay-side thought they had seen him among a group of sailors; but these latter, as far as they could be identified, had no knowledge of his appearance among them.

Before night the whole town was excited about his disappearance. Before night Bell Robson had gone to her long home. And Sylvia still lay quiet and tearless, apparently more unmoved than any other creature by the events of the day, and the strange vanishing of her husband.

The only thing she seemed to care for was her baby; she held it tight in her arms, and Dr Morgan bade them leave it there, its touch might draw the desired tears into her weary, sleepless eyes, and charm the aching pain out of them.

They were afraid lest she should inquire for her husband, whose non-appearance at such a time of sorrow to his wife must (they thought) seem strange to her. And night drew on while they were all in this state. She had gone back to her own room without a word when they had desired her to do so; caressing her child in her arms, and sitting down on the first chair she came to, with a heavy sigh, as if even this slight bodily exertion had been too much for her. They saw her eyes turn towards the door every time it was opened, and they thought it was with anxious expectation of one who could not be found, though many were seeking for him in all probable places.

When night came some one had to tell her of her husband's disappearance; and Dr Morgan was the person who undertook this.



He came into her room about nine o'clock; her baby was sleeping in her arms; she herself pale as death, still silent and tearless, though strangely watchful of gestures and sounds, and probably cognizant of more than they imagined.

'Well, Mrs. Hepburn,' said he, as cheerfully as he could, 'I should advise your going to bed early; for I fancy your husband won't come home to-night. Some journey or other, that perhaps Coulson can explain better than I can, will most likely keep him away till to-morrow. It's very unfortunate that he should be away at such a sad time as this, as I'm sure he'll feel when he returns; but we must make the best of it.'



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He watched her to see the effect of his words.

She sighed, that was all. He still remained a little while. She lifted her head up a little and asked,

'How long do yo' think she was unconscious, doctor? Could she hear things, think yo', afore she fell into that strange kind o' slumber?'

'I cannot tell,' said he, shaking his head. 'Was she breathing in that hard snoring kind of way when you left her this morning?'

'Yes, I think so; I cannot tell, so much has happened.'

'When you came back to her, after your breakfast, I think you said she was in much the same position?'

'Yes, and yet I may be telling yo' lies; if I could but think: but it's my head as is aching so; doctor, I wish yo'd go, for I need being alone, I'm so mazed.'

'Good-night, then, for you're a wise woman, I see, and mean to go to bed, and have a good night with baby there.'

But he went down to Phoebe, and told her to go in from time to time, and see how her mistress was.

He found Hester Rose and the old servant together; both had been crying, both were evidently in great trouble about the death and the mystery of the day.

Hester asked if she might go up and see Sylvia, and the doctor gave his leave, talking meanwhile with Phoebe over the kitchen fire. Hester came down again without seeing Sylvia. The door of the room was bolted, and everything quiet inside.

'Does she know where her husband is, think you?' asked the doctor at this account of Hester's. 'She's not anxious about him at any rate: or else the shock of her mother's death has been too much for her. We must hope for some change in the morning; a good fit of crying, or a fidget about her husband, would be more natural. Good-night to you both,' and off he went.

Phoebe and Hester avoided looking at each other at these words. Both were conscious of the probability of something having gone seriously wrong between the husband and wife. Hester had the recollection of the previous night, Phoebe the untasted breakfast of to-day to go upon.

She spoke first.



'A just wish he'd come home to still folks' tongues. It need niver ha' been known if t' old lady hadn't died this day of all others. It's such a thing for t' shop t' have one o' t' partners missin', an' no one for t' know what's comed on him. It niver happened i' Fosters' days, that's a' I know.'

'He'll maybe come back yet,' said Hester. 'It's not so very late.'

'It were market day, and a', ' continued Phoebe, 'just as if iverything mun go wrong together; an' a' t' country customers'll go back wi' fine tale i' their mouths, as Measter Hepburn was strayed an' missin' just like a beast o' some kind.'

'Hark! isn't that a step?' said Hester suddenly, as a footfall sounded in the now quiet street; but it passed the door, and the hope that had arisen on its approach fell as the sound died away.



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'He'll noane come to-night,' said Phoebe, who had been as eager a listener as Hester, however. 'Thou'd best go thy ways home; a shall stay up, for it's not seemly for us a' t' go to our beds, an' a corpse in t' house; an' Nancy, as might ha' watched, is gone to her bed this hour past, like a lazy boots as she is. A can hear, too, if t' measter does come home; tho' a'll be bound he wunnot; choose wheere he is, he'll be i' bed by now, for it's well on to eleven. I'll let thee out by t' shop-door, and stand by it till thou's close at home, for it's ill for a young woman to be i' t' street so late.'

So she held the door open, and shaded the candle from the flickering outer air, while Hester went to her home with a heavy heart.

Heavily and hopelessly did they all meet in the morning. No news of Philip, no change in Sylvia; an unceasing flow of angling and conjecture and gossip radiating from the shop into the town.

Hester could have entreated Coulson on her knees to cease from repeating the details of a story of which every word touched on a raw place in her sensitive heart; moreover, when they talked together so eagerly, she could not hear the coming footsteps on the pavement without.

Once some one hit very near the truth in a chance remark.

'It seems strange,' she said, 'how as one man turns up, another just disappears. Why, it were but upo' Tuesday as Kinraid come back, as all his own folk had thought to be dead; and next day here's Measter Hepburn as is gone no one knows wheere!'

'That's t' way i' this world,' replied Coulson, a little sententiously. 'This life is full o' changes o' one kind or another; them that's dead is alive; and as for poor Philip, though he was alive, he looked fitter to be dead when he came into t' shop o' Wednesday morning.'

'And how does she take it?' nodding to where Sylvia was supposed to be.

'Oh! she's not herself, so to say. She were just stunned by finding her mother was dying in her very arms when she thought as she were only sleeping; yet she's never been able to cry a drop; so that t' sorrow's gone inwards on her brain, and from all I can hear, she doesn't rightly understand as her husband is missing. T' doctor says if she could but cry, she'd come to a juster comprehension of things.'

'And what do John and Jeremiah Foster say to it all?'

'They're down here many a time in t' day to ask if he's come back, or how she is; for they made a deal on 'em both. They're going t' attend t' funeral to-morrow, and have given orders as t' shop is to be shut up in t' morning.'



To the surprise of every one, Sylvia, who had never left her room since the night of her mother's death, and was supposed to be almost unconscious of all that was going on in the house, declared her intention of following her mother to the grave. No one could do more than remonstrate: no one had sufficient authority to interfere with her. Dr Morgan even thought that she might possibly be roused to tears by the occasion; only he begged Hester to go with her, that she might have the solace of some woman's company.



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She went through the greater part of the ceremony in the same hard, unmoved manner in which she had received everything for days past.

But on looking up once, as they formed round the open grave, she saw Kester, in his Sunday clothes, with a bit of new crape round his hat, crying as if his heart would break over the coffin of his good, kind mistress.

His evident distress, the unexpected sight, suddenly loosed the fountain of Sylvia's tears, and her sobs grew so terrible that Hester feared she would not be able to remain until the end of the funeral. But she struggled hard to stay till the last, and then she made an effort to go round by the place where Kester stood.

'Come and see me,' was all she could say for crying: and Kester only nodded his head—he could not speak a word.

CHAPTER XXXVI

MYSTERIOUS TIDINGS

That very evening Kester came, humbly knocking at the kitchen-door. Phoebe opened it. He asked to see Sylvia.

'A know not if she'll see thee,' said Phoebe. 'There's no makin' her out; sometimes she's for one thing, sometimes she's for another.'

'She bid me come and see her,' said Kester. 'Only this mornin', at missus' buryin', she telled me to come.'

So Phoebe went off to inform Sylvia that Kester was there; and returned with the desire that he would walk into the parlour. An instant after he was gone, Phoebe heard him return, and carefully shut the two doors of communication between the kitchen and sitting-room.

Sylvia was in the latter when Kester came in, holding her baby close to her; indeed, she seldom let it go now-a-days to any one else, making Nancy's place quite a sinecure, much to Phoebe's indignation.

Sylvia's face was shrunk, and white, and thin; her lovely eyes alone retained the youthful, almost childlike, expression. She went up to Kester, and shook his horny hand, she herself trembling all over.

'Don't talk to me of her,' she said hastily. 'I cannot stand it. It's a blessing for her to be gone, but, oh——'



She began to cry, and then cheered herself up, and swallowed down her sobs.

'Kester,' she went on, hastily, 'Charley Kinraid isn't dead; dost ta know? He's alive, and he were here o' Tuesday—no, Monday, was it? I cannot tell—but he were here!'

'A knowed as he weren't dead. Every one is a-speaking on it. But a didn't know as thee'd ha' seen him. A took comfort i' thinkin' as thou'd ha' been wi' thy mother a' t' time as he were i' t' place.'

'Then he's gone?' said Sylvia.

'Gone; ay, days past. As far as a know, he but stopped a' neet. A thought to mysel' (but yo' may be sure a said nought to nobody), he's heerd as our Sylvia were married, and has put it in his pipe, and ta'en hissel' off to smoke it.'

'Kester!' said Sylvia, leaning forwards, and whispering. 'I saw him. He was here. Philip saw him. Philip had known as he wasn't dead a' this time!'



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Kester stood up suddenly.

'By goom, that chap has a deal t' answer for.'

A bright red spot was on each of Sylvia's white cheeks; and for a minute or so neither of them spoke.

Then she went on, still whispering out her words.

'Kester, I'm more afeared than I dare tell any one: can they ha' met, think yo'? T' very thought turns me sick. I told Philip my mind, and took a vow again' him—but it would be awful to think on harm happening to him through Kinraid. Yet he went out that morning, and has niver been seen or heard on sin'; and Kinraid were just fell again' him, and as for that matter, so was I; but——'

The red spot vanished as she faced her own imagination.

Kester spoke.

'It's a thing as can be easy looked into. What day an' time were it when Philip left this house?'

'Tuesday—the day she died. I saw him in her room that morning between breakfast and dinner; I could a'most swear to it's being close after eleven. I mind counting t' clock. It was that very morn as Kinraid were here.'

'A'll go an' have a pint o' beer at t' King's Arms, down on t' quay-side; it were there he put up at. An' a'm pretty sure as he only stopped one night, and left i' t' morning betimes. But a'll go see.'

'Do,' said Sylvia, 'and go out through t' shop; they're all watching and watching me to see how I take things; and daren't let on about t' fire as is burning up my heart. Coulson is i' t' shop, but he'll not notice thee like Phoebe.'

By-and-by Kester came back. It seemed as though Sylvia had never stirred; she looked eagerly at him, but did not speak.

'He went away i' Rob Mason's mail-cart, him as tak's t' letters to Hartlepool. T' lieutenant (as they ca' him down at t' King's Arms; they're as proud on his uniform as if it had been a new-painted sign to swing o'er their doors), t' lieutenant had reckoned upo' stayin' longer wi' 'em; but he went out betimes o' Tuesday morn', an' came back a' ruffled up, an' paid his bill—paid for his breakfast, though he touched noane on it—an' went off i' Rob postman's mail-cart, as starts reg'lar at ten o'clock. Corneys has been there askin' for him, an' makin' a piece o' work, as he niver went near em; and they



bees cousins. Niver a one among 'em knows as he were here as far as a could mak' out.'

'Thank yo', Kester,' said Sylvia, falling back in her chair, as if all the energy that had kept her stiff and upright was gone now that her anxiety was relieved.

She was silent for a long time; her eyes shut, her cheek laid on her child's head. Kester spoke next.

'A think it's pretty clear as they'n niver met. But it's a' t' more wonder where thy husband's gone to. Thee and him had words about it, and thou telled him thy mind, thou said?'



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'Yes,' said Sylvia, not moving. 'I'm afeared lest mother knows what I said to him, there, where she's gone to—I am-' the tears filled her shut eyes, and came softly overflowing down her cheeks; 'and yet it were true, what I said, I cannot forgive him; he's just spoilt my life, and I'm not one-and-twenty yet, and he knowed how wretched, how very wretched, I were. A word fra' him would ha' mended it a'; and Charley had bid him speak the word, and give me his faithful love, and Philip saw my heart ache day after day, and niver let on as him I was mourning for was alive, and had sent me word as he'd keep true to me, as I were to do to him.'

'A wish a'd been there; a'd ha' felled him to t' ground,' said Kester, clenching his stiff, hard hand with indignation.

Sylvia was silent again: pale and weary she sate, her eyes still shut.

Then she said,

'Yet he were so good to mother; and mother loved him so. Oh, Kester!' lifting herself up, opening her great wistful eyes, 'it's well for folks as can die; they're spared a deal o' misery.'

'Ay!' said he. 'But there's folk as one 'ud like to keep fra' shirkin' their misery. Think yo' now as Philip is livin'?'

Sylvia shivered all over, and hesitated before she replied.

'I dunnot know. I said such things; he deserved 'em all——'

'Well, well, lass!' said Kester, sorry that he had asked the question which was producing so much emotion of one kind or another. 'Neither thee nor me can tell; we can neither help nor hinder, seein' as he's ta'en hissel' off out on our sight, we'd best not think on him. A'll try an' tell thee some news, if a can think on it wi' my mind so full. Thou knows Haytersbank folk ha' flitted, and t' oud place is empty?'

'Yes!' said Sylvia, with the indifference of one wearied out with feeling.

'A only telled yo' t' account like for me bein' at a loose end i' Monkshaven. My sister, her as lived at Dale End an' is a widow, has comed int' town to live; an' a'm lodging wi' her, an' jobbin' about. A'm gettin' pretty well to do, an' a'm noane far t' seek, an' a'm going now: only first a just wanted for t' say as a'm thy oldest friend, a reckon, and if a can do a turn for thee, or go an errand, like as a've done to-day, or if it's any comfort to talk a bit to one who's known thy life from a babby, why yo've only t' send for me, an' a'd come if it were twenty mile. A'm lodgin' at Peggy Dawson's, t' lath and plaster cottage at t' right hand o' t' bridge, a' among t' new houses, as they're thinkin' o' buildin' near t' sea: no one can miss it.'



He stood up and shook hands with her. As he did so, he looked at her sleeping baby.

'She's liker yo' than him. A think a'll say, God bless her.'

With the heavy sound of his out-going footsteps, baby awoke. She ought before this time to have been asleep in her bed, and the disturbance made her cry fretfully.

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'Hush thee, darling, hush thee!' murmured her mother; 'there's no one left to love me but thee, and I cannot stand thy weeping, my pretty one. Hush thee, my babe, hush thee!'

She whispered soft in the little one's ear as she took her upstairs to bed.

About three weeks after the miserable date of Bell Robson's death and Philip's disappearance, Hester Rose received a letter from him. She knew the writing on the address well; and it made her tremble so much that it was many minutes before she dared to open it, and make herself acquainted with the facts it might disclose.

But she need not have feared; there were no facts told, unless the vague date of 'London' might be something to learn. Even that much might have been found out by the post-mark, only she had been too much taken by surprise to examine it.

It ran as follows:—

'Dear Hester,—

'Tell those whom it may concern, that I have left Monkshaven for ever. No one need trouble themselves about me; I am provided for. Please to make my humble apologies to my kind friends, the Messrs Foster, and to my partner, William Coulson. Please to accept of my love, and to join the same to your mother. Please to give my particular and respectful duty and kind love to my aunt Isabella Robson. Her daughter Sylvia knows what I have always felt, and shall always feel, for her better than I can ever put into language, so I send her no message; God bless and keep my child. You must all look on me as one dead; as I am to you, and maybe shall soon be in reality.

'Your affectionate and obedient friend to command, 'Philip Hepburn. 'P.S.—Oh, Hester! for God's sake and mine, look after ('my wife,' scratched out) Sylvia and my child. I think Jeremiah Foster will help you to be a friend to them. This is the last solemn request of P. H. She is but very young.'

Hester read this letter again and again, till her heart caught the echo of its hopelessness, and sank within her. She put it in her pocket, and reflected upon it all the day long as she served in the shop.

The customers found her as gentle, but far more inattentive than usual. She thought that in the evening she would go across the bridge, and consult with the two good old brothers Foster. But something occurred to put off the fulfilment of this plan.

That same morning Sylvia had preceded her, with no one to consult, because consultation would have required previous confidence, and confidence would have necessitated such a confession about Kinraid as it was most difficult for Sylvia to make. The poor young wife yet felt that some step must be taken by her; and what it was to be she could not imagine.



She had no home to go to; for as Philip was gone away, she remained where she was only on sufferance; she did not know what means of livelihood she had; she was willing to work, nay, would be thankful to take up her old life of country labour; but with her baby, what could she do?



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In this dilemma, the recollection of the old man's kindly speech and offer of assistance, made, it is true, half in joke, at the end of her wedding visit, came into her mind; and she resolved to go and ask for some of the friendly counsel and assistance then offered.

It would be the first time of her going out since her mother's funeral, and she dreaded the effort on that account. More even than on that account did she shrink from going into the streets again. She could not get over the impression that Kinraid must be lingering near; and she distrusted herself so much that it was a positive terror to think of meeting him again. She felt as though, if she but caught a sight of him, the glitter of his uniform, or heard his well-known voice in only a distant syllable of talk, her heart would stop, and she should die from very fright of what would come next. Or rather so she felt, and so she thought before she took her baby in her arms, as Nancy gave it to her after putting on its out-of-door attire.

With it in her arms she was protected, and the whole current of her thoughts was changed. The infant was wailing and suffering with its teething, and the mother's heart was so occupied in soothing and consoling her moaning child, that the dangerous quayside and the bridge were passed almost before she was aware; nor did she notice the eager curiosity and respectful attention of those she met who recognized her even through the heavy veil which formed part of the draping mourning provided for her by Hester and Coulson, in the first unconscious days after her mother's death.

Though public opinion as yet reserved its verdict upon Philip's disappearance—warned possibly by Kinraid's story against hasty decisions and judgments in such times as those of war and general disturbance—yet every one agreed that no more pitiful fate could have befallen Philip's wife.

Marked out by her striking beauty as an object of admiring interest even in those days when she sate in girlhood's smiling peace by her mother at the Market Cross—her father had lost his life in a popular cause, and ignominious as the manner of his death might be, he was looked upon as a martyr to his zeal in avenging the wrongs of his townsmen; Sylvia had married amongst them too, and her quiet daily life was well known to them; and now her husband had been carried off from her side just on the very day when she needed his comfort most.

For the general opinion was that Philip had been 'carried off'—in seaport towns such occurrences were not uncommon in those days—either by land-crimps or water-crimps.

So Sylvia was treated with silent reverence, as one sorely afflicted, by all the unheeded people she met in her faltering walk to Jeremiah Foster's.

She had calculated her time so as to fall in with him at his dinner hour, even though it obliged her to go to his own house rather than to the bank where he and his brother spent all the business hours of the day.



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Sylvia was so nearly exhausted by the length of her walk and the weight of her baby, that all she could do when the door was opened was to totter into the nearest seat, sit down, and begin to cry.

In an instant kind hands were about her, loosening her heavy cloak, offering to relieve her of her child, who clung to her all the more firmly, and some one was pressing a glass of wine against her lips.

'No, sir, I cannot take it! wine allays gives me th' headache; if I might have just a drink o' water. Thank you, ma'am' (to the respectable-looking old servant), 'I'm well enough now; and perhaps, sir, I might speak a word with yo', for it's that I've come for.'

'It's a pity, Sylvia Hepburn, as thee didst not come to me at the bank, for it's been a long toil for thee all this way in the heat, with thy child. But if there's aught I can do or say for thee, thou hast but to name it, I am sure. Martha! wilt thou relieve her of her child while she comes with me into the parlour?'

But the wilful little Bella stoutly refused to go to any one, and Sylvia was not willing to part with her, tired though she was.

So the baby was carried into the parlour, and much of her after-life depended on this trivial fact.

Once installed in the easy-chair, and face to face with Jeremiah, Sylvia did not know how to begin.

Jeremiah saw this, and kindly gave her time to recover herself, by pulling out his great gold watch, and letting the seal dangle before the child's eyes, almost within reach of the child's eager little fingers.

'She favours you a deal,' said he, at last. 'More than her father,' he went on, purposely introducing Philip's name, so as to break the ice; for he rightly conjectured she had come to speak to him about something connected with her husband.

Still Sylvia said nothing; she was choking down tears and shyness, and unwillingness to take as confidant a man of whom she knew so little, on such slight ground (as she now felt it to be) as the little kindly speech with which she had been dismissed from that house the last time that she entered it.

'It's no use keeping yo', sir,' she broke out at last. 'It's about Philip as I comed to speak. Do yo' know any thing whatsoever about him? He niver had a chance o' saying anything, I know; but maybe he's written?'

'Not a line, my poor young woman!' said Jeremiah, hastily putting an end to that vain idea.



'Then he's either dead or gone away for iver,' she whispered. 'I mun be both feyther and mother to my child.'

'Oh! thee must not give it up,' replied he. 'Many a one is carried off to the wars, or to the tenders o' men-o'-war; and then they turn out to be unfit for service, and are sent home. Philip 'll come back before the year's out; thee'll see that.'

'No; he'll niver come back. And I'm not sure as I should iver wish him t' come back, if I could but know what was gone wi' him. Yo' see, sir, though I were sore set again' him, I shouldn't like harm to happen him.'



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'There is something behind all this that I do not understand. Can thee tell me what it is?'

'I must, sir, if yo're to help me wi' your counsel; and I came up here to ask for it.'

Another long pause, during which Jeremiah made a feint of playing with the child, who danced and shouted with tantalized impatience at not being able to obtain possession of the seal, and at length stretched out her soft round little arms to go to the owner of the coveted possession. Surprise at this action roused Sylvia, and she made some comment upon it.

'I niver knew her t' go to any one afore. I hope she'll not be troublesome to yo', sir?'

The old man, who had often longed for a child of his own in days gone by, was highly pleased by this mark of baby's confidence, and almost forgot, in trying to strengthen her regard by all the winning wiles in his power, how her poor mother was still lingering over some painful story which she could not bring herself to tell.

'I'm afeared of speaking wrong again' any one, sir. And mother were so fond o' Philip; but he kept something from me as would ha' made me a different woman, and some one else, happen, a different man. I were troth-plighted wi' Kinraid the specksioneer, him as was cousin to th' Corneys o' Moss Brow, and comed back lieutenant i' t' navy last Tuesday three weeks, after ivery one had thought him dead and gone these three years.'

