

We noather on us know what to make on her. She's like a wild thing soomtimes—not a human creetur at aw—Gie me that chilt, I tell tha !'

Louie vouchsafed no answer. She sat down composedly before the fire, and, cradling the still sleeping child on her knee, she bent over it examining its waxen hands and tiny feet with an eager curiosity. The nurse, who stood over her trembling with anger, and only deterred from snatching the child away by the fear of wakening it, might have been talking to the wall.

'Now, look here, Louie, what d' you do that for?' said David, remonstrating; 'why can't you leave the child alone? You'll be putting Mrs. Mason in a taking, and that'll do her harm.'

'Nawt o' t' sort,' said Louie composedly, 'it 's that woman there 'll wake her with screeching. She's asleep, and the baby's asleep, and I'm taking care of it. Why can't Mrs. Bury go and look after Mrs. Mason? She hasn't swept her room this two days, and it 's a sight to see.'

Pricked in a tender point, Mrs. Bury broke out again into a stream of protest and invective, only modified by her fear of waking her patient upstairs, and interrupted by appeals to David. But whenever she came near to take the baby Louie put her hands over it, and her wide black eyes shot out intimidating flames before which the aggressor invariably fell back.

Attracted by the fight, Barbier had come up to look, and now stood by the shop-door, riveted by Louie's strange beauty. She wore the same black and scarlet dress in which she had made her first appearance in Manchester. She now never wore it out of doors, her quick eye having at once convinced her that it was not in the fashion. But the instinct which had originally led her to contrive it was abundantly justified whenever she still condescended to put it on, so startling a relief it lent to the curves of her slim figure, developed during the last two years of growth to all womanly roundness and softness, and to the dazzling colour of her dark head and thin face. As she sat by the fire, the white bundle on her knee, one pointed foot swinging in front of her, now hanging over the baby, and now turning her bright dangerous look and compressed lips on Mrs. Bury, she made a peculiar witch-like impression on Barbier which thrilled his old nerves agreeably. It was clear, he thought, that the girl wanted a husband and a family of her own. Otherwise why should she run off with other people's children? But he would be a bold man who ventured on her!

David, at last seeing that Louie was in the mood to tear the babe asunder rather than give it up, with difficulty induced Mrs. Bury to leave her in possession for half an hour, promising that, as soon as the mother woke, the child should be given back.

'If I've had enough of it,' Louie put in, as a saving clause, luckily just too late to be heard by the nurse, who had sulkily closed the door behind her, declaring that 'sich an owdacious chit she never saw in her born days, and niver heerd on one oather.'

David and Barbier went back into the shop to talk, leaving Louie to her nursing. As soon as she was alone she laid back the flannel which lay round the child's head, and examined every inch of its downy poll and puckered face, her warm breath making the tiny lips twitch in sleep as it travelled across them. Then she lifted the little nightgown and looked at the pink feet nestling in their flannel wrapping. A glow sprang into her cheek; her great eyes devoured the sleeping creature. Its weakness and helplessness, its plasticity to anything she might choose to do with it, seemed to intoxicate her. She looked round her furtively, then bent and laid a hot covetous kiss on the small clenched hand. The child moved; had it been a little older it would have wakened; but Louie, hastily covering it up, began to rock it and sing to it.

The door into the shop was ajar. As David and Barbier were hanging together over a map of Paris which David had hunted out of his stores, Barbier suddenly threw up his head with a queer look.

'What's that she's singing?' he said quickly.

He got up hastily, overturning his stool as he did so, and went to the door to listen.

'I haven't heard that,' he said, with some agitation, 'since my father's sister used to sing it me when I was a small lad, up at Augoumat in the mountains near Puy!'

Sur le pont d'Avignon
Tout le monde y danse en rond;
Les beaux messieurs font comme ça,
Les beaux messieurs font comme ça.

The words were but just distinguishable as Louie sang. They were clipped and mutilated as by one who no longer understood what they meant. But the intonation was extraordinarily French, French of the South, and Barbier could hardly stand still under it.

'Where did you learn that?' he called to her from the door.

The girl stopped and looked at him with her bright bird-like glance. But she made no reply.

'Did your mother teach it you?' he asked, coming in.

'I suppose so,' she said indifferently.

