LORNA DOONE

B. R. D. Blackmore.

CHAPTER LVIII

MASTER HUCKABACK'S SECRET

Knowing Master Huckaback to be a man of his word, as well as one who would have others so, I was careful to be in good time the next morning by the side of the Wizard's Slough. I am free to admit that the name of the place bore a feeling of uneasiness, and a love of distance, in some measure, to my heart. But I did my best not to think of this; only I thought it a wise precaution, and due, for the sake of my mother and Lorna, to load my gun with a dozen slugs made from the lead of the old church-porch, laid by, long since, against witchcraft.

I am well aware that some people now begin to doubt about witchcraft; or at any rate feign to do so, being desirous to disbelieve whatever they are afraid of. This spirit is growing too common among us, and will end (unless we put a stop to it) in the destruction of all religion. And as regards witchcraft, a man is bound either to believe in it, or to disbelieve the Bible. For even in the New Testament, discarding many things of the Old, such as sacrifices, and sabbath, and fasting, and other miseries, witchcraft is clearly spoken of as a thing that must continue, that the evil one be not utterly robbed of his vested interests. Hence let no one tell me that witchcraft is done away with; for I will meet him with St. Paul, than whom no better man, and few less superstitious, can be found in all the Bible.

Feeling these things more in those days than I feel them now, I fetched a goodish compass round by the way of the Cloven rocks, rather than cross Black Barrow Down in a reckless and unholy manner. There were several spots upon that Down, cursed, and smitten, and blasted, as if thunder-bolts had fallen there, and satan sat to keep them warm. At any rate, it was good (as every one acknowledged) not to wander there too much, even with a doctor of divinity upon one arm, and of medicine upon the other.

Therefore I, being all alone, and on foot (as seemed the wisest), preferred a course of roundabout; and starting about 8 o'clock, without mentioning my business, arrived at the mouth of the deep descent, such as John Fry described it. Now this (though I have not spoken of it) was not my first time of being there. For although I could not bring myself to spy upon Uncle Reuben as John Fry had done, yet I thought it no ill manners, after he had left our house, to have a look at the famous place where the malefactor came to life, at least in John's opinion. At that time, however, I saw nothing except the great ugly black morass with the grizzly reeds around it; and I did not care to go very near it, much less to pry on the further side.

Now, on the other hand, I was bent to get at the very bottom of this mystery (if there were any), having less fear of witch or wizard, with a man of Uncle Reuben's wealth to take my part, and see me through. So I rattled the ramrod down my gun, just to know if the charge were right, after so much walking; and finding it full six inches deep, as I like to have it, went boldly down the steep gorge of rock with a firm resolve to shoot any witch, unless it were good Mother Meldrum. Nevertheless, to my surprise, all was quiet, and fair to look at, in the decline of the narrow way, with great stalked ferns coming forth like trees, yet hanging like cobwebs over one. And along one side a little spring was getting rid of its waters. Any man might stop and think, or he might go on and think, and in either case, there was none to say that he was making a fool of himself.

When I came to the foot of this ravine, and over against the great black slough, there was no sign of Master Huckaback, nor of any other living man, except myself, in the silence. Therefore I sat in a niche of rock, gazing at the slough, and pondering the old tradition about it.

They say that, in the ancient times, a mighty necromancer lived in the wilderness of Exmoor. Here, by spell and incantation, he built himself a strong, high palace, eight-sided like a spider's web, and standing on a central steep; so that neither man nor beast could cross the moor without his knowledge. If he wished to rob and slay a traveller, or to have wild ox or stag for food, he had nothing more to do than sit at one of his eight windows, and point his unholy book at him. Any moving creature at which that book was pointed must obey the call, and come from whatever distance, if sighted once by the wizard.

This was a bad condition of things, and all the country groaned under it; and Exmoor (although the most honest place that a man could wish to live in) was beginning to get a bad reputation, and all through that vile wizard. No man durst even go to steal a sheep or a pony, or so much as a deer for dinner, lest he should be brought to book by a far bigger rogue than he was. And this went on for many years, though they prayed to God to abate it. But at last, when the wizard was getting fat and haughty upon his high stomach, a mighty deliverance came to Exmoor, and a warning, and a memory. For one day the sorcerer gazed from his window facing the south-east of the compass; and he yawned, having killed so many men, that now he was weary of it.