She paused.

'Well?' said Jeremiah, with interest; although his attention appeared to be divided between the mother's story and the eager playfulness of the baby on his knee.

'Philip knew he were alive; he'd seen him taken by t' press-gang, and Charley had sent a message to me by Philip.'

Her white face was reddening, her eyes flashing at this point of her story.

'And he niver told me a word on it, not when he saw me like to break my heart in thinking as Kinraid were dead; he kept it a' to hissel'; and watched me cry, and niver said a word to comfort me wi' t' truth. It would ha' been a great comfort, sir, only t' have had his message if I'd niver ha' been to see him again. But Philip niver let on to any one, as I iver heard on, that he'd seen Charley that morning as t' press-gang took him. Yo' know about feyther's death, and how friendless mother and me was left? and so I married him; for he were a good friend to us then, and I were dazed like wi' sorrow, and could see naught else to do for mother. He were allays very tender and good to her, for sure.'



Again a long pause of silent recollection, broken by one or two deep sighs.

'If I go on, sir, now, I mun ask yo' to promise as yo'll niver tell. I do so need some one to tell me what I ought to do, and I were led here, like, else I would ha' died wi' it all within my teeth. Yo'll promise, sir?'

Jeremiah Foster looked in her face, and seeing the wistful, eager look, he was touched almost against his judgment into giving the promise required; she went on.



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'Upon a Tuesday morning, three weeks ago, I think, tho' for t' matter o' time it might ha' been three years, Kinraid come home; come back for t' claim me as his wife, and I were wed to Philip! I met him i' t' road at first; and I couldn't tell him there. He followed me into t' house—Philip's house, sir, behind t' shop—and somehow I told him all, how I were a wedded wife to another. Then he up and said I'd a false heart—me false, sir, as had eaten my daily bread in bitterness, and had wept t' nights through, all for sorrow and mourning for his death! Then he said as Philip knowed all t' time he were alive and coming back for me; and I couldn't believe it, and I called Philip, and he come, and a' that Charley had said were true; and yet I were Philip's wife! So I took a mighty oath, and I said as I'd niver hold Philip to be my lawful husband again, nor iver forgive him for t' evil he'd wrought us, but hold him as a stranger and one as had done me a heavy wrong.'

She stopped speaking; her story seemed to her to end there. But her listener said, after a pause,

'It were a cruel wrong, I grant thee that; but thy oath were a sin, and thy words were evil, my poor lass. What happened next?'

'I don't justly remember,' she said, wearily. 'Kinraid went away, and mother cried out; and I went to her. She were asleep, I thought, so I lay down by her, to wish I were dead, and to think on what would come on my child if I died; and Philip came in softly, and I made as if I were asleep; and that's t' very last as I've iver seen or heard of him.'

Jeremiah Foster groaned as she ended her story. Then he pulled himself up, and said, in a cheerful tone of voice,

'He'll come back, Sylvia Hepburn. He'll think better of it: never fear!'

'I fear his coming back!' said she. 'That's what I'm feared on; I would wish as I knew on his well-doing i' some other place; but him and me can niver live together again.'

'Nay,' pleaded Jeremiah. 'Thee art sorry what thee said; thee were sore put about, or thee wouldn't have said it.'

He was trying to be a peace-maker, and to heal over conjugal differences; but he did not go deep enough.

'I'm not sorry,' said she, slowly. 'I were too deeply wronged to be "put about"; that would go off wi' a night's sleep. It's only the thought of mother (she's dead and happy, and knows nought of all this, I trust) that comes between me and hating Philip. I'm not sorry for what I said.'

Jeremiah had never met with any one so frank and undisguised in expressions of wrong feeling, and he scarcely knew what to say.



He looked extremely grieved, and not a little shocked. So pretty and delicate a young creature to use such strong relentless language!

She seemed to read his thoughts, for she made answer to them.

'I dare say you think I'm very wicked, sir, not to be sorry. Perhaps I am. I can't think o' that for remembering how I've suffered; and he knew how miserable I was, and might ha' cleared my misery away wi' a word; and he held his peace, and now it's too late! I'm sick o' men and their cruel, deceitful ways. I wish I were dead.'



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She was crying before she had ended this speech, and seeing her tears, the child began to cry too, stretching out its little arms to go back to its mother. The hard stony look on her face melted away into the softest, tenderest love as she clasped the little one to her, and tried to soothe its frightened sobs.

A bright thought came into the old man's mind.

He had been taking a complete dislike to her till her pretty way with her baby showed him that she had a heart of flesh within her.

'Poor little one!' said he, 'thy mother had need love thee, for she's deprived thee of thy father's love. Thou'rt half-way to being an orphan; yet I cannot call thee one of the fatherless to whom God will be a father. Thou'rt a desolate babe, thou may'st well cry; thine earthly parents have forsaken thee, and I know not if the Lord will take thee up.'

Sylvia looked up at him affrighted; holding her baby tighter to her, she exclaimed.

'Don't speak so, sir! it's cursing, sir! I haven't forsaken her! Oh, sir! those are awful sayings.'

'Thee hast sworn never to forgive thy husband, nor to live with him again. Dost thee know that by the law of the land, he may claim his child; and then thou wilt have to forsake it, or to be forsworn? Poor little maiden!' continued he, once more luring the baby to him with the temptation of the watch and chain.

Sylvia thought for a while before speaking. Then she said,

'I cannot tell what ways to take. Whiles I think my head is crazed. It were a cruel turn he did me!'

'It was. I couldn't have thought him guilty of such baseness.'

This acquiescence, which was perfectly honest on Jeremiah's part, almost took Sylvia by surprise. Why might she not hate one who had been both cruel and base in his treatment of her? And yet she recoiled from the application of such hard terms by another to Philip, by a cool-judging and indifferent person, as she esteemed Jeremiah to be. From some inscrutable turn in her thoughts, she began to defend him, or at least to palliate the harsh judgment which she herself had been the first to pronounce.

'He were so tender to mother; she were dearly fond on him; he niver spared aught he could do for her, else I would niver ha' married him.'

'He was a good and kind-hearted lad from the time he was fifteen. And I never found him out in any falsehood, no more did my brother.'



'But it were all the same as a lie,' said Sylvia, swiftly changing her ground, 'to leave me to think as Charley were dead, when he knowed all t' time he were alive.'

'It was. It was a self-seeking lie; putting thee to pain to get his own ends. And the end of it has been that he is driven forth like Cain.'

'I niver told him to go, sir.'

'But thy words sent him forth, Sylvia.'

'I cannot unsay them, sir; and I believe as I should say them again.'



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But she said this as one who rather hopes for a contradiction.

All Jeremiah replied, however, was, 'Poor wee child!' in a pitiful tone, addressed to the baby.

Sylvia's eyes filled with tears.

'Oh, sir, I'll do anything as iver yo' can tell me for her. That's what I came for t' ask yo'. I know I mun not stay theere, and Philip gone away; and I dunnot know what to do: and I'll do aught, only I must keep her wi' me. Whativer can I do, sir?'

Jeremiah thought it over for a minute or two. Then he replied,

'I must have time to think. I must talk it over with brother John.'

'But you've given me yo'r word, sir!' exclaimed she.

'I have given thee my word never to tell any one of what has passed between thee and thy husband, but I must take counsel with my brother as to what is to be done with thee and thy child, now that thy husband has left the shop.'

This was said so gravely as almost to be a reproach, and he got up, as a sign that the interview was ended.

He gave the baby back to its mother; but not without a solemn blessing, so solemn that, to Sylvia's superstitious and excited mind, it undid the terrors of what she had esteemed to be a curse.

'The Lord bless thee and keep thee! The Lord make His face to shine upon thee!'

All the way down the hill-side, Sylvia kept kissing the child, and whispering to its unconscious ears,—

'I'll love thee for both, my treasure, I will. I'll hap thee round wi' my love, so as thou shall niver need a feyther's.'

CHAPTER XXXVII

BEREAVEMENT

Hester had been prevented by her mother's indisposition from taking Philip's letter to the Fosters, to hold a consultation with them over its contents.



Alice Rose was slowly failing, and the long days which she had to spend alone told much upon her spirits, and consequently upon her health.

All this came out in the conversation which ensued after reading Hepburn's letter in the little parlour at the bank on the day after Sylvia had had her confidential interview with Jeremiah Foster.

He was a true man of honour, and never so much as alluded to her visit to him; but what she had then told him influenced him very much in the formation of the project which he proposed to his brother and Hester.

He recommended her remaining where she was, living still in the house behind the shop; for he thought within himself that she might have exaggerated the effect of her words upon Philip; that, after all, it might have been some cause totally disconnected with them, which had blotted out her husband's place among the men of Monkshaven; and that it would be so much easier for both to resume their natural relations, both towards each other and towards the world, if Sylvia remained where her husband had left her—in an expectant attitude, so to speak.



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Jeremiah Foster questioned Hester straitly about her letter: whether she had made known its contents to any one. No, not to any one. Neither to her mother nor to William Coulson? No, to neither.

She looked at him as she replied to his inquiries, and he looked at her, each wondering if the other could be in the least aware that a conjugal quarrel might be at the root of the dilemma in which they were placed by Hepburn's disappearance.

But neither Hester, who had witnessed the misunderstanding between the husband and wife on the evening, before the morning on which Philip went away, nor Jeremiah Foster, who had learnt from Sylvia the true reason of her husband's disappearance, gave the slightest reason to the other to think that they each supposed they had a clue to the reason of Hepburn's sudden departure.

What Jeremiah Foster, after a night's consideration, had to propose was this; that Hester and her mother should come and occupy the house in the market-place, conjointly with Sylvia and her child. Hester's interest in the shop was by this time acknowledged. Jeremiah had made over to her so much of his share in the business, that she had a right to be considered as a kind of partner; and she had long been the superintendent of that department of goods which were exclusively devoted to women. So her daily presence was requisite for more reasons than one.

Yet her mother's health and spirits were such as to render it unadvisable that the old woman should be too much left alone; and Sylvia's devotion to her own mother seemed to point her out as the very person who could be a gentle and tender companion to Alice Rose during those hours when her own daughter would necessarily be engaged in the shop.

Many desirable objects seemed to be gained by this removal of Alice: an occupation was provided for Sylvia, which would detain her in the place where her husband had left her, and where (Jeremiah Foster fairly expected in spite of his letter) he was likely to come back to find her; and Alice Rose, the early love of one of the brothers, the old friend of the other, would be well cared for, and under her daughter's immediate supervision during the whole of the time that she was occupied in the shop.

Philip's share of the business, augmented by the money which he had put in from the legacy of his old Cumberland uncle, would bring in profits enough to support Sylvia and her child in ease and comfort until that time, which they all anticipated, when he should return from his mysterious wandering—mysterious, whether his going forth had been voluntary or involuntary.

Thus far was settled; and Jeremiah Foster went to tell Sylvia of the plan.



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She was too much a child, too entirely unaccustomed to any independence of action, to do anything but leave herself in his hands. Her very confession, made to him the day before, when she sought his counsel, seemed to place her at his disposal. Otherwise, she had had notions of the possibility of a free country life once more—how provided for and arranged she hardly knew; but Haytersbank was to let, and Kester disengaged, and it had just seemed possible that she might have to return to her early home, and to her old life. She knew that it would take much money to stock the farm again, and that her hands were tied from much useful activity by the love and care she owed to her baby. But still, somehow, she hoped and she fancied, till Jeremiah Foster's measured words and carefully-arranged plan made her silently relinquish her green, breezy vision.

Hester, too, had her own private rebellion—hushed into submission by her gentle piety. If Sylvia had been able to make Philip happy, Hester could have felt lovingly and almost gratefully towards her; but Sylvia had failed in this.

Philip had been made unhappy, and was driven forth a wanderer into the wide world—never to come back! And his last words to Hester, the postscript of his letter, containing the very pith of it, was to ask her to take charge and care of the wife whose want of love towards him had uprooted him from the place where he was valued and honoured.

It cost Hester many a struggle and many a self-reproach before she could make herself feel what she saw all along—that in everything Philip treated her like a sister. But even a sister might well be indignant if she saw her brother's love disregarded and slighted, and his life embittered by the thoughtless conduct of a wife! Still Hester fought against herself, and for Philip's sake she sought to see the good in Sylvia, and she strove to love her as well as to take care of her.

With the baby, of course, the case was different. Without thought or struggle, or reason, every one loved the little girl. Coulson and his buxom wife, who were childless, were never weary of making much of her. Hester's happiest hours were spent with that little child. Jeremiah Foster almost looked upon her as his own from the day when she honoured him by yielding to the temptation of the chain and seal, and coming to his knee; not a customer to the shop but knew the smiling child's sad history, and many a country-woman would save a rosy-cheeked apple from out her store that autumn to bring it on next market-day for 'Philip Hepburn's baby, as had lost its father, bless it.'

Even stern Alice Rose was graciously inclined towards the little Bella; and though her idea of the number of the elect was growing narrower and narrower every day, she would have been loth to exclude the innocent little child, that stroked her wrinkled cheeks so softly every night in return for her blessing, from the few that should be saved. Nay, for the child's sake, she relented towards the mother; and strove to have Sylvia rescued from the many castaways with fervent prayer, or, as she phrased it, 'wrestling with the Lord'.



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Alice had a sort of instinct that the little child, so tenderly loved by, so fondly loving, the mother whose ewe-lamb she was, could not be even in heaven without yearning for the creature she had loved best on earth; and the old woman believed that this was the principal reason for her prayers for Sylvia; but unconsciously to herself, Alice Rose was touched by the filial attentions she constantly received from the young mother, whom she believed to be foredoomed to condemnation.

Sylvia rarely went to church or chapel, nor did she read her Bible; for though she spoke little of her ignorance, and would fain, for her child's sake, have remedied it now it was too late, she had lost what little fluency of reading she had ever had, and could only make out her words with much spelling and difficulty. So the taking her Bible in hand would have been a mere form; though of this Alice Rose knew nothing.

No one knew much of what was passing in Sylvia; she did not know herself. Sometimes in the nights she would waken, crying, with a terrible sense of desolation; every one who loved her, or whom she had loved, had vanished out of her life; every one but her child, who lay in her arms, warm and soft.

But then Jeremiah Foster's words came upon her; words that she had taken for cursing at the time; and she would so gladly have had some clue by which to penetrate the darkness of the unknown region from whence both blessing and cursing came, and to know if she had indeed done something which should cause her sin to be visited on that soft, sweet, innocent darling.

If any one would teach her to read! If any one would explain to her the hard words she heard in church or chapel, so that she might find out the meaning of sin and godliness! —words that had only passed over the surface of her mind till now! For her child's sake she should like to do the will of God, if she only knew what that was, and how to be worked out in her daily life.

But there was no one she dared confess her ignorance to and ask information from. Jeremiah Foster had spoken as if her child, sweet little merry Bella, with a loving word and a kiss for every one, was to suffer heavily for the just and true words her wronged and indignant mother had spoken. Alice always spoke as if there were no hope for her; and blamed her, nevertheless, for not using the means of grace that it was not in her power to avail herself of.

And Hester, that Sylvia would fain have loved for her uniform gentleness and patience with all around her, seemed so cold in her unruffled and undemonstrative behaviour; and moreover, Sylvia felt that Hester blamed her perpetual silence regarding Philip's absence without knowing how bitter a cause Sylvia had for casting him off.



The only person who seemed to have pity upon her was Kester; and his pity was shown in looks rather than words; for when he came to see her, which he did from time to time, by a kind of mutual tacit consent, they spoke but little of former days.



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He was still lodging with his sister, widow Dobson, working at odd jobs, some of which took him into the country for weeks at a time. But on his returns to Monkshaven he was sure to come and see her and the little Bella; indeed, when his employment was in the immediate neighbourhood of the town, he never allowed a week to pass away without a visit.

There was not much conversation between him and Sylvia at such times. They skimmed over the surface of the small events in which both took an interest; only now and then a sudden glance, a checked speech, told each that there were deeps not forgotten, although they were never mentioned.

Twice Sylvia—below her breath—had asked Kester, just as she was holding the door open for his departure, if anything had ever been heard of Kinraid since his one night's visit to Monkshaven: each time (and there was an interval of some months between the inquiries) the answer had been simply, no.

To no one else would Sylvia ever have named his name. But indeed she had not the chance, had she wished it ever so much, of asking any questions about him from any one likely to know. The Corneys had left Moss Brow at Martinmas, and gone many miles away towards Horncastle. Bessy Corney, it is true was married and left behind in the neighbourhood; but with her Sylvia had never been intimate; and what girlish friendship there might have been between them had cooled very much at the time of Kinraid's supposed death three years before.

One day before Christmas in this year, 1798, Sylvia was called into the shop by Coulson, who, with his assistant, was busy undoing the bales of winter goods supplied to them from the West Riding, and other places. He was looking at a fine Irish poplin dress-piece when Sylvia answered to his call.

'Here! do you know this again?' asked he, in the cheerful tone of one sure of giving pleasure.

'No! have I iver seen it afore?'

'Not this, but one for all t' world like it.'

She did not rouse up to much interest, but looked at it as if trying to recollect where she could have seen its like.

'My missus had one on at th' party at John Foster's last March, and yo' admired it a deal. And Philip, he thought o' nothing but how he could get yo' just such another, and he set a vast o' folk agait for to meet wi' its marrow; and what he did just the very day afore he went away so mysterious was to write through Dawson Brothers, o' Wakefield,



to Dublin, and order that one should be woven for yo'. Jemima had to cut a bit off hers for to give him t' exact colour.'

Sylvia did not say anything but that it was very pretty, in a low voice, and then she quickly left the shop, much to Coulson's displeasure.

All the afternoon she was unusually quiet and depressed.

Alice Rose, sitting helpless in her chair, watched her with keen eyes.

At length, after one of Sylvia's deep, unconscious sighs, the old woman spoke:



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'It's religion as must comfort thee, child, as it's done many a one afore thee.'

'How?' said Sylvia, looking up, startled to find herself an object of notice.

'How?' (The answer was not quite so ready as the precept had been.) 'Read thy Bible, and thou wilt learn.'

'But I cannot read,' said Sylvia, too desperate any longer to conceal her ignorance.

'Not read! and thee Philip's wife as was such a great scholar! Of a surety the ways o' this life are crooked! There was our Hester, as can read as well as any minister, and Philip passes over her to go and choose a young lass as cannot read her Bible.'

'Was Philip and Hester——'

Sylvia paused, for though a new curiosity had dawned upon her, she did not know how to word her question.

'Many a time and oft have I seen Hester take comfort in her Bible when Philip was following after thee. She knew where to go for consolation.'

'I'd fain read,' said Sylvia, humbly, 'if anybody would learn me; for perhaps it might do me good; I'm noane so happy.'

Her eyes, as she looked up at Alice's stern countenance, were full of tears.

The old woman saw it, and was touched, although she did not immediately show her sympathy. But she took her own time, and made no reply.

The next day, however, she bade Sylvia come to her, and then and there, as if her pupil had been a little child, she began to teach Sylvia to read the first chapter of Genesis; for all other reading but the Scriptures was as vanity to her, and she would not condescend to the weakness of other books. Sylvia was now, as ever, slow at book-learning; but she was meek and desirous to be taught, and her willingness in this respect pleased Alice, and drew her singularly towards one who, from being a pupil, might become a convert.

All this time Sylvia never lost the curiosity that had been excited by the few words Alice had let drop about Hester and Philip, and by degrees she approached the subject again, and had the idea then started confirmed by Alice, who had no scruple in using the past experience of her own, of her daughter's, or of any one's life, as an instrument to prove the vanity of setting the heart on anything earthly.

This knowledge, unsuspected before, sank deep into Sylvia's thoughts, and gave her a strange interest in Hester—poor Hester, whose life she had so crossed and blighted,



even by the very blighting of her own. She gave Hester her own former passionate feelings for Kinraid, and wondered how she herself should have felt towards any one who had come between her and him, and wiled his love away. When she remembered Hester's unfailing sweetness and kindness towards herself from the very first, she could better bear the comparative coldness of her present behaviour.

She tried, indeed, hard to win back the favour she had lost; but the very means she took were blunders, and only made it seem to her as if she could never again do right in Hester's eyes.



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For instance, she begged her to accept and wear the pretty poplin gown which had been Philip's especial choice; feeling within herself as if she should never wish to put it on, and as if the best thing she could do with it was to offer it to Hester. But Hester rejected the proffered gift with as much hardness of manner as she was capable of assuming; and Sylvia had to carry it upstairs and lay it by for the little daughter, who, Hester said, might perhaps learn to value things that her father had given especial thought to.

Yet Sylvia went on trying to win Hester to like her once more; it was one of her great labours, and learning to read from Hester's mother was another.

Alice, indeed, in her solemn way, was becoming quite fond of Sylvia; if she could not read or write, she had a deftness and gentleness of motion, a capacity for the household matters which fell into her department, that had a great effect on the old woman, and for her dear mother's sake Sylvia had a stock of patient love ready in her heart for all the aged and infirm that fell in her way. She never thought of seeking them out, as she knew that Hester did; but then she looked up to Hester as some one very remarkable for her goodness. If only she could have liked her!

Hester tried to do all she could for Sylvia; Philip had told her to take care of his wife and child; but she had the conviction that Sylvia had so materially failed in her duties as to have made her husband an exile from his home—a penniless wanderer, wifeless and childless, in some strange country, whose very aspect was friendless, while the cause of all lived on in the comfortable home where he had placed her, wanting for nothing—an object of interest and regard to many friends—with a lovely little child to give her joy for the present, and hope for the future; while he, the poor outcast, might even lie dead by the wayside. How could Hester love Sylvia?

Yet they were frequent companions that ensuing spring. Hester was not well; and the doctors said that the constant occupation in the shop was too much for her, and that she must, for a time at least, take daily walks into the country.

Sylvia used to beg to accompany her; she and the little girl often went with Hester up the valley of the river to some of the nestling farms that were hidden in the more sheltered nooks—for Hester was bidden to drink milk warm from the cow; and to go into the familiar haunts about a farm was one of the few things in which Sylvia seemed to take much pleasure. She would let little Bella toddle about while Hester sate and rested: and she herself would beg to milk the cow destined to give the invalid her draught.

