

The human happiness Dora dared no longer grasp at for herself she yearned now to pour lavishly, quickly, into Lucy's hands. Only so—such is our mingled life!—could she altogether still, violently and by force, a sort of upward surge of the soul which terrified her now and then. A mystical casuistry, bred in her naturally simple nature by the subtle influences of a long-descended Christianity, combined in her with a piteous human instinct. When she rose from her knees she was certain that she would never win and marry David Grieve; she was equally certain that she would do all in her power to help little Lucy to win and marry him.

So, like them of old, she pressed the spikes into her flesh, and found a numbing consolation in the pain.

#### CHAPTER VIII

SOME ten days more elapsed before Lucy was pronounced fit to travel south. During this time Dora saw her frequently, and the bond between the two girls grew much closer than before. On the one hand, Lucy yielded herself more than she had ever done yet to Dora's example and persuasion, promised to go to church and see at least what it was like when she got to Hastings, and let Dora provide her with some of her favourite High Church devotional books. On the other, it was understood between them that Dora would look after Lucy's interests, and keep her informed how the land lay while she was in the south, and Lucy, with the blindness of self-love, trusted herself to her cousin without a suspicion or a qualm.

While she was tending Lucy, Dora never saw Purcell but twice, when she passed him in the little dark entry leading to the private part of the house, and on those occasions he did not, so far as she could perceive, make any answer whatever to her salutation. He was changed, she thought. He had always been a morose-looking man, with an iron jaw; but now there was a fixed venom and disquiet, as well as a new look of age, in the sallow face, which made it doubly displeasing. She would have been sorry for his loneliness and his disappointment in Lucy but for the remembrance of his mean plot against David Grieve, and for a certain other little fact. A middle-aged woman, in a dowdy brown-stuff dress and black mantle, had begun to haunt the house. She sat with Purcell sometimes in the parlour downstairs, and sometimes he accompanied her out of doors. Mary Ann reported that she was a widow, a Mrs. Whympier, who belonged to the same chapel that Purcell did, and who was supposed by those who knew to have been making up to him for some time.

'And perhaps she'll get him after all,' said the little ugly maid, with a grin. 'Catch me staying then, Miss Dora! It's bad enough as it is.'

On one occasion Dora came across the widow, waiting in the

little sitting-room. She was an angular person, with a greyish-brown complexion, a prominent mouth and teeth, and a generally snappish, alert look. After a few commonplaces, in which Mrs. Whympier was clearly condescending, she launched into a denunciation of Lucy's ill behaviour to her father, which at last roused Dora to defence. She waxed bold, and pointed out that Lucy might have been managed if her father had been a little more patient with her, had allowed her a few ordinary amusements, and had not insisted in forcing her at once, fresh from school, into ways and practices she did not naturally like, while she had never been trained to them by force of habit.

'Hoity toity, Miss!' said the widow, bridling, 'young people are very uppish nowadays. They never seem to remember there is such a thing as the fifth commandment. In *my* young days what a father said was law, and no questions asked; and I've seen many a Lancashire man take a stick to his gell for less provocation than this gell's given her feyther! I wonder at you, Miss Lomax, that I do, for backing her up. But I'm afraid from what I hear you've been taking up with a lot of Popish ways.'

And the woman looked her up and down with an air which plainly said that she was on her own ground in that parlour, and might say exactly what she pleased there.

'If I have, I don't see that it matters to you,' said Dora quietly, and retreated.

Yes, certainly, a stepmother looked likely! Lucy in her bedroom upstairs knew nothing, and Dora decided to tell her nothing till she was stronger. But this new development made the child's future more uncertain than ever.

On the day before her departure for Hastings, Lucy came out for a short walk, by way of hardening herself for the journey. She walked round the cathedral and up Victoria Street, and then, tired out with the exertion, she made her way in to Dora, to rest. Her face was closely hidden by a thick Shetland veil, for, in addition to her general pallor and emaciation, her usually clear and brilliant skin was roughened and blotched here and there by some effect of her illness; she could not bear to look at herself in the glass, and shrank from meeting any of her old acquaintances. It was, indeed, curious to watch the effect of the temporary loss of beauty upon her; her morbid impatience under it showed at every turn. But for it, Dora was convinced that she must and would have put herself in David Grieve's way again before leaving Manchester. As it was, she was still determined not to let him see her.