"Hackins," he cried, or some such oath, both profane and uncomely, "I see a man on the verge of the sky-line going along laboriously. A pilgrim, I trow, or some such fool, with the nails of his boots inside them. Too thin to be worth eating, but I will have him for the fun of the thing; and most of those saints have got money."

With these words, he stretched forth his legs on a stool, and pointed the book of heathenish spells back upward at the pilgrim. Now this good pilgrim was plodding along soberly and religiously, with a pound of flints in either boot, and not an ounce of meat inside him. He felt the spell of the wicked book, but only as a horse might feel a "gee-wug!" addressed to him. It was in the power of this good man either to go on or turn aside, and see out the wizard's meaning. And for a moment he halted and stood, like one in two minds about a thing. Then the wizard clapped one cover to, in a jocular and insulting manner; and the sound of it came to the pilgrim's ear, about five miles in the distance, like a great gun fired at him.

"By our Lady," he cried, "I must see to this, although my poor feet have no skin below them. I will teach this heathen miscreant how to scoff at Glastonbury."

Thereupon he turned his course, and plowed along through the moors and bogs toward the eight-sided palace. The wizard sat on his chair of comfort, and with the rankest contempt observed the holy man plowing toward him. "He has something good in his wallet, I trow," said the black thief to himself; "these fellows get always the pick of the wine, and the best of a woman's money." Then he cried, "Come in, come in, good sir," as he always did to every one.

"Bad sir, I will not come in," said the pilgrim; "neither shall you come out again. Here are the bones of all you have slain, and here shall your own bones be."

"Hurry me not," cried the sorcerer; "that is a thing to think about. How many miles hast thou traveled this day?"

But the pilgrim was too wide awake; for if he had spoken of any number bearing no cross upon it, the necromancer would have had him like a ball at bandoplay. Therefore he answered, as truly as need be, "By the grace of our Lady, nine."

Now nine is the crossest of all cross numbers, and full to the lip of all crotchets. So the wizard staggered back, and thought, and inquired again with bravery. "Where can you find a man and wife, one going up hill, and one going down, and not a word spoken between them?"

"In a cucumber-plant," said the modest saint, blushing even to think of it; and the wizard knew he was done for.

"You have tried me with ungodly questions," continued the honest pilgrim, with one hand still over his eyes, as he thought of the feminine cucumber; "and now I will ask you a pure one. To whom of mankind have you ever done good since God saw fit to make you?"

The wizard thought, but could quote no one; and he looked at the saint, and the saint at him, and both their hearts were trembling. "Can you mention only one?" asked the saint, pointing a piece of the true cross at him, hoping he might cling to it: "even a little child will do: try to think of some one."

The earth was rocking beneath their feet, and the palace windows darkened on them with a tint of blood; for now the saint was come inside, hoping to save the wizard.

"If I must tell the pure truth," said the wizard, looking up at the arches of his windows, "I can tell of only one to whom I ever have done good."

"One will do: one is quite enough: be quick before the ground opens. The name of one, and this cross will save you. Lay your thumb on the end of it."

"Nay, that I cannot do, great saint. The devil have mercy upon me!"

All this while the palace was sinking, and blackness coming over them.

"Thou hast all but done for thyself," said the saint, with a glory burning round his head, "by that last invocation. Yet give us the name of the one, my friend, if one there be; it will save thee with the cross upon thy breast. All is crashing round us; dear brother, who is that one?"

"My own self," cried the wretched wizard.

"Then there is no help for thee," And with that the honest saint went upward, and the wizard, and all his palace, and even the crag that bore it, sunk to the bowels of the earth; and over them was nothing left except a black bog fringed with reed, of the tint of the wizard's whiskers. The saint, however, was all right, after sleeping off the excitement, and he founded a chapel some three miles westward; and there he lies with his holy relic; and thither in after-ages came (as we all come home at last) both my Lorna's Aunt Sabina, and her guardian Ensor Doone.

While yet I dwelt upon this strange story, wondering if it all were true, and why such things do not happen now, a man on horseback appeared as suddenly as if he had risen out of the earth, on the other side of the great black slough. At first I was a little scared, my mind being in the tune for wonders; but presently the white hair, whiter from the blackness of the bog between us, showed me that it was Uncle Reuben come to look for me that way. Then I left my chair of rock, and waved my hat and shouted to him, and the sound of my voice among the crags and lonely corners frightened me.

