

'In t' books they doan't coe it t' Witch's Pool at aw,' said Louie, obstinately. 'They coe it t' *Mermaid's Pool*.'

'An another book coes it a "Hammer-dry-ad,"' said David, mockingly, 'soa theer yo are.'

'Aye, soom faddlin kind of a name they gie it—I know—those Manchester chaps, as cooms trespassin ower t' Scout wheer they aren't wanted. To hear ony yan o' *them* talk, yo'd think theer wor only three fellows like 'im cam ower i' three ships, an two were drowned. T'aint ov ony account what they an their books coe it.'

And Reuben, as he leant against the gate, blew his smoke contemptuously in the air. It was not often that Reuben Grieve allowed himself, or was allowed by his world, to use airs of superiority towards any other human being whatever. But in the case of the Manchester clerks and warehousemen, who came tramping over the grouse moors which Reuben rented for his sheep, and were always being turned back by keepers or himself—and in their case only—did he exercise, once in a while, the commonest privilege of humanity.

'Did yo iver know onybody 'at went up on Easter Eve?' asked David.

Both children hung on the answer.

Reuben scratched his head. The tales of Jenny Crum, once well known to him, had sunk deep into the waves of memory of late years, and his slow mind had some difficulty in recovering them. But at last he said with the sudden brightening of recollection:

'Aye—of *coorse*!—I knew theer wor soom one. Yo know 'im, Davy, owd 'Lias o' Frimley Moor? He wor allus a foo'hardy sort o' creetur. But if he wor short o' wits when he gan up, he wor mich shorter when he cam down. That wor a rum skit!—now I think on 't. Sieh a seet he wor! He came by here six o'clock i' th' mornin. I found him hangin ower t' yard gate theer, as white an slainp as a puddin cloth oop on eend; an I browt him in, an was for gien him soom tay. An yor aunt, she gien him a warld o' good advice about his gooins on. But bless yo, he didn't tak in a word o' 't. An for th' tay, he'd naw sooner swallowed it than he runs out, as quick as leetnin, an browt it aw up. He wor fairly clemmed wi' t' cold,—'at he wor. I put in th' horse, an I took him down to t' Frimley carrier, an we packed him i' soom rugs an straw, an soa he got home. But they put him out o' t' school, an he wor months in his bed. An they do tell me, as nobory can mak owt o' 'Lias Dawson these mony years, i' th' matter o' brains. Eh, but yo shudno meddle wi Satan.'

'What d'yo think he saw?' asked David, eagerly, his black eyes all aglow.

'He saw t' woman wi t' fish's tail—'at's what he saw,' said Louie, shrilly.

Reuben took no notice. He was sunk in silent reverie poking at his pipe. In spite of his confidence in the Almighty's increased

goodwill towards the present dispensation, he was not prepared to say for certain what 'Lias Dawson did or didn't see.

'Nobory should goo an meddle wi Satan,' he repeated slowly after an interval; and then opening the yard gate he went off on his usual Sunday walk over the moors to have a look at his more distant sheep.

Davy stood intently looking after him; so did Louie. She had clasped her hands behind her head, her eyes were wide, her look and attitude all eagerness. She was putting two and two together—her uncle's promise and the mermaid story as the Manchester man had delivered it. You had but to see her and wish, and, according to the Manchester man and his book, you got your wish. The child's hatred of sermons and ministers had not touched her capacity for belief of this sort in the least. She believed feverishly, and was enraged with David for setting up a rival creed, and with her uncle for endorsing it.

David turned and walked towards the farmyard. Louie followed him, and tapped him peremptorily on the arm. 'I'm gooin up theer Easter Eve—Saturday week'—and she pointed over her shoulder to the Scout.

'Gells conno be out neets,' said David firmly; 'if I goo I can tell yo.'

'Yo'll not goo without me—I'd tell Aunt Hannah!'

'Yo've naw moor sense nor rotten sticks!' said David, angrily. 'Yo'll get your death, an Aunt Hannah 'll be stick stock mad wi boath on us. If I goo she'll never find out.'

Louie hesitated a moment. To provoke Aunt Hannah too much might, indeed, endanger the blue frock. But daring and curiosity triumphed.

'I doan't care!' she said, tossing her head; 'I'm gooin.'

David slammed the yard gate, and, hiding himself in a corner of the cowhouse, fell into moody meditations. It took all the tragic and mysterious edge off an adventure he had set his heart on that Louie should insist on going too. But there was no help for it. Next day they planned it together.

CHAPTER V

'REUBEN, ha yo seen t' childer?' inquired Aunt Hannah, poking her head round the door, so as to be heard by her husband, who was sitting outside cobbling at a bit of broken harness.

'Noa; niver seed un since dinner.'

'They went down to Clough End, two o'clock about, for t' bread, an I've yerd nothin ov em since. Coom in to your tay, Reuben! I'll keep nothin waitin for them! They may goo empty if they conno keep time!'

Reuben went in. An hour later the husband and wife came

out together, and stood looking down the steep road leading to the town.

'Just cast your eye on aw them stockins waitin to be mended,' said Hannah, angrily, turning back to the kitchen, and pointing to a chair piled with various garments. 'That's why she doon it, I spose. I'll be even wi her! It's a poor soart of a supper she'll get this neet, or he noather. An her stomach aw she cares for!'

Reuben wandered down into the road, strolled up and down for nearly an hour, while the sun set and the light waned, went as far as the corner by Wigson's farm, asked a passer-by, saw and heard nothing, and came back, shaking his head in answer to his wife's shrill interrogations.

'Wal, if I doan't gie Louie a good smackin,' ejaculated Hannah, exasperated; and she was just going back into the house when an exclamation from Reuben stopped her; instead, she ran out to him, holding on her cap against the east wind.

'Look theer,' he said, pointing; 'what iver is them two up to?'

For suddenly he had noticed outside the gate leading into the field a basket lying on the ground against the wall. The two peered at it with amazement, for it was their own basket, and in it reposed the loaves David had been told to bring back from Clough End, while on the top lay a couple of cotton reels and a card of mending which Louie had been instructed to buy for her aunt.