She came in, much exhausted, and threw herself into Daddy's arm-chair with groans of self-pity. Did Dora think she would ever be strong again—ever be anything but an ugly fright? It was hard to have all this come upon you, just through doing a service to some one who didn't care.

'Hasn't he heard yet that I've been ill?' she inquired petulantly.

No; Dora did not think he had. Neither she nor Daddy had seen him. He must have been extra busy. But she would get Daddy to ask him up to supper directly, and tell him all about it.

'And then, perhaps,' she said, looking up with a sweet, intense look—how little Lucy was able to decipher it!—'perhaps he may write a letter.'

Lucy was cheered by this suggestion, and sat looking out of window for a while, idly watching the passers-by. But she could not let the one topic that absorbed her mind alone for long, and soon she was once more questioning Dora in close detail about David Grieve's sister and all that he had said about her. For, by way of obliging the child to realise some of the inconvenient burdens and obligations which were at that moment hanging round the young bookseller's neck, and making the very idea of matrimony ridiculous to him, Dora had repeated to her some of his confidences about himself and Louie. Lucy had not taken them very happily. Everything that turned up now seemed only to push her further out of sight and make her more insignificant. She was thirsting, with a woman's nascent passion and a schoolgirl's vanity, to be the centre and heroine of the play; and here she was reduced to the smallest and meanest of parts—a part that caught nobody's eye, do what she would.

Suddenly she broke off what she was saying, and called to Dora:

'Do you see that pair of people, Dora? Come—come at once! What an extraordinary-looking girl!'

Dora turned unwillingly, being absorbed in a golden halo which she had set herself to finish that day; then she dropped her needle, and pushed her stool back that she might see better. From the cathedral end of Market Place an elderly grey-haired man and a young girl were advancing along the pavement towards the Parlour. As they passed, the flower-sellers at the booths were turning to look at them, some persons in front of them were turning back, and a certain number of errand-boys and other loungers were keeping pace with them, observing them. The man leant every now and then on a thick stick he carried, and looked uncertainly from house to house. He had a worn, anxious expression, and the helpless movements of short sight. Whenever he stopped the girl moved on alone, and he had to hurry after her again to catch her up. She, meanwhile, was perfectly conscious that she was being stared at, and stared in return with a haughty composure which seemed to draw the eyes of the passers-by after it like a magnet. She was very tall and slender, and her unusual height made her garish dress the more conspicuous. The small hat perched on her black hair was all bright scarlet, both the felt and the trimming; under her jacket, which was purposely thrown back, there was a scarlet bodice, and there was a broad band of scarlet round the edge of her black dress.

Lucy could not take her eyes off her.

'Did you ever see anybody so handsome, Dora? But what a fast, horrid creature to dress like that! And just look at her; she won't wait for the old man, though he's calling to her—she goes on staring at everybody. They'll have a crowd, presently! Why, they're coming here!'

For suddenly the girl stopped outside the doorway below, and beckoned imperiously to her companion. She said a few sharp words to him, and the pair upstairs felt the swing-door of the restaurant open and shut.

Lucy, forgetting her weakness, ran eagerly to the sitting-room door and listened.

There was a sound of raised voices below, and then the door at the foot of the stairs opened, and Daddy was heard shouting.

'There—go along upstairs. My daughter, she'll speak to you. And don't you come back this way—a man can't be feeding Manchester and taking strangers about, all in the same twinkling of an eye, you know, not unless he happens to have a few spare bodies handy, which ain't precisely my case. My daughter'll tell you what you want to know, and show you out by the private door. Dora!'

Dora stood waiting rather nervously at the sitting-room door. The girl came up first, the old man behind her, bewildered and groping his way.

'We're strangers here—we want somebody to show us the way. We've been to the book-shop in Half Street, and they sent us on here. They were just brutes to us at that book-shop,' said the girl, with a vindictive emphasis and an imperious self-possession which fairly paralysed Lucy and Dora. Lucy's eyes, moreover, were riveted on her face, on its colour, its fineness of feature, its brilliance and piercingness of expression. And what was the extraordinary likeness in it to something familiar?

