LORNA DOONE

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CHAPTER XXVIII

JOHN HAS HOPE OF LORNA

Much as I longed to know more about Lorna, and though all my heart was yearning, I could not reconcile it yet with my duty to mother and Annie, to leave them on the following day, which happened to be a Sunday. For lo, before breakfast was out of our mouths, there came all the men of the farm, and their wives, and even the two crow-boys, dressed as if going to Barnstaple Fair, to inquire how Master John was, and whether it was true that the King has made him one of his body-guard; and if so, what was to be done with the belt for the championship of the West Counties wrestling, which I had held now for a year or more, and none were ready to challenge it. Strange to say this last point seemed the most important of all to them; and none asked who was to manage the farm, or answer for their wages, ; but all asked who was to wear the belt.

To this I replied, after shaking hands twice over all round with all of them, that I meant to wear the belt myself for the honor of the Oare parish, so long as ever God gave me strength and health to meet all comers; for I had never been asked to be body-guard; and if asked I would never have done it. Some of them cried that the King must be mazed, not to keep me for his protection, In these violent times of Popery. I could have told them that the King was not in the least afraid of Papists, but, on the contrary, very fond of them; however I held my tongue, remembering what Judge Jeffreys bade me.

In church, the whole congregation, man, woman, and child (except indeed the Snowe girls, who only looked when I was not watching), turned on me with one accord, and stared so steadfastly, to get some reflection of the King from me, that they forgot the time to kneel down, and the parson was forced to speak to them. If I coughed, or moved my book, or bowed, or even said "Amen," glances were exchanged which meant—"That he hath learned in London town, and most likely from His Majesty."

However, all this went off in time; and people became even angry with me for not being sharper (as they said), or smarter, or a whit more fashionable, for all the great company I had seen, and all the wondrous things wasted upon me.

But though I may have been none the wiser by reason of my stay in London, at any rate I was much better in virtue of coming home again. For now I had learned the joy of quiet, and the gratitude for good things round us, and the love we owe to others (even those who must be kind), for their indulgence to us. All this, before my journey, had been too much as a matter of course to me; but having missed it now, I knew that it was a gift, and might be lost. Moreover, I had pined so much, in the dust and heat of that great town, for trees, and fields, and running waters, and the sounds of country life, and the air of country winds, that never more could I grow weary of those soft enjoyments; or at least I thought so then.

To awake as the summer sun came slanting over the hill-tops, with hope on every beam adance to the laughter of the morning; to see the leaves across the window ruffling on the fresh new air, and the tendrils of the powdery vine turning from their beaded sleep. Then the lustrous meadows far beyond the thatch of the garden-well, yet seen beneath the hanging scollops of the walnut-tree, all awaking, dressed in pearl, all amazed at their own glistening, like a maid at her own ideas. Down them troop the lowing kine, walking each with a step of character (even as men and women do), yet all alike with toss of horns, and spread of udders ready. From them, without a word, we turn to the farm-yard proper, seen on the right, and dryly strawed from the petty rush of the pitch-paved runnel. Round it stand the snug out-buildings, barn, corn-chamber, cider-press, stables, with a blinkered horse in every door-way munching while his driver tightens buckles, whistles and looks down the lane, dallying to begin his labor till the milkmaids be gone by. Here the cock comes forth at last;—where he has been lingering, eggs may tell to-morrow—he claps his wings and shouts "cock-a doodle;" and no other cock dare look at him. Two or three go sideling off, waiting till their spurs be grown; and then the crowd of partlets comes, chattering how their lord has dreamed, and crowed at two in the morning, and praying that the old brown rat would only dare to face him. But while the cock is crowing still, and the pullet world admiring him, who comes up but the old turkey-cock, with all his family round him. Then the geese at the lower end begin to thrust their breasts out, and mum their down bits, and look at the gander and scream shrill joy for the conflict; while the ducks in pond show nothing but tail, in proof of their strict neutrality.

