

upshot. Call it a dream if you will—it was a dream that made for my acquittal, and a welcome fantasy enough. I would it had been true, Lucy, for thy sake and mine. . . . What, girl!—why did I say nothing of it that day in the garden? Indeed, I might have done so, Lucy mine, had it not been for that clout on the head. . . .”

“Oh, think of the provocation, Oliver. But I was wild and beside myself, and, indeed, I only half-knew what I did. Forgive me that!”

But Oliver made light of the blow Lucinda had given him—had only a laugh for it. “Thou shalt do it again, my girl,” said he, “and I shall deserve it.” The more easily he took it, the nearer he came to her old ideal of him. The readier he was to overlook this mere trifle in her treatment of himself, the more she suspected her inner soul of nursing overmuch resentment for a death that might well have been his own. Think what turned on the slip of a steel point, one way or the other. And then, also, what would she have felt towards her brother had her husband’s late wound been from *his* weapon, not a wild mischance of Oliver’s? Yet Vincent had a double justification.

But it is hopeless to follow all the movements in the war of irrepressible love and extinguishable resentment, of which Lucinda’s soul was the battlefield. Human impulses fought on the side of her love for Oliver, while the memory of the dead interposed on the extinction of her anger against him. More and more she found solace in self-censure—was not the blame finally and really her own? But whether this was secretly dictated by a longing to justify her love for Oliver, and sanction it, who can say?

She can only be judged by her actions. She was very silent as they got gradually down the steep hillside; was silent but for a word or two of indifferent matter till they had crossed the bridge and passed beyond the mill, and were again in the lonely road that made a short cross-cut,