'Why!' said Dora, in a little cry, 'aren't you Mr. David Grieve's sister?'

For she had traced the likeness before Lucy. 'Oh, it must be!'

'Well, I am his sister, if you want to know,' said the stranger, looking astonished in her turn. 'He wrote to me to come up. And I lent the letter to uncle to read—that's his uncle—and he went and lost it somehow, fiddling about the fields while I was putting my things together. And then we couldn't think of the proper address there was in it—only the name of a man Purcell, in Half Street, that David said he'd been with for two years. So we went there to ask; and, my!—weren't they rude to us! There was an ugly black man there chivied us out in no time—wouldn't tell us anything. But as I was shutting the door the shopman whispered to me, "Try the Parlour—Market Place." So we came on here, you see.'

And she stared about her, at the room, and at the girls, taking in everything with lightning rapidity—the embroidery

frame, Lucy's veil and fashionably cut jacket, the shabby furniture, the queer old pictures.

'Please come in,' said Dora civilly, 'and sit down. If you're strangers here, I'll just put on my hat and take you round. Mr. Grieve's a friend of ours. He's in Potter Street. You'll find him nicely settled by now. This is my cousin, Mr. Purell's daughter.'

And she ran upstairs, leaving Lucy to grapple with the new-comers.

The two girls sat down, and eyed each other. Reuben stood patiently waiting.

'Is the man at Half Street your father?' asked the new-comer, abruptly.

'Yes,' said Lucy, conscious of the strangest mingling of admiration and dislike, as she met the girl's wonderful eyes.

'Did he and Davy fall out?'

'They didn't get on about Sundays,' said Lucy, unwillingly, glad of the sheltering veil which enabled her to hold her own against this masterful creature.

'Is your father strict about chapel and that sort of thing?'

Lucy nodded. She felt an ungracious wish to say as little as possible.

David's sister laughed.

'Davy was that way once—just for a bit—before he ran away. I knew he wouldn't keep it on.'

Then, with a queer look over her shoulder at her uncle, she relapsed into silence. Her attention was drawn to Dora's frame, and she moved up to it, bending over it and lifting the handkerchief that Dora had thrown across it.

'You mustn't touch it!' said Lucy, hastily, provoked, she knew not why, by every movement the girl made. 'It's very particular work.'

'I'm used to fine things,' said the other, scornfully. 'I'm a silk-weaver—that's my trade—all the best brocades, drawing-room trains, that style of thing. If you didn't handle *them* carefully, you'd know it. Yes, she's doing it well,' and the speaker put her head down and examined the work critically. 'But it must go fearful slow, compared to a loom.'

'She does it splendidly,' said Lucy, annoyed; 'she's getting quite famous for it. That's going to a great church up in London, and she's got more orders than she can take.'

'Does she get good pay?' asked the girl eagerly.

'I don't know,' replied Lucy shortly.

'Because, if there's good pay,' said the other, examining the work again closely, 'I'd soon learn it—why I'd learn it in a week, you see! If I stay here I shan't get no more silk-weaving. And of course I'll stay. I'm just sick of the country. I'd have come up long ago if I'd known where to find Davy.'

'I'm ready,' said Dora in a constrained voice beside her.

Louie Grieve looked up at her.

'Oh, you needn't look so glum!—I haven't hurt it. I'm used to good things, stuffs at two guineas a yard, and the like of that. What money do you take a week?' and she pointed to the frame.

Something in the tone and manner made the question specially offensive. Dora pretended not to hear it.

'Shall we go now?' she said, hurriedly covering her precious work up from those sacrilegious fingers and putting it away.

'Lucy, you ought to be going home.'

'Well, I will directly,' said Lucy. 'Don't you bother about me.'

They all went downstairs. Lucy put up her veil, and pressed her face against the window, watching for them. As she saw them cross Market Street, she was seized with hungry longing. She wanted to be going with them, to talk to him herself—to let him see what she had gone through for him. It would be months and months, perhaps, before they met again. And Dora would see him—his horrid sister—everyone but she. He would forget all about her, and she would be dull and wretched at Hastings.