While yet we dread for the coming event, and the fight which would jar on the morning, behold the grandmother of sows, gruffly grunting right and left with muzzle which no ring may tame (not being matrimonial), hulks across between the two, moving all each side at once, and then all of the other side, as if she were chined down the middle, and afraid of spilling the salt from her. As this mighty view of lard hides each combatant from the other, gladly each retires and boasts how he would have slain his neighbor, but that old sow drove the other away, and no wonder he was afraid of her, after all the chicks she had eaten.

And so it goes on; and so the sun comes, stronger from his drink of dew; and the cattle in the byres, and the horses from the stable, and the men from the cottage door, each had his rest and food, all smell alike of hay and straw, and every one must hie to work, be it drag, or draw, or delve.

So thought I on the Monday morning; while my own work lay before me, and I was plotting how to quit it, void of harm to every one, and let my love have work a little—hardest perhaps of all work, and yet as sure as sunrise. I knew that my first day's task on the farm would be strictly watched by every one, even by my gentle mother, to see what I had learned in London. But could I let still another day pass, for Lorna to think me faithless?

I felt much inclined to tell dear mother all about Lorna, and how I loved her yet had no hope of winning her. Often and often I had longed to do this, and have done with it. But the thought of my father's terrible death at the hands of the Doones prevented me. And it seemed to me foolish and mean to grieve mother without any chance of my suit ever speeding. If once Lorna loved me my mother should know it; and it would be the greatest happiness to me to have no concealment from her, though at first she was sure to grieve terribly. But I saw no more chance of Lorna loving me, than of the man in the moon coming down; or rather of the moon coming down to the man as related in old mythology.

Now the merriment of the small birds, and the clear voice of the waters, and the lowing of cattle in meadows, and the view of no houses (except just our own and a neighbor's), and the knowledge of every body around, their kindness of heart and simplicity, and love of their neighbor's doings—all these could not help or please me at all, and many of them were much against me, in my secret depth of longing and dark tumult of the mind. Many people may think me foolish, especially after coming from London, where many nice maids looked at me (on account of my bulk and stature), and I might have been fitted up with a sweetheart, in spite of my west-country twang, and the smallness of my purse, if only I had said the word. But nay; I have contempt for a man whose heart is like a shirt-stud (such as I saw in London cards), fitted into one to-day, sitting bravely on the breast; plucked out on the morrow morn, and the place that knew it, gone.

Now what did I do but take my chance, reckless whether any one heeded me or not, only craving Lorna's heed, and time for ten words to her. Therefore I left the men of the farm as far away as might be, after making them work with me (which no man round our parts could do, to his own satisfaction) and then knowing them to be well weary, very unlike to follow me—and still more unlike to tell of me, for each had his London present—I strode right away, in good trust of my speed, without any more misgivings; but resolved to face the worst of it, and to try to be home for supper.

And first I went, I know not why, to the crest of the broken highland, whence I had agreed to watch for any mark or signal. And sure enough, at last I saw (when it was too late to see) that the white stone had been covered over with a cloth or mantle—the sign that something had arisen to make Lorna want me. For a moment I stood amazed at my evil fortune; that I should be too late in the very thing of all things on which my heart was set! Then, after eying sorrowfully every crick and cranny, to be sure that not a single flutter of my love was visible, off I set, with small respect either for my knees or neck, to make the round of the outer cliffs, and come up to my old access.

Nothing could stop me; it was not long, although to me it seemed an age, before I stood in the niche of rock at the head of the slippery water-course, and gazed into the quiet glen, where my foolish heart was dwelling. Notwithstanding doubts of right, notwithstanding sense of duty, and despite all manly striving, and the great love of my home, there my heart was ever dwelling, knowing what a fool it was, and content to know it.

Many birds came twittering round me in the gold of August; many trees showed twinkling beauty as the sun went lower and the lines of water fell, from wrinkles into dimples. Little heeding, there I crouched; though with sense of everything that afterward should move me, like a picture or a dream, and everything went by me softly while my heart was gazing.

At last a little figure came, not insignificant (I mean), but looking very light and slender in the moving shadows, gently here and softly there, as if vague of purpose, with a gloss of tender movement, in and out the wealth of trees, and liberty of the meadow. Who was I to crouch or doubt, or look at her from a distance, what matter if they killed me now, and one tear came to bury me? Therefore I rushed out at once, as if shot-guns were unknown yet; not from any real courage, but from prisoned love burst forth.

