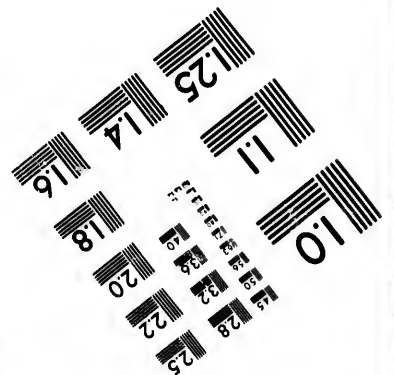
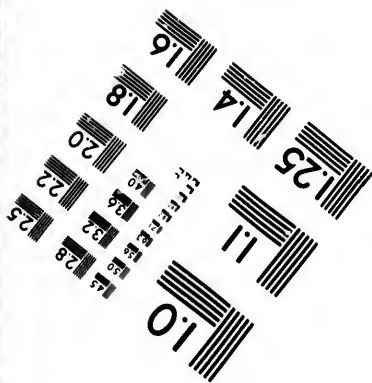
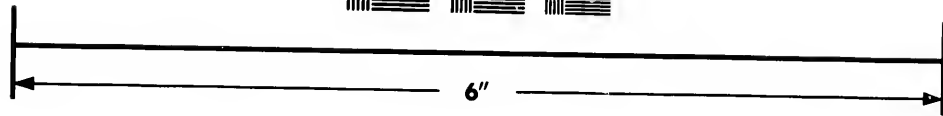
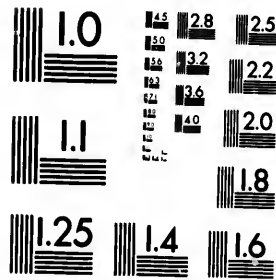