After a moment Reuben looked up, his face working.

'I'm thinkin, Hannah, they'n roon away!'

It seemed to him as he spoke that such a possibility had been always in his mind. And during the past week there had been much bad blood between aunt and niece. Twice had the child gone to bed supperless, and yesterday, for some impertinence, Hannah had given her a blow, the marks of which on her cheek Reuben had watched guiltily all day. At night he had dreamed of Sandy. Since Mr. Ancrum had set him thinking, and so stirred his conscience in various indirect and unforeseen ways, Sandy had been a terror to him; the dead man had gained a mysterious hold on the living.

'Roon away!' repeated Hannah scornfully; 'whar ud they roon to? They're just at soom o' their divilments, 'at's what they are. An if yo doan't tak a stick to boath on them when they coom back, *I will*, soa theer, Reuben Grieve. Yo niver had no sperrit wi 'em—niver—and that's yan reason why they've grown up soa ramjam full o' wickedness.'

It relieved her to abuse her husband. Reuben said nothing, but hung over the wall, straining his eyes into the gathering darkness. The wooded sides of the great moor which enclosed the valley to the north were fading into dimness, and to the east, above the ridge of Kinder Low, a young moon was rising. The black steep wall of the Scout was swiftly taking to itself that majesty which all mountains win from the approach of night. Involuntarily, Reuben held his breath, listening, hungering for

the sound of children's voices on the still air. Nothing—but a few intermittent bird notes and the eternal hurry of water from the moorland to the plain.

There was a step on the road, and a man passed whistling.

'Jim Wigson!' shouted Hannah, 'is that yo, Jim?'

The man opened the yard gate, and came through to them. Jim was the eldest son of the neighbouring farmer, whose girls were Louie's only companions. He was a full-blooded swaggering youth, with whom David was generally on bad terms. David despised him for an oaf who could neither read nor write, and hated him for a bully.

He grinned when Hannah asked him questions about the truants.

'Why, they're gone to Edale, th' yoong rascots, I'll uphowd yo! There's a parcel o' gipsies there tellin fortunes, an lots o' foak ha gone ower there to-day. You may mak your mind up they've gone to Edale. That Louie's a limb, she is. She's got spunk enough to waak to Lunnon if she'd a mind. Oh, they'll be back here soon enough, trust 'em.'

'I shut *my* door at nine o'clock,' said Hannah, grimly. 'Them as cooms after that, may sleep as they can.'

'Well, that'll be sharp wark for th' eyes if they're gone to Edale,' said Jim, with a laugh. 'It's a good step fro here to Edale.'

'Aye, an soom o' 't bad ground,' said Reuben uneasily—'varra bad ground.'

'Aye, it's not good walkin, neets. If they conno see their way when they get top o' t' Downfall, they'll stay theer till it gets mornin, if they've ony sort o' gumption. But, bless yo, it bean't gooin to be a dark neet,'—and he pointed to the moon. 'They'll be here afore yo goo to bed. An if yo want onybody to help yo gie Davy a bastin, just coe me, Mr. Grieve. Good neet to yo.'

Reuben fidgeted restlessly all the evening. Towards nine he went out on the pretext of seeing to a cow that had lately calved and was in a weakly state. He gave the animal her food and clean litter, doing everything more clumsily than usual. Then he went into the stable and groped about for a lantern that stood in the corner.

He found it, slipped through the farmyard into the lane, and then lit it out of sight of the house.

'It's bad ground top o' t' Downfall,' he said to himself, apologetically, as he guiltily opened the gate on to the moor—'varra bad ground.'

Hannah shut her door that night neither at nine nor at ten. For by the latter hour the master of the house was still absent, and nowhere to be found, in spite of repeated calls from the door and up the lane. Hannah guessed where he had gone without much difficulty; but her guess only raised her wrath to a white heat. Troublesome brats Sandy's children had always been—Louie more especially—but they had never perpetrated any such

overt act of rebellion as this before, and the dour, tyrannical woman was filled with a kind of silent frenzy as she thought of her husband going out to welcome the wanderers.

'It's a quare kind o' fatted calf they'll get when I lay hands on 'em,' she thought to herself as she stood at the front door, in the cold darkness, listening.

Meanwhile David and Louie, high up on the side of Kinder Scout, were speculating with a fearful joy as to what might be happening at the farm. The manner of their escape had cost them much thought. Should they slip out of the front door instead of going to bed? But the woodwork of the farm was old and creaking, and the bolts and bars heavy. They were generally secured before supper by Hannah herself, and, though they might be surreptitiously oiled, the children despaired—considering how close the kitchen was to the front door—of getting out without rousing Hannah's sharp ears. Other projects, in which windows and ropes played a part, were discussed. David held strongly that he alone could have managed any one of them, but he declined flatly to attempt them with a 'gell.' In the same way he alone could have made his way up the Scout and over the river in the dark. But who'd try it with a 'gell'?

The boy's natural conviction of the uselessness of 'gells' was never more disagreeably expressed than on this occasion. But he could not shake Louie off. She pinched him when he enraged her beyond bounds, but she never wavered in her determination to go too.

Finally they decided to brave Aunt Hannah and take the consequences. They meant to be out all night in hiding, and in the morning they would come back and take their beatings. David comfortably reflected that Uncle Reuben couldn't do him much harm, and, though Louie could hardly flatter herself so far, her tone, also, in the matter was philosophical.

'Theer's soom bits o' owd books i' th' top-attic,' she said to David; 'I'll leave 'em in t' stable, an when we coom home, I'll tie 'em on my baek—under my dress—an she may leather away till Christmas.'

So on their return from Clough End with the bread—about five o'clock—they slipped into the field, crouching under the wall, so as to escape Hannah's observation, deposited their basket by the gate, took up a bundle and tin box which David had hidden that morning under the hedge, and, creeping back again into the road, passed noiselessly through the gate on to the moor, just as Aunt Hannah was lifting the kettle off the fire for tea.

Then came a wild and leaping flight over the hill, down to the main Kinder stream, across it, and up the face of the Scout—up, and up, with smothered laughter, and tumbles and scratches at every step, and a glee of revolt and adventure swelling every vein.