One May evening the three had been out on some such expedition; the country side still looked gray and bare, though the leaves were showing on the willow and blackthorn and sloe, and by the tinkling runnels, making hidden music along the copse side, the pale delicate primrose buds were showing amid their fresh, green, crinkled leaves. The



larks had been singing all the afternoon, but were now dropping down into their nests in the pasture fields; the air had just the sharpness in it which goes along with a cloudless evening sky at that time of the year.



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But Hester walked homewards slowly and languidly, speaking no word. Sylvia noticed this at first without venturing to speak, for Hester was one who disliked having her ailments noticed. But after a while Hester stood still in a sort of weary dreamy abstraction; and Sylvia said to her,

'I'm afeared yo're sadly tired. Maybe we've been too far.'

Hester almost started.

'No!' said she, 'it's only my headache which is worse to-night. It has been bad all day; but since I came out it has felt just as if there were great guns booming, till I could almost pray 'em to be quiet. I am so weary o' th' sound.'

She stepped out quickly towards home after she had said this, as if she wished for neither pity nor comment on what she had said.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE RECOGNITION

Far away, over sea and land, over sunny sea again, great guns were booming on that 7th of May, 1799.

The Mediterranean came up with a long roar on a beach glittering white with snowy sand, and the fragments of innumerable sea-shells, delicate and shining as porcelain. Looking at that shore from the sea, a long ridge of upland ground, beginning from an inland depth, stretched far away into the ocean on the right, till it ended in a great mountainous bluff, crowned with the white buildings of a convent sloping rapidly down into the blue water at its base.

In the clear eastern air, the different characters of the foliage that clothed the sides of that sea-washed mountain might be discerned from a long distance by the naked eye; the silver gray of the olive-trees near its summit; the heavy green and bossy forms of the sycamores lower down; broken here and there by a solitary terebinth or ilex tree, of a deeper green and a wider spread; till the eye fell below on the maritime plain, edged with the white seaboard and the sandy hillocks; with here and there feathery palm-trees, either isolated or in groups—motionless and distinct against the hot purple air.

Look again; a little to the left on the sea-shore there are the white walls of a fortified town, glittering in sunlight, or black in shadow.

The fortifications themselves run out into the sea, forming a port and a haven against the wild Levantine storms; and a lighthouse rises out of the waves to guide mariners into safety.



Beyond this walled city, and far away to the left still, there is the same wide plain shut in by the distant rising ground, till the upland circuit comes closing in to the north, and the great white rocks meet the deep tideless ocean with its intensity of blue colour.



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Above, the sky is literally purple with heat; and the pitiless light smites the gazer's weary eye as it comes back from the white shore. Nor does the plain country in that land offer the refuge and rest of our own soft green. The limestone rock underlies the vegetation, and gives a glittering, ashen hue to all the bare patches, and even to the cultivated parts which are burnt up early in the year. In spring-time alone does the country look rich and fruitful; then the corn-fields of the plain show their capability of bearing, 'some fifty, some an hundred fold'; down by the brook Kishon, flowing not far from the base of the mountainous promontory to the south, there grow the broad green fig-trees, cool and fresh to look upon; the orchards are full of glossy-leaved cherry-trees; the tall amaryllis puts forth crimson and yellow glories in the fields, rivalling the pomp of King Solomon; the daisies and the hyacinths spread their myriad flowers; the anemones, scarlet as blood, run hither and thither over the ground like dazzling flames of fire.

A spicy odour lingers in the heated air; it comes from the multitude of aromatic flowers that blossom in the early spring. Later on they will have withered and faded, and the corn will have been gathered, and the deep green of the eastern foliage will have assumed a kind of gray-bleached tint.

Even now in May, the hot sparkle of the everlasting sea, the terribly clear outline of all objects, whether near or distant, the fierce sun right overhead, the dazzling air around, were inexpressibly wearying to the English eyes that kept their skilled watch, day and night, on the strongly-fortified coast-town that lay out a little to the northward of where the British ships were anchored.

They had kept up a flanking fire for many days in aid of those besieged in St Jean d'Acre; and at intervals had listened, impatient, to the sound of the heavy siege guns, or the sharper rattle of the French musketry.

In the morning, on the 7th of May, a man at the masthead of the *Tigre* sang out that he saw ships in the offing; and in reply to the signal that was hastily run up, he saw the distant vessels hoist friendly flags. That May morning was a busy time. The besieged Turks took heart of grace; the French outside, under the command of their great general, made hasty preparations for a more vigorous assault than all many, both vigorous and bloody, that had gone before (for the siege was now at its fifty-first day), in hopes of carrying the town by storm before the reinforcement coming by sea could arrive; and Sir Sidney Smith, aware of Buonaparte's desperate intention, ordered all the men, both sailors and marines, that could be spared from the necessity of keeping up a continual flanking fire from the ships upon the French, to land, and assist the Turks and the British forces already there in the defence of the old historic city.



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Lieutenant Kinraid, who had shared his captain's daring adventure off the coast of France three years before, who had been a prisoner with him and Westley Wright, in the Temple at Paris, and had escaped with them, and, through Sir Sidney's earnest recommendation, been promoted from being a warrant officer to the rank of lieutenant, received on this day the honour from his admiral of being appointed to an especial post of danger. His heart was like a war-horse, and said, Ha, ha! as the boat bounded over the waves that were to land him under the ancient machicolated walls where the Crusaders made their last stand in the Holy Land. Not that Kinraid knew or cared one jot about those gallant knights of old: all he knew was, that the French, under Boney, were trying to take the town from the Turks, and that his admiral said they must not, and so they should not.

He and his men landed on that sandy shore, and entered the town by the water-port gate; he was singing to himself his own country song,—

Weel may the keel row, the keel row, &C.

and his men, with sailors' aptitude for music, caught up the air, and joined in the burden with inarticulate sounds.

So, with merry hearts, they threaded the narrow streets of Acre, hemmed in on either side by the white walls of Turkish houses, with small grated openings high up, above all chance of peeping intrusion.

Here and there they met an ample-robed and turbaned Turk going along with as much haste as his stately self-possession would allow. But the majority of the male inhabitants were gathered together to defend the breach, where the French guns thundered out far above the heads of the sailors.

They went along none the less merrily for the sound to Djezzar Pacha's garden, where the old Turk sate on his carpet, beneath the shade of a great terebinth tree, listening to the interpreter, who made known to him the meaning of the eager speeches of Sir Sidney Smith and the colonel of the marines.

As soon as the admiral saw the gallant sailors of H.M.S. *Tigre*, he interrupted the council of war without much ceremony, and going to Kinraid, he despatched them, as before arranged, to the North Ravelin, showing them the way with rapid, clear directions.

Out of respect to him, they had kept silent while in the strange, desolate garden; but once more in the streets, the old Newcastle song rose up again till the men were, perforce, silenced by the haste with which they went to the post of danger.



It was three o'clock in the afternoon. For many a day these very men had been swearing at the terrific heat at this hour—even when at sea, fanned by the soft breeze; but now, in the midst of hot smoke, with former carnage tainting the air, and with the rush and whizz of death perpetually whistling in their ears, they were uncomplaining and light-hearted. Many an old joke, and some new ones, came brave and hearty, on their cheerful voices, even though the speaker was veiled from sight in great clouds of smoke, cloven only by the bright flames of death.



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A sudden message came; as many of the crew of the *Tigre* as were under Lieutenant Kinraid's command were to go down to the Mole, to assist the new reinforcements (seen by the sailor from the masthead at day-dawn), under command of Hassan Bey, to land at the Mole, where Sir Sidney then was.

Off they went, almost as bright and thoughtless as before, though two of their number lay silent for ever at the North Ravelin—silenced in that one little half-hour. And one went along with the rest, swearing lustily at his ill-luck in having his right arm broken, but ready to do good business with his left.

They helped the Turkish troops to land more with good-will than tenderness; and then, led by Sir Sidney, they went under the shelter of English guns to the fatal breach, so often assailed, so gallantly defended, but never so fiercely contested as on this burning afternoon. The ruins of the massive wall that here had been broken down by the French, were used by them as stepping stones to get on a level with the besieged, and so to escape the heavy stones which the latter hurled down; nay, even the dead bodies of the morning's comrades were made into ghastly stairs.

When Djeddar Pacha heard that the British sailors were defending the breach, headed by Sir Sidney Smith, he left his station in the palace garden, gathered up his robes in haste, and hurried to the breach; where, with his own hands, and with right hearty good-will, he pulled the sailors down from the post of danger, saying that if he lost his English friends he lost all!

But little recked the crew of the *Tigre* of the one old man—Pacha or otherwise—who tried to hold them back from the fight; they were up and at the French assailants clambering over the breach in an instant; and so they went on, as if it were some game at play instead of a deadly combat, until Kinraid and his men were called off by Sir Sidney, as the reinforcement of Turkish troops under Hassan Bey were now sufficient for the defence of that old breach in the walls, which was no longer the principal object of the French attack; for the besiegers had made a new and more formidable breach by their incessant fire, knocking down whole streets of the city walls.

'Fight your best Kinraid!' said Sir Sidney; 'for there's Boney on yonder hill looking at you.'

And sure enough, on a rising ground, called Richard Coeur de Lion's Mount, there was a half-circle of French generals, on horseback, all deferentially attending to the motions, and apparently to the words, of a little man in their centre; at whose bidding the aide-de-camp galloped swift with messages to the more distant French camp.

The two ravelins which Kinraid and his men had to occupy, for the purpose of sending a flanking fire upon the enemy, were not ten yards from that enemy's van.

But at length there was a sudden rush of the French to that part of the wall where they imagined they could enter unopposed.



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Surprised at this movement, Kinraid ventured out of the shelter of the ravelin to ascertain the cause; he, safe and untouched during that long afternoon of carnage, fell now, under a stray musket-shot, and lay helpless and exposed upon the ground undiscerned by his men, who were recalled to help in the hot reception which had been planned for the French; who, descending the city walls into the Pacha's garden, were attacked with sabre and dagger, and lay headless corpses under the flowering rose-bushes, and by the fountain side.

Kinraid lay beyond the ravelins, many yards outside the city walls.

He was utterly helpless, for the shot had broken his leg. Dead bodies of Frenchmen lay strewn around him; no Englishman had ventured out so far.

All the wounded men that he could see were French; and many of these, furious with pain, gnashed their teeth at him, and cursed him aloud, till he thought that his best course was to assume the semblance of death; for some among these men were still capable of dragging themselves up to him, and by concentrating all their failing energies into one blow, put him to a speedy end.

The outlying pickets of the French army were within easy rifle shot; and his uniform, although less conspicuous in colour than that of the marines, by whose sides he had been fighting, would make him a sure mark if he so much as moved his arm. Yet how he longed to turn, if ever so slightly, so that the cruel slanting sun might not beat full into his aching eyes. Fever, too, was coming upon him; the pain in his leg was every moment growing more severe; the terrible thirst of the wounded, added to the heat and fatigue of the day, made his lips and tongue feel baked and dry, and his whole throat seemed parched and wooden. Thoughts of other days, of cool Greenland seas, where ice abounded, of grassy English homes, began to make the past more real than the present.

With a great effort he brought his wandering senses back; he knew where he was now, and could weigh the chances of his life, which were but small; the unwonted tears came to his eyes as he thought of the newly-made wife in her English home, who might never know how he died thinking of her.

Suddenly he saw a party of English marines advance, under shelter of the ravelin, to pick up the wounded, and bear them within the walls for surgical help. They were so near he could see their faces, could hear them speak; yet he durst not make any sign to them when he lay within range of the French picket's fire.

For one moment he could not resist raising his head, to give himself a chance for life; before the unclean creatures that infest a camp came round in the darkness of the night to strip and insult the dead bodies, and to put to death such as had yet the breath of life

within them. But the setting sun came full into his face, and he saw nothing of what he longed to see.

He fell back in despair; he lay there to die.



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That strong clear sunbeam had wrought his salvation.

He had been recognized as men are recognized when they stand in the red glare of a house on fire; the same despair of help, of hopeless farewell to life, stamped on their faces in blood-red light.

One man left his fellows, and came running forwards, forwards in among the enemy's wounded, within range of their guns; he bent down over Kinraid; he seemed to understand without a word; he lifted him up, carrying him like a child; and with the vehement energy that is more from the force of will than the strength of body, he bore him back to within the shelter of the ravelin—not without many shots being aimed at them, one of which hit Kinraid in the fleshy part of his arm.

Kinraid was racked with agony from his dangling broken leg, and his very life seemed leaving him; yet he remembered afterwards how the marine recalled his fellows, and how, in the pause before they returned, his face became like one formerly known to the sick senses of Kinraid; yet it was too like a dream, too utterly improbable to be real.

Yet the few words this man said, as he stood breathless and alone by the fainting Kinraid, fitted in well with the belief conjured up by his personal appearance. He panted out,—

'I niver thought you'd ha' kept true to her!'

And then the others came up; and while they were making a sling of their belts, Kinraid fainted utterly away, and the next time that he was fully conscious, he was lying in his berth in the *Tigre*, with the ship surgeon setting his leg. After that he was too feverish for several days to collect his senses. When he could first remember, and form a judgment upon his recollections, he called the man especially charged to attend upon him, and bade him go and make inquiry in every possible manner for a marine named Philip Hepburn, and, when he was found, to entreat him to come and see Kinraid.

The sailor was away the greater part of the day, and returned unsuccessful in his search; he had been from ship to ship, hither and thither; he had questioned all the marines he had met with, no one knew anything of any Philip Hepburn.

Kinraid passed a miserably feverish night, and when the doctor exclaimed the next morning at his retrogression, he told him, with some irritation, of the ill-success of his servant; he accused the man of stupidity, and wished fervently that he were able to go himself.

Partly to soothe him, the doctor promised that he would undertake the search for Hepburn, and he engaged faithfully to follow all Kinraid's eager directions; not to be satisfied with men's careless words, but to look over muster-rolls and ships' books.

He, too, brought the same answer, however unwillingly given.

He had set out upon the search so confident of success, that he felt doubly discomfited by failure. However, he had persuaded himself that the lieutenant had been partially delirious from the effects of his wound, and the power of the sun shining down just where he lay. There had, indeed, been slight symptoms of Kinraid's having received a sun-stroke; and the doctor dwelt largely on these in his endeavour to persuade his patient that it was his imagination which had endued a stranger with the lineaments of some former friend.



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Kinraid threw his arms out of bed with impatience at all this plausible talk, which was even more irritating than the fact that Hepburn was still undiscovered.

'The man was no friend of mine; I was like to have killed him when last I saw him. He was a shopkeeper in a country town in England. I had seen little enough of him; but enough to make me able to swear to him anywhere, even in a marine's uniform, and in this sweltering country.'

'Faces once seen, especially in excitement, are apt to return upon the memory in cases of fever,' quoth the doctor, sententiously.

The attendant sailor, reinstated to some complacency by the failure of another in the search in which he himself had been unsuccessful, now put in his explanation.

'Maybe it was a spirit. It's not th' first time as I've heared of a spirit coming upon earth to save a man's life i' time o' need. My father had an uncle, a west-country grazier. He was a-coming over Dartmoor in Devonshire one moonlight night with a power o' money as he'd got for his sheep at t' fair. It were stowed i' leather bags under th' seat o' th' gig. It were a rough kind o' road, both as a road and in character, for there'd been many robberies there of late, and th' great rocks stood convenient for hiding-places. All at once father's uncle feels as if some one were sitting beside him on th' empty seat; and he turns his head and looks, and there he sees his brother sitting—his brother as had been dead twelve year and more. So he turns his head back again, eyes right, and never say a word, but wonders what it all means. All of a sudden two fellows come out upo' th' white road from some black shadow, and they looked, and they let th' gig go past, father's uncle driving hard, I'll warrant him. But for all that he heard one say to t' other, "By——, there's *two* on 'em!" Straight on he drove faster than ever, till he saw th' far lights of some town or other. I forget its name, though I've heared it many a time; and then he drew a long breath, and turned his head to look at his brother, and ask him how he'd managed to come out of his grave i' Barum churchyard, and th' seat was as empty as it had been when he set out; and then he knew that it were a spirit come to help him against th' men who thought to rob him, and would likely enough ha' murdered him.'

Kinraid had kept quiet through this story. But when the sailor began to draw the moral, and to say, 'And I think I may make bold to say, sir, as th' marine who carried you out o' th' Frenchy's gun-shot was just a spirit come to help you,' he exclaimed impatiently, swearing a great oath as he did so, 'It was no spirit, I tell you; and I was in my full senses. It was a man named Philip Hepburn. He said words to me, or over me, as none but himself would have said. Yet we hated each other like poison; and I can't make out why he should be there and putting himself in danger to save me. But so it was; and as you can't find him, let me hear no more of your nonsense. It was him, and not my fancy, doctor. It was flesh and blood, and not a spirit, Jack. So get along with you, and leave me quiet.'



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All this time Stephen Freeman lay friendless, sick, and shattered, on board the *Thesus*.

He had been about his duty close to some shells that were placed on her deck; a gay young midshipman was thoughtlessly striving to get the fusee out of one of these by a mallet and spike-nail that lay close at hand; and a fearful explosion ensued, in which the poor marine, cleaning his bayonet near, was shockingly burnt and disfigured, the very skin of all the lower part of his face being utterly destroyed by gunpowder. They said it was a mercy that his eyes were spared; but he could hardly feel anything to be a mercy, as he lay tossing in agony, burnt by the explosion, wounded by splinters, and feeling that he was disabled for life, if life itself were preserved. Of all that suffered by that fearful accident (and they were many) none was so forsaken, so hopeless, so desolate, as the Philip Hepburn about whom such anxious inquiries were being made at that very time.

CHAPTER XXXIX

CONFIDENCES

It was a little later on in that same summer that Mrs. Brunton came to visit her sister Bessy.

Bessy was married to a tolerably well-to-do farmer who lived at an almost equal distance between Monkshaven and Hartswell; but from old habit and convenience the latter was regarded as the Dawsons' market-town; so Bessy seldom or never saw her old friends in Monkshaven.

But Mrs. Brunton was far too flourishing a person not to speak out her wishes, and have her own way. She had no notion, she said, of coming such a long journey only to see Bessy and her husband, and not to have a sight of her former acquaintances at Monkshaven. She might have added, that her new bonnet and cloak would be as good as lost if it was not displayed among those who, knowing her as Molly Corney, and being less fortunate in matrimony than she was, would look upon it with wondering admiration, if not with envy.

So one day farmer Dawson's market-cart deposited Mrs. Brunton in all her bravery at the shop in the market-place, over which Hepburn and Coulson's names still flourished in joint partnership.

After a few words of brisk recognition to Coulson and Hester, Mrs. Brunton passed on into the parlour and greeted Sylvia with boisterous heartiness.

It was now four years and more since the friends had met; and each secretly wondered how they had ever come to be friends. Sylvia had a country, raw, spiritless look to Mrs. Brunton's eye; Molly was loud and talkative, and altogether distasteful to Sylvia, trained

in daily companionship with Hester to appreciate soft slow speech, and grave thoughtful ways.

However, they kept up the forms of their old friendship, though their hearts had drifted far apart. They sat hand in hand while each looked at the other with eyes inquisitive as to the changes which time had made. Molly was the first to speak.



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'Well, to be sure! how thin and pale yo've grown, Sylvia! Matrimony hasn't agreed wi' yo' as well as it's done wi me. Brunton is allays saying (yo' know what a man he is for his joke) that if he'd ha' known how many yards o' silk I should ha' ta'en for a gown, he'd ha' thought twice afore he'd ha' married me. Why, I've gained a matter o' thirty pound o' flesh sin' I were married!'

'Yo' do look brave and hearty!' said Sylvia, putting her sense of her companion's capacious size and high colour into the prettiest words she could.

'Eh! Sylvia! but I know what it is,' said Molly, shaking her head. 'It's just because o' that husband o' thine as has gone and left thee; thou's pining after him, and he's not worth it. Brunton said, when he heared on it—I mind he was smoking at t' time, and he took his pipe out of his mouth, and shook out t' ashes as grave as any judge—"The man," says he, "as can desert a wife like Sylvia Robson as was, deserves hanging!" That's what he says! Eh! Sylvia, but speakin' o' hanging I was so grieved for yo' when I heared of yo'r poor feyther! Such an end for a decent man to come to! Many a one come an' called on me o' purpose to hear all I could tell 'em about him!'

'Please don't speak on it!' said Sylvia, trembling all over.

'Well, poor creature, I wunnot. It is hard on thee, I grant. But to give t' devil his due, it were good i' Hepburn to marry thee, and so soon after there was a' that talk about thy feyther. Many a man would ha' drawn back, choose howiver far they'd gone. I'm noane so sure about Charley Kinraid. Eh, Sylvia! only think on his being alive after all. I doubt if our Bessy would ha' wed Frank Dawson if she'd known as he wasn't drowned. But it's as well she did, for Dawson's a man o' property, and has getten twelve cows in his cow-house, beside three right down good horses; and Kinraid were allays a fellow wi' two strings to his bow. I've allays said and do maintain, that he went on pretty strong wi' yo', Sylvie; and I will say I think he cared more for yo' than for our Bessy, though it were only yesterday at e'en she were standing out that he liked her better than yo'. Yo'll ha' heared on his grand marriage?'

'No!' said Sylvia, with eager painful curiosity.

'No! It was in all t' papers! I wonder as yo' didn't see it. Wait a minute! I cut it out o' t' *Gentleman's Magazine*, as Brunton bought o' purpose, and put it i' my pocket-book when I were a-coming here: I know I've got it somewheere.'

She took out her smart crimson pocket-book, and rummaged in the pocket until she produced a little crumpled bit of printed paper, from which she read aloud,

'On January the third, at St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol, Charles Kinraid, Esq., lieutenant Royal Navy, to Miss Clarinda Jackson, with a fortune of 10,000_l_.'

'Theere!' said she, triumphantly, 'it's something as Brunton says, to be cousin to that.'



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'Would yo' let me see it?' said Sylvia, timidly.

Mrs. Brunton graciously consented; and Sylvia brought her newly acquired reading-knowledge, hitherto principally exercised on the Old Testament, to bear on these words.

There was nothing wonderful in them, nothing that she might not have expected; and yet the surprise turned her giddy for a moment or two. She never thought of seeing him again, never. But to think of his caring for another woman as much as he had done for her, nay, perhaps more!