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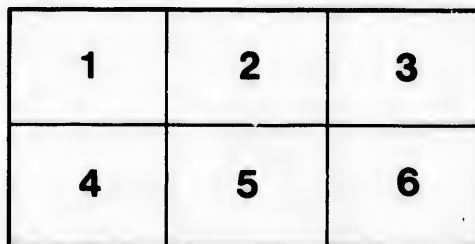
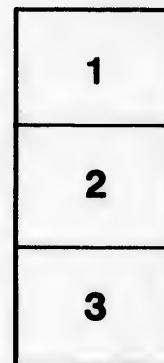
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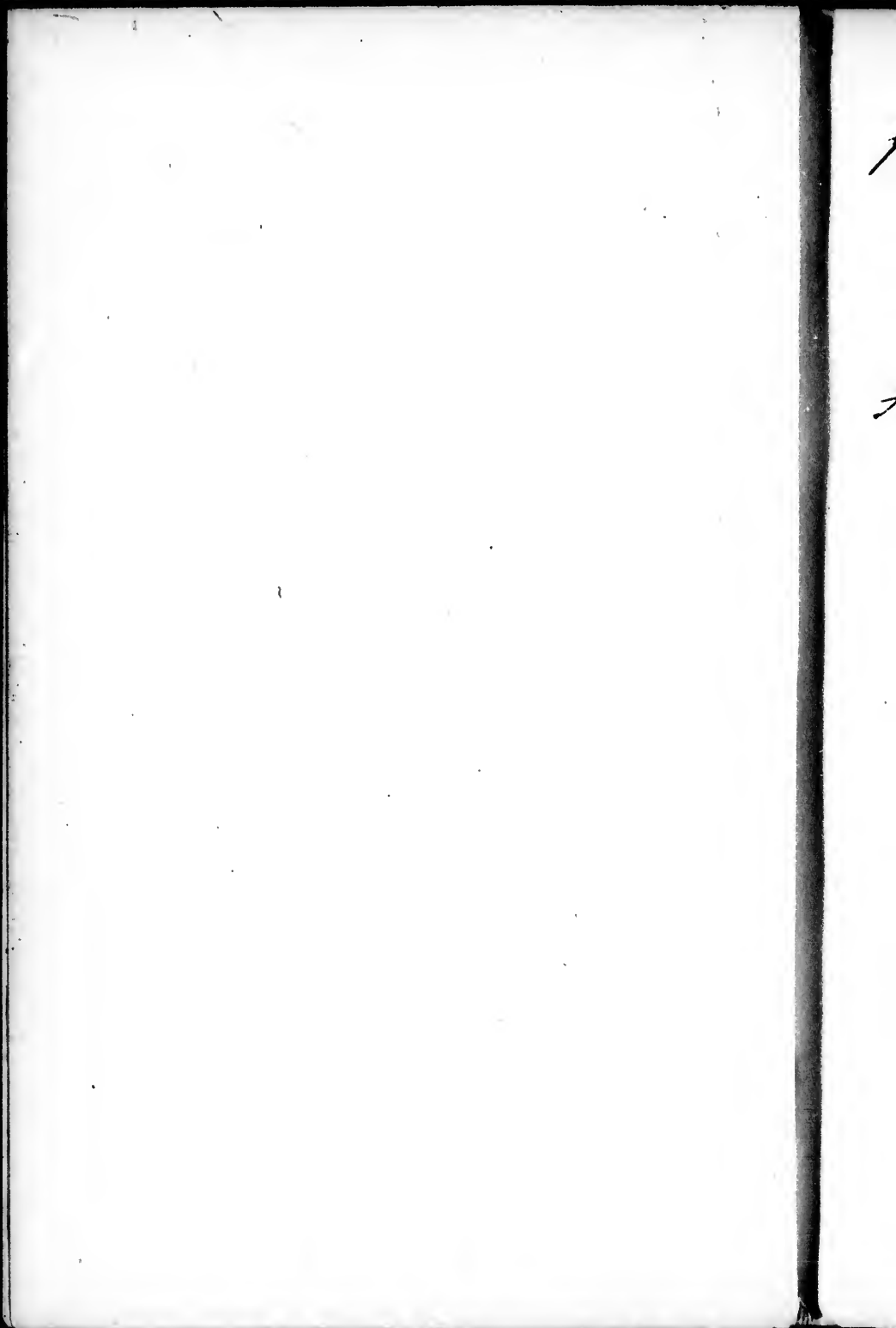
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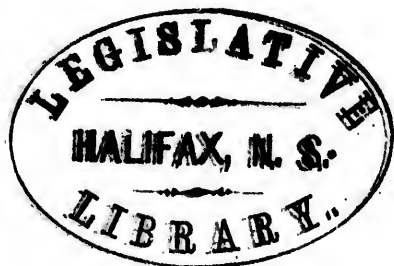
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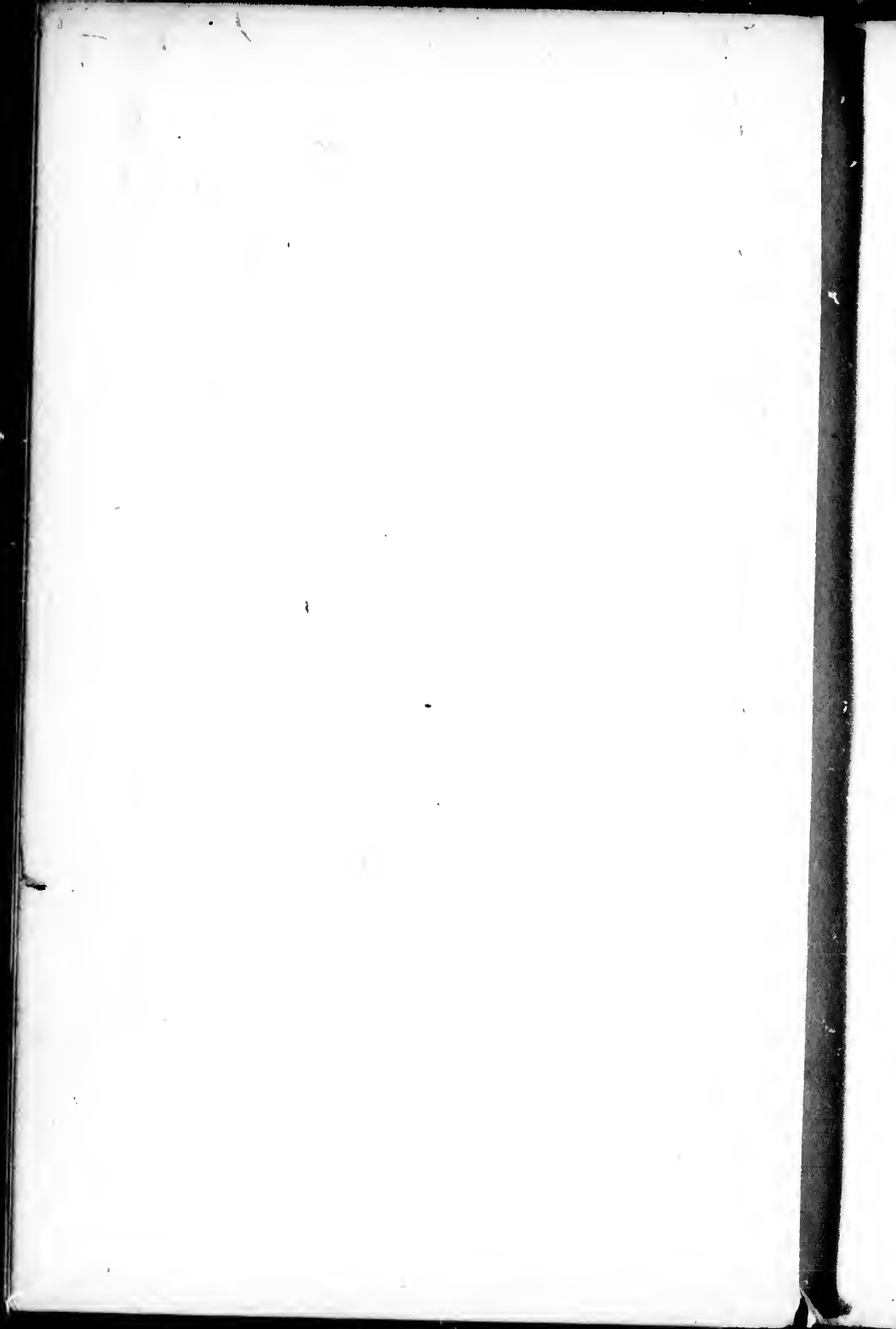