It was then a somewhat stormy afternoon, with alternate gusts of wind and gleams of sun playing on the black boulders, the red-brown slopes of the mountain. The air was really cold

and cutting, promising a frosty night. But the children took no notice of it. Up, and on, through the elastic carpet of heather and bilberry, and across bogs which showed like veins of vivid green on the dark surface of the moor; under circling peewits, who fled before them, crying with plaintive shrillness to each other, as though in protest; and past grouse-nests, whence the startled mothers soared precipitately with angry cluckings, each leaving behind her a loose gathering of eggs lying wide and open on the heather, those newly laid gleaming a brighter red beside their fellows. The tin box and its contents rattled under David's arm as he leapt and straddled across the bogs, choosing always the widest jump and the stiffest bit of climb, out of sheer wantonness of life and energy. Louie's thin figure, in its skimp cotton dress and red crossover, her long legs in their blue worsted stockings, seemed to fly over the moor, winged, as it were, by an ecstasy of freedom. If one could but be in two places at once—on the Scout—and peeping from some safe corner at Aunt Hannah's wrath!

Presently they came to the shoulder whereon—gleaming under the level light—lay the Mermaid's Pool. David had sufficiently verified the fact that the tarn did indeed bear this name in the modern guide-book parlance of the district. Young men and women, out on a holiday from the big towns near, and carrying little red or green 'guides,' spoke of the 'Mermaid's Pool' with the accent of romantic interest. But the boy had also discovered that no native-born farmer or shepherd about had ever heard of the name, or would have a word to say to it. And for the first time he had stumbled full into the deep deposit of witch-lore and belief still surviving in the Kinder Scout district, as in all the remoter moorland of the North. Especially had he won the confidence of a certain 'owd Matt,' a shepherd from a farm high on Mardale Moor; and the tales 'owd Matt' had told him—of mysterious hares coursed at night by angry farmers enraged by the 'bedevilment' of their stock, shot at with silver slugs, and identified next morning with some dreaded hag or other lying groaning and wounded in her bed—of calves' hearts burnt at midnight with awful ceremonies, while the baffled witch outside flung herself in rage and agony against the close-barred doors and windows—of spells and wise men—these things had sent chills of pleasing horror through the boy's frame. They were altogether new to him, in this vivid personal guise at least, and mixed up with all the familiar names and places of the district; for his childish life had been singularly solitary, giving to books the part which half a century ago would have been taken by tradition; and, moreover, the witch-belief in general had now little foothold among the younger generation of the Scout, and was only spoken of with reserve and discretion among the older men.

But the stories once heard had struck deep into the lad's quick and pondering mind. Jenny Crum seemed to have been the latest of all the great witches of Kinder Scout. The memory of

her as a real and awful personage was still fresh in the mind of many a grey-haired farmer; the history of her death was well known; and most of the local inhabitants, even the boys and girls, turned out, when you came to inquire, to be familiar with the later legends of the Pool, and, as David presently discovered, with one or more tales—for the stories were discrepant—of Lias Dawson's meeting with the witch, now fifteen years ago.

'What had Lias seen? What would they see?' His flesh crept deliciously.

'Wal, owd Mermaid!' shouted Louie, defiantly, as soon as she had got her breath again. 'Are yo coomin out to-night? Yo 'll ha coompany if yo do.'

David smiled contemptuously and did not condescend to argue.

'Are yo coomin on?' he said, shouldering his box and bundle again. 'They'st be up after us if we doan't look out.'

And on they went, climbing a steep boulder-strewn slope above the pool till they came to the 'edge' itself, a tossed and broken battlement of stone, running along the top of the Scout. Here the great black slabs of grit were lying fantastically piled upon each other at every angle and in every possible combination. The path which leads from the Hayfield side across the desolate tableland of the Scout to the Snake Inn on the eastern side of the ridge, ran among them, and many a wayfarer, benighted or mist-bound on the moor, had taken refuge before now in their caverns and recesses, waiting for the light, and dreading to find himself on the cliffs of the Downfall.

But David pushed on past many hiding-places well known to him, till the two reached the point where the mountain face sweeps backward in the curve of which the Downfall makes the centre. At the outward edge of the curve a great buttress of ragged and jutting rocks descends perpendicularly towards the valley, like a ruined staircase with displaced and gigantic steps.

Down this David began to make his way, and Louie jumped, and slid, and swung after him, as lithe and sure-footed as a cat. Presently David stopped. 'This ull do,' he said, surveying the place with a critical eye.

They had just slid down a sloping chimney of rock, and were now standing on a flat block, over which hung another like a penthouse roof. On the side of the Downfall there was a projecting stone, on which David stepped out to look about him.

Holding on to a rock above for precaution's sake, he reconnoitred their position. To his left was the black and semicircular cliff, down the centre of which the Downfall stream, now tamed and thinned by the dry spring winds, was trickling. The course of the stream was marked by a vivid orange colour, produced, apparently, in the grit by the action of water; and about halfway down the fall a mass of rock had recently slipped, leaving a bright scar, through which one saw, as it were, the inner mass of the Peak, the rectangular blocks, now thick, now thin, as of some Cyclopean masonry, wherewith the earth-forces had built it up in

days before a single alp had yet risen on the face of Europe. Below the boy's feet a precipice, which his projecting stone overhung, fell to the bed of the stream. On this side at least they were abundantly protected.

On the moorside the steep broken ground of the hill came up to the rocky line they had been descending, and offered no difficulty to any sure-footed person. But no path ran anywhere near them, and from the path up above they were screened by the grit 'edge' already spoken of. Moreover, their penthouse, or half-gable, had towards the Downfall a tolerably wide opening; but towards the moor and the north there was but a narrow hole, which David soon saw could be stopped by a stone. When he crept back into their hiding-place, it pleased him extremely.