But as she turned away in her restless pain, she caught sight of her changed face in the cracked looking-glass over the mantel-piece. Her white lips tightened. She drew down her veil, and went home.

Meanwhile Dora led the way to Potter Street. Louie took little notice of any attempts to talk to her. She was wholly engaged in looking about her and at the shops. Especially was she attracted by the drapers' windows in St. Ann's Square, pronouncing her opinion loudly and freely as to their contents.

Dora fell meditating. Young Grieve would have his work cut out for him, she thought, if this extraordinary sister were really going to settle with him. She was very like him—strangely like him. And yet in the one face there was a quality which was completely lacking in the other, and which seemed to make all the difference. Dora tried to explain what she meant to herself, and failed.

'Here's Potter Street,' she said, as they turned into it. 'And that's his shop—that one with the stall outside. Oh, there he is!'

David was in fact standing on his step talking to a customer who was turning over the books outside.

Louie looked at him. Then she began to run. Old Grieve too, crimson all over, and evidently much excited, hurried on. Dora fell behind, her quick sympathies rising.

'They won't want me interfering,' she said, turning round. 'I'll just go back to my work.'

Meanwhile, in David's little back room, which he had already swept and garnished—for after his letter of the night before, he had somehow expected Louie to rush upon him by the earliest

possible train—the meeting of these long-sundered persons took place.

David saw Reuben come in with amazement.

'Why, Uncle Reuben! Well, I'm real glad to see you. I didn't think you'd have been able to leave the farm. Well, this is my bit of a place, you see. What do you think of it?'

And, holding his sister by the hand, the young fellow looked joyously at his uncle, pride in his new possessions and the recollection of his destitute childhood rushing upon him together as he spoke.

'Aye, it's a fine beginning yo've made, Davy,' said the old man, cautiously looking round, first at the little room, with its neat bits of new furniture in Louie's honour, and then through the glass door at the shop, which was now heavily lined with books. 'Yo wor allus a cliver lad, Davy. A' think a'll sit down.'

And Reuben, subsiding into a chair, fell forthwith into an abstraction, his old knotted hands trembling a little on his knees.

Meanwhile David was holding Louie at arm's-length to look at her. He had kissed her heartily when she came in first, and now he was all pleasure and excitement.

'Pon my word, Louie, you've grown as high as the roof! I say, Louie, what's become of that smart pink dress you wore at last "wake," and of that overlooker, with the moustaches, from New Mills, you walked about with all day?'

She stared at him open-mouthed.

'What do you mean by that?' she said, quickly.

David laughed out.

'And who was it gave Jim Wigson a box on the ears last fifth of November, in the lane just by the Dye-works, eh, Miss Louie?—and danced with young Redway at the Upper Mill dance, New Year's Day?—and had words with Mr. James at the office about her last "cut," a fortnight ago—eh, Louie?'

'What ever do you mean?' she said, half crossly, her colour rising. 'You've been spying on me.'

She hated to be mystified. It made her feel herself in some one else's power; and the wild creature in her blood grew restive.

'Why, I've known all about you these four years!' the lad began, with dancing eyes. Then suddenly his voice changed, and dropped: 'I say, look at Uncle Reuben!'

For Reuben sat bent forward, his light blurred eyes looking out straight before him, with a singular yet blind intentness, as though, while seeing nothing round about him, they passed beyond the walls of the little room to some vision of their own.

'I don't know whatever he came for,' began Louie, as they both examined him.

'Uncle Reuben,' said David, going up to him and touching him on the shoulder, 'you look tired. You'll be wanting some dinner. I'll just send my man, John Dalby, round the corner for something.'

And he made a step towards the door, but Reuben raised his hand.

'Noa, noa, Davy! Shut that door, wiltha?'

David wondered, and shut it.

Then Reuben gave a long sigh, and put his hand deep into his coat pocket, with the quavering, uncertain movement characteristic of him.

'Davy, my lad, a've got summat to say to tha.'