I know not whether my own Lorna was afraid of what I looked, or what I might say to her, or of her own thoughts of me; all I know is that she looked frightened when I hoped for gladness. Perhaps the power of my joy was more than maiden liked to own, or in any way to answer to; and, to tell the truth, it seemed as if I might now forget myself; while she would take good care of it. This makes a man grow thoughtful; unless, as some low fellows do, he believe all women hypocrites.

Therefore I went slowly toward her, taken back in my impulse; and said all I could come to say, with some distress in doing it.

"Mistress Lorna, I hope that you were in need of me."

"Oh yes; but that was long ago; two months ago, or more, sir." And saying this she looked away, as if it were all over. But I was now so dazed and frightened that it took my breath away, and I could not answer, feeling sure that I was robbed and some one else had won her. And I tried to turn away, without another word, and go."

But I could not help one stupid sob, though mad with myself for allowing it, but it came too sharp for pride to stay it, and it told a world of things. Lorna heard it, and ran to me, with her bright eyes full of wonder, pity, and great kindness, as if amazed that I had more than a simple liking for her. Then she held out both hands to me, and I took and looked at them.

"Master Ridd, I did not mean," she whispered very softly, "I did not mean to vex you."

"If you would be loath to vex me, none else in this world can do it," I answered out of my great love, but fearing yet to look at her, mine eyes not being strong enough.

"Come away from this bright place," she answered, trembling in her turn; "I am watched and spied of late. Come beneath the shadows, John."

I would have leaped into the valley of the shadow of death (as described by the late John Bunyan), only to hear her call me 'John;' though Apollyon were lurking there, and Despair should lock me in.

She stole across the silent grass; but I strode hotly after her; fear was all beyond me now, except the fear of losing her. I could not but behold her manner, as she went before me, all her grace, and lovely sweetness, and her sense of what she was.

She led me to her own rich bower, which I told of once before; and if in spring it were a sight, what was it in summer glory? But although my mind had notice of its fairness and its wonder, not a heed my heart took of it, neither dwelt it in my presence more than flowing water. All that in my presence dwelt, all that in my heart was felt, was the maiden moving gently, and afraid to look at me.

For now the power of my love was abiding on her, new to her, unknown to her; not a thing to speak about, nor even to think clearly; only just to feel and wonder, with a pain of sweetness. She could look at me no more, neither could she look away, with a studied manner—only to let fall her eyes, and blush, and be put out with me, and still more with herself.

I left her quite alone; though close, though tingling to have hold of her. Even her right hand was dropped and lay among the mosses. Neither did I try to steal one glimpse below her eyelids. Life and death were hanging on the first glance I should win; yet I let it be so.

After long or short—I, know not, yet ere I was weary, ere I yet began to think or wish for any answer—Lorna slowly raised her eyelids, with a gleam of dew below them, and looked at me doubtfully. Any look with so much in it never met my gaze before.

"Darling, do you love me?" was all that I could say to her.

"Yes, I like you very much," she answered, with her eyes gone from me, and her dark hair falling over, so as not to show me things.

"But do you love me, Lorna, Lorna; do you love me more than all the world?"

"No, to be sure not. Now why should I?"

"In truth, I know not why you should. Only I hoped that you did, Lorna. Either love me not at all, or as I love you, forever."

"John, I love you very much, and I would not grieve you. You are the bravest and the kindest, and the simplest of all men—I mean of all people—I like you very much, Master Ridd, and I think of you almost every day."

"That will not do for me, Lorna. Not almost every day I think, but every instant of my life, of you. For you I would give up my home, my love of all the world beside, my duty to my dearest ones; for you I would give up my life, and my hope of life beyond it. Do you love me so?"

"Not by any means," said Lorna; "no; I like you very much when you do not talk so wildly; and I like to see you come as if you would fill our valley up, and I like to think that even Carver would be nothing in your hands—but as to liking you like that, what should make it likely, especially when I have made the signal, and for some two months or more you have never even answered it? If you like me so ferociously, why do you leave me for other people to do just as they like with me?"

"To do as they liked! Oh, Lorna, not to make you marry Carver?"