'They'll niver find us, if they look till next week!' he exclaimed exultantly, and, slipping off the heavy bundle strapped on his back, he undid its contents. Two old woollen rugs appeared—one a blanket, the other a horse-rug—and wrapped up in the middle of them a jagged piece of tarpaulin, a hammer, some wooden pegs, and two or three pieces of tallow dip. Louie, sitting cross-legged in the other corner, with her chin in her hands, looked on with her usual detached and critical air. David had not allowed her much of a voice in the preparations, and she felt an instinctive aversion towards other people's ingenuities. All she had contributed was something to while away the time, in the shape of a bag of bull's-eyes, bought with some of the sixpence Uncle Reuben had given her.

Having laid out his stores, David went to work. Getting out on the projecting stone again, he laid the bit of tarpaulin along the sloping edge of the rock which roofed them, pegged it down into crevices at either end, and laid a stone to hold it in the middle. Then he slipped back again, and, behold, there was a curtain between them and the Downfall, which, as the dusk was fast advancing, made the little den inside almost completely dark.

'What's t' good o' that?' inquired Louie, scornfully, more than half inclined to put out a mischievous hand and pull it down again.

'Doan't worrit, an yo'll see,' returned David, and Louie's curiosity got the better of her malice.

Stooping down beside her, he looked through the hole which opened to the moor. His eye travelled down the hillside to the path far below, just visible in the twilight to a practised eye, to the river, to the pasture-fields on the hill beyond, and to the smoke, rising above the tops of some unseen trees, which marked the site of the farmhouse. No one in sight. The boy crawled out, and searched the moor till he found a large flattish stone, which he brought and placed against the opening, ready to be drawn quite across it from inside.

Then he slipped back again, and in the glimmer of light which remained groped for his tin box. Louie stooped over and eagerly watched him open it. Out came a bottle of milk, some

large slices of bread, some oatcake, and some cheese. In the corner, recklessly near the cheese, lurked a grease-bespattered lantern and a box of matches. David had borrowed the lantern that afternoon from a Clough End friend under the most solemn vows of secrecy, and he drew it out now with a deliberate and special relish. When he had driven a peg into a cranny of the rock, trimmed half a dip carefully, lighted it, put it into the lantern, and hung the lantern on the peg, he fell back on his heels to study the effect, with a beaming countenance, filled all through with the essentially human joy of contrivance.

'Now, then, d'yo see what that tarpaulin 's for?' he inquired triumphantly of Louie.

But Louie's mouth was conveniently occupied with a bull's-eye, and she only sucked it the more vigorously in answer.

'Why, yo little silly, if it worn't for that we couldno ha no lect. They'd see us from t' fields even, as soon as it 's real dark.'

'Doan't bleeve it,' said Louie, laconically, in a voice much muffled by bull's-eyes.

'Wal, yo needn't; I'm gooin to have my tea.'

And David, diving into the tin, brought out a hunch of bread and a knob of cheese. The voracity with which he fell on them, soon, with him also, stopped up the channels of speech. Louie, alarmed perhaps by the rapidity with which the mouthfuls disappeared, slid up on her heels and claimed her share. Never was there a more savoury meal than that! Their little den with its curtain felt warm for the moment after the keen air of the moor; the lantern light seemed to shut them in from the world, gave them the sense of settlers carving a home out of the desert, and milk which had been filched from Aunt Hannah lay like nectar in the mouth.

After their meal both children crept out on to the moor to see what might be going on in the world outside. Darkness was fast advancing. A rising wind swept through the dead bracken, whirled round the great grit boulders, and sent a shiver through Louie's thin body.

'It's cowl,' she said pettishly; 'I'm gooin back.'

'Did yo spose it wor gooin to be warm, yo little silly? That's why I browt t' rugs, of course. Gells never think o' nothin. It's parishin cowl here, neets—fit to tie yo up in knots wi th' rheumatics, like Jim Spedding, if yo doan't mind yorsel. It wor only laying out a neet on Frimley Moor—poachin, I guess—'at twisted Jim that way.'

Louie's countenance fell. Jim Spedding was a little crooked greengrocer in Clough End, of whom she had a horror. The biting hostile wind, which obliged her to hold her hat on against it with both hands, the black moor at their feet, the grey sweep of sky, the pale cloudy moon, the darkness which was fast enveloping them—blotting out the distant waves of hill, and fusing the great blocks of grit above them into one threatening mass—all these became suddenly hateful to her. She went back into

their den, wrapped herself up in one of the tattered rugs, and crept sulkily into a corner. The lantern gleamed on the child's huddled form, the frowning brow, the great vixenish eyes. She had half a mind to run home, in spite of Aunt Hannah. Hours to wait! and she loathed waiting.

But gradually, as the rug warmed her, the passion for adventure and mystery—the vision of the mermaid—the hope of the blue cotton—reasserted themselves, and the little sharp face relaxed. She began to amuse herself with hunting the spiders and beetles which ran across the rocky roof above her head, or crept in and out of the crevices of stone, wondering, no doubt, at this unbidden and tormenting daylight. She caught one or two small blackbeetles in a dirty rag of a handkerchief—for she would not touch them if she could help it—and then it delighted her to push aside the curtain, stretch her hand out into the void darkness, and let them fall into the gulf below. Even if they could fly, she reflected, it must 'gie 'em a good start.'

Meanwhile, David had charged up the hill, filled with a sudden curiosity to see what the top of the Scout might look like by night. He made his way through the battlement of grit, found the little path behind, gleaming white in the moonlight, because of the quartz sheddings which wind and weather are for ever teasing out of the grit, and which drift into the open spaces; and at last, guided by the sound and the gleam of water, he made out the top of the Downfall, climbed a high peat bank, and the illimitable plateau of the Scout lay wide and vast before him.

Here, on the mountain-top, there seemed to be more daylight left than on its rocky sides, and the moon among the parting clouds shone intermittently over the primeval waste. The top of the Peak is, so to speak, a vast black glacier, whereof the crevasses are great fissures, ebon-black in colour, sometimes ten feet deep, and with ten feet more of black water at the bottom. For miles on either side the ground is seamed and torn with these crevasses, now shallower, now deeper, succeeding each other at intervals of a yard or two, and it is they which make the crossing of the Peak in the dark or in mist a matter of danger sometimes even for the native. David, high on his bank, from which the black overhanging eaves curled inwards beneath his feet to a sullen depth of water, could see against the moonlit sky the posts which marked the track from the Downfall to the Snake Inn on the Glossop Road. Miss that track—a matter of some fifteen minutes' walk for the sturdy farmer who knows it well—and you find yourself lost in a region which has no features and no landmarks, where the earth lays snares for you and the mists betray you, and where even in bright sunshine there reigns an eternal and indescribable melancholy. The strangeness and wildness of the scene entered the boy's consciousness, and brought with them a kind of exaltation. He stood gazing; that inner life of his, of which Louie, his constant companion, knew as good as nothing, asserting itself.

