

of the corner of his eye, placed the poor mangled remains of the braces reverently on the table, and gazed at them with a sigh, as if he regarded them as still beautiful, even in death. Then he produced a pair of woollen socks from his parcel.

"These 'ere," he said "o' course they've been in wear a good deal and—"

"I didn't give 'em to you for to keep under a glass case," protested Sophie, her bitter feelings softened a little by the fact that he had been glad to make use of her present.

"No, quite so," said David turning and addressing her for the first time. "Only, you see, when you've got to give things back again—"

"I don't want them back," said Sophie.

"Well, there don't seem to be no choice about it, as far as I can see," replied David. "And as I couldn't give 'em back with holes in 'em, and I didn't like to let no one else touch 'em now, I tried to mend 'em up a bit myself. You'll see—"

Mrs. Meadows guffawed again. And finding her mirth not so easy to check on this occasion, she fled precipitately into the shop, and left the young people alone. Sophie frowned at the interruption, but the next moment she found herself half smiling at David's dilemma. This big, rough fellow's confession of his helplessness was not displeasing to her. It showed her at least that there were times when she would be missed, and the reflection softened her a little.

"Show me," she said, holding out her hand.

David passed the socks along and indicated with his finger the spot where his handiwork was to be seen. A huge lumpy blotch of red wool that had been laboriously grafted on to a grey background, it did not need to be pointed out. It caught the eye at once, and absolutely riveted the attention. Sophie felt the corners of her mouth breaking down, and finally unable to resist the ludicrousness of the absurd incongruity she burst into a peal of derisive laughter.

"I never was much of a 'and with a needle," David explained, smilingly. Then as if realizing that Sophie's mirth was a distinct sign of encouragement, he leaned across the table, and said in a tone of gentle protest: "See what a mess I should make o' things if you should give me up."

Sophie stopped laughing and looked at him sternly.

"There is—Faith Duker," she said.

"Not for me, there ain't he said, scornfully. "An' I can't make out what you keep on about the gal for. I don't suppose I've spoken a dozen words to her". Father give 'er people a job mending the sacks at the mill, but the work's done now, and—"

"But Mrs. Green said that Bobby Harper told 'er—"

"Yes, I know. An' you give my compliments to Bobby 'Arper an' ask 'm what 'e's got 'is left eye shut up for. As for old Mother Green, scandal-mongerin' is 'er business when she's got no drinkin' to do. You don't want to go listenin' to a parcel of old gossips like that. S'pose you let me keep the things you gave me. Come, now, that's a bargain. And the things I gave you—"

"I—I returned them," faltered Sophie, as her right hand sought the finger of her left hand that only yesterday had been decorated with a gold ring set with two pearls and a gem.

David turned to the second parcel on the table.

"I brought 'em back on the off-chance," he said. "Shall I undo the string?"

By way of reply, Sophie took her scissors from the mantle-piece behind her, and reaching across the table, cut the string in several places. Then she looked up at David's face and laughed.

And Mrs. Meadows coming into the parlour abruptly to see if David were still there, remarked that she was very sorry to have interrupted, but hadn't, of course, had the least idea that everything was going so well.