

"Gone to Northam to see her old mother, Baker. I'd have gone with her, but the poor old soul wanted to talk about some little property which the boy is to have. But I expect her home shortly."

"Come, then, and have a social glass in the meanwhile, John."

Laing hesitated for a few moments. "It must only be one, then," he said at last; and he thought as he followed his companion to the Three Mariners that there would be no harm in that, and that Mary surely would not wish him to deny himself that slight indulgence.

Night closed in rapidly, dark threatening clouds had gathered in the west, through which the sun had fought its downward path, breaking them up into picturesque confusion. The vane, variable all the day, pointed steadily northward at last. The old coast-guardsman, walking on his beat, heard the wind wail fitfully and knowing that sign, looked out to sea and saw through the gloom the white breakers rise, and stopped to ask what boats were out and who were with them. They came in now fast before the wind like birds, when a storm threatens, and were hauled high and dry upon the shingle.

Another hour, and the wind had risen, coming heavily from the north, driving the sea before it, in long regular waves, which hurled themselves upon the steep beach, and broke into clouds of spray. There were but two boats out now, and as the night wore on, the coast-guardsman said to himself, "They've put into Hollesley Haven by this time, and small blame to them. It will be an ugly night."

John Laing was the centre of a merry group, Other friends had crowded around him with congratulations and good wishes, and before long he found himself the host of a large party. Habit and fashion seemed to forbid escape, which at first he desired, and before long the one glass to which he had limited himself was far exceeded. Then, as the night wore on, he forgot his son's absence, his wife's delay, the growing storm without, in the excitement of company and intoxicating drink.

The merriment of the party assembled in the parlour of the Three Mariners was at its height, when a single shrill cry was above the storm. There was a momentary pause, and then a