For the real companions of his heart were not Louie or the boys with whom he had joked and sparred at school; they were ideas, images, sounds, imaginations, caught from books or from the talk of old 'Lias and Mr. Ancrum. He had but to stand still a moment, as it were, to listen, and the voices and sights of another world came out before him like players on to a stage. Spaces of shining water, crossed by ships with decks manned by heroes for whom the blue distance was for ever revealing new lands to conquer, new adventures to affront; the plumed Indian in his forest divining the track of his enemy from a displaced leaf or twig; the Zealots of Jehovah urging a last frenzied defence of Jehovah's Sanctuary against the Roman host; and now, last of all, the gloom and flames, the infernal palaces, the towering fiends, the grandiose and lumbering war of 'Paradise Lost': these things, together with the names and suggestions of 'Lias's talk—that whole crew of shining, fighting, haranguing men and women whom the old dreamer was for ever bringing into weird action on the moorside—lived in the boy's mind, and in any pause of silence, as we have said, emerged and took possession.

It was only that morning, in an old meal-chest which had belonged to his grandfather, James Grieve, he had discovered the old calf-bound copy of 'Paradise Lost,' which was now in one of his pockets, balanced by 'Anson's Voyages' in the other. All the morning he had been lying hidden in a corner of the sheepfold devouring it, the rolling verse imprinting itself on the boy's plastic memory by a sort of enchantment—

Yon dreary plain, forlorn and wild,
The seat of desolation, void of light,
Save what the glimmering of these livid flames
Casts pale and dreadful.

He chanted the words aloud, flinging them out in an ecstasy of pleasure. Before him, as it seemed, there stretched that very plain 'forlorn and wild,' with its black fissures and its impenetrable horizons; the fitful moonlight stood for the glimmering of the Tartarean flames; the remembered words and the actual sights played into and fused with each other, till in the cold and darkness the boy thrilled all through with that mingling of joy and terror which is only possible to the creature of fine gifts and high imagination.

Jenny Crum, too! A few more hours and he might see her face to face—as 'Lias had seen her. He quaked a little at the thought, but he would not have flinched for the world. *He* was not going to lose his wits, as 'Lias did; and as for Louie, if she were frightened it would do her good to be afraid of something.

Hark! He turned, stooped, put his hand to his ear.

The sound he heard had startled him, turned him pale. But he soon recovered himself. It was the sound of heavy boots on stones, and it was brought to him by the wind, as it seemed, from

far below. Some one was coming after them—perhaps more than one. He thought he heard a voice.

He leapt fissure after fissure like a young roe, fled to the top of the Downfall and looked over. Did the light show through the tarpaulin? Alack!—there must be a rent somewhere—for he saw a dim glow-worm light beyond the cliff, on the dark rib of the mountain. It was invisible from below, but any roving eye from the top would be caught by it in an instant. In a second he had raced along the edge, dived in and out of the blocks, guiding his way by a sort of bat's instinct, till he reached the rocky stairway, which he descended at imminent risk of his neck.

'Put your hand ower t' leet, Louie, till I move t' stone!'

The light disappeared, David crept in, and the two children crouched together in a glow of excitement.

'Is 't Uncle Reuben?' whispered Louie, pressing her face against the side of the rocks, and trying to look through the chink between it and the covering stone.

'Aye—wi a lantern. But there's talkin—theer's someone else. Jim Wigson, mebbe.'

'If it's Jim Wigson,' said Louie, between her small, shut teeth, 'I'll bite him!'

'Cos yo're a gell! Gells and cats bite—they can't do nowt else!'

Whereupon Louie pinched him, and David, giving an involuntary kick as he felt the nip, went into first a fit of smothered laughter, and then seized her arm in a tight grip.

'Keep quiet, conno yo? Now they're coomin, an I bleeve they're coomin this way!'

But, after another minute's waiting, he was quite unable to obey his own injunction, and he crept out on the stone overlooking the precipice to look.

'Coom back! They'll see yo!' cried Louie, in a shrill whisper; and she caught him by the ankle.

David gave a kick. 'Let goo; if yo do 'at I shall fall an be kilt!'

She held her breath. Presently, with an exclamation, he knelt down and looked over the edge of the great sloping block which served them for roof.

'Wal, I niver! Theer's nobory but Uncle Reuben, an he's talkin to hissel. Wal, this is a rum skit!'

And he stayed outside watching, in spite of Louie's angry commands to him to come back into the den. David had no fears of being discovered by Uncle Reuben. If it had been Jim Wigson it would have been different.

Presently, on the path some sixty feet above them, but hidden from them by the mass of tumbled rocks through which they had descended, they heard some one puffing and blowing, a stick striking and slipping on the stones, and weird rays of light stole down the mountain-side, and in and out of the vast blocks with which it was overstrewn.

'He's stopt up theer,' said David, creeping in under the gable, 'an I mun hear what he's sayin. I'm gooin up nearer. If yo coom we'll be caught.'

'Yo stoopid!' cried Louie. But he had crawled up the narrow chimney they had come down by in a moment, and she was left alone. Her spirit failed her a little. She daren't climb after him in the dark.

David clambered in and out, the fierce wind that beat the side of the mountain masking whatever sounds he may have made, till he found himself directly under the place where Reuben Grieve sat, slowly recovering his breath.

'O Lord! O Lord! They're aw reet, Sandy—they're aw reet!'

The boy crouched down sharply under an overhanging stone, arrested by the name—*Sandy*—his father's name.