Old Master Huckaback made no answer, but (so far as I could guess) beckoned me to come to him. There was just room between the fringe of reed and the belt of rock around it for a man going very carefully to escape that horrible pit-hole. And so I went round to the other side, and there found open space enough, with stunted bushes, and starveling trees, and struggling tufts of rushes.

"You fool, you are frightened," said Uncle Ben, as he looked at my face after shaking hands: "I want a young man of steadfast courage, as well as strength and silence. And after what I heard of the battle at Glen Doone, I thought I might trust you for courage."

"So you may," said I, "wherever I see mine enemy; but not where witch and wizard be."

"Tush, great fool!" cried Master Huckaback; "the only witch or wizard here is the one that bewitcheth all men. Now fasten up my horse, John Ridd, and not too near the slough, lad. Ah! we have chosen our entrance wisely. Two good horsemen, and their horses, coming hither to spy us out, are gone mining on their own account (and their last account it is) down this good wizard's bog-hole."

With these words Uncle Reuben clutched the mane of his horse and came down, as the man does when his legs are old, and as I myself begin to do at this time of writing. I offered a hand, but he was vexed, and would have naught to do with it.

"Now follow me, step for step," he said, when I had teethered his horse to a tree; "the ground is not death (like the wizard's hole), but many parts are treacherous. I know it well by this time."

Without any more ado, he led me in and out the marshy places to a great round hole or shaft, bratticed up with timber. I never had seen the like before, and wondered how they could want a well, with so much water on every side. Around the mouth were a few little heaps of stuff unused to the daylight; and I thought at once of the tales I had heard concerning mines in Cornwall, and the silver cup at Combe Martin, sent to the Queen Elizabeth.

"We had a tree across it, John," said Uncle Reuben, smiling grimly at my sudden shrink from it: "but some rogue came spying here just as one of our men went up. He was frightened half out of his life. I believe, and never ventured to come again. But we put the blame of that upon you. And I see that we were wrong, John." Here he looked at me with keen eyes, though weak.

"You were altogether wrong," I answered. "Am I mean enough to spy upon any one dwelling with us? And more than that, Uncle Reuben, it was mean of you to suppose it."

"All ideas are different," replied the old man to my heat, like a little worn-out rill running down a smithy; "you with your strength, and youth, and all that, are inclined to be romantic. I take things as I have known them, going on for seventy years. Now will you come and meet the wizard, or does your courage fail you?"

"My courage must be none," said I, "if I would not go where you go, sir."

He said no more, but signed to me to lift a heavy wooden corb with an iron loop across it, and sunk in a little pit of earth, a yard or so from the mouth of the shaft. I raised it, and by his direction dropped it into the throat of the shaft, where it hung and shook from a great cross-beam laid at the level of the earth. A very stout thick rope was fastened to the handle of the corb, and ran across a pulley hanging from the center of the beam, and thence out of sight in the nether places.

"I will first descend," he said; "your weight is too great for safety. When the bucket comes up again, follow me, if your heart is good."

Then he whistled down, with a quick, sharp noise, and a whistle from below replied: and he climbed into the vehicle, and the rope ran through the pulley and Uncle Ben went merrily down, and was out of sight before I had time to think of him.

Now, being left on the bank like that, and in full sight of the goodly heaven, I wrestled hard with my flesh and blood about going down into the pit-hole. And but for the pale shame of the thing, that a white-headed man should adventure so, and green youth doubt about it, never could I have made up my mind; for I do love air and heaven. However, at last came up the bucket; and with a short, sad prayer I went into whatever might happen.

My teeth would chatter, do all I could; but the strength of my arms was with me; and by them I held on the grimy rope, and so eased the foot of the corb, which threatened to go away fathoms under me. Of course I should still have been safe enough, being like an egg in an egg cup, too big to care for the bottom: still I wished that all should be done in good order, without excitement.

The scoopings of the side grew black, and the patch of sky above more blue, as, with many thoughts of Lorna, a long way under ground I sunk. Then I was fetched up at the bottom with a jerk and rattle; and but for holding by the rope so, must have tumbled over. Two great torches of bale-resin showed me all the darkness, one being held by Uncle Ben, and the other by a short, square man, with a face which seemed well known to me.

"Hail to the world of gold, John Ridd," said Master Huckaback, smiling in the old dry manner: "bigger coward never came down the shaft, now did he, Carfax?"

"They be all alike," said the short, square man, "fust time as they does it."