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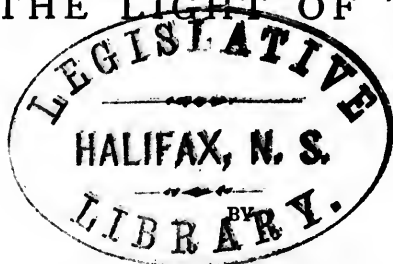
WEARITHORNE.





WEARITHORNE;

IN THE LIGHT OF TO-DAY.



AUTHOR OF "INGEMISCO" AND "RANDOLPH HONOR."

— "this dream of mine—
Being now awake, I'll queen it no inch further,
But milk my ewes, and weep."—*Winter's Tale.*

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WEARITHORNE.

I.

How the wind flitteth
In and out the halls !
Unseen robes trailing,—
Lightest foot that falls ;
Murmur and laughter,
Weird and soft-suppress,—
How mem'ries wander here,
And never rest !

Blue the flames flicker
In the yawning hearth,—
Leaping and dancing,
Yet withouten mirth.
Far in dark corners
In and out they glide ;
Out from dim corners, eyes
Just peer, and hide.

“AY, ay, he'll ha' need o' a long spoon, if so
be he's bound for to sup porridge wi' Auld
Nick,—that will my young Mester o' Wearithorne.
An' so he's find out for himsen, one o' thoe days,
mayhap.”