Once or twice since he came to Kinder he had heard it on Uncle Reuben's lips, once or twice from neighbours who had known James Grieve's sons in their youth. But Sandy had left the farm early and was little remembered, and the true story of Sandy's life was unknown in the valley, though there were many rumours. What the close and timid Reuben heard from Mr. Gurney, the head of Sandy's firm, after Sandy's death, he told to no one but Hannah. The children knew generally, from what Hannah often let fall when she was in a temper, that their mother was a disgrace to them, but they knew no more, and, with the natural instinct of forlorn creatures on the defensive, studiously avoided the subject within the walls of Needham Farm. They might question old 'Lias; they would suffer many things rather than question their uncle and aunt.

But David especially had had many secret thoughts he could not put away, of late, about his parents. And to hear his father's name dropped like this into the night moved the lad strangely. He lay close, listening with all his ears, expecting passionately, he knew not what.

But nothing came—or the wind carried it away. When he was rested, Reuben got up and began to move about with the lantern, apparently throwing its light from side to side.

'David! Louie!'

The hoarse, weak voice, strained to its utmost pitch, died away on the night wind, and a weird echo came back from the cliffs of the Downfall.

There was no menace in the cry—rather a piteous entreaty. The truant below had a strange momentary impulse to answer—to disclose himself. But it was soon past, and instead, he crept well out of reach of the rays which flashed over the precipitous ground about him. As he did so he noticed the Mermaid's Pool, gleaming in a pale ray of moonlight, some two hundred feet below. A sudden alarm seized him, lest Reuben should be caught by it, put two and two together and understand.

But Reuben was absorbed in a discomfort, half moral, half

superstitious, and nothing else reached the slow brain—which was besides preoccupied by Jim Wigson's suggestion. After a bit he picked up his stick and went on again. David, eagerly watching, tracked him along the path which follows the ridge, and saw the light pause once more close to the Downfall.

So far as the boy could see, his uncle made a long stay at a point beyond the stream, the bed of which was just discernible, as a sort of paler streak on the darkness.

'Why, that's about whar th' Edale path cooms in,' thought David, wondering. 'What ud he think we'd be doin theer?'

Faint sounds came to him in a lull of the wind, as though Reuben were shouting again—shouting many times. Then the light went wavering on, defining in its course the curved ridge of the further moor, till at last it made a long circuit downwards, disappearing for a minute somewhere in the dark bosom of Kinder Low, about midway between earth and sky. David guessed that Uncle Reuben must be searching the smithy. Then it descended rapidly, till finally it vanished behind the hill far below, which was just distinguishable in the cloudy moonshine. Uncle Reuben had gone home.

David drew a long breath. But that patient quest in the dark—the tone of the farmer's call—that mysterious word *Sandy*, had touched the boy, made him restless. His mood grew a little flat, even a little remorseful. The joy of their great adventure ebbed a little.

However, he climbed down again to Louie, and found a dark elfish figure standing outside their den, and dancing with excitement.

'Wouldn't yo like to ketch us—wouldn't yo?—wouldn't yo?' screeched the child, beside herself. She too had been watching, had seen the light vanish.

'Yo'll have t' parish up after yo if yo doan't howd your tongue,' said David roughly.

And creeping into their den he relit the lantern. Then he pulled out a watch, borrowed from the same friend who had provided the lantern. Past nine. Two hours and more before they need think of starting downwards for the Pool.

Louie condescended to come in again, and the stone was drawn close. But how fierce the wind had grown, and how nipping was the air! David shivered, and looked about for the rugs. He wrapt Louie in the horse-rug, which was heaviest, and tucked the blanket round himself.

'Howd that tight round yo,' he commanded, struck with an uneasy sense of responsibility, as he happened to notice how starved she looked, 'an goo to sleep if yo want to. I'll wake yo—I'm gooin to read.'

Louie rolled the rug round her chrysalis-like, and then, disdain the rest of David's advice, sat bolt upright against the rock, her wide-open eyes staring defiantly at all within their ken.

The minutes went by. David sat close up against the lantern, bitterly cold, but reading voraciously. At last, however, a sharper gust than usual made him look up and turn restive. Louie still sat in the opposite corner as stiffly as before, but over the great staring eyes the lids had just fallen, sorely against their owner's will; the head was dropping against the rock; the child was fast asleep. It occurred to David she looked odd; the face seemed so grey and white. He instinctively took his own blanket and put it over her. The silence and helplessness of her sleep seemed to appeal to him, to change his mood towards her, for the action was brotherly and tender. Then he pushed the stone aside and crept out on to the moor.

There he stood for a while, with his hands in his pockets, marking time to warm himself. How the wind bit to be sure!—and it would be colder still by dawn.

The pool showed dimly beneath him, and the gruesome hour was stealing on them fast. His heart beat quick. The weirdness and loneliness of the night came home to him more than they had done yet. The old woman dragged to her death, the hooting crowd, the inexorable parson, the struggle in the water, the last gurgling cry—the vision rose before him on the dark with an ever ghastlier plainness than a while ago on the mountain-top. How had Lias seen her that the sight had changed him so? Did she come to him with her drowned face and floating grey hair—grip him with her cold hands? David, beginning to thrill in good earnest, obstinately filled in the picture with all the horrible detail he could think of, so as to harden himself. Only now he wished with all his heart that Louie were safe at home.

An idea occurred to him. He smiled at it, turned it over, gradually resolved upon it. She would lead him a life afterward, but what matter?—let her!

From the far depths of the unseen valley a sound struck upwards, piercing through the noises of river and wind. It was the clock of Clough End church, tolling eleven.

Well, one could not stand perishing there another hour. He stooped down and crawled in beside Louie. She was sleeping heavily, the added warmth of David's blanket conducting thereto. He hung over her, watching her breathing with a merry look, which gradually became a broad grin. It was a real shame—she would be just mad when she woke up. But mermaids were all stuff, and Jenny Crum would 'skeer' her to death. Just in proportion as the adventure became more awesome and more real did the boy's better self awake. He grew soft for his sister, while, as he proudly imagined, iron for himself.