"May I go to heaven," I cried, "which is a thing quite out of sight"—for I always have a vein of humor, too small to be followed by any one—"if ever again of my own accord I go so far away from it!" Uncle Ben grinned less at this than at the way I knocked my shin in getting out of the bucket; and as for Master Carfax, he would not even deign to smile. And he seemed to look upon my entrance as an interloping.

For my part, I had naught to do after rubbing my bruised leg, except to look about me, so far as the dullness of light would help. And herein I seemed like a mouse in a trap, able no more than to run to and fro, and knock himself, and stare at things. For here was a channel grooved with posts on either side of it, and ending with a heap of darkness, whence the sight came back again; and there was a scooped place, like a funnel, but pouring only to darkness. So I waited for somebody to speak first, not seeing my way to anything.

"You seem to be disappointed, John," said Uncle Reuben, looking blue by the light of the flambeau; "did you expect to see the roof of gold, and the sides of gold, and the floor of gold, John Ridd?"

"Ha, ha!" cried Master Carfax; "I reckon her did; no doubt her did."

"You are wrong," I replied: "but I did expect to see something better than dirt and darkness."

"Come on, then, my lad, and we will show you something better. We want your great arm on here for a job that has beaten the whole of us."

With these words Uncle Ben led the way along a narrow passage, roofed with rock and floored with slate-colored shade and shingle, and winding in and out, until we stopped at a great stone block or bowlder, lying across the floor, and as large as my mother's best oaken wardrobe. Beside it were several sledge-hammers, battered, and some with broken helves.

"Thou great villain!" cried Uncle Ben, giving the holder a little kick; "I believe thy time has come at last. Now, John, give us a sample of the things they tell of thee. Take the biggest of them sledge-hammers and crack this rogue in two for us. We have tried at him for a fortnight, and he is a nut worth cracking. But we have no man who can swing that hammer, though all in the mine have handled it."

"I will do my very best," said I, pulling off my coat and waistcoat as if I were going to wrestle; "but I fear he will prove too tough for me."

"Ay, that her wull," grunted Master Carfax; "lack'th a Carnishman, and beg one too, not a little charp such I be. There be no man outside Cornwall as can crack that boolder."

"Bless my heart, I answered, "but I know something of you my friend, or at any rate of your family. Well, I have beaten most of your Carnishmen, though not my place to talk of it. But mind, if I crack this rock for you, I must have some of the gold inside it.

"Dost think to see the gold come tumbling out like the kernel of a nut, thou zany?" asked Uncle Reuben, pettishly; "now wilt thou crack it, or wilt thou not? For I believe thou canst do it, though only a lad of Somerset."

Uncle Reuben showed by saying this, and by his glance at Carfax, that he was proud of his country, and would be disappointed for it, if I failed to crack the bowlder. So I begged him to stoop his torch a little, that I might examine my subject. To me there appeared to be nothing at all remarkable about it, except that it sparkled here and there, when the flash of flame fell upon it. A great, obstinate oblong, sullen stone; how could it be worth the breaking, except for making roads with?

Nevertheless I took up the hammer, and swinging it far behind my head, fetched it down, with all my power, upon the middle of the rock. The roof above rung mightily, and the echo went down delven galleries, so that all the miners flocked to know what might be doing. But Master Carfax only smiled, although the blow shook him where he stood; for behold the stone was still unbroken, and as firm as ever. Then I smote it again with no better fortune, and Uncle Ben looked vexed and angry; but all the miners grinned with triumph.

"This little tool is too light," I cried; "one of you give me a piece of strong cord."

Then I took two more of the weightiest hammers, and lashed them fast to the back of mine, not so as to strike, but to burden the fall. Having made this firm and with room to grasp the handle of the largest one only—for the helves of the others were shorter—I smiled at Uncle Ben, and whirled the mighty implement round my head, just to try whether I could manage it. Upon that the miners gave a cheer, being honest men, and desirous of seeing fair play between this "shameless stone" (as Dan Homer calls it) and me with my hammer hammering.

Then I swung me on nigh to the swing of the sledge, as a thresher bends back to the rise of his flail, and with all my power descending delivered the ponderous onset. Crashing and crushed, the great stone fell over, and threads of sparkling gold appeared in the jagged sides of the breakage.

"How now, Simon Carfax?" cried Uncle Ben, triumphantly; "wilt thou find a man in Cornwall can do the like of that?"