And with many hitches, while the others watched him in astonishment, he pulled out of his pocket a canvas bag and put it down on an oak stool in front of him. Then he undid the string of it with his large awkward fingers, and pushed the stool across to David.

'Theer's sixty pund theer, Davy—sixty pund! Yo can keawnt it—it's aw reet. A've saved it for yo, this four year—four year coom lasst Michaelmas Day. Hannah nor nobory knew owt abeawt it. But it's yourn—it's yor share, being t' half o' Mr. Gurney's money. Louie's share—that wor different; we had a reet to that, she bein a growin girl, and doin nowt mich for her vittles. Fro the time when yo should ha had it—whether for wages or for 'prenticin—an yo *couldna* ha it, because Hannah had set hersen agen it,—a saved it for tha, owt o' t' summer cattle moastly, without tellin nobory, so as not to mak words.'

David, bewildered, had taken the bag into his hand. Louie's eyes were almost out of her head with curiosity and amazement. 'Mr. Gurney's money!' What did he mean? It was all double-Dutch to them.

David, with an effort, controlled himself, being now a man and a householder. He stood with his back against the shop door, his gaze fixed on Reuben.

'Now, Uncle Reuben, I don't understand a bit of what you've been saying, and Louie don't either. Who's Mr. Gurney? and what's his money?'

Unconsciously the young man's voice took a sharp, magisterial note. Reuben gave another long sigh. He was now leaning on his stick, staring at the floor.

'Noa,—a' know yo doan't understan; a've got to tell tha—'at's t' worst part on 't. An I'm soa bad at tellin. Do yo mind when yor feyther deed, Davy?' he said suddenly, looking up.

David nodded,—a red flush of presentiment spread itself over his face—his whole being hung on Reuben's words.

'He sent for me afore he deed,' continued Reuben, slowly; 'an he towd me aw about his affairs. Six hunderd pund he'd got saved—*six-hunderd-pund*! Aye, it wor a lot for a young mon like him, and after sich a peck o' troobles! And he towd me Mr. Gurney ud pay us th' interest for yor bringin-up—th' two on yo; an whan yo got big, Davy, I wor to tak keawnsel wi Mr. Gurney, an, if yo chose for t' land, yo were to ha yor money for a farm, when yo wor big eneuf, an if yo turned agen th' land, yo

wor to be 'prenticed to soom trade, an ha yor money when yo wanted it,—Mr. Gurney bein willin. An I promised him I'd deal honest wi his childer, an—'

Reuben paused painfully. He was wrestling with his conscience, and groping for words about his wife. The brother and sister sat open-mouthed, pale with excitement, afraid of losing a single syllable.

'An takkin it awthegither,' he said, bringing each word out with an effort, 'I doan't think, by t' Lord's mercy, as I've gone soa mich astray, though I ha been mich troobled this four year wi thowts o' Sandy—my brither Sandy—an wi not knowin wheer yo wor gone, Davy. Bit yo seem coom to an honest trade—an Louie theer ha larnt a trade too,—an adde't a bit money,—an she's a fine-grown lass—'

He turned a slow, searching look upon her, as though he were pleading a cause before some unseen judge.

'An theer's yor money, Davy. It's aw th' same, a'm thinkin, whether yo get it fro me or fro Mr. Gurney. An here—'

He rose, and unbuttoning his inner coat, fumbled in the pocket of it till he found a letter.

'An here is a letter for Mr. Gurney. If yo gie me a pen, Davy, I'll write in to 't yor reet address, an put it in t' post as I goo to t' station. I took noatice of a box as I coom along. An then—'

He stood still a moment pondering, one outspread hand on the letter.

'An then theer's nowt moor as a can remember,—an your aunt ull be wearyin; an it's but reet she should know now, at wonst, abeawt t' money a've saved this four year, an t' letter to Mr. Gurney. Yo understan—when yor letter came this mornin—t' mon browt it up to Louie abeawt eight o'clock—she towd me fust out i' th' yard—an I said to her, "Doan't you tell yor aunt nowt abeawt it, an we'st meet at t' station." An I made soom excuse to Hannah abeawt gooin ower t' Scout after soom beëasts—an—an—Louie an me coom thegither.'