'Can you talk any French—do you remember it?'

'No.'

'But you'd soon learn. You haven't got the English mouth, that's plain. Do you know your brother thinks of taking you to Paris?'

She started.

'He don't,' she said laconically.

'Oh, don't he. Just ask him then?'

Ten minutes later Louie had been put in possession of the situation. As David had fully expected, she took no notice whatever of his suggestion that after all she might not care to come.

They might be rough quarters, he said, and queer people about ; and it would cost a terrible deal more for two than one. Should he not ask Dora Lomax to take her in for a fortnight ? John, of course, would look after the shop. He spoke under the pressure of a sudden qualm, knowing it would be no use ; but his voice had almost a note of entreaty in it.

'When do you want to be starting ?' she asked him sharply. 'I'll not go to Dora's—so you needn't talk o' that. You can take the money out of what you'll be owing me next month.'

Her nostrils dilated as the quick breath passed through them. Barbier was fascinated by the extraordinary animation of the face, and could not take his eyes off her.

'Not for a fortnight,' said David reluctantly, answering her question. 'Barbier's letter says about the tenth of May. There's two country sales I must go to, and some other things to settle.'

She nodded.

'Well, then, I can get some things ready,' she said half to herself, staring across the baby into the fire.

When David and Barbier were gone together 'up street,' still talking over their plans, Louie leapt to her feet and laid the baby down—carelessly, as though she no longer cared anything at all about it—in the old-fashioned arm-chair wherein David spent so many midnight vigils. Then locking her hands behind her, she paced up and down the narrow room with the springing gait, the impetuous feverish grace, of some prisoned animal. Paris ! Her education was small, and her ignorance enormous. But in the columns of a 'lady's paper' she had often bought from the station bookstall at Clough End she had devoured nothing more eagerly than the Paris letter, with its luscious descriptions of 'Paris fashions,' whereby even Lancashire women, even Clough End mill-hands in their Sunday best, were darkly governed from afar. All sorts of bygone dreams recurred to her—rich and subtle combinations of silks, satins, laces, furs, imaginary glories clothing an imaginary Louie Grieve. The remembrance of them filled her with a greed past description, and she forthwith conceived Paris as a place all shops, each of them superior to the best in St. Ann's Square—where one might gloat before the windows all day.

She made a spring to the door, and ran upstairs to her own room. There she began to pull out her dresses and scatter them about the floor, looking at them with a critical discontented eye.

Time passed. She was standing absorbed before an old gown, planning out its renovation, when a howl arose from downstairs. She fled like a roe deer, and pounced upon the baby just in time to checkmate Mrs. Bury, who was at her heels.

Quite regardless of the nurse's exasperation with her, first for leaving the child alone, half uncovered, in a chilly room, and now for again withholding it, Louie put the little creature against her neck, rocking and crooning to it. The sudden warm contact stilled the baby ; it rubbed its head into the soft hollow thus pre-

sented to it, and its hungry lips sought eagerly for their natural food. The touch of them sent a delicious thrill through Louie ; she turned her head round and kissed the tiny, helpless cheek with a curious violence ; then, tired of Mrs. Bury, and anxious to get back to her plans, she almost threw the child to her.

'There—take it ! I'll soon get it again when I want to.'

And she was as good as her word. The period of convalescence was to poor Mrs. Mason—a sickly, plaintive creature at the best of times—one long struggle and misery. Louie represented to her a sort of bird of prey, who was for ever descending on her child and carrying it off to unknown lairs. For neither mother nor nurse had Louie the smallest consideration ; she despised and tyrannised over them both. But her hungry fondness for the baby grew with gratification, and there was no mastering her in the matter. Warm weather came, and when she reached home after her work, she managed by one ruse or another to get hold of the child, and on one occasion she disappeared with it into the street for hours. David was amazed by the whim, but neither he nor anyone else could control it. At last, Mrs. Mason was more or less hysterical all day long, and hardly sane when Louie was within reach. As for the husband, who managed to be more at home during the days of his wife's weakness than he had yet been since David's tenancy began, he complained to David and spoke his mind to Louie once or twice, and then, suddenly, he ceased to pay any attention to his wife's wails. With preternatural quickness the wife guessed the reason. A fresh terror seized her—terror of the girl's hateful beauty. She dragged herself from her bed, found a room, while Louie was at her work, and carried off baby and husband, leaving no address. Luckily for her, the impression of Louie's black eyes proved to have been a passing intoxication, and the poor mother breathed and lived again.