"Ay, and more," he answered; "however, it be pretty fair for a lad of these outlandish parts. Get your rollers, my lads, and lead it to the crushing-engine."

I was glad to have been of some service to them; for it seems that this great bowlder had been too large to be drawn along the gallery, and too hard to crack. But now they moved it very easily, taking piece by piece, and carefully picking up the fragments.

"Thou hast done us a good turn, my lad," said Uncle Reuben, as the others passed out of sight at the corner; "and now I will show thee the bottom of a very wondrous mystery. But we must not do it more than once, for the time of day is the wrong one."

The whole affair being a mystery to me, and far beyond my understanding I followed him softly without a word, yet thinking very heavily, and longing to be above-ground again He led me through small passages to a hollow place near the descending shaft, where I saw a most extraordinary monster fitted up. In form it was like a great coffee-mill, such as I had seen in London, only a thousand times larger, and with a heavy windlass to work it.

"Put in a barrow-load of the smoulder," said Uncle Ben to Carfax, "and let them work the crank, for John to understand a thing or two."

"At this time of day!" cried Simon Carfax; "and the watching as has been o' late!"

However, he did it without more remonstrance, pouring into the scuttle at the top of the machine about a basketful of broken rock; and then a dozen men went to the wheel and forced it round as sailors do. Upon that such a hideous noise arose as I never should have believed any creature capable of making; and I ran to the well of the mine for air; and to ease my ears, if possible.

"Enough, enough!" shouted Uncle Ben, by the time I was nearly deafened; "we will digest our goodly bowlder after the devil is come abroad for his evening work. Now, John, not a word about what you have learned, but henceforth you will not be frightened by the noise we make at dusk."

I could not deny but what this was very clever management. If they could not keep the echoes of the upper air from moving, the wisest plan was to open their valves during the discouragement of the falling evening; when folk would rather be driven away, than drawn into the wilds and quagmires, by a sound so deep and awful coming through the darkness.

CHAPTER LIX

LORNA GONE AWAY

Although there are very ancient tales of gold being found upon Exmoor, in lumps and solid hammocks, and of men who slew one another for it, this deep digging and great labor seemed to me a dangerous and unholy enterprise. And Master Huckaback confessed that up to the present time his two partners and himself (for they proved to be three adventurers) had put into the earth more gold than they had taken out of it. Nevertheless he felt quite sure that it must in a very short time succeed, and pay them back an hundred-fold; and he pressed me with great earnestness to join them, and work there as much as I could, without moving my mother's suspicions. I asked him how they had managed so long to carry on without discovery; and he said that this was partly through the wildness of the neighborhood, and the legends that frightened people of a superstitious turn; partly through their own great caution, and manner of fetching both supplies and implements by night; but, most of all, they had to thank the troubles of the period, the suspicions of rebellion, and the terror of the Doones, which (like the wizard I was speaking of) kept folk from being too inquisitive where they had no business. The slough, moreover, had helped them well, both by making their access dark, and yet more by swallowing up and concealing all that was cast from the mouth of the pit. Once, before the attack on Glen Doone, they had a narrow escape from the King's Commissioner; for Captain Stickles, having heard, no doubt, the story of John Fry, went with half a dozen troopers on purpose to search the neighborhood. Now if he had ridden alone, most likely he would have discovered everything; but he feared to venture so, having suspicion of a trap. Coming as they did in a company, all mounted and conspicuous, the watchman (who was posted now on the top of the hill, almost almost every day, since John Fry's appearance) could not help espying them, miles distant, over the moore-land. He watched them under the shade of his hand, and presently ran down the hill, and raised a great commotion. Then Simon Carfax and all his men came up, and made things natural, removing every sign of work; and finally, sinking underground, drew across the mouth of the pit a hurdle thatched with sedge and heather. Only Simon himself was left behind, ensconced in a hole of the crags, to observe the doings of the enemy.

Captain Stickles rode very bravely, with all his men clattering after him, down the rocky pass, and even to the margin of the slough. And there they stopped, and held council, for it was a perilous thing to risk the passage upon horseback between the treacherous brink and the cliff, unless one knew it thoroughly. Stickles, however, and one follower, carefully felt the way along, having their horses well in hand, and bearing a rope to draw them out, in case of being foundered. Then they spurred across the rough boggy land farther away than the shaft was. Here the ground lay jagged and shaggy, wrought up with high tufts of reed, or scragged with stunted brush-wood. And between the ups and downs (which met any body anyhow) green-covered places tempted the foot, and black bog-holes discouraged it. It is not to be marveled at that amid such place as this, for the first time visited, the horses were a little scary; and their riders partook of the feeling, as all good riders do. In and out the tufts they went, with their eyes dilating wishing to be out of harm, if conscience were but satisfied. And of this tufty, flaggy ground, pocked with bogs and boglets, one especial nature is that it will not hold impressions.