He crept in under the blanket carefully so as not to disturb her. He was too tired and excited to read. He would think the hour out. So he lay staring at the opposite wall of rock, at its crevices, and creeping ants, at the odd lights and shadows thrown by the lantern, straining his eyes every now and then, that he might be the more sure how wide awake they were.

Louie stretched herself. What was the matter? Where was she? What was that smell? She leant forward on her elbow. The lantern was just going out, and smelt intolerably. A cold grey light was in the little den. What? Where?

A loud wail broke the morning silence, and David, sleeping profoundly, his open mouth just showing above the horse-rug, was roused by a shower of blows from Louie's fists. He stirred uneasily, tried to escape them by plunging deeper into the folds, but they pursued him vindictively.

'Give over!' he said at last, striking back at random, and then sitting up he rubbed his eyes. There was Louie sitting opposite to him, crying great tears of rage and pain, now rocking her ankle as if it hurt her, and now dealing cuffs at him.

He hastily pulled out his watch. Half-past four o'clock!

'Yo great gonner, yo!' sobbed Louie, her eyes blazing at him through her tears. 'Yo good-for-nowt, yo muffin-yed, yo donkey!' And so on through all the words of reviling known to the Derbyshire child. David looked extremely sheepish under them.

Then suddenly he put his head down on his knees and shook with laughter. The absurdity of it all—of their preparations, of his own terrors, of the disturbance they had made, all to end in this flat and futile over-sleeping, seized upon him so that he could not control himself. He laughed till he cried, while Louie hit and abused him and cried too. But her crying had a different note, and at last he looked up at her, sobered.

'Howd your tongue!—an doan't keep bully-raggin like 'at! What's t' matter wi yo?'

For answer, she rolled over on the rock and lay on her face, howling with pain. David sprang up and bent over her.

'What *iver's* t' matter wi yo, Louie?'

But she kept him off like a wild cat, and he could make nothing of her till her passion had spent itself and she was quiet again, from sheer exhaustion.

Then David, who had been standing near, shivering, with his hands in his pockets, tried again.

'Now, Louie, do coom home,' he said appealingly. 'I can find yo a place in t' stable ull be warmer nor this. You be parished if yo stay here.' For, ignorant as he was, her looks began to frighten him.

Louie would have liked never to speak to him again. The thought of the blue cotton and of her own lost chance seemed to be burning a hole in her. But the stress of his miserable look drew her eyes open whether she would or no, and when she saw him her self-pity overcame her.

'I conno walk,' she said, with a sudden loud sob. 'It's my leg.'

'What's wrong wi't?' said David, inspecting it anxiously. 'It's got th' cowl in 't, that's what it is; it's th' rheumatics, I speck. Tak howd on me, I'll help yo down.'

And with much coaxing on his part and many cries and outbursts on hers he got her up at last, and out of the den. He had tied his tin box across his back, and Louie, with the rugs wrapped about her, clung, limping, and with teeth chattering, on to his arm. The child was in the first throes of a sharp attack of rheumatism, and half her joints were painful.

That was a humiliating descent! A cold grey morning was breaking over the moor; the chimneys of the distant cotton-towns rose out of mists, under a sky streaked with windy cloud. The Mermaid's Pool, as they passed it, looked chill and mocking; and the world altogether felt so raw and lonely that David welcomed the first sheep they came across with a leap of the heart, and positively hungered for a first sight of the farm. How he got Louie—in whose cheeks the fever-spots were rising—over the river he never quite remembered. But at last he had dragged her up the hill, through the fields close to the house, where the lambs were huddling in the nipping dawn beside their mothers, and into the farmyard.

The house rose before them grey and frowning. The lower windows were shuttered; in the upper ones the blinds were pulled closely down; not a sign of life anywhere. Yes; the dogs had heard them! Such a barking as began! Jock, in his kennel by the front door, nearly burst his chain in his joyful efforts to get at them; while Tib, jumping the half-door of the out-house in the back yard, where he had been curled up in a heap of bracken, leapt about them and barked like mad.

Louie sank down crying and deathly pale on a stone by the stable door.

'They'll hear that fast enoof,' said David, looking anxiously up at the shut windows.

But the dogs went on barking, and nothing happened. Ten minutes of chilly waiting passed away.

'Tak him away, *do!*' she cried, as Tib jumped up at her. 'No, I woan't!—I woan't!'

The last words rose to a shriek, as David tried to persuade her to go into the stable, and let him make her a bed in the straw. He stood looking at her in despair. They had always supposed they would be locked out; but surely the sleepers inside must hear the dogs. He turned and stared at the house, hungering for some sign of life in it. Uncle Reuben would hear them—Uncle Reuben would let them in!

But the blinds of the top room never budged. Louie, with her head against the stable-door, and her eyes shut, went on convulsively sobbing, while Tibby sniffed about her for sympathy. And the bitter wind coming from the Scout whistled through the yard and seemed to cut the shivering child like a knife.

'I'll mak a clunter agen th' window wi some gravel,' said David at last, in desperation. And he picked up a handful and threw it, first cautiously, then recklessly. Yes!—at last a hand moved the blind—a hand the children knew well, and a face

appeared to one side of it. Hannah Grieve had never looked so forbidding as at that moment. The boy caught one glance of a countenance pale with wrath and sleeplessness; of eyes that seemed to blaze at them through the window; then the blind fell. He waited breathlessly for minute after minute. Not a sound.

Furiously he stooped for more gravel, and flung it again and again. For an age, as it seemed to him, no more notice was taken. At last, there was an agitation in the blind, as though more than one person was behind it. It was Hannah who lifted it again; but David thought he caught a motion of her arm as though she were holding some one else back. The lad pointed excitedly to Louie.

'She's took bad!' he shouted. 'Uncle Reuben!—Uncle Reuben!—coom down an see for yorsel. If yo let her in, yo can keep me out as long as yo like!'

Hannah looked at him, and at the figure huddled against the stable-door—looked deliberately, and then, as deliberately, pulled the blind down lower than before, and not a sign of Reuben anywhere.

A crimson flame sprang to David's cheek. He rushed at the door, and while with one hand he banged away at the old knocker, he thumped with the other, kicking lustily the while at the panels, till Louie, almost forgetting her pains in the fierce excitement of the moment, thought he would kick them in. In the intervals of his blows, David could hear voices inside in angry debate.