He passed his other hand painfully across his brow. The travail of expression, the moral struggle of the last twenty-four hours, seemed to have aged him before them.

David sat looking at him in a stupefied silence. A light was breaking in upon him, transfiguring, combining, interpreting a hundred scattered remembrances of his boyhood. But Louie, the instant her uncle stopped, broke into a string of questions, shrill and breathless, her face quite white, her eyes glittering. Reuben seemed hardly to hear her, and in the middle of them David said sharply,

'Stop that, Louie, and let me talk to Uncle Reuben!'

He drew the letter from under Reuben's fingers, and went on, steadily looking up into his uncle's face:

'You'll let me read it, uncle, and I'll get you a pen directly to put in the address. But first will you tell us about father? You never did—you nor Aunt Hannah. And about mother, too?'

He said the last words with difficulty, having all his life been pricked by a certain instinct about his mother, which had, however, almost nothing definite to work upon. Reuben thought a minute, then sat down again patiently.

'Aye, a'll tell tha. Theer's nobory else can. An tha ought to know, though it'll mebbe be a shock to tha.'

And, with his head resting against his stick, he began to tell the story of his brother and his brother's marriage as he remembered it.

First came the account of Sandy's early struggles, as Sandy himself had described them on that visit which he had paid to the farm in the first days of his prosperity; then a picture of his ultimate success in business, as it had appeared to the dull elder brother dazzled by the younger's 'cliverness.'

'Aye, he might ha been a great mon; he might ha coom to varra high things, might Sandy,' said Reuben solemnly, his voice suddenly rising, 'bit for th' hizzy that ruined him!'

Both his hearers made an involuntary movement. But Reuben had now lost all count of them. He was intent on one thing, and capable only of one thing. They had asked him for his story, and he was telling it, with an immense effort of mind, recovering the past as best he could, and feeling some of it over again intensely.

So when he came to the marriage, he told the story like one thinking it out to himself, with an appalling plainness of phrase. It was, of course, impossible for him to *explain* Sandy's aberration—there were no resources in him equal to the task. Louise Suveret became in his account what she had always remained in his imagination since Sandy's employers told him what was known of her story—a mere witch and devil, sent for his brother's perdition. All his resentment against his brother's fate had passed into his hatred of this creature whom he had never seen. Nay, he even held up the picture of her hideous death before her children with a kind of sinister triumph. So let the ungodly and the harlot perish!

David stood opposite to the speaker all the while, motionless, save for an uneasy movement here and there when Reuben's words grew more scripturally frank than usual. Louie's face was much more positive than David's in what it said. Reuben and Reuben's vehemence annoyed and angered her. She frowned at him from under her black brows. It was evident that he, rather than his story, excited her.

'An we buried him aw reet an proper,' said Reuben at last, wiping his brow, damp with this unwonted labour of brain and tongue. 'Mr. Gurney he would ha it aw done handsome; and we put him in a corner o' Kensal Green, just as close as might be to whar they'd put her after th' crowner had sat on her. Yor feyther had left word, an Mr. Gurney would ha nowt different. But it went agen me—aye, it *did*—to leave him wi *her* after aw!'

And falling suddenly silent, Reuben sat wrapped in a sombre mist of memory.

Then Louie broke out, rolling and unrolling the ribbons of her hat in hot fingers.

'I don't believe half on't—I don't see how you could know—nor Mr. Gurney either.'

Reuben looked round bewildered. Louie got up noisily, went to the window and threw it open, as though oppressed by the narrowness of the room.

'No, I don't,' she repeated, defiantly—'I don't believe the half on't. But I'll find out some day.'

She leaned her elbows on the sill, and, looking out into the squalid bit of yard, threw a bit of grit that lay on the window at a cat that sat sleepily blinking on the flags outside.

Reuben rose heavily.

'Gie me pen and ink, Davy, an let me go.'

The young man brought it him without a word. Reuben put in the address.

'Ha yo read it, Davy?'

David started. In his absorption he had forgotten to read it.