Seeing thus no track of men, nor anything but marshwork, and storm-work, and of the seasons, these two honest men rode back, and were glad to do so. For above them hung the mountains, cowled with fog and seamed with storm, and around them desolation, and below their feet the grave. Hence, they went, with all good-will, and vowed forever afterward that fear of a simple place like that was only too ridiculous. So they all rode home with mutual praises, and their courage well approved: and the only result of the expedition was to confirm John Fry's repute as a bigger liar than ever.

Now, I had enough of that underground work, as before related, to last me for a year to come; neither would I, for sake of gold, have ever stepped into that bucket of my own good-will again. But when I told Lorna—whom I could trust in any matter of secrecy as if she had never been a woman—all about my great descent, and the honeycombing of the earth, and the mournful noise at even-tide, when the gold was under the crusher, and bewailing the mischief it must do, then Lorna's chief desire was to know more about Simon Carfax.

"It must be our Gwenny's father," she cried; "the man who disappeared underground, and whom she has ever been seeking. How grieved the poor little thing will be if it should turn out, after all, that he left his child on purpose! I can hardly believe it; can you, John?"

"Well," I replied, "all men are wicked, more or less, to some extent, and no man may say otherwise."

For I did not wish to commit myself to an opinion about Simon, lest I might be wrong and Lorna think less of my judgment.

But being resolved to see this out, and do a good turn, if I could, to Gwenny, who had done me many a good one, I begged my Lorna to say not a word of this matter to the handmaiden until I had further searched it out. And to carry out this resolve, I went again to the place of business, where they were grinding gold as freely as an apothecary at his pills.

Having now true right of entrance, and being known to the watchman, and regarded (since I cracked the bowlder) as one who could pay his footing, and haps would be the master when Uncle Ben should be choked with money, I found the corb sent up for me rather sooner than I wished it. For the smell of the places underground, and the way men's eyes come out of them, with links, and brands, and flambeaux, instead of God's light to look at, were to me a point of caution rather than of pleasure.

No doubt but what some men enjoy it, being born, like worms, to dig, and to live in their own scoopings. Yet even the worms come up sometimes, after a good soft shower of rain, and hold discourse with one another; whereas these men, and the horses let down, come above ground never.

And the changing of the sky is half the change our nature calls for. Earth we have, and all its produce (moving from the first appearance, and the hope with infant's eyes, through the bloom of beauty's promise, to the rich and bright fulfillment, and the falling back to rest); sea we have (with all its wonder shed on eyes, and ears, and heart; and the thought of something more)—but without the sky to look at, what would earth, and sea, and even our own selves, be to us?

Do we look at earth with hope? Yes, for victuals only. Do we look at sea with hope! Yes, that we may escape it. At the sky alone (though questioned with the doubts of sunshine, or scattered with uncertain stars) at the sky alone we look, with pure hope and with memory.

Hence it always hurt my feelings when I got into that bucket, with my small-clothes turned up over, and a 'kerchief round my hat. But knowing that my purpose was sound, and my motives pure, I let the sky grow to a little blue hole, and then to nothing over me. At the bottom Master Carfax met me, being captain of the mine, and desirous to know my business. He wore a loose sack round his shoulders, and his beard was two feet long.

"My business is to speak with you," I answered, rather sternly; for this man, who was nothing more than Uncle Reuben's servant, had carried things too far with me, showing no respect whatever; and though I do not care for much I liked to receive a little, even in my early days.

"Come into the muck-hole, then," was his gracious answer; and he led me into a filthy cell, where the miners changed their jackets.

"Simon Carfax," I began, with a manner to discourage him, "I fear you are a shallow fellow, and not worth my trouble."

"Then don't take it," he replied! "I want no man's trouble."

"For your sake I would not," I answered; "but for your daughter's sake I will; the daughter whom you left to starve so pitifully in the wilderness."