The idea was irresistibly forced upon her that Philip would not have acted so; it would have taken long years before he could have been induced to put another on the throne she had once occupied. For the first time in her life she seemed to recognize the real nature of Philip's love.

But she said nothing but 'Thank yo', when she gave the scrap of paper back to Molly Brunton. And the latter continued giving her information about Kinraid's marriage.

'He were down in t' west, Plymouth or somewheere, when he met wi' her. She's no feyther; he'd been in t' sugar-baking business; but from what Kinraid wrote to old Turner, th' uncle as brought him up at Cullercoats, she's had t' best of edications: can play on t' instrument and dance t' shawl dance; and Kinraid had all her money settled on her, though she said she'd rayther give it all to him, which I must say, being his cousin, was very pretty on her. He's left her now, having to go off in t' *Tigre*, as is his ship, to t' Mediterranean seas; and she's written to offer to come and see old Turner, and make friends with his relations, and Brunton is going to gi'e me a crimson satin as soon as we know for certain when she's coming, for we're sure to be asked out to Cullercoats.'

'I wonder if she's very pretty?' asked Sylvia, faintly, in the first pause in this torrent of talk.

'Oh! she's a perfect beauty, as I understand. There was a traveller as come to our shop as had been at York, and knew some of her cousins theere that were in t' grocery line—her mother was a York lady—and they said she was just a picture of a woman, and iver so many gentlemen had been wantin' to marry her, but she just waited for Charley Kinraid, yo' see!'

'Well, I hope they'll be happy; I'm sure I do!' said Sylvia.

'That's just luck. Some folks is happy i' marriage, and some isn't. It's just luck, and there's no forecasting it. Men is such unaccountable animals, there's no prophesyin' upon 'em. Who'd ha' thought of yo'r husband, him as was so slow and sure—steady Philip, as we lasses used to ca' him—makin' a moonlight flittin', and leavin' yo' to be a widow bewitched?'



'He didn't go at night,' said Sylvia, taking the words 'moonlight flitting' in their literal sense.

'No! Well, I only said "moonlight flittin'" just because it come uppermost and I knowed no better. Tell me all about it, Sylvie, for I can't mak' it out from what Bessy says. Had he and yo' had words?—but in course yo' had.'

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At this moment Hester came into the room; and Sylvia joyfully availed herself of the pretext for breaking off the conversation that had reached this painful and awkward point. She detained Hester in the room for fear lest Mrs. Brunton should repeat her inquiry as to how it all happened that Philip had gone away; but the presence of a third person seemed as though it would be but little restraint upon the inquisitive Molly, who repeatedly bore down upon the same questions till she nearly drove Sylvia distracted, between her astonishment at the news of Kinraid's marriage; her wish to be alone and quiet, so as to realize the full meaning of that piece of intelligence; her desire to retain Hester in the conversation; her efforts to prevent Molly's recurrence to the circumstances of Philip's disappearance, and the longing—more vehement every minute—for her visitor to go away and leave her in peace. She became so disturbed with all these thoughts and feelings that she hardly knew what she was saying, and assented or dissented to speeches without there being either any reason or truth in her words.

Mrs. Brunton had arranged to remain with Sylvia while the horse rested, and had no compunction about the length of her visit. She expected to be asked to tea, as Sylvia found out at last, and this she felt would be the worst of all, as Alice Rose was not one to tolerate the coarse, careless talk of such a woman as Mrs. Brunton without uplifting her voice in many a testimony against it. Sylvia sate holding Hester's gown tight in order to prevent her leaving the room, and trying to arrange her little plans so that too much discordance should not arise to the surface. Just then the door opened, and little Bella came in from the kitchen in all the pretty, sturdy dignity of two years old, Alice following her with careful steps, and protecting, outstretched arms, a slow smile softening the sternness of her grave face; for the child was the unconscious darling of the household, and all eyes softened into love as they looked on her. She made straight for her mother with something grasped in her little dimpled fist; but half-way across the room she seemed to have become suddenly aware of the presence of a stranger, and she stopped short, fixing her serious eyes full on Mrs. Brunton, as if to take in her appearance, nay, as if to penetrate down into her very real self, and then, stretching out her disengaged hand, the baby spoke out the words that had been hovering about her mother's lips for an hour past.

'Do away!' said Bella, decisively.

'What a perfect love!' said Mrs. Brunton, half in real admiration, half in patronage. As she spoke, she got up and went towards the child, as if to take her up.

'Do away! do away!' cried Bella, in shrill affright at this movement.

'Dunnot,' said Sylvia; 'she's shy; she doesn't know strangers.'

But Mrs. Brunton had grasped the struggling, kicking child by this time, and her reward for this was a vehement little slap in the face.



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'Yo' naughty little spoilt thing!' said she, setting Bella down in a hurry. 'Yo' deserve a good whipping, yo' do, and if yo' were mine yo' should have it.'

Sylvia had no need to stand up for the baby who had run to her arms, and was soothing herself with sobbing on her mother's breast; for Alice took up the defence.

'The child said, as plain as words could say, "go away," and if thou wouldst follow thine own will instead of heeding her wish, thou mun put up with the wilfulness of the old Adam, of which it seems to me thee hast gotten thy share at thirty as well as little Bella at two.'

'Thirty!' said Mrs. Brunton, now fairly affronted. 'Thirty! why, Sylvia, yo' know I'm but two years older than yo'; speak to that woman an' tell her as I'm only four-and-twenty. Thirty, indeed!'

'Molly's but four-and-twenty,' said Sylvia, in a pacificatory tone.

'Whether she be twenty, or thirty, or forty, is alike to me,' said Alice. 'I meant no harm. I meant but for t' say as her angry words to the child bespoke her to be one of the foolish. I know not who she is, nor what her age may be.'

'She's an old friend of mine,' said Sylvia. 'She's Mrs. Brunton now, but when I knowed her she was Molly Corney.'

'Ay! and yo' were Sylvia Robson, and as bonny and light-hearted a lass as any in a' t' Riding, though now yo're a poor widow bewitched, left wi' a child as I mustn't speak a word about, an' living wi' folk as talk about t' old Adam as if he wasn't dead and done wi' long ago! It's a change, Sylvia, as makes my heart ache for yo', to think on them old days when yo' were so thought on yo' might have had any man, as Brunton often says; it were a great mistake as yo' iver took up wi' yon man as has run away. But seven year '11 soon be past fro' t' time he went off, and yo'll only be six-and-twenty then; and there'll be a chance of a better husband for yo' after all, so keep up yo'r heart, Sylvia.'

Molly Brunton had put as much venom as she knew how into this speech, meaning it as a vengeful payment for the supposition of her being thirty, even more than for the reproof for her angry words about the child. She thought that Alice Rose must be either mother or aunt to Philip, from the serious cast of countenance that was remarkable in both; and she rather exulted in the allusion to a happier second marriage for Sylvia, with which she had concluded her speech. It roused Alice, however, as effectually as if she had been really a blood relation to Philip; but for a different reason. She was not slow to detect the intentional offensiveness to herself in what had been said; she was indignant at Sylvia for suffering the words spoken to pass unanswered; but in truth they were too much in keeping with Molly Brunton's character to make as much impression on Sylvia as they did on a stranger; and besides, she felt as if the less reply Molly received, the

less likely would it be that she would go on in the same strain. So she coaxed and chattered to her child and behaved like a little coward in trying to draw out of the conversation, while at the same time listening attentively.



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'As for Sylvia Hepburn as was Sylvia Robson, she knows my mind,' said Alice, in grim indignation. 'She's humbling herself now, I trust and pray, but she was light-minded and full of vanity when Philip married her, and it might ha' been a lift towards her salvation in one way; but it pleased the Lord to work in a different way, and she mun wear her sackcloth and ashes in patience. So I'll say naught more about her. But for him as is absent, as thee hast spoken on so lightly and reproachfully, I'd have thee to know he were one of a different kind to any thee ever knew, I reckon. If he were led away by a pretty face to slight one as was fitter for him, and who had loved him as the apple of her eye, it's him as is suffering for it, inasmuch as he's a wanderer from his home, and an outcast from wife and child.'

To the surprise of all, Molly's words of reply were cut short even when they were on her lips, by Sylvia. Pale, fire-eyed, and excited, with Philip's child on one arm, and the other stretched out, she said,—

'Noane can tell—noane know. No one shall speak a judgment 'twixt Philip and me. He acted cruel and wrong by me. But I've said my words to him hissel', and I'm noane going to make any plaint to others; only them as knows should judge. And it's not fitting, it's not' (almost sobbing), 'to go on wi' talk like this afore me.'

The two—for Hester, who was aware that her presence had only been desired by Sylvia as a check to an unpleasant *tete-a-tete* conversation, had slipped back to her business as soon as her mother came in—the two looked with surprise at Sylvia; her words, her whole manner, belonged to a phase of her character which seldom came uppermost, and which had not been perceived by either of them before.

Alice Rose, though astonished, rather approved of Sylvia's speech; it showed that she had more serious thought and feeling on the subject than the old woman had given her credit for; her general silence respecting her husband's disappearance had led Alice to think that she was too childish to have received any deep impression from the event. Molly Brunton gave vent to her opinion on Sylvia's speech in the following words:—

'Hoighty-toighty! That tells tales, lass. If yo' treated steady Philip to many such looks an' speeches as yo'n given us now, it's easy t' see why he took hisself off. Why, Sylvia, I niver saw it in yo' when yo' was a girl; yo're grown into a regular little vixen, there where yo' stand!'

Indeed she did look defiant, with the swift colour flushing her cheeks to crimson on its return, and the fire in her eyes not yet died away. But at Molly's jesting words she sank back into her usual look and manner, only saying quietly,—

'It's for noane to say whether I'm vixen or not, as doesn't know th' past things as is buried in my heart. But I cannot hold them as my friends as go on talking on either my

husband or me before my very face. What he was, I know; and what I am, I reckon he knows. And now I'll go hurry tea, for yo'll be needing it, Molly!

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The last clause of this speech was meant to make peace; but Molly was in twenty minds as to whether she should accept the olive-branch or not. Her temper, however, was of that obtuse kind which is not easily ruffled; her mind, stagnant in itself, enjoyed excitement from without; and her appetite was invariably good, so she stayed, in spite of the inevitable *tete-a-tete* with Alice. The latter, however, refused to be drawn into conversation again; replying to Mrs. Brunton's speeches with a curt yes or no, when, indeed, she replied at all.

When all were gathered at tea, Sylvia was quite calm again; rather paler than usual, and very attentive and subdued in her behaviour to Alice; she would evidently fain have been silent, but as Molly was her own especial guest, that could not be, so all her endeavours went towards steering the conversation away from any awkward points. But each of the four, let alone little Bella, was thankful when the market-cart drew up at the shop door, that was to take Mrs. Brunton back to her sister's house.

When she was fairly off, Alice Rose opened her mouth in strong condemnation; winding up with—

'And if aught in my words gave thee cause for offence, Sylvia, it was because my heart rose within me at the kind of talk thee and she had been having about Philip; and her evil and light-minded counsel to thee about waiting seven years, and then wedding another.'

Hard as these words may seem when repeated, there was something of a nearer approach to an apology in Mrs. Rose's manner than Sylvia had ever seen in it before. She was silent for a few moments, then she said,—

'I ha' often thought of telling yo' and Hester, special-like, when yo've been so kind to my little Bella, that Philip an' me could niver come together again; no, not if he came home this very night——'

She would have gone on speaking, but Hester interrupted her with a low cry of dismay.

Alice said,—

'Hush thee, Hester. It's no business o' thine. Sylvia Hepburn, thou'rt speaking like a silly child.'

'No. I'm speaking like a woman; like a woman as finds out she's been cheated by men as she trusted, and as has no help for it. I'm noane going to say any more about it. It's me as has been wronged, and as has to bear it: only I thought I'd tell yo' both this much, that yo' might know somewhat why he went away, and how I said my last word about it.'



So indeed it seemed. To all questions and remonstrances from Alice, Sylvia turned a deaf ear. She averted her face from Hester's sad, wistful looks; only when they were parting for the night, at the top of the little staircase, she turned, and putting her arms round Hester's neck she laid her head on her neck, and whispered,—

'Poor Hester—poor, poor Hester! if yo' an' he had but been married together, what a deal o' sorrow would ha' been spared to us all!'

Hester pushed her away as she finished these words; looked searchingly into her face, her eyes, and then followed Sylvia into her room, where Bella lay sleeping, shut the door, and almost knelt down at Sylvia's feet, clasping her, and hiding her face in the folds of the other's gown.



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'Sylvia, Sylvia,' she murmured, 'some one has told you—I thought no one knew—it's no sin—it's done away with now—indeed it is—it was long ago—before yo' were married; but I cannot forget. It was a shame, perhaps, to have thought on it iver, when he niver thought o' me; but I niver believed as any one could ha' found it out. I'm just fit to sink into t' ground, what wi' my sorrow and my shame.'

Hester was stopped by her own rising sobs, immediately she was in Sylvia's arms. Sylvia was sitting on the ground holding her, and soothing her with caresses and broken words.

'I'm allays saying t' wrong things,' said she. 'It seems as if I were all upset to-day; and indeed I am;' she added, alluding to the news of Kinraid's marriage she had yet to think upon.

'But it wasn't yo', Hester: it were nothing yo' iver said, or did, or looked, for that matter. It were yo'r mother as let it out.'

'Oh, mother! mother!' wailed out Hester; 'I niver thought as any one but God would ha' known that I had iver for a day thought on his being more to me than a brother.'

Sylvia made no reply, only went on stroking Hester's smooth brown hair, off which her cap had fallen. Sylvia was thinking how strange life was, and how love seemed to go all at cross purposes; and was losing herself in bewilderment at the mystery of the world; she was almost startled when Hester rose up, and taking Sylvia's hands in both of hers, and looking solemnly at her, said,—

'Sylvia, yo' know what has been my trouble and my shame, and I'm sure yo're sorry for me—for I will humble myself to yo', and own that for many months before yo' were married, I felt my disappointment like a heavy burden laid on me by day and by night; but now I ask yo', if yo've any pity for me for what I went through, or if yo've any love for me because of yo'r dead mother's love for me, or because of any fellowship, or daily breadliness between us two,—put the hard thoughts of Philip away from out yo'r heart; he may ha' done yo' wrong, anyway yo' think that he has; I niver knew him aught but kind and good; but if he comes back from wheriver in th' wide world he's gone to (and there's not a night but I pray God to keep him, and send him safe back), yo' put away the memory of past injury, and forgive it all, and be, what yo' can be, Sylvia, if you've a mind to, just the kind, good wife he ought to have.'

'I cannot; yo' know nothing about it, Hester.'

'Tell me, then,' pleaded Hester.

'No!' said Sylvia, after a moment's hesitation; 'I'd do a deal for yo', I would, but I daren't forgive Philip, even if I could; I took a great oath again' him. Ay, yo' may look shocked at



me, but it's him as yo' ought for to be shocked at if yo' knew all. I said I'd niver forgive him; I shall keep to my word.'

'I think I'd better pray for his death, then,' said Hester, hopelessly, and almost bitterly, loosing her hold of Sylvia's hands.



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'If it weren't for baby there, I could think as it were my death as 'ud be best. Them as one thinks t' most on, forgets one soonest.'

It was Kinraid to whom she was alluding; but Hester did not understand her; and after standing for a moment in silence, she kissed her, and left her for the night.

CHAPTER XL

AN UNEXPECTED MESSENGER

After this agitation, and these partial confidences, no more was said on the subject of Philip for many weeks. They avoided even the slightest allusion to him; and none of them knew how seldom or how often he might be present in the minds of the others.

One day the little Bella was unusually fractious with some slight childish indisposition, and Sylvia was obliged to have recourse to a never-failing piece of amusement; namely, to take the child into the shop, when the number of new, bright-coloured articles was sure to beguile the little girl out of her fretfulness. She was walking along the high terrace of the counter, kept steady by her mother's hand, when Mr. Dawson's market-cart once more stopped before the door. But it was not Mrs. Brunton who alighted now; it was a very smartly-dressed, very pretty young lady, who put one dainty foot before the other with care, as if descending from such a primitive vehicle were a new occurrence in her life. Then she looked up at the names above the shop-door, and after ascertaining that this was indeed the place she desired to find, she came in blushing.

'Is Mrs. Hepburn at home?' she asked of Hester, whose position in the shop brought her forwards to receive the customers, while Sylvia drew Bella out of sight behind some great bales of red flannel.

'Can I see her?' the sweet, south-country voice went on, still addressing Hester. Sylvia heard the inquiry, and came forwards, with a little rustic awkwardness, feeling both shy and curious.

'Will yo' please walk this way, ma'am?' said she, leading her visitor back into her own dominion of the parlour, and leaving Bella to Hester's willing care.

'You don't know me!' said the pretty young lady, joyously. 'But I think you knew my husband. I am Mrs. Kinraid!'

A sob of surprise rose to Sylvia's lips—she choked it down, however, and tried to conceal any emotion she might feel, in placing a chair for her visitor, and trying to make her feel welcome, although, if the truth must be told, Sylvia was wondering all the time why her visitor came, and how soon she would go.



'You knew Captain Kinraid, did you not?' said the young lady, with innocent inquiry; to which Sylvia's lips formed the answer, 'Yes,' but no clear sound issued therefrom.

'But I know your husband knew the captain; is he at home yet? Can I speak to him? I do so want to see him.'

Sylvia was utterly bewildered; Mrs. Kinraid, this pretty, joyous, prosperous little bird of a woman, Philip, Charley's wife, what could they have in common? what could they know of each other? All she could say in answer to Mrs. Kinraid's eager questions, and still more eager looks, was, that her husband was from home, had been long from home: she did not know where he was, she did not know when he would come back.



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Mrs. Kinraid's face fell a little, partly from her own real disappointment, partly out of sympathy with the hopeless, indifferent tone of Sylvia's replies.

'Mrs. Dawson told me he had gone away rather suddenly a year ago, but I thought he might be come home by now. I am expecting the captain early next month. Oh! how I should have liked to see Mr. Hepburn, and to thank him for saving the captain's life!'

'What do yo' mean?' asked Sylvia, stirred out of all assumed indifference. 'The captain! is that' (not 'Charley', she could not use that familiar name to the pretty young wife before her) 'yo'r husband?'

'Yes, you knew him, didn't you? when he used to be staying with Mr Corney, his uncle?'

'Yes, I knew him; but I don't understand. Will yo' please to tell me all about it, ma'am?' said Sylvia, faintly.

'I thought your husband would have told you all about it; I hardly know where to begin. You know my husband is a sailor?'

Sylvia nodded assent, listening greedily, her heart beating thick all the time.

'And he's now a Commander in the Royal Navy, all earned by his own bravery! Oh! I am so proud of him!'

So could Sylvia have been if she had been his wife; as it was, she thought how often she had felt sure that he would be a great man some day.

'And he has been at the siege of Acre.'

Sylvia looked perplexed at these strange words, and Mrs. Kinraid caught the look.

'St Jean d'Acre, you know—though it's fine saying "you know", when I didn't know a bit about it myself till the captain's ship was ordered there, though I was the head girl at Miss Dobbin's in the geography class—Acre is a seaport town, not far from Jaffa, which is the modern name for Joppa, where St Paul went to long ago; you've read of that, I'm sure, and Mount Carmel, where the prophet Elijah was once, all in Palestine, you know, only the Turks have got it now?'

'But I don't understand yet,' said Sylvia, plaintively; 'I daresay it's all very true about St Paul, but please, ma'am, will yo' tell me about yo'r husband and mine—have they met again?'

'Yes, at Acre, I tell you,' said Mrs. Kinraid, with pretty petulance. 'The Turks held the town, and the French wanted to take it; and we, that is the British Fleet, wouldn't let them. So Sir Sidney Smith, a commodore and a great friend of the captain's, landed in



order to fight the French; and the captain and many of the sailors landed with him; and it was burning hot; and the poor captain was wounded, and lay a-dying of pain and thirst within the enemy's—that is the French—fire; so that they were ready to shoot any one of his own side who came near him. They thought he was dead himself, you see, as he was very near; and would have been too, if your husband had not come out of shelter, and taken him up in his arms or on his back (I couldn't make out which), and carried him safe within the walls.'



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'It couldn't have been Philip,' said Sylvia, dubiously.

'But it was. The captain says so; and he's not a man to be mistaken. I thought I'd got his letter with me; and I would have read you a part of it, but I left it at Mrs. Dawson's in my desk; and I can't send it to you,' blushing as she remembered certain passages in which 'the captain' wrote very much like a lover, 'or else I would. But you may be quite sure it was your husband that ventured into all that danger to save his old friend's life, or the captain would not have said so.'

'But they weren't—they weren't—not to call great friends.'

'I wish I'd got the letter here; I can't think how I could be so stupid; I think I can almost remember the very words, though—I've read them over so often. He says, "Just as I gave up all hope, I saw one Philip Hepburn, a man whom I had known at Monkshaven, and whom I had some reason to remember well"—(I'm sure he says so—"remember well"), "he saw me too, and came at the risk of his life to where I lay. I fully expected he would be shot down; and I shut my eyes not to see the end of my last chance. The shot rained about him, and I think he was hit; but he took me up and carried me under cover." I'm sure he says that, I've read it over so often; and he goes on and says how he hunted for Mr. Hepburn all through the ships, as soon as ever he could; but he could hear nothing of him, either alive or dead. Don't go so white, for pity's sake!' said she, suddenly startled by Sylvia's blanching colour. 'You see, because he couldn't find him alive is no reason for giving him up as dead; because his name wasn't to be found on any of the ships' books; so the captain thinks he must have been known by a different name to his real one. Only he says he should like to have seen him to have thanked him; and he says he would give a deal to know what has become of him; and as I was staying two days at Mrs. Dawson's, I told them I must come over to Monkshaven, if only for five minutes, just to hear if your good husband was come home, and to shake his hands, that helped to save my own dear captain.'

'I don't think it could have been Philip,' reiterated Sylvia.

'Why not?' asked her visitor; 'you say you don't know where he is; why mightn't he have been there where the captain says he was?'

'But he wasn't a sailor, nor yet a soldier.'

'Oh! but he was. I think somewhere the captain calls him a marine; that's neither one nor the other, but a little of both. He'll be coming home some day soon; and then you'll see!'

