

His hand trembled, and he sat down to steady it. The wind had been silent a minute before, but now it came with a rush and roar against the house, causing him to start and listen. "Nothing but the wind," he murmured, and listened again, for with the wind he seemed to hear the sound of waves breaking on the shingly beach, and to see a low cottage with blue smoke curling from the chimney, and old David's honest cheery face and kindly voice and his last words, "As long as I've a roof to cover me or a crust of bread, old chap, you're welcome to a share, and pleased I'll be to see you. God bless you, old boy, good-bye!"

At the thought the razor dropped from his nervous fingers, and he leant his aching head on his hands. "He will be sorry when he hears, if he ever does. He's the only one that ever cared a straw for me, and he'll be sorry." He stooped and picked up the razor again, but a shudder came over him and he laid it down on the table and turned away. Again and again came the wind; again and again came the old memories, and his dreadful purpose got weaker and weaker. "I'd like to see old Davy again," he thought, "and Westbeach, and the sea, and then perhaps I should be less of a coward and better able to make an end of this miserable life of mine. I've a great mind to go, but yet—oh, what a poor miserable wretch I am!" He had only a few pence in his pocket, and weak as he was, the long journey to Westbeach on foot seemed almost impossible; yet, after about half an hour's indecision he rushed out, hardly knowing where he was going to, or what he wished, only full of a horrible dread of that dreary room with the guttering candle and the open razor.

About ten days after this, dusty and footsore, with all his worldly goods in a small bundle in his hand, Tom Sharpe came into Westbeach, shunning, as much as possible, the glance of passers-by, and slinking past the group of men round the boats like a beaten hound. They did not seem to notice him, though there were many there that he knew. Now he had come to David's cottage, and he stood still for a moment looking at it before he entered. It was the only home he had ever known, and it contained the only true friend he had ever had, and his heart, hardened and dried by sin, felt warmer and softer at the sight. "At any rate," he said to himself, "there's one man in the world that's always glad to see me;" and with a smile on his face, as he thought of David's hearty welcome, he pushed open the door.

"Hullo!" he said, "where's the old chap?"

With a cry of surprise Becky started from her seat.

"What, haven't you heard?" she said, in a strange, quiet voice; and one glance at the black dress, and the pale young face, told the tale. He staggered back against the door-post, sick and giddy with the terrible surprise, and uttered the first words that came to his lips.

"What! there?" he said, pointing to the bright, dancing sea.

"No, there," she answered, pointing up to the quiet blue sky; and then she turned to rock and soothe her fretting baby. Tom dropped into a seat and sat silent, watching her. At last she spoke.