'I wor forced to write it i' the top sheepfold,' Reuben began to explain apologetically, then stopped suddenly. Several times he had been on the point of bringing Hannah into the conversation, and had always refrained. He refrained now. David read it. It was written in Reuben's most laborious business style, and merely requested that Mr. Gurney would now communicate with Sandy's son direct on the subject of his father's money. He had left Needham Farm, and was old enough to take counsel himself with Mr. Gurney in future as to what should be done with it.

Reuben looked over David's shoulder as he read.

'An Louie?' he said uncertainly, at the end, jerking his thumb towards her.

'I'm stayin here,' said Louie peremptorily, still looking out of window.

Reuben said nothing. Perhaps a shade of relief lightened his old face.

When the letter was handed back to him, he sealed it and put it into his pocket, buttoning up his coat for departure.

'Yo wor talkin abeawt dinner, Davy—or summat,' said the old man, courteously. 'Thankee kindly. I want for nowt. I mun get home—I mun get home.'

Louie, standing absorbed in her own excited thoughts, could hardly be disturbed to say good-bye to him. David, still in a dream, led him through the shop, where Reuben peered about him with a certain momentary curiosity.

But at the door he said good-bye in a great hurry and ran down the steps, evidently impatient to be rid of his nephew.

David turned and came slowly back through the little piled-up shop, where John, all eyes and ears, sat on a high stool in the corner, into the living room.

As he entered it Louie sprang upon him, and seizing him with both hands, danced him madly round the little space of vacant boards, till she tripped her foot over the oak stool, and sank down on a chair, laughing wildly.

'How much of that money am I going to have?' she demanded suddenly, her arms crossed over her breast, her eyes brilliant, her whole aspect radiant and exulting.

David was standing over the fire, looking down into it, and made no answer. He had disengaged himself from her as soon as he could.

Louie waited a while; then, with a contemptuous lip and a shrug of the shoulders, she got up.

'What's the good of worriting about things, I'd like to know? You won't do 'em no good. Why don't you think about the money? My word, won't Aunt Hannah be mad! How am I to get my parcels from the station, and where am I to sleep?'

'You can go and see the house,' said David, shortly. 'The lodgers upstairs are out, and there's the key of the attic.'

He threw it to her, and she ran off. He had meant to take her in triumphal progress through the little house, and show her all the changes he had been making for her benefit and his own. But a gulf had yawned between them. He was relieved to see her go, and when he was left alone he laid his arms on the low mantelpiece and hid his face upon them. His mother's story, his father's fate, seemed to be burning into his heart.

Reuben hurried home through the bleak March evening. In the train he could not keep himself still, fidgeting so much that his neighbours eyed him with suspicion, and gave him a wide berth. As he started to walk up to Kinder a thin, raw sleet came on. It drove in his face, chilling him through and through, as he climbed the lonely road, where the black moorland farms lay all about him, seen dimly through the white and drifting veil of the storm. But he was conscious of nothing external. His mind was absorbed by the thought of his meeting with Hannah, and by the excited feeling that one of the crises of his timid and patient life was approaching. During the last four years they had been very poor, in spite of Mr. Gurney's half-yearly cheque, partly because of the determination with which he had stuck to his secret saving. Hannah would think they were going now to be poorer still, but he meant to prove to her that what with Louie's departure and the restoration of their whole income to its natural channels, there would not be so much difference. He conned his figures eagerly, rehearsing what he would say. For the rest he walked lightly and briskly. The burden of his brother's children had dropped away from him, and in those strange inner colloquies of his he could look Sandy in the face again.

Had Hannah discovered his flight, he wondered? Some one he was afraid, might have seen him and Louie at the station and

told tales. He was not sure that one of the Wigsons had not been hanging about the station yard. And that letter of David's to Louie, which in his clumsy blundering way he had dropped somewhere about the farm buildings or the house, and had not been able to find again! It gave him a cold sweat to think that in his absence Hannah might have come upon it and drawn her own conclusions. As he followed out this possibility in his mind, his step quickened till it became almost a run.

Aye, and Hannah had been ailing of late—there had been often 'summat wrang wi her.' Well, they were both getting into years. Perhaps now that Louie with her sharp tongue and aggravating ways was gone, now that there was only him to do for, Hannah would take things easier.