Alice Rose came in at this minute, and Mrs. Kinraid jumped to the conclusion that she was Sylvia's mother, and in her overflowing gratitude and friendliness to all the family of



him who had 'saved the captain' she went forward, and shook the old woman's hand in that pleasant confiding way that wins all hearts.

'Here's your daughter, ma'am!' said she to the half-astonished, half-pleased Alice. 'I'm Mrs. Kinraid, the wife of the captain that used to be in these parts, and I'm come to bring her news of her husband, and she don't half believe me, though it's all to his credit, I'm sure.'



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Alice looked so perplexed that Sylvia felt herself bound to explain.

'She says he's either a soldier or a sailor, and a long way off at some place named in t' Bible.'

'Philip Hepburn led away to be a soldier!' said she, 'who had once been a Quaker?'

'Yes, and a very brave one too, and one that it would do my heart good to look upon,' exclaimed Mrs. Kinraid. 'He's been saving my husband's life in the Holy Land, where Jerusalem is, you know.'

'Nay!' said Alice, a little scornfully. 'I can forgive Sylvia for not being over keen to credit thy news. Her man of peace becoming a man of war; and suffered to enter Jerusalem, which is a heavenly and a typical city at this time; while me, as is one of the elect, is obliged to go on dwelling in Monkshaven, just like any other body.'

'Nay, but,' said Mrs. Kinraid, gently, seeing she was touching on delicate ground, 'I did not say he had gone to Jerusalem, but my husband saw him in those parts, and he was doing his duty like a brave, good man; ay, and more than his duty; and, you may take my word for it, he'll be at home some day soon, and all I beg is that you'll let the captain and me know, for I'm sure if we can, we'll both come and pay our respects to him. And I'm very glad I've seen you,' said she, rising to go, and putting out her hand to shake that of Sylvia; 'for, besides being Hepburn's wife, I'm pretty sure I've heard the captain speak of you; and if ever you come to Bristol I hope you'll come and see us on Clifton Downs.'

She went away, leaving Sylvia almost stunned by the new ideas presented to her. Philip a soldier! Philip in a battle, risking his life. Most strange of all, Charley and Philip once more meeting together, not as rivals or as foes, but as saviour and saved! Add to all this the conviction, strengthened by every word that happy, loving wife had uttered, that Kinraid's old, passionate love for herself had faded away and vanished utterly: its very existence apparently blotted out of his memory. She had torn up her love for him by the roots, but she felt as if she could never forget that it had been.

Hester brought back Bella to her mother. She had not liked to interrupt the conversation with the strange lady before; and now she found her mother in an obvious state of excitement; Sylvia quieter than usual.

'That was Kinraid's wife, Hester! Him that was th' specksioneer as made such a noise about t' place at the time of Darley's death. He's now a captain—a navy captain, according to what she says. And she'd fain have us believe that Philip is abiding in all manner of Scripture places; places as has been long done away with, but the similitude whereof is in the heavens, where the elect shall one day see them. And she says Philip is there, and a soldier, and that he saved her husband's life, and is coming home soon.'

I wonder what John and Jeremiah 'll say to his soldiering then? It'll noane be to their taste, I'm thinking.'



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This was all very unintelligible to Hester, and she would dearly have liked to question Sylvia; but Sylvia sat a little apart, with Bella on her knee, her cheek resting on her child's golden curls, and her eyes fixed and almost trance-like, as if she were seeing things not present.

So Hester had to be content with asking her mother as many elucidatory questions as she could; and after all did not gain a very clear idea of what had really been said by Mrs. Kinraid, as her mother was more full of the apparent injustice of Philip's being allowed the privilege of treading on holy ground—if, indeed, that holy ground existed on this side heaven, which she was inclined to dispute—than to confine herself to the repetition of words, or narration of facts.

Suddenly Sylvia roused herself to a sense of Hester's deep interest and balked inquiries, and she went over the ground rapidly.

'Yo'r mother says right—she is his wife. And he's away fighting; and got too near t' French as was shooting and firing all round him; and just then, according to her story, Philip saw him, and went straight into t' midst o' t' shots, and fetched him out o' danger. That's what she says, and upholds.'

'And why should it not be?' asked Hester, her cheek flushing.

But Sylvia only shook her head, and said,

'I cannot tell. It may be so. But they'd little cause to be friends, and it seems all so strange—Philip a soldier, and them meeting there after all!'

Hester laid the story of Philip's bravery to her heart—she fully believed in it. Sylvia pondered it more deeply still; the causes for her disbelief, or, at any rate, for her wonder, were unknown to Hester! Many a time she sank to sleep with the picture of the event narrated by Mrs. Kinraid as present to her mind as her imagination or experience could make it: first one figure prominent, then another. Many a morning she wakened up, her heart beating wildly, why, she knew not, till she shuddered at the remembrance of the scenes that had passed in her dreams: scenes that might be acted in reality that very day; for Philip might come back, and then?

And where was Philip all this time, these many weeks, these heavily passing months?

CHAPTER XLI

THE BEDESMAN OF ST SEPULCHRE

Philip lay long ill on board the hospital ship. If his heart had been light, he might have rallied sooner; but he was so depressed he did not care to live. His shattered jaw-bone,



his burnt and blackened face, his many injuries of body, were torture to both his physical frame, and his sick, weary heart. No more chance for him, if indeed there ever had been any, of returning gay and gallant, and thus regaining his wife's love. This had been his poor, foolish vision in the first hour of his enlistment; and the vain dream had recurred more than once in the feverish stage of excitement which the new scenes into which he had been hurried as a recruit had called forth. But that was all over now. He knew that it was the most unlikely thing in the world to have come to pass; and yet those were happy days when he could think of it as barely possible. Now all he could look forward to was disfigurement, feebleness, and the bare pittance that keeps pensioners from absolute want.



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Those around him were kind enough to him in their fashion, and attended to his bodily requirements; but they had no notion of listening to any revelations of unhappiness, if Philip had been the man to make confidences of that kind. As it was, he lay very still in his berth, seldom asking for anything, and always saying he was better, when the ship-surgeon came round with his daily inquiries. But he did not care to rally, and was rather sorry to find that his case was considered so interesting in a surgical point of view, that he was likely to receive a good deal more than the average amount of attention.

Perhaps it was owing to this that he recovered at all. The doctors said it was the heat that made him languid, for that his wounds and burns were all doing well at last; and by-and-by they told him they had ordered him 'home'. His pulse sank under the surgeon's finger at the mention of the word; but he did not say a word. He was too indifferent to life and the world to have a will; otherwise they might have kept their pet patient a little longer where he was.

Slowly passing from ship to ship as occasion served; resting here and there in garrison hospitals, Philip at length reached Portsmouth on the evening of a September day in 1799. The transport-ship in which he was, was loaded with wounded and invalided soldiers and sailors; all who could manage it in any way struggled on deck to catch the first view of the white coasts of England. One man lifted his arm, took off his cap, and feebly waved it aloft, crying, 'Old England for ever!' in a faint shrill voice, and then burst into tears and sobbed aloud. Others tried to pipe up 'Rule Britannia', while more sate, weak and motionless, looking towards the shores that once, not so long ago, they never thought to see again. Philip was one of these; his place a little apart from the other men. He was muffled up in a great military cloak that had been given him by one of his officers; he felt the September breeze chill after his sojourn in a warmer climate, and in his shattered state of health.

As the ship came in sight of Portsmouth harbour, the signal flags ran up the ropes; the beloved Union Jack floated triumphantly over all. Return signals were made from the harbour; on board all became bustle and preparation for landing; while on shore there was the evident movement of expectation, and men in uniform were seen pressing their way to the front, as if to them belonged the right of reception. They were the men from the barrack hospital, that had been signalled for, come down with ambulance litters and other marks of forethought for the sick and wounded, who were returning to the country for which they had fought and suffered.



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With a dash and a great rocking swing the vessel came up to her appointed place, and was safely moored. Philip sat still, almost as if he had no part in the cries of welcome, the bustling care, the loud directions that cut the air around him, and pierced his nerves through and through. But one in authority gave the order; and Philip, disciplined to obedience, rose to find his knapsack and leave the ship. Passive as he seemed to be, he had his likings for particular comrades; there was one especially, a man as different from Philip as well could be, to whom the latter had always attached himself; a merry fellow from Somersetshire, who was almost always cheerful and bright, though Philip had overheard the doctors say he would never be the man he was before he had that shot through the side. This marine would often sit making his fellows laugh, and laughing himself at his own good-humoured jokes, till so terrible a fit of coughing came on that those around him feared he would die in the paroxysm. After one of these fits he had gasped out some words, which led Philip to question him a little; and it turned out that in the quiet little village of Potterne, far inland, nestled beneath the high stretches of Salisbury Plain, he had a wife and a child, a little girl, just the same age even to a week as Philip's own little Bella. It was this that drew Philip towards the man; and this that made Philip wait and go ashore along with the poor consumptive marine.

The litters had moved off towards the hospital, the sergeant in charge had given his words of command to the remaining invalids, who tried to obey them to the best of their power, falling into something like military order for their march; but soon, very soon, the weakest broke step, and lagged behind; and felt as if the rough welcomes and rude expressions of sympathy from the crowd around were almost too much for them. Philip and his companion were about midway, when suddenly a young woman with a child in her arms forced herself through the people, between the soldiers who kept pressing on either side, and threw herself on the neck of Philip's friend.

'Oh, Jem!' she sobbed, 'I've walked all the road from Potterne. I've never stopped but for food and rest for Nelly, and now I've got you once again, I've got you once again, bless God for it!'

She did not seem to see the deadly change that had come over her husband since she parted with him a ruddy young labourer; she had got him once again, as she phrased it, and that was enough for her; she kissed his face, his hands, his very coat, nor would she be repulsed from walking beside him and holding his hand, while her little girl ran along scared by the voices and the strange faces, and clinging to her mammy's gown.

Jem coughed, poor fellow! he coughed his churchyard cough; and Philip bitterly envied him—envied his life, envied his approaching death; for was he not wrapped round with that woman's tender love, and is not such love stronger than death? Philip had felt as if his own heart was grown numb, and as though it had changed to a cold heavy stone. But at the contrast of this man's lot to his own, he felt that he had yet the power of suffering left to him.



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The road they had to go was full of people, kept off in some measure by the guard of soldiers. All sorts of kindly speeches, and many a curious question, were addressed to the poor invalids as they walked along. Philip's jaw, and the lower part of his face, were bandaged up; his cap was slouched down; he held his cloak about him, and shivered within its folds.

They came to a standstill from some slight obstacle at the corner of a street. Down the causeway of this street a naval officer with a lady on his arm was walking briskly, with a step that told of health and a light heart. He stayed his progress though, when he saw the convoy of maimed and wounded men; he said something, of which Philip only caught the words, 'same uniform,' 'for his sake,' to the young lady, whose cheek blanched a little, but whose eyes kindled. Then leaving her for an instant, he pressed forward; he was close to Philip,—poor sad Philip absorbed in his own thoughts,—so absorbed that he noticed nothing till he heard a voice at his ear, having the Northumbrian burr, the Newcastle inflections which he knew of old, and that were to him like the sick memory of a deadly illness; and then he turned his muffled face to the speaker, though he knew well enough who it was, and averted his eyes after one sight of the handsome, happy man,—the man whose life he had saved once, and would save again, at the risk of his own, but whom, for all that, he prayed that he might never meet more on earth.

'Here, my fine fellow, take this,' forcing a crown piece into Philip's hand. 'I wish it were more; I'd give you a pound if I had it with me.'

Philip muttered something, and held out the coin to Captain Kinraid, of course in vain; nor was there time to urge it back upon the giver, for the obstacle to their progress was suddenly removed, the crowd pressed upon the captain and his wife, the procession moved on, and Philip along with it, holding the piece in his hand, and longing to throw it far away. Indeed he was on the point of dropping it, hoping to do so unperceived, when he bethought him of giving it to Jem's wife, the footsore woman, limping happily along by her husband's side. They thanked him, and spoke in his praise more than he could well bear. It was no credit to him to give that away which burned his fingers as long as he kept it.

Philip knew that the injuries he had received in the explosion on board the *Theseus* would oblige him to leave the service. He also believed that they would entitle him to a pension. But he had little interest in his future life; he was without hope, and in a depressed state of health. He remained for some little time stationary, and then went through all the forms of dismissal on account of wounds received in service, and was turned out loose upon the world, uncertain where to go, indifferent as to what became of him.

It was fine, warm October weather as he turned his back upon the coast, and set off on his walk northwards. Green leaves were yet upon the trees; the hedges were one flush



of foliage and the wild rough-flavoured fruits of different kinds; the fields were tawny with the uncleared-off stubble, or emerald green with the growth of the aftermath. The roadside cottage gardens were gay with hollyhocks and Michaelmas daisies and marigolds, and the bright panes of the windows glittered through a veil of China roses.



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The war was a popular one, and, as a natural consequence, soldiers and sailors were heroes everywhere. Philip's long drooping form, his arm hung in a sling, his face scarred and blackened, his jaw bound up with a black silk handkerchief; these marks of active service were revered by the rustic cottagers as though they had been crowns and sceptres. Many a hard-handed labourer left his seat by the chimney corner, and came to his door to have a look at one who had been fighting the French, and pushed forward to have a grasp of the stranger's hand as he gave back the empty cup into the good wife's keeping, for the kind homely women were ever ready with milk or homebrewed to slake the feverish traveller's thirst when he stopped at their doors and asked for a drink of water.

At the village public-house he had had a welcome of a more interested character, for the landlord knew full well that his circle of customers would be large that night, if it was only known that he had within his doors a soldier or a sailor who had seen service. The rustic politicians would gather round Philip, and smoke and drink, and then question and discuss till they were drouthy again; and in their sturdy obtuse minds they set down the extra glass and the supernumerary pipe to the score of patriotism.

Altogether human nature turned its sunny side out to Philip just now; and not before he needed the warmth of brotherly kindness to cheer his shivering soul. Day after day he drifted northwards, making but the slow progress of a feeble man, and yet this short daily walk tired him so much that he longed for rest—for the morning to come when he needed not to feel that in the course of an hour or two he must be up and away.

He was toiling on with this longing at his heart when he saw that he was drawing near a stately city, with a great old cathedral in the centre keeping solemn guard. This place might be yet two or three miles distant; he was on a rising ground looking down upon it. A labouring man passing by, observed his pallid looks and his languid attitude, and told him for his comfort, that if he turned down a lane to the left a few steps farther on, he would find himself at the Hospital of St Sepulchre, where bread and beer were given to all comers, and where he might sit him down and rest awhile on the old stone benches within the shadow of the gateway. Obeying these directions, Philip came upon a building which dated from the time of Henry the Fifth. Some knight who had fought in the French wars of that time, and had survived his battles and come home to his old halls, had been stirred up by his conscience, or by what was equivalent in those days, his confessor, to build and endow a hospital for twelve decayed soldiers, and a chapel wherein they were to attend the daily masses he ordained to be said till the end of all time (which eternity lasted rather more than a century, pretty well for an eternity bespoken by a man), for his soul and the



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souls of those whom he had slain. There was a large division of the quadrangular building set apart for the priest who was to say these masses; and to watch over the well-being of the bedesmen. In process of years the origin and primary purpose of the hospital had been forgotten by all excepting the local antiquaries; and the place itself came to be regarded as a very pleasant quaint set of almshouses; and the warden's office (he who should have said or sung his daily masses was now called the warden, and read daily prayers and preached a sermon on Sundays) an agreeable sinecure.

Another legacy of old Sir Simon Bray was that of a small croft of land, the rent or profits of which were to go towards giving to all who asked for it a manchet of bread and a cup of good beer. This beer was, so Sir Simon ordained, to be made after a certain receipt which he left, in which ground ivy took the place of hops. But the receipt, as well as the masses, was modernized according to the progress of time.

Philip stood under a great broad stone archway; the back-door into the warden's house was on the right side; a kind of buttery-hatch was placed by the porter's door on the opposite side. After some consideration, Philip knocked at the closed shutter, and the signal seemed to be well understood. He heard a movement within; the hatch was drawn aside, and his bread and beer were handed to him by a pleasant-looking old man, who proved himself not at all disinclined for conversation.

'You may sit down on yonder bench,' said he. 'Nay, man! sit i' the sun, for it's a chilly place, this, and then you can look through the grate and watch th' old fellows toddling about in th' quad.'

Philip sat down where the warm October sun slanted upon him, and looked through the iron railing at the peaceful sight.

A great square of velvet lawn, intersected diagonally with broad flag-paved walks, the same kind of walk going all round the quadrangle; low two-storied brick houses, tinted gray and yellow by age, and in many places almost covered with vines, Virginian creepers, and monthly roses; before each house a little plot of garden ground, bright with flowers, and evidently tended with the utmost care; on the farther side the massive chapel; here and there an old or infirm man sunning himself, or leisurely doing a bit of gardening, or talking to one of his comrades—the place looked as if care and want, and even sorrow, were locked out and excluded by the ponderous gate through which Philip was gazing.

'It's a nice enough place, bean't it?' said the porter, interpreting Philip's looks pretty accurately. 'Leastways, for them as likes it. I've got a bit weary on it myself; it's so far from th' world, as a man may say; not a decent public within a mile and a half, where one can hear a bit o' news of an evening.'

'I think I could make myself very content here,' replied Philip. 'That's to say, if one were easy in one's mind.'



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'Ay, ay, my man. That's it everywhere. Why, I don't think that I could enjoy myself—not even at th' White Hart, where they give you as good a glass of ale for twopence as anywhere i' th' four kingdoms—I couldn't, to say, flavour my ale even there, if my old woman lay a-dying; which is a sign as it's the heart, and not the ale, as makes the drink.'

Just then the warden's back-door opened, and out came the warden himself, dressed in full clerical costume.

He was going into the neighbouring city, but he stopped to speak to Philip, the wounded soldier; and all the more readily because his old faded uniform told the warden's experienced eye that he had belonged to the Marines.

'I hope you enjoy the victual provided for you by the founder of St Sepulchre,' said he, kindly. 'You look but poorly, my good fellow, and as if a slice of good cold meat would help your bread down.'

'Thank you, sir!' said Philip. 'I'm not hungry, only weary, and glad of a draught of beer.'

'You've been in the Marines, I see. Where have you been serving?'

'I was at the siege of Acre, last May, sir.'

'At Acre! Were you, indeed? Then perhaps you know my boy Harry? He was in the——th.'

'It was my company,' said Philip, warming up a little. Looking back upon his soldier's life, it seemed to him to have many charms, because it was so full of small daily interests.

'Then, did you know my son, Lieutenant Pennington?'

'It was he that gave me this cloak, sir, when they were sending me back to England. I had been his servant for a short time before I was wounded by the explosion on board the *Theseus*, and he said I should feel the cold of the voyage. He's very kind; and I've heard say he promises to be a first-rate officer.'

'You shall have a slice of roast beef, whether you want it or not,' said the warden, ringing the bell at his own back-door. 'I recognize the cloak now—the young scamp! How soon he has made it shabby, though,' he continued, taking up a corner where there was an immense tear not too well botched up. 'And so you were on board the *Theseus* at the time of the explosion? Bring some cold meat here for the good man—or stay! Come in with me, and then you can tell Mrs. Pennington and the young ladies all you know about Harry,—and the siege,—and the explosion.'



So Philip was ushered into the warden's house and made to eat roast beef almost against his will; and he was questioned and cross-questioned by three eager ladies, all at the same time, as it seemed to him. He had given all possible details on the subjects about which they were curious; and was beginning to consider how he could best make his retreat, when the younger Miss Pennington went up to her father—who had all this time stood, with his hat on, holding his coat-tails over his arms, with his back to the fire. He bent his ear down a very little to hear some whispered suggestion of his daughter's, nodded his head, and then went on questioning Philip, with kindly inquisitiveness and patronage, as the rich do question the poor.



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'And where are you going to now?'

Philip did not answer directly. He wondered in his own mind where he was going. At length he said,

'Northwards, I believe. But perhaps I shall never reach there.'

'Haven't you friends? Aren't you going to them?'

There was again a pause; a cloud came over Philip's countenance. He said,

'No! I'm not going to my friends. I don't know that I've got any left.'

They interpreted his looks and this speech to mean that he had either lost his friends by death, or offended them by enlisting.

The warden went on,

'I ask, because we've got a cottage vacant in the mead. Old Dobson, who was with General Wolfe at the taking of Quebec, died a fortnight ago. With such injuries as yours, I fear you'll never be able to work again. But we require strict testimonials as to character,' he added, with as penetrating a look as he could summon up at Philip.

Philip looked unmoved, either by the offer of the cottage, or the illusion to the possibility of his character not being satisfactory. He was grateful enough in reality, but too heavy at heart to care very much what became of him.

The warden and his family, who were accustomed to consider a settlement at St Sepulchre's as the sum of all good to a worn-out soldier, were a little annoyed at Philip's cool way of receiving the proposition. The warden went on to name the contingent advantages.

'Besides the cottage, you would have a load of wood for firing on All Saints', on Christmas, and on Candlemas days—a blue gown and suit of clothes to match every Michaelmas, and a shilling a day to keep yourself in all other things. Your dinner you would have with the other men, in hall.'

'The warden himself goes into hall every day, and sees that everything is comfortable, and says grace,' added the warden's lady.

'I know I seem stupid,' said Philip, almost humbly, 'not to be more grateful, for it's far beyond what I ever expected or thought for again, and it's a great temptation, for I'm just worn out with fatigue. Several times I've thought I must lie down under a hedge, and just die for very weariness. But once I had a wife and a child up in the north,' he stopped.



'And are they dead?' asked one of the young ladies in a soft sympathizing tone. Her eyes met Philip's, full of dumb woe. He tried to speak; he wanted to explain more fully, yet not to reveal the truth.

'Well!' said the warden, thinking he perceived the real state of things, 'what I propose is this. You shall go into old Dobson's house at once, as a kind of probationary bedesman. I'll write to Harry, and get your character from him. Stephen Freeman I think you said your name was? Before I can receive his reply you'll have been able to tell how you'd like the kind of life; and at any rate you'll have the rest you seem to require in the meantime. You see, I take Harry's having given you that cloak as a kind of character,' added he, smiling kindly. 'Of course you'll have to conform to rules just like all the rest,—chapel at eight, dinner at twelve, lights out at nine; but I'll tell you the remainder of our regulations as we walk across quad to your new quarters.'