“He's none so far wrong, my man, there,” put
in another and a shriller voice. “He's nobbut
right at the most o' times, is my man. But about
t' young Squire, now ; why, I were in an' out here

at Wearithorne, under Marget like, when he were but a bit laddie; and for all he were a stiff one, I've niver clapt eyne on a finer bairn."

The young Squire?

The words, coming through the open window of Naunty Marget's great cheery kitchen, stayed me in my loitering past it across the courtyard. The young Squire? Tidings of him? With more of interest than of mere girlish curiosity, I stopped, and leaned with both arms on the window-ledge.

I hardly deepened the shadow there, which the swaying ivy-bough had flung before, across the lattice. There was little risk of my being observed. All were assembled round the hearth, where, until the summer evenings set in hopelessly, my good old friend Marget, sole guardian of Wearithorne, or "The House," as it was known in the neighborhood, was wont to keep a light fire crackling away, by way of companionship in her loneliness.

But the present was as far removed from loneliness as it could be by four or five old wives assembled there, and more than one or two among them with "her man." The dark-blue belted smock, or the short-waisted frock-coat, a-glitter with its rows of metal buttons, made the shadows to the picture, where gay flames lighted up gayer kirtles and short-gowns, and high-crowned white caps. The flames glanced, too, upon the great oak dresser, with its burnished pewters flashing out from floor to roof; and on the oak-beamed roof

itself and its suspended frame, garlanded with oat-cake and garnished with pendants of cured hams and legs of mutton.

Yet the picture was too large a part of my own life to hold my attention, as a picture, even for a moment. No roof in all the dale—ours up at the Hag only excepted—beneath which these good gossips were not used to meet thus, to hear or to tell some new thing under cover of the click of the knitting-pricks. These “sittings,” however, were chiefly in the winter evenings; and it must be a choice bit of gossip indeed, to draw the men here now.

So it was no wonder I had loitered when I heard a deep bass mingling in the chorus of the knitting-song which was dying away as I set foot on the courtyard pavement.

All this while the conversation had gone on. A third voice,—it was Meg o’ Birkdale’s:

“Eh, Bessy, happen ye may make us a’ believe, as ye believe yersen, as t’ sun rises and sets in yer man yonder. But,” went on the scornful spinster, nothing heeding the little laugh that went round the circle,—“but t’ young Squire,—that’s quite another make o’ a thing. As ye say, he *were* a stiff one when he were a bairn, an’ flitted away fro’ Wearithorne it’s fifteen year ago this summer; an’ I am thinking he’s be but a stiff one yet. And—though it’s no all day long an’ ivery day as men-folk’s wide enough awake to run a

proverb straight, let be a plow—yet I'll say this for yer Adam yonder, this time,—he's be right enough; it's ill supping porridge wi' Auld Nick wi' a short spoon. An' I misdoubt the young Squire's is none o' t' longest. What's that, Bessy? He's no call for to sup porridge wi' Auld Nick? Happen ye're right there, an' we all say that same. It's t' way o' t' world, leastways in our dales. When Auld Nick spreads his feast, we tuck our head o' one side, not to see who's sitting anent us, an' we dip on after t' savory porridge wi' our poor little spoon o' good intentions. But betimes t' spoon falls with a ring in t' empty platter, an' we turn our head in a vast o' hurry—to find our queer friend flitted, mayhap, but wi' him t' porridge as we'd fain ha' suppered on. It's none so pretty-behaved in us: if we're friends to t' gift, it's no for us to be fremd to t' giver. If nought wunna serve t' young Mester but coming back here to Wearithorne an' shutting us out o' t' common an' setting up a factory as 'll ruin a' our trade i' weaving an' knitting,—if nought wunna serve him but this, why, then, I say, let him sup wi' s' Auld Nick. But let him make his manners, beg a spoon o' his, an' fall to it so,—not rattle his 'good intentions' in our face to pleasure us, as if we were bairns, an' have it talked about as he's bound for to improve our dales and us."