Meanwhile Louie's excitement and restlessness over the Paris plan made her more than usually trying to Dora. During this fortnight she could never be counted on for work, not even when it was a question of finishing an important commission. She was too full of her various preparations. Barbier offered her, for instance, a daily French lesson. She grasped in an instant the facilities which even the merest smattering of French would give her in Paris ; every night she sat up over her phrase book, and every afternoon she cut her work short to go to Barbier. Her whole life seemed to be one flame of passionate expectation, though what exactly she expected it would have been hard to say.

Poor Dora ! She had suffered many things in much patience all these weeks. Louie's clear, hard mind, her sensuous temperament, her apparent lack of all maidenly reserve, all girlish softness, made her incomprehensible to one for whom life was an iridescent web of ideal aims and obligations. The child of grace was dragged out of her own austere or delicate thoughts, and

made to touch, taste, and handle what the 'world,' as the Christian understands it, might be like. Like every other daughter of the people, Dora was familiar enough with sin and weakness—Daddy alone had made her amply acquainted with both at one portion or another of his career. But just this particular temper of Louie's, with its apparent lack both of passion and of moral sense, was totally new to her, and produced at times a stifling impression upon her, without her being able to explain to herself with any clearness what was the matter.

Yet, in truth, it often seemed as if the lawless creature had been in some sort touched by Dora, as if daily contact with a being so gentle and so magnanimous had won even upon her. That confidence, for instance, which Louie had promised John, at Dora's expense, had never been made. When it came to the point, some touch of remorse, of shame, had sealed the girl's mocking lips.

One little fact in particular had amazed Dora. Louie insisted, for a caprice, on going with her one night, in Easter week, to St. Damian's, and thenceforward went often. What attracted her, Dora puzzled herself to discover. When, however, Louie had been a diligent spectator, even at early services, for some weeks, Dora timidly urged that she might be confirmed, and that Father Russell would take her into his class. Louie laughed immoderately at the idea, but continued to go to St. Damian's all the same. Dora could not bear to be near her in church, but however far away she might place herself, she was more conscious than she liked to be of Louie's conspicuous figure and hat thrown out against a particular pillar which the girl affected. The sharp uplifted profile with its disdainful expression drew her eyes against their will. She was also constantly aware of the impression Louie made upon the crowd, of the way in which she was stared at and remarked upon. Whenever she passed in or out of the church, people turned, and the girl, expecting it, and totally unabashed, flashed her proud look from side to side.

But once in her place, she was not inattentive. The dark chancel with its flowers and incense, the rich dresses and slow movements of the priests, the excitement of the processional hymns—these things caught her and held her. Her look was fixed and eager all the time. As to the clergy, Dora spoke to Father's Russell's sister, and some efforts were made to get hold of the new-comer. But none of them were at all successful. The girl slipped through everybody's hands. Only in the case of one of the curates, a man with a powerful, ugly head, and a penetrating personality, did she show any wavering. Dora fancied that she put herself once or twice in his way, that something about him attracted her, and that he might have influenced her. But as soon as the Paris project rose on the horizon, Louie thought of nothing else. Father Impey and St. Damian's, like everything else, were forgotten. She never went near the church from the evening David told her his news to the day they left Manchester.

David ran in to say good-bye to Daddy and Dora on the night before they were to start. Since the Paris journey had been in the air, Daddy's friendliness for the young fellow had revived. He was not, after all, content to sit at home upon his six hundred pounds 'like a hatching hen,' and so far Daddy, whose interest in him had been for the time largely dashed by his sudden accession to fortune, was appeased.

When David appeared Lomax was standing on the rug, with a book under his arm.

'Well, good-bye to you, young man, good-bye to you. And here's a book to take with you that you may read in the train. It will stir you up a bit, give you an idea or two. Don't you come back too soon.'

'Father,' remonstrated Dora, who was standing by, 'who's to look after his business?'

'Be quiet, Dora! That book 'll show him what can be made even of a beastly bookseller.'