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And thus Philip, almost in spite of himself, became installed in a bedesman's house at St Sepulchre.

CHAPTER XLII

A FABLE AT FAULT

Philip took possession of the two rooms which had belonged to the dead Sergeant Dobson. They were furnished sufficiently for every comfort by the trustees of the hospital. Some little fragments of ornament, some small articles picked up in distant countries, a few tattered books, remained in the rooms as legacies from their former occupant.

At first the repose of the life and the place was inexpressibly grateful to Philip. He had always shrunk from encountering strangers, and displaying his blackened and scarred countenance to them, even where such disfigurement was most regarded as a mark of honour. In St Sepulchre's he met none but the same set day after day, and when he had once told the tale of how it happened and submitted to their gaze, it was over for ever, if he so minded. The slight employment his garden gave him—there was a kitchen-garden behind each house, as well as the flower-plot in front—and the daily arrangement of his parlour and chamber were, at the beginning of his time of occupation, as much bodily labour as he could manage. There was something stately and utterly removed from all Philip's previous existence in the forms observed at every day's dinner, when the twelve bedesmen met in the large quaint hall, and the warden came in his college-cap and gown to say the long Latin grace which wound up with something very like a prayer for the soul of Sir Simon Bray. It took some time to get a reply to ship letters in those times when no one could exactly say where the fleet might be found.

And before Dr Pennington had received the excellent character of Stephen Freeman, which his son gladly sent in answer to his father's inquiries, Philip had become restless and uneasy in the midst of all this peace and comfort.

Sitting alone over his fire in the long winter evenings, the scenes of his past life rose before him; his childhood; his aunt Robson's care of him; his first going to Foster's shop in Monkshaven; Haytersbank Farm, and the spelling lessons in the bright warm kitchen there; Kinraid's appearance; the miserable night of the Corneys' party; the farewell he had witnessed on Monkshaven sands; the press-gang, and all the long consequences of that act of concealment; poor Daniel Robson's trial and execution; his own marriage; his child's birth; and then he came to that last day at Monkshaven: and he went over and over again the torturing details, the looks of contempt and anger, the words of loathing indignation, till he almost brought himself, out of his extreme sympathy with Sylvia, to believe that he was indeed the wretch she had considered him to be.



He forgot his own excuses for having acted as he had done; though these excuses had at one time seemed to him to wear the garb of reasons. After long thought and bitter memory came some wonder. What was Sylvia doing now? Where was she? What was his child like—his child as well as hers? And then he remembered the poor footsore wife and the little girl she carried in her arms, that was just the age of Bella; he wished he had noticed that child more, that a clear vision of it might rise up when he wanted to picture Bella.



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One night he had gone round this mill-wheel circle of ideas till he was weary to the very marrow of his bones. To shake off the monotonous impression he rose to look for a book amongst the old tattered volumes, hoping that he might find something that would sufficiently lay hold of him to change the current of his thoughts. There was an old volume of *Peregrine Pickle*; a book of sermons; half an army list of 1774, and the *Seven Champions of Christendom*. Philip took up this last, which he had never seen before. In it he read how Sir Guy, Earl of Warwick, went to fight the Paynim in his own country, and was away for seven long years; and when he came back his own wife Phillis, the countess in her castle, did not know the poor travel-worn hermit, who came daily to seek his dole of bread at her hands along with many beggars and much poor. But at last, when he lay a-dying in his cave in the rock, he sent for her by a secret sign known but to them twain. And she came with great speed, for she knew it was her lord who had sent for her; and they had many sweet and holy words together before he gave up the ghost, his head lying on her bosom.

The old story known to most people from their childhood was all new and fresh to Philip. He did not quite believe in the truth of it, because the fictitious nature of the histories of some of the other Champions of Christendom was too patent. But he could not help thinking that this one might be true; and that Guy and Phillis might have been as real flesh and blood, long, long ago, as he and Sylvia had even been. The old room, the quiet moonlit quadrangle into which the cross-barred casement looked, the quaint aspect of everything that he had seen for weeks and weeks; all this predisposed Philip to dwell upon the story he had just been reading as a faithful legend of two lovers whose bones were long since dust. He thought that if he could thus see Sylvia, himself unknown, unseen—could live at her gates, so to speak, and gaze upon her and his child—some day too, when he lay a-dying, he might send for her, and in soft words of mutual forgiveness breathe his life away in her arms. Or perhaps—and so he lost himself, and from thinking, passed on to dreaming. All night long Guy and Phillis, Sylvia and his child, passed in and out of his visions; it was impossible to make the fragments of his dreams cohere; but the impression made upon him by them was not the less strong for this. He felt as if he were called to Monkshaven, wanted at Monkshaven, and to Monkshaven he resolved to go; although when his reason overtook his feeling, he knew perfectly how unwise it was to leave a home of peace and tranquillity and surrounding friendliness, to go to a place where nothing but want and wretchedness awaited him unless he made himself known; and if he did, a deeper want, a more woeful wretchedness, would in all probability be his portion.



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In the small oblong of looking-glass hung against the wall, Philip caught the reflection of his own face, and laughed scornfully at the sight. The thin hair lay upon his temples in the flakes that betoken long ill-health; his eyes were the same as ever, and they had always been considered the best feature in his face; but they were sunk in their orbits, and looked hollow and gloomy. As for the lower part of his face, blackened, contracted, drawn away from his teeth, the outline entirely changed by the breakage of his jaw-bone, he was indeed a fool if he thought himself fit to go forth to win back that love which Sylvia had forsworn. As a hermit and a beggar, he must return to Monkshaven, and fall perforce into the same position which Guy of Warwick had only assumed. But still he should see his Phillis, and might feast his sad hopeless eyes from time to time with the sight of his child. His small pension of sixpence a day would keep him from absolute want of necessaries.

So that very day he went to the warden and told him he thought of giving up his share in the bequest of Sir Simon Bray. Such a relinquishment had never occurred before in all the warden's experience; and he was very much inclined to be offended.

'I must say that for a man not to be satisfied as a bedesman of St Sepulchre's argues a very wrong state of mind, and a very ungrateful heart.'

'I'm sure, sir, it's not from any ingratitude, for I can hardly feel thankful to you and to Sir Simon, and to madam, and the young ladies, and all my comrades in the hospital, and I niver expect to be either so comfortable or so peaceful again, but——'

'But? What can you have to say against the place, then? Not but what there are always plenty of applicants for every vacancy; only I thought I was doing a kindness to a man out of Harry's company. And you'll not see Harry either; he's got his leave in March!'

'I'm very sorry. I should like to have seen the lieutenant again. But I cannot rest any longer so far away from—people I once knew.'

'Ten to one they're dead, or removed, or something or other by this time; and it'll serve you right if they are. Mind! no one can be chosen twice to be a bedesman of St Sepulchre's.'

The warden turned away; and Philip, uneasy at staying, disheartened at leaving, went to make his few preparations for setting out once more on his journey northwards. He had to give notice of his change of residence to the local distributor of pensions; and one or two farewells had to be taken, with more than usual sadness at the necessity; for Philip, under his name of Stephen Freeman, had attached some of the older bedesmen a good deal to him, from his unselfishness, his willingness to read to them, and to render them many little services, and, perhaps, as much as anything, by his habitual silence, which made him a convenient recipient of all their garrulousness. So before the time for his



departure came, he had the opportunity of one more interview with the warden, of a more friendly character than that in which he gave up his bedesmanship. And so far it was well; and Philip turned his back upon St Sepulchre's with his sore heart partly healed by his four months' residence there.



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He was stronger, too, in body, more capable of the day-after-day walks that were required of him. He had saved some money from his allowance as bedesman and from his pension, and might occasionally have taken an outside place on a coach, had it not been that he shrank from the first look of every stranger upon his disfigured face. Yet the gentle, wistful eyes, and the white and faultless teeth always did away with the first impression as soon as people became a little acquainted with his appearance.

It was February when Philip left St Sepulchre's. It was the first week in April when he began to recognize the familiar objects between York and Monkshaven. And now he began to hang back, and to question the wisdom of what he had done—just as the warden had prophesied that he would. The last night of his two hundred mile walk he slept at the little inn at which he had been enlisted nearly two years before. It was by no intention of his that he rested at that identical place. Night was drawing on; and, in making, as he thought, a short cut, he had missed his way, and was fain to seek shelter where he might find it. But it brought him very straight face to face with his life at that time, and ever since. His mad, wild hopes—half the result of intoxication, as he now knew—all dead and gone; the career then freshly opening shut up against him now; his youthful strength and health changed into premature infirmity, and the home and the love that should have opened wide its doors to console him for all, why in two years Death might have been busy, and taken away from him his last feeble chance of the faint happiness of seeing his beloved without being seen or known of her. All that night and all the next day, the fear of Sylvia's possible death overclouded his heart. It was strange that he had hardly ever thought of this before; so strange, that now, when the terror came, it took possession of him, and he could almost have sworn that she must be lying dead in Monkshaven churchyard. Or was it little Bella, that blooming, lovely babe, whom he was never to see again? There was the tolling of mournful bells in the distant air to his disturbed fancy, and the cry of the happy birds, the plaintive bleating of the new-dropped lambs, were all omens of evil import to him.

As well as he could, he found his way back to Monkshaven, over the wild heights and moors he had crossed on that black day of misery; why he should have chosen that path he could not tell—it was as if he were led, and had no free will of his own.

The soft clear evening was drawing on, and his heart beat thick, and then stopped, only to start again with fresh violence. There he was, at the top of the long, steep lane that was in some parts a literal staircase leading down from the hill-top into the High Street, through the very entry up which he had passed when he shrank away from his former and his then present life. There he stood, looking down once more at the numerous irregular roofs, the many stacks of chimneys below him, seeking out that which had once been his own dwelling—who dwelt there now?



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The yellower gleams grew narrower; the evening shadows broader, and Philip crept down the lane a weary, woeful man. At every gap in the close-packed buildings he heard the merry music of a band, the cheerful sound of excited voices. Still he descended slowly, scarcely wondering what it could be, for it was not associated in his mind with the one pervading thought of Sylvia.

When he came to the angle of junction between the lane and the High Street, he seemed plunged all at once into the very centre of the bustle, and he drew himself up into a corner of deep shadow, from whence he could look out upon the street.

A circus was making its grand entry into Monkshaven, with all the pomp of colour and of noise that it could muster. Trumpeters in parti-coloured clothes rode first, blaring out triumphant discord. Next came a gold-and-scarlet chariot drawn by six piebald horses, and the windings of this team through the tortuous narrow street were pretty enough to look upon. In the chariot sate kings and queens, heroes and heroines, or what were meant for such; all the little boys and girls running alongside of the chariot envied them; but they themselves were very much tired, and shivering with cold in their heroic pomp of classic clothing. All this Philip might have seen; did see, in fact; but heeded not one jot. Almost opposite to him, not ten yards apart, standing on the raised step at the well-known shop door, was Sylvia, holding a child, a merry dancing child, up in her arms to see the show. She too, Sylvia, was laughing for pleasure, and for sympathy with pleasure. She held the little Bella aloft that the child might see the gaudy procession the better and the longer, looking at it herself with red lips apart and white teeth glancing through; then she turned to speak to some one behind her—Coulson, as Philip saw the moment afterwards; his answer made her laugh once again. Philip saw it all; her bonny careless looks, her pretty matronly form, her evident ease of mind and prosperous outward circumstances. The years that he had spent in gloomy sorrow, amongst wild scenes, on land or by sea, his life in frequent peril of a bloody end, had gone by with her like sunny days; all the more sunny because he was not there. So bitterly thought the poor disabled marine, as, weary and despairing, he stood in the cold shadow and looked upon the home that should have been his haven, the wife that should have welcomed him, the child that should have been his comfort. He had banished himself from his home; his wife had forsworn him; his child was blossoming into intelligence unwitting of any father. Wife, and child, and home, were all doing well without him; what madness had tempted him thither? an hour ago, like a fanciful fool, he had thought she might be dead—dead with sad penitence for her cruel words at her heart—with mournful wonder at the unaccounted-for absence of her child's father preying on her spirits, and in some measure causing the death he had apprehended. But to look at her there where she stood, it did not seem as if she had had an hour's painful thought in all her blooming life.



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Ay! go in to the warm hearth, mother and child, now the gay cavalcade has gone out of sight, and the chill of night has succeeded to the sun's setting. Husband and father, steal out into the cold dark street, and seek some poor cheap lodging where you may rest your weary bones, and cheat your more weary heart into forgetfulness in sleep. The pretty story of the Countess Phillis, who mourned for her husband's absence so long, is a fable of old times; or rather say Earl Guy never wedded his wife, knowing that one she loved better than him was alive all the time she had believed him to be dead.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE UNKNOWN

A few days before that on which Philip arrived at Monkshaven, Kester had come to pay Sylvia a visit. As the earliest friend she had, and also as one who knew the real secrets of her life, Sylvia always gave him the warm welcome, the cordial words, and the sweet looks in which the old man delighted. He had a sort of delicacy of his own which kept him from going to see her too often, even when he was stationary at Monkshaven; but he looked forward to the times when he allowed himself this pleasure as a child at school looks forward to its holidays. The time of his service at Haytersbank had, on the whole, been the happiest in all his long monotonous years of daily labour. Sylvia's father had always treated him with the rough kindness of fellowship; Sylvia's mother had never stinted him in his meat or grudged him his share of the best that was going; and once, when he was ill for a few days in the loft above the cow-house, she had made him possets, and nursed him with the same tenderness which he remembered his mother showing to him when he was a little child, but which he had never experienced since then. He had known Sylvia herself, as bud, and sweet promise of blossom; and just as she was opening into the full-blown rose, and, if she had been happy and prosperous, might have passed out of the narrow circle of Kester's interests, one sorrow after another came down upon her pretty innocent head, and Kester's period of service to Daniel Robson, her father, was tragically cut short. All this made Sylvia the great centre of the faithful herdsman's affection; and Bella, who reminded him of what Sylvia was when first Kester knew her, only occupied the second place in his heart, although to the child he was much more demonstrative of his regard than to the mother.

He had dressed himself in his Sunday best, and although it was only Thursday, had forestalled his Saturday's shaving; he had provided himself with a paper of humbugs for the child—'humbugs' being the north-country term for certain lumps of toffy, well-flavoured with peppermint—and now he sat in the accustomed chair, as near to the door as might be, in Sylvia's presence, coaxing the little one, who was not quite sure of his identity, to come to him, by opening the paper parcel, and letting its sweet contents be seen.



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'She's like thee—and yet she favours her feyther,' said he; and the moment he had uttered the incautious words he looked up to see how Sylvia had taken the unpremeditated, unusual reference to her husband. His stealthy glance did not meet her eye; but though he thought she had coloured a little, she did not seem offended as he had feared. It was true that Bella had her father's grave, thoughtful, dark eyes, instead of her mother's gray ones, out of which the childlike expression of wonder would never entirely pass away. And as Bella slowly and half distrustfully made her way towards the temptation offered her, she looked at Kester with just her father's look.

Sylvia said nothing in direct reply; Kester almost thought she could not have heard him. But, by-and-by, she said,—

'Yo'll have heared how Kinraid—who's a captain now, and a grand officer—has gone and got married.'

'Nay!' said Kester, in genuine surprise. 'He niver has, for sure!'

'Ay, but he has,' said Sylvia. 'And I'm sure I dunnot see why he shouldn't.'

'Well, well!' said Kester, not looking up at her, for he caught the inflections in the tones of her voice. 'He were a fine stirrin' chap, yon; an' he were allays for doin' summut; an' when he fund as he couldn't ha' one thing as he'd set his mind on, a reckon he thought he mun put up wi' another.'

'It 'ud be no "putting up,"' said Sylvia. 'She were staying at Bessy Dawson's, and she come here to see me—she's as pretty a young lady as yo'd see on a summer's day; and a real lady, too, wi' a fortune. She didn't speak two words wi'out bringing in her husband's name,—“the captain”, as she called him.'

'An' she come to see thee?' said Kester, cocking his eye at Sylvia with the old shrewd look. 'That were summut queer, weren't it?'

Sylvia reddened a good deal.

'He's too fause to have spoken to her on me, in t' old way,—as he used for t' speak to me. I were nought to her but Philip's wife.'

'An' what t' dickins had she to do wi' Philip?' asked Kester, in intense surprise; and so absorbed in curiosity that he let the humbugs all fall out of the paper upon the floor, and the little Bella sat down, plump, in the midst of treasures as great as those fabled to exist on Tom Tiddler's ground.

Sylvia was again silent; but Kester, knowing her well, was sure that she was struggling to speak, and bided his time without repeating his question.



'She said—and I think her tale were true, though I cannot get to t' rights on it, think on it as I will—as Philip saved her husband's life somewhere nearabouts to Jerusalem. She would have it that t' captain—for I think I'll niver ca' him Kinraid again—was in a great battle, and were near upon being shot by t' French, when Philip—our Philip—come up and went right into t' fire o' t' guns, and saved her husband's life. And she spoke as if both she and t' captain were more beholden to Philip than words could tell. And she come to see me, to try and get news on him.



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'It's a queer kind o' story,' said Kester, meditatively. 'A should ha' thought as Philip were more likely to ha' gi'en him a shove into t' thick on it, than t' help him out o' t' scrape.'

'Nay!' said Sylvia, suddenly looking straight at Kester; 'yo're out theere. Philip had a deal o' good in him. And I dunnot think as he'd ha' gone and married another woman so soon, if he'd been i' Kinraid's place.'

'An' yo've niver heard on Philip sin' he left?' asked Kester, after a while.

'Niver; nought but what she told me. And she said that t' captain made inquiry for him right and left, as soon after that happened as might be, and could hear niver a word about him. No one had seen him, or knowed his name.'

'Yo' niver heard of his goin' for t' be a soldier?' persevered Kester.

'Niver. I've told yo' once. It were unlike Philip to think o' such a thing.'

'But thou mun ha' been thinkin' on him at times i' a' these years. Bad as he'd behaved hissel', he were t' feyther o' thy little un. What did ta think he had been agait on when he left here?'

'I didn't know. I were noane so keen a-thinking on him at first. I tried to put him out o' my thoughts a'together, for it made me like mad to think how he'd stood between me and—that other. But I'd begun to wonder and to wonder about him, and to think I should like to hear as he were doing well. I reckon I thought he were i' London, where he'd been that time afore, yo' know, and had allays spoke as if he'd enjoyed hissel' tolerable; and then Molly Brunton told me on t' other one's marriage; and, somehow, it gave me a shake in my heart, and I began for to wish I hadn't said all them words i' my passion; and then that fine young lady come wi' her story—and I've thought a deal on it since,—and my mind has come out clear. Philip's dead, and it were his spirit as come to t' other's help in his time o' need. I've heard feyther say as spirits cannot rest i' their graves for trying to undo t' wrongs they've done i' their bodies.'

'Them's my conclusions,' said Kester, solemnly. 'A was fain for to hear what were yo'r judgments first; but them's the conclusions I comed to as soon as I heard t' tale.'

'Let alone that one thing,' said Sylvia, 'he were a kind, good man.'

'It were a big deal on a "one thing", though,' said Kester. 'It just spoilt yo'r life, my poor lass; an' might ha' gone near to spoilin' Charley Kinraid's too.'

'Men takes a deal more nor women to spoil their lives,' said Sylvia, bitterly.

'Not a' mak' o' men. I reckon, lass, Philip's life were pretty well on for bein' spoilt at after he left here; and it were, mebbe, a good thing he got rid on it so soon.'



'I wish I'd just had a few kind words wi' him, I do,' said Sylvia, almost on the point of crying.

'Come, lass, it's as ill moanin' after what's past as it 'ud be for me t' fill my eyes wi' weepin' after t' humbugs as this little wench o' thine has grubbed up whilst we'n been talkin'. Why, there's not one on 'em left!



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'She's a sad spoilt little puss!' said Sylvia, holding out her arms to the child, who ran into them, and began patting her mother's cheeks, and pulling at the soft brown curls tucked away beneath the matronly cap. 'Mammy spoils her, and Hester spoils her——'

'Granny Rose doesn't spoil me,' said the child, with quick, intelligent discrimination, interrupting her mother's list.

'No; but Jeremiah Foster does above a bit. He'll come in fro' t' Bank, Kester, and ask for her, a'most ivery day. And he'll bring her things in his pocket; and she's so fause, she allays goes straight to peep in, and then he shifts t' apple or t' toy into another. Eh! but she's a little fause one,'—half devouring the child with her kisses. 'And he comes and takes her a walk oftentimes, and he goes as slow as if he were quite an old man, to keep pace wi' Bella's steps. I often run upstairs and watch 'em out o' t' window; he doesn't care to have me with 'em, he's so fain t' have t' child all to hisself.'

'She's a bonny un, for sure,' said Kester; 'but not so pretty as thou was, Sylvie. A've niver tell'd thee what a come for tho', and it's about time for me t' be goin'. A'm off to t' Cheviots to-morrow morn t' fetch home some sheep as Jonas Blundell has purchased. It'll be a job o' better nor two months a reckon.'

'It'll be a nice time o' year,' said Sylvia, a little surprised at Kester's evident discouragement at the prospect of the journey or absence; he had often been away from Monkshaven for a longer time without seeming to care so much about it.

'Well, yo' see it's a bit hard upon me for t' leave my sister—she as is t' widow-woman, where a put up when a'm at home. Things is main an' dear; four-pound loaves is at sixteenpence; an' there's a deal o' talk on a famine i' t' land; an' whaten a paid for my victual an' t' bed i' t' lean-to helped t' oud woman a bit,—an' she's sadly down i' t' mouth, for she cannot hear on a lodger for t' tak' my place, for a' she's moved o'er to t' other side o' t' bridge for t' be nearer t' new buildings, an' t' grand new walk they're makin' round t' cliffs, thinkin' she'd be likelier t' pick up a labourer as would be glad on a bed near his work. A'd ha' liked to ha' set her agait wi' a 'sponsible lodger afore a'd ha' left, for she's just so soft-hearted, any scamp may put upon her if he nobbut gets houd on her blind side.'

'Can I help her?' said Sylvia, in her eager way. 'I should be so glad; and I've a deal of money by me——'

'Nay, my lass,' said Kester, 'thou munnot go off so fast; it were just what I were feared on i' tellin' thee. I've left her a bit o' money, and I'll mak' shift to send her more; it's just a kind word, t' keep up her heart when I'm gone, as I want. If thou'd step in and see her fra' time to time, and cheer her up a bit wi' talkin' to her on me, I'd tak' it very kind, and I'd go off wi' a lighter heart.'