"No, Master Ridd, be not frightened so; it makes me fear to look at you."

"But you have not married Carver yet? Say quick? Why keep me waiting so?"

"Of course I have not, Master Ridd. Should I be here if I had, think you, and allowing you to like me so, and to hold my hand, and make me laugh, as I declare you almost do sometimes? And at other times you frighten me."

"Did they want you to marry Carver? Tell me all the truth of it."

"Not yet, not yet. They are not half so impetuous as you are, John. I am only just seventeen, you know, and who is to think of marrying? But they wanted me to give my word, and be formally betrothed to him in the presence of my grandfather. It seems that something frightened them. There is a youth named Charleworth Doone, every one calls him "Charlie;" a headstrong and gay young man, very gallant in his looks and manner; and my uncle, the Counselor, chose to fancy that Charlie looked at me too much coming by my grandfather's cottage."

Here Lorna blushed so that I was frightened, and began to hate this Charlie more, a great deal more, than even Carver Doone.

"He had better not," said I; "I will fling him over it, if he dare. He shall see thee through the roof, Lorna, if at all he see thee."

"Master Ridd, you are worse than Carver! I thought you were so kind-hearted. Well, they wanted me to promise, and even to swear a solemn oath (a thing I had never done in my life) that I would wed my eldest cousin, this same Carver Doone, who is twice as old as I am, being thirty-five and upward. That was why I gave the token that I wished to see you, Master Ridd. They pointed out how much it was for the peace of all the family, and for mine own benefit; but I would not listen for a moment, though the Counselor was most eloquent, and my grandfather begged me to consider, and Carver smiled his pleasantest, which is a truly frightful thing. Then both he and his crafty father were for using force with me; but Sir Ensor would not hear of it; and they have put off that extreme until he shall be past its knowledge, or at least beyond preventing it. And now I am watched, and spied, and followed, and half my little liberty seems to be taken from me. I could not be here speaking with you, even in my own nook and refuge, but for the aid, and skill, and courage of dear little Gwenny Carfax. She is now my chief reliance, and through her alone I hope to baffle all my enemies, since others have forsaken me."

Tears of sorrow and reproach were lurking in her soft dark eyes, until in fewest words I told her that my seeming negligence was nothing but my bitter loss and wretched absence far away; of which I had so vainly striven to give any tidings without danger to her. When she heard all this, and saw what I had brought from London (which was nothing less than a ring of pearls with a sapphire in the midst of them, as pretty as could well be found.) she let the gentle tears flow fast, and came and sat so close beside me that I trembled like a folded sheep at the bleating of her lamb. But recovering comfort quickly, without more ado I raised her left hand and observed it with a nice regard, wondering at the small blue veins, and curves, and tapering whiteness, and the points it finished with. My wonder seemed to please her much, herself so well accustomed to it, and not fond of watching it. And then, before she could say a word, or guess what I was up to, as quick as ever I turned hand at a bout of wrestling, on her finger was my ring—sapphire for the veins of blue, and pearls to match white fingers.

"Oh you crafty Master Ridd!" said Lorna, looking up at me, and blushing now a far brighter blush than when she spoke of Charlie; "I thought that you were much too simple ever to do this sort of thing. No wonder you can catch the fish, as when first I saw you."

"Have I caught you, little fish? Or must all my life be spent in hopeless angling for you?"

"Neither one nor the other, John! You have not caught me yet altogether, though I like you dearly, John; and if you will only keep away, I shall like you more and more. As for hopeless angling, John, that all others shall have until I tell thee otherwise."

With large tears in her eyes—tears which seemed to me to rise partly from her want to love me with the power of my love—she put her pure bright lips, half smiling, half prone to reply to tears, against my forehead lined with trouble, doubt, and eager longing. And then she drew my ring from off that snowy twig, her finger, and held it out to me: and then, seeing how my face was falling, thrice she touched it with her lips, and sweetly gave it back to me. "John, I dare not take it now; else I should be cheating you. I will try to love you dearly, even as you deserve and wish. Keep it for me just till then. Something tells me I shall earn it in a very little time. Perhaps you will be sorry then, sorry when it is all too late, to be loved by such as I am."