The man stared at me with his pale gray eyes, whose color was lost from candle-light; and his voice as well as his body shook, while he cried:

"It is a lie, man. No daughter and no son have I. Nor was ever child of mine left to starve in the wilderness. You are too big for me to tackle, and that makes you a coward for saying it." His hands were playing with a pickax-helve, as if he longed to have me under it.

"Perhaps I have wronged you, Simon," I answered, very softly; for the sweat upon his forehead shone in the smoky torch-light: "if I have, I crave your pardon. But did you not bring up from Cornwall a little maid named 'Gwenny,' and supposed to be your daughter?"

"Ay, and she was my daughter, my last and only child of five; and for her I would give this mine, and all the gold will ever come from it."

"You shall have her, without either mine or gold, if you only prove to me that you did not abandon her."

"Abandon her! I abandon Gwenny!" He cried, with such a rage of scorn, that I at once believed him. "They told me she was dead, and crushed, and buried in the drift here; and half my heart died with her. The Almighty blast their mining-work if the scoundrels lied to me!"

"The scoundrels must have lied to you," I answered, with a spirit fired by his heat of fury; "the maid is living, and with us. Come up, and you shall see her."

"Rig the bucket!" he shouted out along the echoing gallery; and then he fell against the wall, and through the grimy sack I saw the heaving of his breast, as I have seen my opponent's chest in a long, hard bout of wrestling. For my part, I could do no more than hold my tongue and look at him.

Without another word we rose to the level of the moors and mires; neither would Master Carfax speak, as I led him across the barrows. In this he was welcome to his own way, for I do love silence, so little harm can come of it. And though Gwenny was no beauty her father might be fond of her.

So I put him in the cow-house (not to frighten the little maid), and the folding shutters over him, such as we used at the beestings; and he listened to my voice outside, and held on, and preserved himself. For now he would have scooped the earth as cattle do at yearning-time, and as meekly and as patiently, to have his child restored to him. Not to make long tale of it—for this thing is beyond me, through want of true experience—I went and fetched his Gwenny forth from the back kitchen, where she was fighting as usual with our Betty.

"Come along, you little Vick," I said, for so we called her: "I have a message to you, Gwenny, from the Lord in Heaven."

"Don't 'ee talk about He," she answered. "Her have long forgatten me."

"That He has never done, you stupid. Come and see who is in the cow-house." Gwenny knew; she knew in a moment. Looking into my eyes, she knew; and hanging back from me to sigh, she knew it even better.

She had not much elegance of emotion, being flat and square all over; but none the less for that her heart came quick, and her words came slowly.

"Oh, Jan, you are too good to cheat me. Is it a joke you are putting upon me?"

I answered her with a gaze alone; and she tucked up her clothes and followed me, because the road was dirty. Then I opened the door just wide enough for the child to go to her father, and left those two to have it out, as might be most natural. And they took a long time about it.

Meanwhile I needs must go and tell my Lorna all the matter; and her joy was almost as great as if she herself had found a father. And the wonder of the whole was this, that I got all the credit, of which not a thousandth part belonged by right and reason to me. Yet so it almost always is. If I work for good desert, and slave, and lie awake at night, and spend my unborn life in dreams, not a blink, nor wink, nor inkling of my labor ever tells. It would have been better to leave unburned, and to keep undevoured, the fuel and the food of life. But if I have labored not, only acted by some impulse, whim, caprice, or anything, or even acting not at all, only letting things float by, piled upon me commendations, bravoes, and applauses, almost work me up to tempt once again (though sick of it) the ill-luck of deserving.

Without intending any harm, and meaning only good in deeds, I had now done serious wrong to Uncle Reuben's prospects. For Captain Carfax was full as angry at the trick played on him, as he was happy in discovering the falsehood and the fraud of it. Nor could I help agreeing with him, when he told me all of it, as with tears in his eyes he did, and ready to be my slave henceforth. I could not forbear from owning that it was a low and heartless trick, unworthy of men who had families; and the recoil whereof was well deserved, whatever it might end in.

For when this poor man left his daughter asleep, as he supposed, and having his food, and change of clothes, and Sunday hat to see to, he meant to return in an hour or so, and settle about her sustenance in some house of the neighborhood. But this was the very thing of all things which the leader of the enterprise, who had brought him up from Cornwall, for his noted skill in metals, were determined, whether by fair means or foul, to stop at the very outset. Secrecy being their main object, what chance could there be of it if the miners were allowed to keep their children in the neighborhood? Hence, on the plea of feasting Simon, they kept him drunk for three days days and three nights, assuring him (whenever he had gleams enough to ask for her) that his daughter was as well as could be, and enjoying herself with the children. Not wishing the maid to see him tipsy, he pressed the matter no further, but applied himself to the bottle again, and drank her health with pleasure.

