

Bella came back full of smiles : wild, hoyden playfulness had taken the place of the sullen acerbity of her manners.

"Harold," she said, "don't be so foolish; Old Methusalem isn't half such a brute as he looks: let us take a peep at this piece of paper, and see what it's all about."

She opened the document, and read the contents aloud. It was a deed of assignment of some property, valued at two thousand pounds, situated at Milton. It was cunningly devised, and gave the holder and his heirs possession of certain houses at the expiration of leases, varying from seven to nine years. At the end was written in pencil a singularly accurate facsimile of old Macfarlane's signature and the names of two attesting witnesses.

"And so," she continued, "all you have to do is just to ink over this little bit of pencil-work and take it to Abraham's friend in the City, who will give you one thousand pounds money down. Why, bless my life, it's like coining money!"

"Forging, Bella, forging."

"Forging, what nonsense! Is'n't it all in the family? Doesn't it belong to you as well as him? Besides, who's to know? The chances are a thousand to one he'll never live to see one lease die out, and Abrahams vows it shall all be kept as secret as the grave for seven years."

Eve tempted Adam, and he ate the forbidden fruit. When Abrahams came back at night the tracing was effected, and, after a visit to the City he relieved Harold of his pressing necessities by the advance of a thousand pounds.

Then came the expected letter from his father; how anxiously he had awaited it, and now he hardly cared to open it. On breaking the seal, he took out four five-pound notes, and read as follows;—

"I am sorry to find that you cannot make your exceedingly liberal allowance meet your expenses. When I was your age, I lived upon fifteen shillings a week, and saved out of that; but young people will be young people, and I hope the experience you have bought will be valuable to you. I have some very startling news to give you. You may remember making the acquaintance of an exceedingly amiable young person, Miss Loder, the sister of our friend and late curate. Shortly after his removal from the parish (for unfortunately for us all, the rector was induced to dispense with his services,) I discovered that she was the niece of an old and worthy friend of mine, a man of large means, and moreover, his adopted child. Hearing much of her high personal character and sweetness of disposition, I went to the place of her brother's present residence, a neighbouring village, and they are now both frequent guests in my house. I beg you at once to come home and cultivate an acquaintance that always gave me so much pleasure to see you forming. I shall take no denial, and shall expect to see you at the end of the week at the latest. I enclose you £20. Take the number of the notes carefully, and use them judiciously."

"Too late, too late!" groaned Harold, as he crushed the letter in the grasp of his clammy hand.

Then Bella took it and read it. She sat some time poring over it, at last she said :