What could I do, at her mournful tone, but to kiss a thousand times the hand which she put to warn me, and vow that I would rather die with one assurance of her love, than without it live forever with all beside that the world could give? Upon this she looked so lovely, with her dark eyelashes trembling, and her soft eyes full of light, and the color of clear sunrise mounting on her cheeks and brow, that I was forced to turn away, being overcome with beauty.

"Dearest darling, love of my life," I whispered, through her clouds of hair; "how long must I wait to know—how long must I linger doubting whether you can ever stoop from your birth and wondrous beauty to a poor coarse hind like me, an ignorant, unlettered yeoman——"

"I will not have you revile yourself," said Lorna, very tenderly—just as I had meant to make her. "You are not rude and unlettered, John. You know a great deal more than I do: you have learned both Greek and Latin, as you told me long ago, and you have been at the very best school in the West of England. None of us but my grandfather and the Counselor (who is a great scholar) can compare with you in this. And though I have laughed at your manner of speech, I only laughed in fun; John; I never meant to vex you by it, nor knew that I had done so."

"Naught you say can vex me, dear," I answered, as she leaned toward me, in generous sorrow; "unless you say, 'Begone, John Ridd; I love another more than you.'"

"Then I shall never vex you, John—never, I mean by saying that. Now, John, if you please, be quiet——"

For I was carried away so much by hearing her call me "John" so often, and the music of her voice, and the way she bent toward me, and the shadow of soft weeping in the sunlight of her eyes, that some of my great hand was creeping in a manner not to be imagined; and far less explained, toward the lithesome, wholesome curving underneath her mantle-fold, and out of sight and harm, as I thought; not being her front waist. However, I was dashed with that, and pretended not to mean it; only to pluck some lady-fern, whose elegance did me no good.

"Now, John!" said Lorna, being so quick that not even a lover could cheat her, and observing my confusion more intently than she need have done. "Master John Ridd, it is high time for you to go home to your mother. I love your mother very much from what you have told me about her, and I will not have her cheated."

"If you truly love my mother," said I, very craftly, "the only way to show it is by truly loving me."

Upon that she laughed at me in the sweetest manner, and with such provoking ways, and such come-and-go of glances, and beginning of quick blushes, which she tried to laugh away, that I knew, as well as if she herself had told me, by some knowledge (void of reasoning, and the surer for it,) I knew quite well, while all my heart was burning hot within me, and mine eyes were shy of hers, and her eyes were shy of mine; for certain and forever this I knew—as in a glory—that Lorna Doone had now begun and would go on to love me.

CHAPTER XXIX

REAPING LEADS TO REVELING

Although I was under interdict for two months from my darling—"one for your sake, one for mine," she had whispered with her head withdrawn, yet not so very far from me—lighter heart was not on Exmoor than I bore for half the time, and even for three quarters. For she was safe; I knew that daily by the mode of signals, well-contrived between us now, on the strength of our experience. "I have nothing now to fear, John," she had said to me, as we parted; "it is true that I am spied and watched, but Gwenny is too keen for them. While I have my grandfather to prevent all violence, and little Gwenny to keep watch on those who try to watch me, and you above all others, John, ready at a moment, if the worst comes to the worst—this neglected Lorna Doone was never in such case before. Therefore, do not squeeze my hand, John; I am safe without it, and you do not know your strength."

Ah, I knew my strength right well. Hill and valley scarcely seemed to be step and landing for me; fiercest cattle I would play with, making them go backward, and afraid of hurting them, like John Fry with his terrier; even rooted trees seemed to me but as sticks I could smite down, except for my love of everything. The love of all things was upon me, and a softness to them all, and a sense of having something even such as they had.

Then the golden harvest came, waving on the broad hillside, and nestling in the quiet nooks scooped from out the fringe of wood—a wealth of harvest such as never gladdened all our country side since my father ceased to reap, and his sickle hung to rust. There had not been a man on Exmoor fit to work that reaping-hook since the time its owner fell, in the prime of life and strength, before a sterner reaper. But now I took it from the wall, where mother proudly stored it, while she watched me, hardly knowing whether she should smile or cry.