However, after three days of this, his constitution rose against it, and he became quite sober; with a certain lowness of heart, moreover, and a sense of error. And his first desire to right himself, and easiest way to do it, was by exerting parental authority upon Gwenny. Possessed with this intention (for he was not a sweet-tempered man, and his head was aching sadly), he sought for Gwenny high and low; first with threats, and then with fears, and then with tears and wailing. And so he became to the other men a warning and great annoyance. Therefore they combined to swear what seemed a very likely thing, and might be true, for all they knew; to-wit, that Gwenny had come to seek for her father down the shaft-hole, and peering too eagerly into the dark, had toppled forward and gone down, and laid at the bottom as dead as a stone.

"And thou being so happy with drink," the villians finished up to him, "and getting drunker every day, we thought it shame to trouble thee; and we buried the wench in the lower drift; and no use to think more of her, but come and have a glass, Sim."

But Simon Carfax swore that drink had lost him his wife, and now had lost him the last of his five children, and would lose him his own soul, if further he went on with it; and from that day to his death he never touched strong drink again. Nor only this, but being soon appointed captain of the mine, he allowed no man on any pretext to bring cordials thither; and to this, and his stern hard rule, and stealthy secret management (as much as to good luck and place), might it be attributed that scarcely any but themselves had dreamed about this Exmoor mine.

As for me, I had no ambition to become a miner; and the state to which gold-seeking had brought poor Uncle Ben was not at all encouraging. My business was to till the ground, and tend the growth that came of it, and store the fruit in Heaven's good time, rather than to scoop and burrow like a weasel or a rat for the yellow root of evil. Moreover, I was led from home between the hay and corn harvests (when we often have a week to spare), by a call there was no resisting, unless I gave up all regard for wrestling, and for my county.

Now here many persons may take me amiss, and there always has been some confusion, which people who ought to have known better have wrought into subject of quarreling. By birth it is true, and cannot be denied, that I am a man of Somerset; nevertheless, by bread I am, as well as by education, a son of Devon also. And just as both our two counties vowed that Glen Doone was none of theirs, but belonged to the other one, so now, each with hot claim and jangling (leading even to blows sometimes), asserted, and would swear to it (as I became more famous), that John Ridd was of its own producing, bred of its own true blood, and basely stolen by the other.

Now I have not judged it in any way needful, or even becoming or delicate, to enter into my wrestling adventures, or describe my progress. The whole thing is so different from Lorna, and her gentle manners, and her style of walking; moreover, I must seem (even to kind people) to magnify myself so much or at least attempt to do it, that I have scratched out written pages, through my better taste and sense.

Neither will I, upon this head, make any difference even now, being simply betrayed into mentioning the matter, because bare truth requires it, in the tale of Lorna's fortunes.

For a mighty giant had arisen in a part of Cornwall, and his calf was twenty-five inches round, and the breadth of his shoulders two feet and a quarter, and his stature seven feet and three-quarters. Round the chest he was seventy inches, and his hand a foot across, and there were no scales strong enough to judge of his weight in the market-place. Now this man—or I should say, his backers and his boasters, for the giant himself was modest—sent me a brave and haughty challenge to meet him in the ring at Bodmintown on the first day of August, or else to return my champion's belt to them by the messenger.

It is no use to deny but that I was greatly dashed and scared at first. For my part, I was only, when measured without clothes on, sixty inches round the breast, and round the calf scarce twenty-one, only two feet across the shoulders, and in height not six and three-quarters. However my mother would never believe that this man could beat me; and Lorna being of the same mind, I resolved to go and try him, as they would pay all expenses, and a hundred pounds, if I conquered him, so confident were those Cornishmen.

Now this story is too well known for me to go through it again and again. Every child in Devonshire knows, and his grandson will know, the song which some clever man made of it, after I had treated him to water, and to lemon, and a little sugar, and a drop of *eau de vie*. Enough that I had found the giant quite as big as they had described him, and enough to terrify any one. But trusting in my practice and study of the art, I resolved to try a back with him; and when my arms were round him once, the giant was but a farthing-