He opened the gate into the farmyard and walked up to the house door with a beating heart. It struck him as strange that the front blinds were not drawn, for it was nearly dark and the storm beat against the windows. There was a glimmer of fire in the room, but he could see nothing clearly. He turned the handle and went into the passage, making a clatter on purpose. But nothing stirred in the house, and he pushed open the kitchen door, which stood ajar, filled with a vague alarm.

Hannah was sitting in the rocking-chair, by the fire. Beside her was the table partly spread with tea, which, however, had been untouched. At Reuben's entrance she turned her head and looked at him fixedly. In the dim light—a mixture of the dying fire and of the moonlight from outside—he could not see her plainly, but he felt that there was something strange, and he ran forward to her.

'Hannah, are yo bad?—is there owt wrang wi yo?'

Then his seeking eye made out a crumpled paper in her left hand, and he knew at once that it must be Davy's letter.

Before he could speak again she gave him a push backward with her free hand, and said with an effort:

'Where's t' gell?'

'Louie? She's left i' Manchester. A've found Davy, Hannah.'

There was a pause, after which he said, trembling:

'Shall I get yo summat, Hannah?'

A hoarse voice came out of the dark:

'Ha doon wi yo! Yo ha been lecin to me. Yo wor seen at t' station.'

Reuben sat down.

'Hannah,' he said, 'yo mun just listen to me.'

And taking his courage in both hands, he told everything without a break: how he had been 'feart' of what Sandy might say to him 'at th' joodgment,' how he had saved and lied, and how now he had seen David, had written to Mr. Gurney, and stopped the cheques for good and all.

When he came to the letter to Mr. Gurney, Hannah sat suddenly upright in her chair, grasping one arm of it.

'It shall mak noa difference to tha, a tell tha,' he cried

hastily, putting up his hand, fearing he knew not what, 'nobbut a few shillins ony way. I'll work for tha an mak it up.'

She made a sound which turned him cold with terror—a sound of baffled weakness, pain, vindictive passion all in one—then she fell helplessly to one side in her chair, and her grey head dropped on her shoulder.

In another moment he was crying madly for help in the road outside. For long there was no answer—only the distant roar of the Downfall and the sweep of the wind. Then a labourer, on the path leading to the Wigsons' farm, heard and ran up.

An hour later a doctor had been got hold of, and Hannah was lying upstairs, tended by Mrs. Wigson and Reuben.

'A paralytic seizure,' said the doctor to Reuben. 'This woman says she's been failing for some time past. She's lived and worked hard, Mr. Grieve; you know that. And there's been some shock.'

Reuben explained incoherently. The doctor did not understand, and did not care, being a dull man and comparatively new to the place. He did what he could, said she would recover—oh, yes, she would recover; but, of course, she could never be the same woman again. Her working days were done.

A servant came over from Wigsons' to sit up with Reuben, Mrs. Wigson being too delicate to undertake it. The girl went to lie down first for an hour or two in the room across the landing, and he was left alone in the gaunt room with his wife. Poor quailing soul! As he sat there in the windy darkness, hour after hour, open-mouthed and open-eyed, he was steeped in terror—terror of the future, of its forlornness, of his own feebleness, of death. His heart clave piteously to the unconscious woman beside him, for he had nothing else. It seemed to him that the Lord had indeed dealt hardly with him, thus to strike him down on the day of his great atonement!

#### CHAPTER IX

No news of the catastrophe at Needham Farm reached the brother and sister in Potter Street. The use of the pen had always been to Reuben one of the main torments and mysteries of life, and he had besides all those primitive instincts of silence and concealment which so often in the peasant nature accompany misfortune. His brain-power, moreover, was absorbed by his own calamity and by the changes in the routine of daily life which his wife's state brought upon him, so that immediately after his great effort of reparation towards them—an effort which had taxed the whole man physically and mentally—his brother's children and their affairs passed for a while strangely and completely from his troubled mind.

Meanwhile, what a transformation he had wrought in their fortunes! When the shock of his parents' story had subsided in