All the parish was assembled in our upper court-yard; for we were to open the harvest that year, as had been settled with Farmer Nicholas, and with Jasper Kebby, who held the third or little farm. We started in proper order, therefore, as our practice is; first, the parson, Josiah Bowden, wearing his gown and cassock, with the parish Bible in his hand, and a sickle strapped behind him. As he strode along well and stoutly, being a man of substance, all our family came next, I leading mother with one hand, in the other bearing my father's book, and with a loaf of our own bread and a keg of cider upon my back. Behind us Annie and Lizzie walked, wearing wreaths of corn-flowers, set out very prettily, such as mother would have worn if she had been a farmer's wife instead of a farmer's widow. Being as she was, she had no adornment, except that her widow's hood was off, and her hair allowed to flow, as if she had been a maiden; and very rich bright hair it was, in spite of all her troubles.

After us the maidens came, milkmaids and the rest of them, with Betty Muxworthy at their head, scolding even now, because they would not walk fitly. But they only laughed at her; and she knew it was no good to scold, with all the men behind them.

Then the Snowes came trooping forward; Farmer Nicholas in the middle, walking as he would rather walk to a wheatfield of his own, yet content to follow lead, because he knew himself to be the leader; and signing every now and then to the people here and there, as if I were nobody. But to see his three great daughters, strong and handsome wenches, making upon either side, as if somebody would run off with them—this was the very thing that taught me how to value Lorna, and her pure simplicity.

After the Snowes came Jasper Kebby with his wife new-married; and a very honest pair they were, upon only a hundred acres, and a right of common. After these the men came hotly, without decent order, trying to spy the girls in front, and make good jokes about them, at which their wives laughed heartily, being jealous when alone, perhaps. And after these men and their wives came all the children toddling, picking flowers by the way, and chattering and asking questions, as the children will. There must have been three-score of us, take one with another; and the lane was full of people. When we were come to the big field-gate, where the first sickle was to be, Parson Bowden heaved up the rail with the sleeves of his gown done green with it; and he said that everybody might hear him, though his breath was short, "In the name of the Lord, Amen!"

"Amen! So be it!" cried the clerk, who was far behind, being only a shoe-maker.

Then Parson Bowden read some verses from the parish Bible, telling us to lift up our eyes, and look upon the fields already white to harvest; and then he laid the Bible down on the square head of the gate-post, and, despite his gown and cassock three good swipes he cut of corn, and laid them right end onward. All this time the rest were huddling outside the gate and along the lane, not daring to interfere with parson, but whispering how well he did it.

When he had stowed the corn like that, mother entered leaning on me, and we both said, "Thank the Lord for all His mercies, and these the first fruits of His hand!" And then the clerk gave out a psalm, verse by verse, done very well; although he sneezed in the midst of it, from a beard of wheat thrust up his nose by the rival cobbler at Brendon. And when the psalm was sung, so strongly that the foxgloves on the bank ware shaking, like a chime of bells, at it, Parson took a stoop of cider and we all fell to at reaping.

Of course I mean the men, not women, although I know that up the country women are allowed to reap; and right well they reap it, keeping row for row with men, comely, and in due order, yet, meseems, the men must ill attend to their own reaping-hooks, in fear lest the other cut themselves, being the weaker vessel. But in our part women do what seems their proper business, following well behind the men, out of harm of the swinging-hook, and stooping with their breasts and arms up they catch the swaths of corn, where the reapers cast them, and tucking them together tightly with a wisp laid under them, this they fetch around and twist, with a knee to keep it close; and lo, there is a goodly sheaf, ready to set up in stooks! After these the children come, gathering each for his little self, if the farmer be right-minded, until each hath a bundle made as big as himself and longer, and tumbles now and again with it, in the deeper part of the stubble.

We, the men, kept marching onward down the flank of the yellow wall, with knees bent wide, and left arm bowed, and right arm flashing steel. Each man in his several place, keeping down the rig or chine on the right side of the reaper in front, and the left of the man that followed him; each making farther sweep and inroad into the golden breadth and depth, each casting leftward his rich clearance on his foregoer's double track.