'Uncle Reuben!' he shouted, stopping the noise for a moment, 'Uncle Reuben, Louie's turned sick! She's clemmed wi t' cold. If yo doan't open th' door, I'll go across to Wigson's, and tell 'em as Louie's parishin, an yo're bein th' death on her.'

The bolt shot back, and there stood Reuben, his red hair sticking up wildly from his head, his frame shaking with unusual excitement.

'What are yo makin that roompus for, Davy?' began Reuben, with would-be severity. 'Ha done wi yo, or I'll have to tak a stick to yo.'

But the boy stood akimbo on the steps, and the old farmer shrank before him, as David's black eye travelled past him to a gaunt figure on the stairs.

'Yo'll tak noa stick to me, Uncle Reuben. I'll not put up wi it, and yo know it. I'm goin to bring Louie in. We've bin on t' moor by t' Pool lookin for th' owd witch, an we both on us fell asleep, an Louie's took the rheumatics.—Soa theer.—Stan out o' t' way.'

And running back to Louie, who cried out as he lifted her up, he half carried, half dragged her in.

'Why, she's like death,' cried Reuben. 'Hannah! summat hot—at woonst.'

But Hannah did not move. She stood at the foot of the stairs, barring the way, the chill morning light falling on her

threatening attitude, her grey dishevelled hair and all the squalid disarray of her dress.

'Them as doos like beggar's brats,' she said grimly, 'may fare like 'em. I'll do nowt for 'em.'

The lad came up to her, his look all daring and resolution—his sister on his arm. But as he met the woman's expression, his lips trembled, he suddenly broke down.

'Now, look here,' he cried, with a sob in his throat. 'I know we're beggar's brats. I know yo hate th' seet on us. But I wor t' worst. I'm t' biggest. Tak Louie in, and bully-rag me as mich as yo like. Louie—*Louie!*' and he hung over her in a frenzy, 'wake up, Louie!'

But the child was insensible. Fatigue, the excitement of the struggle, the anguish of movement had done their work—she lay like a log upon his arm.

'She's fainted,' said Hannah, recognising the fact with a sort of fierce reluctance. 'Tak her up, an doan't stan blatherin theer.'

And she moved out of the way.

The boy gathered up the thin figure, and, stumbling over the tattered rugs, carried her up by a superhuman effort.

Reuben leant against the passage wall, staring at his wife.

'Yo're a hard woman, Hannah—a hard woman,' he said to her under his breath, in a low, shaken voice. 'An yo coed 'em beggar's brats—oh Lord—Lord!'

'Howd your tongue, an blow up t' fire,' was all the reply she vouchsafed him, and Reuben obeyed.

Meanwhile upstairs Louie had been laid on her bed. Consciousness had come back, and she was moaning.

David stood beside her in utter despair. He thought she was going to die, and he had done it. At last he sank down beside her, and flinging an arm round her, he laid his hot cheek to her icy one.

'Louie, doan't—doan't—I'll tak yo away from here, Louie, when I can. I'll tak care on yo, Louie. Doan't, Louie,—doan't!'

His whole being seemed rent asunder by sympathy and remorse. Uncle Reuben, coming up with some hot gruel, found him sitting on the bed beside his sister, on whom he had heaped all the clothing he could find, the tears running down his cheeks.

CHAPTER VI

FROM that night forward, David looked upon the farm and all his life there with other eyes.

Up till now, in spite of the perennial pressure of Hannah's tyrannies, which, however, weighed much less upon him than upon Louie, he had been—as he had let Reuben see—happy enough. The open-air life, the animals, his books, out of all of them he managed to extract a very fair daily sum of enjoyment.

And he had been content enough with his daily tasks—herding the sheep, doing the rough work of the stable and cow-house, running Aunt Hannah's errands with the donkey-cart to Clough End, helping in the haymaking and the sheep-shearing, or the driving of stock to and from the various markets Reuben frequented. All these things he had done with a curious placidity, a detachment and yet readiness of mind, as one who lends himself, without reluctance, to a life not his own. It was this temper mainly, helped, no doubt, by his unusual tastes and his share of foreign blood and looks, which had set him apart from the other lads of his own class in the neighbourhood. He had few friends of his own age, yet he was not unpopular, except, perhaps, with an overbearing animal like Jim Wigson, who instinctively looked upon other people's brains as an offence to his own muscular pretensions.

But his Easter Eve struggle with Hannah closed, as it were, a childhood, which, though hard and loveless, had been full of compensations and ignorant of its own worst wants. It woke in him the bitterness of the orphan dependant, who feels himself a burden and loathes his dependence. That utter lack of the commonest natural affection, in which he and Louie had been brought up—for Reuben's timorous advances had done but little to redress the balance—had not troubled him much, till suddenly it was writ so monstrous large in Hannah's refusal to take pity on the fainting and agonised Louie. Thenceforward every morsel of food he took at her hands seemed to go against him. They were paupers, and Aunt Hannah hated them. The fact had been always there, but it had never meant anything substantial to him till now. Now, at last, that complete dearth of love, in which he had lived since his father died, began to react in revolt and discontent.

The crisis may have been long preparing, those words of his uncle as to his future, as well as the incident of their locking out, may have had something to say to it. Anyway, a new reflective temper set in. The young immature creature became self-conscious, began to feel the ferments of growth. The ambition and the restlessness his father had foreseen, with dying eyes, began to stir.

Reuben's qualms returned upon him. On the 15th of May, he and David went to Woodhead, some sixteen or seventeen miles off, to receive the young stock from the Yorkshire breeders, which were to be grazed on the farm during the summer. In general, David had taken the liveliest interest in the animals, in the number and quality of them, in the tariff to be paid for them, and the long road there and back had been cheered for the farmer by the lad's chatter, and by the athletic antics he was always playing with any handy gate or tree which crossed their path.

'Them heifers ull want a deal o' grass puttin into 'em afoor they'll be wuth onybody's buyin, Davy,' said Reuben, inspecting