'Then I'm sure I'll do it for yo', Kester. I niver justly feel like mysel' when yo're away, for I'm lonesome enough at times. She and I will talk a' t' better about yo' for both on us grieving after yo'.'



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So Kester took his leave, his mind set at ease by Sylvia's promise to go and see his sister pretty often during his absence in the North.

But Sylvia's habits were changed since she, as a girl at Haytersbank, liked to spend half her time in the open air, running out perpetually without anything on to scatter crumbs to the poultry, or to take a piece of bread to the old cart-horse, to go up to the garden for a handful of herbs, or to clamber to the highest point around to blow the horn which summoned her father and Kester home to dinner. Living in a town where it was necessary to put on hat and cloak before going out into the street, and then to walk in a steady and decorous fashion, she had only cared to escape down to the freedom of the sea-shore until Philip went away; and after that time she had learnt so to fear observation as a deserted wife, that nothing but Bella's health would have been a sufficient motive to take her out of doors. And, as she had told Kester, the necessity of giving the little girl a daily walk was very much lightened by the great love and affection which Jeremiah Foster now bore to the child. Ever since the day when the baby had come to his knee, allured by the temptation of his watch, he had apparently considered her as in some sort belonging to him; and now he had almost come to think that he had a right to claim her as his companion in his walk back from the Bank to his early dinner, where a high chair was always placed ready for the chance of her coming to share his meal. On these occasions he generally brought her back to the shop-door when he returned to his afternoon's work at the Bank. Sometimes, however, he would leave word that she was to be sent for from his house in the New Town, as his business at the Bank for that day was ended. Then Sylvia was compelled to put on her things, and fetch back her darling; and excepting for this errand she seldom went out at all on week-days.

About a fortnight after Kester's farewell call, this need for her visit to Jeremiah Foster's arose; and it seemed to Sylvia that there could not be a better opportunity of fulfilling her promise and going to see the widow Dobson, whose cottage was on the other side of the river, low down on the cliff-side, just at the bend and rush of the full stream into the open sea. She set off pretty early in order to go there first. She found the widow with her house-place tidied up after the midday meal, and busy knitting at the open door—not looking at her rapid-clicking needles, but gazing at the rush and recession of the waves before her; yet not seeing them either,—rather seeing days long past.

She started into active civility as soon as she recognized Sylvia, who was to her as a great lady, never having known Sylvia Robson in her wild childish days. Widow Dobson was always a little scandalized at her brother Christopher's familiarity with Mrs. Hepburn.

She dusted a chair which needed no dusting, and placed it for Sylvia, sitting down herself on a three-legged stool to mark her sense of the difference in their conditions, for there was another chair or two in the humble dwelling; and then the two fell into talk—first about Kester, whom his sister would persist in calling Christopher, as if his dignity

as her elder brother was compromised by any familiar abbreviation; and by-and-by she opened her heart a little more.



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'A could wish as a'd learned write-of-hand,' said she; 'for a've that for to tell Christopher as might set his mind at ease. But yo' see, if a wrote him a letter he couldn't read it; so a just comfort mysel' wi' thinkin' nobody need learn writin' unless they'n got friends as can read. But a reckon he'd ha' been glad to hear as a've gotten a lodger.' Here she nodded her head in the direction of the door opening out of the house-place into the 'lean-to', which Sylvia had observed on drawing near the cottage, and the recollection of the mention of which by Kester had enabled her to identify widow Dobson's dwelling. 'He's a-bed yonder,' the latter continued, dropping her voice. 'He's a queer-lookin' tyke, but a don't think as he's a bad un.'

'When did he come?' said Sylvia, remembering Kester's account of his sister's character, and feeling as though it behoved her, as Kester's confidante on this head, to give cautious and prudent advice.

'Eh! a matter of a s'ennight ago. A'm noane good at mindin' time; he's paid me his rent twice, but then he were keen to pay aforehand. He'd comed in one night, an' sate him down afore he could speak, he were so done up; he'd been on tramp this many a day, a reckon. "Can yo' give me a bed?" says he, panting like, after a bit. "A chap as a met near here says as yo've a lodging for t' let." "Ay," says a, "a ha' that; but yo' mun pay me a shilling a week for 't." Then my mind misgive me, for a thought he hadn't a shilling i' t' world, an' yet if he hadn't, a should just ha' gi'en him t' bed a' t' same: a'm not one as can turn a dog out if he comes t' me wearied o' his life. So he outs wi' a shillin', an' lays it down on t' table, 'bout a word. "A'll not trouble yo' long," says he. "A'm one as is best out o' t' world," he says. Then a thought as a'd been a bit hard upon him. An' says I, "A'm a widow-woman, and one as has gotten but few friends:" for yo' see a were low about our Christopher's goin' away north; "so a'm forced-like to speak hard to folk; but a've made mysel' some stirabout for my supper; and if yo'd like t' share an' share about wi' me, it's but puttin' a sup more watter to 't, and God's blessing 'll be on 't, just as same as if 't were meal." So he ups wi' his hand afore his e'en, and says not a word. At last he says, "Missus," says he, "can God's blessing be shared by a sinner—one o' t' devil's children?" says he. "For the Scriptur' says he's t' father o' lies." So a were puzzled-like; an' at length a says, "Thou mun ask t' parson that; a'm but a poor faint-hearted widow-woman; but a've allays had God's blessing somehow, now a bethink me, an' a'll share it wi' thee as far as my will goes." So he raxes his hand across t' table, an' mutters summat, as he grips mine. A thought it were Scriptur' as he said, but a'd needed a' my strength just then for t' lift t' pot off t' fire—it were t' first vittle a'd tasted sin' morn, for t' famine comes down like stones on t' head o' us poor



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folk: an' a' a said were just "Coom along, chap, an' fa' to; an' God's blessing be on him as eats most." An' sin' that day him and me's been as thick as thieves, only he's niver telled me nought of who he is, or wheere he comes fra'. But a think he's one o' them poor colliers, as has gotten brunt i' t' coal-pits; for, t' be sure, his face is a' black wi' fire-marks; an' o' late days he's ta'en t' his bed, an' just lies there sighing,—for one can hear him plain as dayleet thro' t' bit partition wa'.'

As a proof of this, a sigh—almost a groan—startled the two women at this very moment.

'Poor fellow!' said Sylvia, in a soft whisper. 'There's more sore hearts i' t' world than one reckons for!' But after a while, she bethought her again of Kester's account of his sister's 'softness'; and she thought that it behoved her to give some good advice. So she added, in a sterner, harder tone—'Still, yo' say yo' know nought about him; and tramps is tramps a' t' world over; and yo're a widow, and it behoves yo' to be careful. I think I'd just send him off as soon as he's a bit rested. Yo' say he's plenty o' money?'

'Nay! A never said that. A know nought about it. He pays me aforehand; an' he pays me down for whatever a've gotten for him; but that's but little; he's noane up t' his vittle, though a've made him some broth as good as a could make 'em.'

'I wouldn't send him away till he was well again, if I were yo; but I think yo'd be better rid on him,' said Sylvia. 'It would be different if yo'r brother were in Monkshaven.' As she spoke she rose to go.

Widow Dobson held her hand in hers for a minute, then the humble woman said,—

'Yo'll noane be vexed wi' me, missus, if a cannot find i' my heart t' turn him out till he wants to go hissel'? For a wouldn't like to vex yo', for Christopher's sake; but a know what it is for t' feel for friendless folk, an' choose what may come on it, I cannot send him away.'

'No!' said Sylvia. 'Why should I be vexed? it's no business o' mine. Only I should send him away if I was yo'. He might go lodge wheere there was men-folk, who know t' ways o' tramps, and are up to them.'

Into the sunshine went Sylvia. In the cold shadow the miserable tramp lay sighing. She did not know that she had been so near to him towards whom her heart was softening, day by day.

CHAPTER XLIV

FIRST WORDS



It was the spring of 1800. Old people yet can tell of the hard famine of that year. The harvest of the autumn before had failed; the war and the corn laws had brought the price of corn up to a famine rate; and much of what came into the market was unsound, and consequently unfit for food, yet hungry creatures bought it eagerly, and tried to cheat disease by mixing the damp, sweet, clammy flour with rice or potato meal. Rich families denied themselves pastry and all unnecessary and luxurious uses of wheat in any shape; the duty on hair-powder was increased; and all these palliatives were but as drops in the ocean of the great want of the people.



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Philip, in spite of himself, recovered and grew stronger; and as he grew stronger hunger took the place of loathing dislike to food. But his money was all spent; and what was his poor pension of sixpence a day in that terrible year of famine? Many a summer's night he walked for hours and hours round the house which once was his, which might be his now, with all its homely, blessed comforts, could he but go and assert his right to it. But to go with authority, and in his poor, maimed guise assert that right, he had need be other than Philip Hepburn. So he stood in the old shelter of the steep, crooked lane opening on to the hill out of the market-place, and watched the soft fading of the summer's eve into night; the closing of the once familiar shop; the exit of good, comfortable William Coulson, going to his own home, his own wife, his comfortable, plentiful supper. Then Philip—there were no police in those days, and scarcely an old watchman in that primitive little town—would go round on the shady sides of streets, and, quickly glancing about him, cross the bridge, looking on the quiet, rippling stream, the gray shimmer foretelling the coming dawn over the sea, the black masts and rigging of the still vessels against the sky; he could see with his wistful, eager eyes the shape of the windows—the window of the very room in which his wife and child slept, unheeding of him, the hungry, broken-hearted outcast. He would go back to his lodging, and softly lift the latch of the door; still more softly, but never without an unspoken, grateful prayer, pass by the poor sleeping woman who had given him a shelter and her share of God's blessing—she who, like him, knew not the feeling of satisfied hunger; and then he laid him down on the narrow pallet in the lean-to, and again gave Sylvia happy lessons in the kitchen at Haytersbank, and the dead were alive; and Charley Kinraid, the specksioneer, had never come to trouble the hopeful, gentle peace.

For widow Dobson had never taken Sylvia's advice. The tramp known to her by the name of Freeman—that in which he received his pension—lodged with her still, and paid his meagre shilling in advance, weekly. A shilling was meagre in those hard days of scarcity. A hungry man might easily eat the produce of a shilling in a day.

Widow Dobson pleaded this to Sylvia as an excuse for keeping her lodger on; to a more calculating head it might have seemed a reason for sending him away.

'Yo' see, missus,' said she, apologetically, to Sylvia, one evening, as the latter called upon the poor widow before going to fetch little Bella (it was now too hot for the child to cross the bridge in the full heat of the summer sun, and Jeremiah would take her up to her supper instead)—'Yo' see, missus, there's not a many as 'ud take him in for a shillin' when it goes so little way; or if they did, they'd take it out on him some other way, an' he's not gotten much else, a reckon. He ca's me granny, but a'm



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vast mista'en if he's ten year younger nor me; but he's gotten a fine appetite of his own, choose how young he may be; an' a can see as he could eat a deal more nor he's gotten money to buy, an' it's few as can mak' victual go farther nor me. Eh, missus, but yo' may trust me a'll send him off when times is better; but just now it would be sendin' him to his death; for a ha' plenty and to spare, thanks be to God an' yo'r bonny face.'

So Sylvia had to be content with the knowledge that the money she gladly gave to Kester's sister went partly to feed the lodger who was neither labourer nor neighbour, but only just a tramp, who, she feared, was preying on the good old woman. Still the cruel famine cut sharp enough to penetrate all hearts; and Sylvia, an hour after the conversation recorded above, was much touched, on her return from Jeremiah Foster's with the little merry, chattering Bella, at seeing the feeble steps of one, whom she knew by description must be widow Dobson's lodger, turn up from the newly-cut road which was to lead to the terrace walk around the North Cliff, a road which led to no dwelling but widow Dobson's. Tramp, and vagrant, he might he in the eyes of the law; but, whatever his character, Sylvia could see him before her in the soft dusk, creeping along, over the bridge, often stopping to rest and hold by some support, and then going on again towards the town, to which she and happy little Bella were wending.

A thought came over her: she had always fancied that this unknown man was some fierce vagabond, and had dreaded lest in the lonely bit of road between widow Dobson's cottage and the peopled highway, he should fall upon her and rob her if he learnt that she had money with her; and several times she had gone away without leaving the little gift she had intended, because she imagined that she had seen the door of the small chamber in the 'lean-to' open softly while she was there, as if the occupant (whom widow Dobson spoke of as never leaving the house before dusk, excepting once a week) were listening for the chink of the coin in her little leathern purse. Now that she saw him walking before her with heavy languid steps, this fear gave place to pity; she remembered her mother's gentle superstition which had prevented her from ever sending the hungry empty away, for fear lest she herself should come to need bread.

'Lassie,' said she to little Bella, who held a cake which Jeremiah's housekeeper had given her tight in her hand, 'yon poor man there is hungry; will Bella give him her cake, and mother will make her another to-morrow twice as big?'

For this consideration, and with the feeling of satisfaction which a good supper not an hour ago gives even to the hungry stomach of a child of three years old, Bella, after some thought, graciously assented to the sacrifice.

Sylvia stopped, the cake in her hand, and turned her back to the town, and to the slow wayfarer in front. Under the cover of her shawl she slipped a half-crown deep into the crumb of the cake, and then restoring it to little Bella, she gave her her directions.



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'Mammy will carry Bella; and when Bella goes past the poor man, she shall give him the cake over mammy's shoulder. Poor man is so hungry; and Bella and mammy have plenty to eat, and to spare.'

The child's heart was touched by the idea of hunger, and her little arm was outstretched ready for the moment her mother's hurried steps took her brushing past the startled, trembling Philip.

'Poor man, eat this; Bella not hungry.'

They were the first words he had ever heard his child utter. The echoes of them rang in his ears as he stood endeavouring to hide his disfigured face by looking over the parapet of the bridge down upon the stream running away towards the ocean, into which his hot tears slowly fell, unheeded by the weeper. Then he changed the intention with which he had set out upon his nightly walk, and turned back to his lodging.

Of course the case was different with Sylvia; she would have forgotten the whole affair very speedily, if it had not been for little Bella's frequent recurrence to the story of the hungry man, which had touched her small sympathies with the sense of an intelligible misfortune. She liked to act the dropping of the bun into the poor man's hand as she went past him, and would take up any article near her in order to illustrate the gesture she had used. One day she got hold of Hester's watch for this purpose, as being of the same round shape as the cake; and though Hester, for whose benefit the child was repeating the story in her broken language for the third or fourth time, tried to catch the watch as it was intended that she should (she being the representative of the 'hungry man' for the time being), it went to the ground with a smash that frightened the little girl, and she began to cry at the mischief she had done.

'Don't cry, Bella,' said Hester. 'Niver play with watches again. I didn't see thee at mine, or I'd ha' stopped thee in time. But I'll take it to old Darley's on th' quay-side, and maybe he'll soon set it to rights again. Only Bella must niver play with watches again.'

'Niver no more!' promised the little sobbing child. And that evening Hester took her watch down to old Darley's.

This William Darley was the brother of the gardener at the rectory; the uncle to the sailor who had been shot by the press-gang years before, and to his bed-ridden sister. He was a clever mechanic, and his skill as a repairer of watches and chronometers was great among the sailors, with whom he did a very irregular sort of traffic, conducted often without much use of money, but rather on the principle of barter, they bringing him foreign coins and odd curiosities picked up on their travels in exchange for his services to their nautical instruments or their watches. If he had ever had capital to extend his business, he might have been a rich man; but it is to be doubted whether he would have been as happy as he was now in his queer little habitation of two rooms, the front one

being both shop and workshop, the other serving the double purpose of bedroom and museum.



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The skill of this odd-tempered, shabby old man was sometimes sought by the jeweller who kept the more ostentatious shop in the High Street; but before Darley would undertake any 'tickle' piece of delicate workmanship for the other, he sneered at his ignorance, and taunted and abused him well. Yet he had soft places in his heart, and Hester Rose had found her way to one by her patient, enduring kindness to his bed-ridden niece. He never snarled at her as he did at too many; and on the few occasions when she had asked him to do anything for her, he had seemed as if she were conferring the favour on him, not he on her, and only made the smallest possible charge.

She found him now sitting where he could catch the most light for his work, spectacles on nose, and microscope in hand.

He took her watch, and examined it carefully without a word in reply to her. Then he began to open it and take it to pieces, in order to ascertain the nature of the mischief.

Suddenly he heard her catch her breath with a checked sound of surprise. He looked at her from above his spectacles; she was holding a watch in her hand which she had just taken up off the counter.

'What's amiss wi' thee now?' said Darley. 'Hast ta niver seen a watch o' that mak' afore? or is it them letters on t' back, as is so wonderful?'

Yes, it was those letters—that interlaced, old-fashioned cipher. That Z. H. that she knew of old stood for Zachary Hepburn, Philip's father. She knew how Philip valued this watch. She remembered having seen it in his hands the very day before his disappearance, when he was looking at the time in his annoyance at Sylvia's detention in her walk with baby. Hester had no doubt that he had taken this watch as a matter of course away with him. She felt sure that he would not part with this relic of his dead father on any slight necessity. Where, then, was Philip?—by what chance of life or death had this, his valued property, found its way once more to Monkshaven?

'Where did yo' get this?' she asked, in as quiet a manner as she could assume, sick with eagerness as she was.

To no one else would Darley have answered such a question. He made a mystery of most of his dealings; not that he had anything to conceal, but simply because he delighted in concealment. He took it out of her hands, looked at the number marked inside, and the maker's name—'Natteau Gent, York'—and then replied,—

'A man brought it me yesterday, at nightfall, for t' sell it. It's a matter o' forty years old. Natteau Gent has been dead and in his grave pretty nigh as long as that. But he did his work well when he were alive; and so I gave him as brought it for t' sell about as much



as it were worth, i' good coin. A tried him first i' t' bartering line, but he wouldn't bite; like enough he wanted food,—many a one does now-a-days.'

'Who was he?' gasped Hester.

'Bless t' woman! how should I know?'



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'What was he like?—how old?—tell me.'

'My lass, a've summut else to do wi' my eyes than go peering into men's faces i' t' dusk light.'

'But yo' must have had light for t' judge about the watch.'

'Eh! how sharp we are! A'd a candle close to my nose. But a didn't tak' it up for to gaze int' his face. That wouldn't be manners, to my thinking.'

Hester was silent. Then Darley's heart relented.

'If yo're so set upo' knowing who t' fellow was, a could, mebbe, put yo' on his tracks.'

'How?'' said Hester, eagerly. 'I do want to know. I want to know very much, and for a good reason.'

'Well, then, a'll tell yo'. He's a queer tyke, that one is. A'll be bound he were sore pressed for t' brass; yet he out's wi' a good half-crown, all wrapped up i' paper, and he axes me t' make a hole in it. Says I, "It's marring good king's coin, at after a've made a hole in't, it'll never pass current again." So he mumbles, and mumbles, but for a' that it must needs be done; and he's left it here, and is t' call for 't to-morrow at e'en.'

'Oh, William Darley!' said Hester, clasping her hands tight together. 'Find out who he is, where he is—anything—everything about him—and I will so bless yo'.'

Darley looked at her sharply, but with some signs of sympathy on his grave face. 'My woman,' he said 'a could ha' wished as you'd niver seen t' watch. It's poor, thankless work thinking too much on one o' God's creatures. But a'll do thy bidding,' he continued, in a lighter and different tone. 'A'm a 'cute old badger when need be. Come for thy watch in a couple o' days, and a'll tell yo' all as a've learnt.'

So Hester went away, her heart beating with the promise of knowing something about Philip,—how much, how little, in these first moments, she dared not say even to herself. Some sailor newly landed from distant seas might have become possessed of Philip's watch in far-off latitudes; in which case, Philip would be dead. That might be. She tried to think that this was the most probable way of accounting for the watch. She could be certain as to the positive identity of the watch—being in William Darley's possession. Again, it might be that Philip himself was near at hand—was here in this very place—starving, as too many were, for insufficiency of means to buy the high-priced food. And then her heart burnt within her as she thought of the succulent, comfortable meals which Sylvia provided every day—nay, three times a day—for the household in the market-place, at the head of which Philip ought to have been; but his place knew him not. For Sylvia had inherited her mother's talent for housekeeping, and on her, in Alice's



decrepitude and Hester's other occupations in the shop, devolved the cares of due provision for the somewhat heterogeneous family.

And Sylvia! Hester groaned in heart over the remembrance of Sylvia's words, 'I can never forgive him the wrong he did to me,' that night when Hester had come, and clung to her, making the sad, shameful confession of her unreturned love.



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What could ever bring these two together again? Could Hester herself—ignorant of the strange mystery of Sylvia's heart, as those who are guided solely by obedience to principle must ever be of the clue to the actions of those who are led by the passionate ebb and flow of impulse? Could Hester herself? Oh! how should she speak, how should she act, if Philip were near—if Philip were sad and in miserable estate? Her own misery at this contemplation of the case was too great to bear; and she sought her usual refuge in the thought of some text, some promise of Scripture, which should strengthen her faith.

'With God all things are possible,' said she, repeating the words as though to lull her anxiety to rest.

Yes; with God all things are possible. But oftentimes He does his work with awful instruments. There is a peacemaker whose name is Death.

CHAPTER XLV

SAVED AND LOST

Hester went out on the evening of the day after that on which the unknown owner of the half-crown had appointed to call for it again at William Darley's. She had schooled herself to believe that time and patience would serve her best. Her plan was to obtain all the knowledge about Philip that she could in the first instance; and then, if circumstances allowed it, as in all probability they would, to let drop by drop of healing, peacemaking words and thoughts fall on Sylvia's obdurate, unforgiving heart. So Hester put on her things, and went out down towards the old quay-side on that evening after the shop was closed.

Poor little Sylvia! She was unforgiving, but not obdurate to the full extent of what Hester believed. Many a time since Philip went away had she unconsciously missed his protecting love; when folks spoke shortly to her, when Alice scolded her as one of the non-elect, when Hester's gentle gravity had something of severity in it; when her own heart failed her as to whether her mother would have judged that she had done well, could that mother have known all, as possibly she did by this time. Philip had never spoken otherwise than tenderly to her during the eighteen months of their married life, except on the two occasions before recorded: once when she referred to her dream of Kinraid's possible return, and once again on the evening of the day before her discovery of his concealment of the secret of Kinraid's involuntary disappearance.