David took it from him, looked at the title, and laughed. He knew it well. It was the 'Life and Errors of John Dunton, Citizen of London,' the eccentric record of a seventeenth-century dealer in books, who, like Daddy, had been a character and a vagrant.

'Och! Don't I know it by heart?' said Daddy, with enthusiasm. 'Many a time it's sent me off tramping, when my poor Isabella thought she'd got me tied safe by the heels in the chimney corner. "Though love is strong as death, and every good man loves his wife as himself, yet—many's the score of times I've said it off pat to Isabella—yet I cannot think of being confined in a narrower study than the whole world." There's a man for you! He gets rid of one wife and saddles himself with another—sorrow a bit will he stop at home for either of them! "Finding I am for travelling, Valeria, to show the height of her love, is as willing I should see Europe as Eliza was I should see America." Och! give me the book, you divil,' cried Daddy, growing more and more Hibernian as his passion rose, 'and, bedad, but I'll drive it into you.'

And, reaching over, Daddy seized it, and turned over the pages with a trembling hand. Dora flushed, and the tears rose into her eyes. She realised perfectly that this performance was levelled at her at least as much as at David. Daddy's mad irritability had grown of late with every week.

'Listen to this, Davy!' cried Daddy, putting up his hand for silence. "'When I have crossed the Hellespont, where poor Leander was drowned, Greece, China, and the Holy Land are the other three countries I'm bound to. And perhaps when my hand is in—'"

'My hand is in!' repeated Daddy, in an ecstasy. 'What a jewel of a man!'

'I may step thence to the Indies, for I am a true lover of travels, and, when I am once mounted, care not whether I meet

the sun at his rising or going down, provided only I may but ramble . . . *He* is truly a scholar who is versed in the volume of the Universe, who doth not so much read of Nature as study Nature herself.'

'Well said—well said indeed!' cried Daddy, flinging the book down with a wild gesture which startled them both. 'Was that the man, Adrian Lomax, to spend the only hours of the only life he was ever likely to see—his first thought in the morning, and his last thought at night—in tickling the stomachs of Manchester clerks?'

His peaked chin and straggling locks fell forward on his breast. He stared sombrely at the young people before him, in an attitude which, as usual, was the attitude of an actor.

David's natural instinct was to jeer. But a glance at Dora perplexed him. There was some tragedy he did not understand under this poor comedy.

'Don't speak back,' said Dora, hurriedly, under her breath, as she passed him to get her frame. 'It only makes him worse.'

After a few minutes' broken chat, which Daddy's mood made it difficult to keep up, David took his departure. Dora followed him downstairs.

'You're going to be away a fortnight,' she said, timidly.

As she spoke, she moved her head backwards and forwards against the wall, as though it ached, and she could not find a restful spot.

'Oh, we shall be back by then, never fear!' said David, cheerfully. He was growing more and more sorry for her.

'I should like to see foreign parts,' she said wistfully. 'Is there a beautiful church, a cathedral, in Paris? Oh, there are a great many in France, I know! I've heard the people at St. Damian's speak of them. I would like to see the services. But they can't be nicer than ours.'

David smiled.

'I'm afraid I can't tell you much about them, Miss Dora; they aren't in my line. Good-bye, and keep your heart up.'

He was going, but he turned back to say quickly—

'Why don't you let him go off for a bit of a tramp? It might quiet him.'

'I would; I would,' she said eagerly; 'but I don't know what would come of it. We're dreadfully behindhand this month, and if he were to go away, people would be down on us; they'd think he wanted to get out of paying.'

He stayed talking a bit, trying to advise her, and, in the first place, trying to find out how wrong things were. But she had not yet come to the point of disclosing her father's secrets. She parried his questions, showing him all the while, by look and voice, that she was grateful to him for asking—for caring.

He went at last, and she locked the door behind him. But when that was done, she stood still in the dark, wringing her hands in a silent passion of longing—longing to be with him, out-

side, in the night, to hear his voice, to see his handsome looks again. Oh! the fortnight would be long. So long as he was there, within a stone's throw, though he did not love her, and she was sad and anxious, yet Manchester held her treasure, and Manchester streets had glamour, had charm.

He walked to Piccadilly, and took a 'bus to Mortimer Street. He must say good-bye also to Mr. Ancrum, who had been low and ill of late.