So like half a wedge of wild fowl, to and fro we swept the field; and when to either hedge we came, sickles wanted whettling, and throats required moistening, and backs were in need of easing, and every man had much to say, and women wanted praising. Then all returned to the other end, with reaping-hooks beneath our arms, and dogs left to mind jackets.

But now, will you believe me well, or will you only laugh at me? For even in the world of wheat, when deep among the varnished crispness of the jointed stalks, and below the feathered yielding of the graceful heads, even as I gripped the swaths and swept the sickle round them, even as I flung them by to rest on brother stubble, through the whirling yellow world, and eagerness of reaping, came the vision of my love, as with downcast eyes she wondered at my power of passion. And then the sweet remembrance glowed, brighter than the sun through wheat, through the very depth of heart, of how she raised those beaming eyes, and ripened in my breast rich hope. Even now I could descry, like high waves in the distance, the rounded heads and folded shadows of the wood of Bagworthy. Perhaps she was walking in the valley, and softly gazing up at them. Oh, to be a bird just there! I could see a bright mist hanging just above the Doone Glen. Perhaps it was shedding its drizzle upon her. Oh, to be a drop of rain! The very breeze which bowed the harvest to my bosom gently might have come direct from Lorna, with her sweet voice laden. Ah, the flaws of air, that wander where they will around her, fan her bright cheek, play with lashes, even revel in her hair and reveal her beauties—man is but a breath, we know; would I were such breath as that!

But confound it, while I ponder, with delicious dreams suspended, with my right arm hanging frustrate and the giant sickle drooped, with my left arm bowed for clasping something more germane than wheat, and my eyes not minding business, but intent on distant woods—confound it, what are the men about, and why am I left vaporing? They have taken advantage of me, the rogues! They are gone to the hedge for the cider-jars; they have had up the sledd of bread and meat, quite softly over the stubble, and if I can believe my eyes (so dazed with Lorna's image), they are sitting down to an excellent dinner before the church clock has gone eleven!

"John Fry, you big villain!" I cried, with John hanging up in the air by the scuff of his neckcloth, but holding still by his knife and fork, and a goose-leg in between his lips, "John Fry, what mean you by this, sir?"

"Latt me dowun, or I can't tell 'e," John answered, with some difficulty. So I let him come down, and I must confess that he had reason on his side. "Plaise your worship"—John called me so ever since I returned from London, firmly believing that the King had made me a magistrate at least, though I was to keep it secret—"us zeed as how your worship were took with thinkin' of King's business in the middle of the whate-rigg; and so us zed, 'Latt un coom to his zell, us had better zave taime, by takking our dinner;' and here us be, plaise your worship, and hopps no offense with thick iron spoon full of vried taties."

I was glad enough to accept the ladleful of fried batatas, and to make the best of things, which is generally done by letting men have their own way. Therefore I managed to dine with them, although it was so early.

For according to all that I can find, in a long life and a varied one, twelve o'clock is the real time for a man to have his dinner. Then the sun is at his noon, calling halt to look around, and then the plants and leaves are turning, each with a little leisure time, before the work of the afternoon. Then is the balance of east and west, and then the right and left side of a man are in due proportion, and contribute fairly with harmonious fluids. And the health of this mode of life and its reclaiming virtue are well set forth in our ancient rhyme,

"Sunrise, breakfast; sun high, dinner;
Sundown, sup; makes a saint of a sinner."

Whish, the wheat falls! Whirl again; ye have had good dinners; give your master and mistress plenty to supply another year. And in truth we did reap well and fairly through the whole of that afternoon, I not only keeping lead but keeping the men up to it. We got through a matter of ten acres ere the sun between the shocks broke his light on wheaten plumes, then hung his red cloak on the clouds and fell into gray slumber.

Seeing this, we wiped our sickles, and our breasts and foreheads, and soon were on the homeward road, looking forward to good supper.

