

"I have no Christmas gift for you, Adrian. I have just stolen down here because it is Christmas morning, to tell you something of my unspeakable happiness. I am afraid sometimes when I think of it, dreading always that something may mar it soon."

"Nay, my wife, we have had our share of clouds, and our sun is shining now, that is all. Has my wife nothing to ask from me, no request to make on Christmas day?"

"None," she answered; "none at all."

I have one thing to say to you, Barbara, and it must not bring a cloud upon my darling's face to-day. You will remember, I do not doubt, that on the 11th of next month your brother will be a free man again."

"I remember," she said faintly, not knowing what was coming.

"Then we will go down to Dartmoor together, Barbara, and meet him with words of comfort and hope for the future. I have been thinking much of him of late, and I think it will be better for him to go abroad at once. Your grandfather and I have talked it over. We wanted to provide the wherewithal, but it is my right to stretch out the first helping hand to him—afterwards he can give or send him what he pleases. You understand I look upon it as a sacred duty—as a thank-offering for past and present mercy extended to you and to me."

Merry voices in the hall, the sound of feet approaching the library, disturbed them, but Barbara found time to draw her husband's face close down to hers, to try and whisper something of the gratitude and unspeakable love welling up in her heart.

A gay party walked across the crisp, whitened fields to the church of Abbot's Lynn. Only Ethel noticed the unusual stillness of Lady Severne. Also in church she saw, when her head was bent in prayer, two tears steal through her fingers and that all through the service her eyes were dim.

What wonder? Deep joy moves to tears, and there was deep, thankful, unutterable joy that Christmas morning in the heart of Barbara Severne.

THE END.