

yet it struck him suddenly that if those *had* been the missing two he was seeking, it would have been just the same. The night would have swallowed them up just as swiftly and as certainly, and he would never have known.

In spite of the pride of his young manhood, a forlorn, helpless feeling brought the tears into his eyes, and a sob climbing up into his throat. He laid his arms upon the coping, and his head upon his arms; and if at that moment a wish would have taken him home, he would have been standing the next instant on the little bridge over the Staneslow brook, with Boskyfield looking down upon him from the ridge of the grassy hill.

A heavy step passed him, paused, and came back again, and a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

'My lad,' said a deep strong voice, carefully subdued to an undertone; 'if you're in trouble, as you seem to be by the looks of you, don't be thinking of it *here*, of all places in this great, God-forsaken town.'

'Why not?' asked Oliver, looking up with a start of surprise.

It was a very tall man who was standing over him, long and lank both in figure and face, with a thin fringe of beard beneath a long square chin. It was too dark to see the expression of the face, but the voice sounded kindly.

'Why not?' repeated Oliver. 'What harm is there in the place?'

'It's full of temptation—for some,' said the man, after a pause. 'I don't know, though, now I come to look at you, whether you're one of them.'

He glanced at the dark water flowing silently beneath them; and Oliver understood him.

'I know what you mean,' he said, quietly. 'But I don't want to die, though I was miserable enough just now. I've something that I must do first—if only I could get it done.'

'What is it, then?' asked his new companion, leaning against the low wall as if he was in no hurry to be gone. 'Yours is a different complaint from most. It's

mostly something that they've had and lost, or something that they want and can't get. What is it you want to do?'

Oliver hesitated a moment. He had told a part of his story to so many strangers that he had almost forgotten to be shy about it. But there was something in this man's voice and manner that seemed to ask for more than a half-confidence; and yet—he had never seen his face before!

'Wait a bit,' said the stranger, abruptly, while he still hesitated. 'I said a word at random just now, and I'll take it back, for it's one that shouldn't be spoken. I called this town "*God-forsaken*," and He knows that if I really thought that He had forgotten it, or any other place where poor folks live, I might be jumping off this bridge myself, instead of trying to stop other folks doing it.'

'I've seen places hereabouts that looked like enough to that,' said Oliver, gloomily. 'It seemed easy enough up at home to think that He knew and cared about us all; but by the looks of some of yon streets—'

'Ay! looks! *looks!*' broke in the other, in almost passionate tones. 'But we mustn't go by looks. Some of us *daren't*, for fear we should go crazy, and curse God, and die. He is *Love*. That's the first thing I heard about Him, and I hold on to that. When I lose that I'll lose all.'

'They taught us so, up yonder, at home,' said Oliver, half to himself, looking down at the swiftly-flowing river. 'But I could think sometimes that I'd come here just to find out for myself whether it's *true*.'

'So much the better for you, if you fight through with it,' said his new companion. 'So you're country bred, are you? You may as well tell me, if it's no secret, what's brought you here?'

Oliver hesitated no longer. What he was looking for was easy enough to tell, but to his own surprise he found himself going further, and telling this stranger the whole story—all that he had not told to Mr. Wilmot or to his uncle, that he had hardly owned even to himself.

The darkness seemed to make it easy to