'So you are off, David?' said Ancrum, rousing himself from what seemed a melancholy brooding over books that he was in truth not reading. As David shook hands with him, the small fusty room, the pale face and crippled form awoke in the lad a sense of indescribable dreariness. In a flash of recoil and desire his thought sprang to the journey of the next day—to the May seas—the foreign land.

'Well, good luck to you!' said the minister, altering his position so as to look at his visitor full, and doing it with a slowness which showed that all movement was an effort. 'Look after your sister, Davy.'

David had sat down at Ancrum's invitation. He said nothing in answer to this last remark, and Ancrum could not decipher him in the darkness visible of the ill-trimmed lamp.

'She's been on your mind, Davy, hasn't she?' he said, gently, laying his blanched hand on the young man's knee.

'Well, perhaps she has,' David admitted, with an odd note in his voice. 'She's not an easy one to manage.'

'No. But you've got to manage her, Davy. There's only you and she together. It's your task. It's set you. And you're young, indeed, and raw, to have that beautiful self-willed creature on your hands.'

'Beautiful? Do you think she's that?' David tried to laugh it off.

The minister nodded.

'You'll find it out in Paris even more than you have here. Paris is a bad place, they say. So's London, for the matter of that. Davy, before you go, I've got one thing to say to you.'

'Say away, sir.'

'You know a great deal, Davy. My wits are nothing to yours. You'll shoot ahead of all your old friends, my boy, some day. But there's one thing you know nothing about—absolutely nothing—and you prate as if you did. Perhaps you must turn Christian before you do. I don't know. At least, so long as you're not a Christian you won't know what *we* mean by it—what the Bible means by it. It's one little word, Davy—*sin*.'

The minister spoke with a deep intensity, as though his whole being were breathed into what he said. David sat silent and embarrassed, opposition rising in him to what he thought ministerial assumption.

'Well, I don't know what you mean,' he said, after a pause.

'One needn't be very old to find out that a good many people and

things in the world are pretty bad. Only we Secularists explain it differently from you. We put a good deal of it down to education, or health, or heredity.'

'Oh, I know—I know!' said the minister hastily, as though shrinking from the conversation he had himself evoked. 'I'm not fit to talk about it, Davy. I'm ill, I think! But there were those two things I wanted to say to you—your sister—and—'

His voice dropped. He shaded his eyes and looked away from David into the smouldering coals.

'No—no,' he resumed almost in a whisper; 'it's the *will*—it's the *will*. It's not anything he says, and Christ—*Christ*'s the only help.'

Again there was a silence. David studied his old teacher attentively, as far as the half-light availed him. The young man was simply angry with a religion which could torment a soul and body like this. Ancrum had been 'down' in this way for a long time now. Was another of his black fits approaching? If so, religion was largely responsible for them!

When at last David sighted his own door, he perceived a figure lounging on the steps.

'I say,' he said to himself with a groan, 'it's John!'

'What on earth do you want, John, at this time of night?' he demanded. But he knew perfectly.

'Look here!' said the other thickly, 'it's all straight. You're coming back in a fortnight, and you'll bring her back too!'

David laughed impatiently.

'Do you think I shall lose her in Paris or drop her in the Channel?'

'I don't know,' said Dalby, with a curiously heavy and indistinct utterance. 'She's very bad to me. She won't ever marry me; I know that. But when I think I might never see her again I'm fit to go and hang myself.'

David began to kick the pebbles in the road.

'You know what I think about it all,' he said at last, gloomily. 'I've told you before now. She couldn't care for you if she tried. It isn't a ha'p'orth of good. I don't believe she'll ever care for anybody. Anyway, she'll marry nobody who can't give her money and fine clothes. There! You may put that in your pipe and smoke it, for it's as true as you stand there.'

John turned round restlessly, laid his hands against the wall, and his head upon them.

'Well, it don't matter,' he said slowly, after a pause. 'I'll be here early. Good night!'

David stood and looked after him in mingled disgust and pity.

'I must pack him off,' he said, 'I must.'

Then he threw back his young shoulders and drew in the warm spring air with a long breath. Away with care and trouble! Things would come right—must come right. This weather was summer, and in forty-eight hours they would be in Paris!

BOOK III

STORM AND STRESS