After she had learnt that Kinraid was married, her heart had still more strongly turned to Philip; she thought that he had judged rightly in what he had given as the excuse for his double dealing; she was even more indignant at Kinraid's fickleness than she had any reason to be; and she began to learn the value of such enduring love as Philip's had



been—lasting ever since the days when she first began to fancy what a man's love for a woman should be, when she had first shrunk from the tone of tenderness he put into his especial term for her, a girl of twelve—'Little lassie,' as he was wont to call her.



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But across all this relenting came the shadow of her vow—like the chill of a great cloud passing over a sunny plain. How should she decide? what would be her duty, if he came again, and once more called her 'wife'? She shrank from such a possibility with all the weakness and superstition of her nature; and this it was which made her strengthen herself with the re-utterance of unforgiving words; and shun all recurrence to the subject on the rare occasion when Hester had tried to bring it back, with a hope of softening the heart which to her appeared altogether hardened on this one point.

Now, on this bright summer evening, while Hester had gone down to the quay-side, Sylvia stood with her out-of-door things on in the parlour, rather impatiently watching the sky, full of hurrying clouds, and flushing with the warm tints of the approaching sunset. She could not leave Alice: the old woman had grown so infirm that she was never left by her daughter and Sylvia at the same time; yet Sylvia had to fetch her little girl from the New Town, where she had been to her supper at Jeremiah Foster's. Hester had said that she should not be away more than a quarter of an hour; and Hester was generally so punctual that any failure of hers, in this respect, appeared almost in the light of an injury on those who had learnt to rely upon her. Sylvia wanted to go and see widow Dobson, and learn when Kester might be expected home. His two months were long past; and Sylvia had heard through the Fosters of some suitable and profitable employment for him, of which she thought he would be glad to know as soon as possible. It was now some time since she had been able to get so far as across the bridge; and, for aught she knew, Kester might already be come back from his expedition to the Cheviots. Kester was come back. Scarce five minutes had elapsed after these thoughts had passed through her mind before his hasty hand lifted the latch of the kitchen-door, his hurried steps brought him face to face with her. The smile of greeting was arrested on her lips by one look at him: his eyes staring wide, the expression on his face wild, and yet pitiful.

'That's reet,' said he, seeing that her things were already on. 'Thou're wanted sore. Come along.'

'Oh! dear God! my child!' cried Sylvia, clutching at the chair near her; but recovering her eddying senses with the strong fact before her that whatever the terror was, she was needed to combat it.

'Ay; thy child!' said Kester, taking her almost roughly by the arm, and drawing her away with him out through the open doors on to the quay-side.

'Tell me!' said Sylvia, faintly, 'is she dead?'

'She's safe now,' said Kester. 'It's not her—it's him as saved her as needs yo', if iver husband needed a wife.'

'He?—who? O Philip! Philip! is it yo' at last?'

Unheeding what spectators might see her movements, she threw up her arms and staggered against the parapet of the bridge they were then crossing.



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'He!—Philip!—saved Bella? Bella, our little Bella, as got her dinner by my side, and went out wi' Jeremiah, as well as could be. I cannot take it in; tell me, Kester.' She kept trembling so much in voice and in body, that he saw she could not stir without danger of falling until she was calmed; as it was, her eyes became filmy from time to time, and she drew her breath in great heavy pants, leaning all the while against the wall of the bridge.

'It were no illness,' Kester began. 'T' little un had gone for a walk wi' Jeremiah Foster, an' he were drawn for to go round t' edge o' t' cliff, where they's makin' t' new walk reet o'er t' sea. But it's but a bit on a pathway now; an' t' one was too oud, an' t' other too young for t' see t' water comin' along wi' great leaps; it's allays for comin' high up again' t' cliff, an' this spring-tide it's comin' in i' terrible big waves. Some one said as they passed t' man a-sittin' on a bit on a rock up above—a dunnot know, a only know as a heard a great fearful screech i' t' air. A were just a-restin' me at after a'd comed in, not half an hour i' t' place. A've walked better nor a dozen mile to-day; an' a ran out, an' a looked, an' just on t' walk, at t' turn, was t' swish of a wave runnin' back as quick as t' mischief int' t' sea, an' oud Jeremiah standin' like one crazy, lookin' o'er int' t' watter; an' like a stroke o' leeghtnin' comes a man, an' int' t' very midst o' t' great waves like a shot; an' then a knowed summut were in t' watter as were nearer death than life; an' a seemed to misdoubt me that it were our Bella; an' a shouts an' a cries for help, an' a goes mysel' to t' very edge o' t' cliff, an' a bids oud Jeremiah, as was like one beside hissel', houd tight on me, for he were good for nought else; an' a bides my time, an' when a sees two arms houdin' out a little drippin' streamin' child, a clutches her by her waist-band, an' hauls her to land. She's noane t' worse for her bath, a'll be bound.'

'I mun go—let me,' said Sylvia, struggling with his detaining hand, which he had laid upon her in the fear that she would slip down to the ground in a faint, so ashen-gray was her face. 'Let me,—Bella, I mun go see her.'

He let go, and she stood still, suddenly feeling herself too weak to stir.

'Now, if you'll try a bit to be quiet, a'll lead yo' along; but yo' mun be a steady and brave lass.'

'I'll be aught if yo' only let me see Bella,' said Sylvia, humbly.

'An' yo' niver ax at after him as saved her,' said Kester, reproachfully.

'I know it's Philip,' she whispered, 'and yo' said he wanted me; so I know he's safe; and, Kester, I think I'm 'feared on him, and I'd like to gather courage afore seeing him, and a look at Bella would give me courage. It were a terrible time when I saw him last, and I did say—'



'Niver think on what thou did say; think on what thou will say to him now, for he lies a-dyin'! He were dashed again t' cliff an' bruised sore in his innards afore t' men as come wi' a boat could pick him up.'



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She did not speak; she did not even tremble now; she set her teeth together, and, holding tight by Kester, she urged him on; but when they came to the end of the bridge, she seemed uncertain which way to turn.

'This way,' said Kester. 'He's been lodgin' wi' Sally this nine week, an' niver a one about t' place as knowed him; he's been i' t' wars an' gotten his face brunt.'

'And he was short o' food,' moaned Sylvia, 'and we had plenty, and I tried to make yo'r sister turn him out, and send him away. Oh! will God iver forgive me?'

Muttering to herself, breaking her mutterings with sharp cries of pain, Sylvia, with Kester's help, reached widow Dobson's house. It was no longer a quiet, lonely dwelling. Several sailors stood about the door, awaiting, in silent anxiety, for the verdict of the doctor, who was even now examining Philip's injuries. Two or three women stood talking eagerly, in low voices, in the doorway.

But when Sylvia drew near the men fell back; and the women moved aside as though to allow her to pass, all looking upon her with a certain amount of sympathy, but perhaps with rather more of antagonistic wonder as to how she was taking it—she who had been living in ease and comfort while her husband's shelter was little better than a hovel, her husband's daily life a struggle with starvation; for so much of the lodger at widow Dobson's was popularly known; and any distrust of him as a stranger and a tramp was quite forgotten now.

Sylvia felt the hardness of their looks, the hardness of their silence; but it was as nothing to her. If such things could have touched her at this moment, she would not have stood still right in the midst of their averted hearts, and murmured something to Kester. He could not hear the words uttered by that hoarse choked voice, until he had stooped down and brought his ear to the level of her mouth.

'We'd better wait for t' doctors to come out,' she said again. She stood by the door, shivering all over, almost facing the people in the road, but with her face turned a little to the right, so that they thought she was looking at the pathway on the cliff-side, a hundred yards or so distant, below which the hungry waves still lashed themselves into high ascending spray; while nearer to the cottage, where their force was broken by the bar at the entrance to the river, they came softly lapping up the shelving shore.

Sylvia saw nothing of all this, though it was straight before her eyes. She only saw a blurred mist; she heard no sound of waters, though it filled the ears of those around. Instead she heard low whispers pronouncing Philip's earthly doom.

For the doctors were both agreed; his internal injury was of a mortal kind, although, as the spine was severely injured above the seat of the fatal bruise, he had no pain in the lower half of his body.

They had spoken in so low a tone that John Foster, standing only a foot or so away, had not been able to hear their words. But Sylvia heard each syllable there where she stood outside, shivering all over in the sultry summer evening. She turned round to Kester.



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'I mun go to him, Kester; thou'll see that noane come in to us, when t' doctors come out.'

She spoke in a soft, calm voice; and he, not knowing what she had heard, made some easy conditional promise. Then those opposite to the cottage door fell back, for they could see the grave doctors coming out, and John Foster, graver, sadder still, following them. Without a word to them,—without a word even of inquiry—which many outside thought and spoke of as strange—white-faced, dry-eyed Sylvia slipped into the house out of their sight.

And the waves kept lapping on the shelving shore.

The room inside was dark, all except the little halo or circle of light made by a dip candle. Widow Dobson had her back to the bed—her bed—on to which Philip had been borne in the hurry of terror as to whether he was alive or whether he was dead. She was crying—crying quietly, but the tears down-falling fast, as, with her back to the lowly bed, she was gathering up the dripping clothes cut off from the poor maimed body by the doctors' orders. She only shook her head as she saw Sylvia, spirit-like, steal in—white, noiseless, and upborne from earth.

But noiseless as her step might be, he heard, he recognized, and with a sigh he turned his poor disfigured face to the wall, hiding it in the shadow.

He knew that she was by him; that she had knelt down by his bed; that she was kissing his hand, over which the languor of approaching death was stealing. But no one spoke.

At length he said, his face still averted, speaking with an effort.

'Little lassie, forgive me now! I cannot live to see the morn!'

There was no answer, only a long miserable sigh, and he felt her soft cheek laid upon his hand, and the quiver that ran through her whole body.

'I did thee a cruel wrong,' he said, at length. 'I see it now. But I'm a dying man. I think that God will forgive me—and I've sinned against Him; try, lassie—try, my Sylvie—will not thou forgive me?'

He listened intently for a moment. He heard through the open window the waves lapping on the shelving shore. But there came no word from her; only that same long shivering, miserable sigh broke from her lips at length.

'Child,' said he, once more. 'I ha' made thee my idol; and if I could live my life o'er again I would love my God more, and thee less; and then I shouldn't ha' sinned this sin against thee. But speak one word of love to me—one little word, that I may know I have thy pardon.'



'Oh, Philip! Philip!' she moaned, thus adjured.

Then she lifted her head, and said,

'Them were wicked, wicked words, as I said; and a wicked vow as I vowed; and Lord God Almighty has ta'en me at my word. I'm sorely punished, Philip, I am indeed.'

He pressed her hand, he stroked her cheek. But he asked for yet another word.

'I did thee a wrong. In my lying heart I forgot to do to thee as I would have had thee to do to me. And I judged Kinraid in my heart.'



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'Thou thought as he was faithless and fickle,' she answered quickly; 'and so he were. He were married to another woman not so many weeks at after thou went away. Oh, Philip, Philip! and now I have thee back, and—'

'Dying' was the word she would have said, but first the dread of telling him what she believed he did not know, and next her passionate sobs, choked her.

'I know,' said he, once more stroking her cheek, and soothing her with gentle, caressing hand. 'Little lassie!' he said, after a while when she was quiet from very exhaustion, 'I niver thought to be so happy again. God is very merciful.'

She lifted up her head, and asked wildly, 'Will He iver forgive me, think yo'? I drove yo' out fra' yo'r home, and sent yo' away to t' wars, where yo' might ha' gotten yo'r death; and when yo' come back, poor and lone, and weary, I told her for t' turn yo' out, for a' I knew yo' must be starving in these famine times. I think I shall go about among them as gnash their teeth for iver, while yo' are where all tears are wiped away.'

'No!' said Philip, turning round his face, forgetful of himself in his desire to comfort her. 'God pities us as a father pities his poor wandering children; the nearer I come to death the clearer I see Him. But you and me have done wrong to each other; yet we can see now how we were led to it; we can pity and forgive one another. I'm getting low and faint, lassie; but thou must remember this: God knows more, and is more forgiving than either you to me, or me to you. I think and do believe as we shall meet together before His face; but then I shall ha' learnt to love thee second to Him; not first, as I have done here upon the earth.'

Then he was silent—very still. Sylvia knew—widow Dobson had brought it in—that there was some kind of medicine, sent by the hopeless doctors, lying upon the table hard by, and she softly rose and poured it out and dropped it into the half-open mouth. Then she knelt down again, holding the hand feebly stretched out to her, and watching the faint light in the wistful loving eyes. And in the stillness she heard the ceaseless waves lapping against the shelving shore.

Something like an hour before this time, which was the deepest midnight of the summer's night, Hester Rose had come hurrying up the road to where Kester and his sister sate outside the open door, keeping their watch under the star-lit sky, all others having gone away, one by one, even John and Jeremiah Foster having returned to their own house, where the little Bella lay, sleeping a sound and healthy slumber after her perilous adventure.



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Hester had heard but little from William Darley as to the owner of the watch and the half-crown; but he was chagrined at the failure of all his skilful interrogations to elicit the truth, and promised her further information in a few days, with all the more vehemence because he was unaccustomed to be baffled. And Hester had again whispered to herself 'Patience! Patience!' and had slowly returned back to her home to find that Sylvia had left it, why she did not at once discover. But, growing uneasy as the advancing hours neither brought Sylvia nor little Bella to their home, she had set out for Jeremiah Foster's as soon as she had seen her mother comfortably asleep in her bed; and then she had learnt the whole story, bit by bit, as each person who spoke broke in upon the previous narration with some new particular. But from no one did she clearly learn whether Sylvia was with her husband, or not; and so she came speeding along the road, breathless, to where Kester sat in wakeful, mournful silence, his sister's sleeping head lying on his shoulder, the cottage door open, both for air and that there might be help within call if needed; and the dim slanting oblong of the interior light lying across the road.

Hester came panting up, too agitated and breathless to ask how much was truth of the fatal, hopeless tale which she had heard. Kester looked at her without a word. Through this solemn momentary silence the lapping of the ceaseless waves was heard, as they came up close on the shelving shore.

'He? Philip?' said she. Kester shook his head sadly.

'And his wife—Sylvia?' said Hester.

'In there with him, alone,' whispered Kester.

Hester turned away, and wrung her hands together.

'Oh, Lord God Almighty!' said she, 'was I not even worthy to bring them together at last?' And she went away slowly and heavily back to the side of her sleeping mother. But 'Thy will be done' was on her quivering lips before she lay down to her rest.

The soft gray dawn lightens the darkness of a midsummer night soon after two o'clock. Philip watched it come, knowing that it was his last sight of day,—as we reckon days on earth.

He had been often near death as a soldier; once or twice, as when he rushed into fire to save Kinraid, his chances of life had been as one to a hundred; but yet he had had a chance. But now there was the new feeling—the last new feeling which we shall any of us experience in this world—that death was not only close at hand, but inevitable.

He felt its numbness stealing up him—stealing up him. But the head was clear, the brain more than commonly active in producing vivid impressions.



It seemed but yesterday since he was a little boy at his mother's knee, wishing with all the earnestness of his childish heart to be like Abraham, who was called the friend of God, or David, who was said to be the man after God's own heart, or St John, who was called 'the Beloved.' As very present seemed the day on which he made resolutions of trying to be like them; it was in the spring, and some one had brought in cowslips; and the scent of those flowers was in his nostrils now, as he lay a-dying—his life ended, his battles fought, his time for 'being good' over and gone—the opportunity, once given in all eternity, past.



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All the temptations that had beset him rose clearly before him; the scenes themselves stood up in their solid materialism—he could have touched the places; the people, the thoughts, the arguments that Satan had urged in behalf of sin, were reproduced with the vividness of a present time. And he knew that the thoughts were illusions, the arguments false and hollow; for in that hour came the perfect vision of the perfect truth: he saw the 'way to escape' which had come along with the temptation; now, the strong resolve of an ardent boyhood, with all a life before it to show the world 'what a Christian might be'; and then the swift, terrible now, when his naked, guilty soul shrank into the shadow of God's mercy-seat, out of the blaze of His anger against all those who act a lie.

His mind was wandering, and he plucked it back. Was this death in very deed? He tried to grasp at the present, the earthly present, fading quick away. He lay there on the bed—on Sally Dobson's bed in the house-place, not on his accustomed pallet in the lean-to. He knew that much. And the door was open into the still, dusk night; and through the open casement he could hear the lapping of the waves on the shelving shore, could see the soft gray dawn over the sea—he knew it was over the sea—he saw what lay unseen behind the poor walls of the cottage. And it was Sylvia who held his hand tight in her warm, living grasp; it was his wife whose arm was thrown around him, whose sobbing sighs shook his numbed frame from time to time.

'God bless and comfort my darling,' he said to himself. 'She knows me now. All will be right in heaven—in the light of God's mercy.'

And then he tried to remember all that he had ever read about, God, and all that the blessed Christ—that bringeth glad tidings of great joy unto all people, had said of the Father, from whom He came. Those sayings dropped like balm down upon his troubled heart and brain. He remembered his mother, and how she had loved him; and he was going to a love wiser, tenderer, deeper than hers.

As he thought this, he moved his hands as if to pray; but Sylvia clenched her hold, and he lay still, praying all the same for her, for his child, and for himself. Then he saw the sky redden with the first flush of dawn; he heard Kester's long-drawn sigh of weariness outside the open door.

He had seen widow Dobson pass through long before to keep the remainder of her watch on the bed in the lean-to, which had been his for many and many a sleepless and tearful night. Those nights were over—he should never see that poor chamber again, though it was scarce two feet distant. He began to lose all sense of the comparative duration of time: it seemed as long since kind Sally Dobson had bent over him with soft, lingering look, before going into the humble sleeping-room—as long as it was since his boyhood, when he stood by his mother dreaming of the life that should be his, with the scent of the cowslips tempting him to be off to the woodlands where they grew. Then there came a rush and an eddying through his brain—his soul trying her wings for the

long flight. Again he was in the present: he heard the waves lapping against the shelving shore once again.



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And now his thoughts came back to Sylvia. Once more he spoke aloud, in a strange and terrible voice, which was not his. Every sound came with efforts that were new to him.

'My wife! Sylvie! Once more—forgive me all.'

She sprang up, she kissed his poor burnt lips; she held him in her arms, she moaned, and said,

'Oh, wicked me! forgive me—me—Philip!'

Then he spoke, and said, 'Lord, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive each other!' And after that the power of speech was conquered by the coming death. He lay very still, his consciousness fast fading away, yet coming back in throbs, so that he knew it was Sylvia who touched his lips with cordial, and that it was Sylvia who murmured words of love in his ear. He seemed to sleep at last, and so he did—a kind of sleep, but the light of the red morning sun fell on his eyes, and with one strong effort he rose up, and turned so as once more to see his wife's pale face of misery.

'In heaven,' he cried, and a bright smile came on his face, as he fell back on his pillow.

Not long after Hester came, the little Bella scarce awake in her arms, with the purpose of bringing his child to see him ere yet he passed away. Hester had watched and prayed through the livelong night. And now she found him dead, and Sylvia, tearless and almost unconscious, lying by him, her hand holding his, her other thrown around him.

Kester, poor old man, was sobbing bitterly; but she not at all.

Then Hester bore her child to her, and Sylvia opened wide her miserable eyes, and only stared, as if all sense was gone from her. But Bella suddenly rousing up at the sight of the poor, scarred, peaceful face, cried out,—

'Poor man who was so hungry. Is he not hungry now?'

'No,' said Hester, softly. 'The former things are passed away—and he is gone where there is no more sorrow, and no more pain.'

But then she broke down into weeping and crying. Sylvia sat up and looked at her.

'Why do yo' cry, Hester?' she said. 'Yo' niver said that yo' wouldn't forgive him as long as yo' lived. Yo' niver broke the heart of him that loved yo', and let him almost starve at yo'r very door. Oh, Philip! my Philip, tender and true.'



Then Hester came round and closed the sad half-open eyes; kissing the calm brow with a long farewell kiss. As she did so, her eye fell on a black ribbon round his neck. She partly lifted it out; to it was hung a half-crown piece.

'This is the piece he left at William Darley's to be bored,' said she, 'not many days ago.'

Bella had crept to her mother's arms as a known haven in this strange place; and the touch of his child loosened the fountains of her tears. She stretched out her hand for the black ribbon, put it round her own neck; after a while she said,

'If I live very long, and try hard to be very good all that time, do yo' think, Hester, as God will let me to him where he is?'



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Monkshaven is altered now into a rising bathing place. Yet, standing near the site of widow Dobson's house on a summer's night, at the ebb of a spring-tide, you may hear the waves come lapping up the shelving shore with the same ceaseless, ever-recurrent sound as that which Philip listened to in the pauses between life and death.

And so it will be until 'there shall be no more sea'.

But the memory of man fades away. A few old people can still tell you the tradition of the man who died in a cottage somewhere about this spot,—died of starvation while his wife lived in hard-hearted plenty not two good stone-throws away. This is the form into which popular feeling, and ignorance of the real facts, have moulded the story. Not long since a lady went to the 'Public Baths', a handsome stone building erected on the very site of widow Dobson's cottage, and finding all the rooms engaged she sat down and had some talk with the bathing woman; and, as it chanced, the conversation fell on Philip Hepburn and the legend of his fate.

'I knew an old man when I was a girl,' said the bathing woman, 'as could niver abide to hear t' wife blamed. He would say nothing again' th' husband; he used to say as it were not fit for men to be judging; that she had had her sore trial, as well as Hepburn hisself.'

The lady asked, 'What became of the wife?'

'She was a pale, sad woman, allays dressed in black. I can just remember her when I was a little child, but she died before her daughter was well grown up; and Miss Rose took t' lassie, as had always been like her own.'

'Miss Rose?'

'Hester Rose! have yo' niver heard of Hester Rose, she as founded t' alms-houses for poor disabled sailors and soldiers on t' Horncastle road? There's a piece o' stone in front to say that "This building is erected in memory of P. H."—and some folk will have it P. H. stands for t' name o' th' man as was starved to death.'

'And the daughter?'

'One o' th' Fosters, them as founded t' Old Bank, left her a vast o' money; and she were married to distant cousin of theirs, and went off to settle in America many and many a year ago.'

THE END.