Of course all the reapers came at night to the harvest-supper, and Parson Bowden to say the grace as well as to help to carve for us. And some help was needed there, I can well assure you, for the reaper have brave appetites, and most of their wives having babies, were forced to eat as a duty. Neither failed they of this duty; cut and come again was the order of the evening, as it had been of the day; and I had no time to ask questions, but help meat and ladle gravy. All the while our darling Annie with her sleeves tucked up, and her comely figure panting, was running about with a bucket of taties mashed with lard and cabbage. Even Lizzie had left her books, and was serving out beer and cider; while mother helped plum-pudding largely on pewter plates with the mutton. And all the time Betty Muxworthy was grunting in and out everywhere, not having space to scold even, but changing the dishes, serving the meat, poking the fire, and cooking more. But John Fry would not stir a peg, except with his knife and fork, having all the airs of a visitor, and his wife to keep him eating, till I thought there would be no end of it.

Then having eaten all they could, they prepared themselves, with one accord, for the business now of drinking. But first they lifted the neck of corn, dressed with ribbons gayly, and set it upon the mantel-piece, each man with his horn a-froth; and then they sung a song about it, every one shouting in the chorus louder than harvest thunder-storm. Some were in the middle of one verse, and some at the end of the next one: yet somehow all managed to get together in the mighty roar of the burden. And if any farmer up the country would like to know Exmoor harvest-song as sung in my time, and will be sung long after I am garnered home, lo, here I set it down for him, omitting only the dialect, which perchance might puzzle him.

EXMOOR HARVEST-SONG

1.

The corn, oh the corn, 'tis the ripening of the corn!
Go unto the door, my lad, and look beneath the moon,
Thou canst see beyond the wood-rick, how it is yelloon,
'Tis the harvesting of wheat, and the barley must be shorn.

(Chorus.)

The corn, oh the corn, and the yellow mellow corn!
Here's to the corn, with the cups upon the board!
We've been reaping all the day, and we'll reap again the morn,
And fetch it home to mow-yard, and then we'll thank the Lord.

2.

The wheat, oh the wheat, 'tis the ripening of the wheat!
All the day it has been hanging down its heavy head,
Bowing over on our bosoms with a beard of red;
'Tis the harvest, and the value makes the labor sweet.

(Chorus.)

The wheat, oh the wheat, and the golden, golden wheat!
Here to the wheat, with the loaves upon the board!
We've been reaping all the day, and we never will be beat,
But fetch it all to mow-yard, and then we'll thank the Lord.

3.

The barley, oh the barley, and the barley is in prime!
All the day it has been rustling with its bristles brown,
Waiting with its beard a bowing, till it can be mown!
'Tis the harvest, and the barley must abide its time.

(Chorus.)

The barley, oh the barley, and the barley ruddy brown!
Here's to the barley, with the beer upon the board!
We'll go a-mowing, soon as ever all the wheat is down;
When all is in the mow-yard, we'll stop and thank the Lord.

4.

The oats, oh the oats, 'tis the ripening of the oats!
All the day they have been dancing with their flakes of white,
Waiting for the girding-hook, to the nags' delight:
'Tis the harvest, let them dangle in their skirted coats.

(Chorus.)

The oats, oh the oats, and the silver, silver oats!
Here's to the oats with the back-stone on the board!
We'll go among them when the barley has been laid in rotes;
When all is home to mow-yard, we'll kneel and thank the Lord.

5.

The corn, oh the corn, and the blessing of the corn!
Come unto the door, my lads, and look beneath the moon,
We can see, on hill and valley, how it is yelloon,
With a breadth of glory, as when our Lord was born.

(Chorus.)

The corn, oh the corn, and the yellow, mellow corn!
Thanks for the corn, with our bread upon the board!
So shall we acknowledge it, before we reap the morn,
With our hands to heaven, and our knees unto the Lord.

Now we sung this song very well the first time, having the parish choir to lead us, and the clarionet, and the parson to give us the time with his cup; and we sung it again the second time, not so but what you might praise it (if you had been with us all the evening,) although the parson was gone then, and the clerk not fit to compare with him in the matter of keeping time. But when that song was in its third singing, I defy any man (however sober) to have made out one verse from the other, or even the burden from the verses, inasmuch as every man present, ay, and women, too, sung as became convenient to them, in utterance both of words and tune.

And in truth there was much excuse for them; because it was a noble harvest, fit to thank the Lord for, without His thinking us hypocrites. For we had

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