Truly, Meg o' Birkdale was generally credited with knowing the most profitable way of supping

with Auld Nick—and saving her soul too, perhaps; for she never had the worst of any bargain. But I grew impatient of her over-long harangue, being more eager for text than for commentary. I was not one to take warning until the day came when my own spoon fell with a ring upon the empty platter.

But I never thought of myself, so intent was I on gaining something more of the strange news.

“But, Meg,” remonstrated the other (I had looked round for a sharper answer from Naughty Marget, but she was not in the room), “what ails ye at t’ Mester, to miscall him this gate? One ’ud think as ye’d be main glad to see Wearithorne wi’ a Lethwaite again under t’ auld roof, and a Lethwaite as has gotten his pockets lined wi’ gold away off in t’ Indies, they do say, and’s bound for to ha’ builders down fro’ York for to build up t’ House braw an’ fine again, as’ll be a credit to t’ dale. For it’s been but a dree House this many a year, it has.”

There was a general murmur of assent, and an “It’ll pleasure Marget rarely, t’ day t’ Mester comes back to his own.” But there had been a half-suppressed, doubtful “Humph” from one or two among the men, and Adam knitted his brows darkly over the knitting-pins in his great, brown, clumsy, skilful fingers.

Meg had shrugged her shoulders, while she took up the word again:

"I'll none miscall t' Mester, Bessy. But I'll say just this: It's a kittle thing, it is, to come back here fro' foreign parts, be they London city or across t' seas, and bring wi' him such a rubble o' new-fangled notions as'll take thoe bread-winners straight out o' yer hands," she added, with a nod, as she held up her own knitting, while the firelight flashes came and went upon the steel. "How many bump-caps can ye knit a day? Well, what time div ye think to make again' this new-fangled machinery, as they say as he's to set up in a stretch o' t' common?"

"T' common, as we'n gi'en up to t' sheep to pick a mouthful on," muttered Adam, with the grim frown gathering again.

"Eh, but ye'll mind it's no just to say t' common," put in Bessy, deprecatingly. "It's but a bit o' t' Lethwaite estate as has lain waste on t' edge o' t' common."

"Common or no common,"—this time there were voices more than two or three that took the question up,—“t' beasties ha' had t' range o't for so long, it's ill shutting them out now.”

"And for one o' t' proud Lethwaites to demean himsen wi' building a mill,—an' that on t' ruin o' t' auld castle as has been a pride an' a show in t' dale! Why, many's t' sixpence as my Kit's earned fro' travelling bodies passing by t' cottage, as were speering t' road to t' auld place."

"And it's here an inclosure-bill, and there an in-

closure-bill, till there'll be niver an acre o' waste land in a' t' Ridings."

"Eh, well," cried Bessy, dropping her knitting forgotten on her knee, while she looked round from one to another with a broad face of blank dismay, "if it's althegether such a kittle cast to play, this about t' mill, what for dunnot ye go to t' poor laddie and warn him?"

She was broken in upon by the mocking laugh of Meg o' Birkdale.

"Ay, ay, I'se go fetch away t' torrent o' Har-draw in t' hollow o' my hand; and at after, I'se wait a wee to gather strength afore I strive to turn t' current o' a Lethwaite's will. Go to t' poor laddie an' warn him, did she say?"

"Him as wanna be warned by his feyther, mun be warned by his stepfeyther."

It was Adam o' Linn Brig's gruff voice said that. He was a man of few words, leaving the burden of conversation generally, with a somewhat scornful indifference, to his good wife Bessy. But what he said he meant; and somehow a shuddering thrill ran through me as I listened to the familiar saying from his lips.

Perhaps it made the same impression upon others; for a dead pause followed it, in which the crackling of the flames, and the click-click of the knitting-pricks, had space to make themselves distinctly heard,—until Bessy spoke, presently, in a hushed voice.

“Whisht!” she almost whispered, her eyes fixed on the inner door; “it’s Marget’s coming back.”

Guilty glances were exchanged from one to another,—they had evidently been talking treason, and dreaded lest some shadow of it might have stamped its brand upon the brow. Some one coughed: there was an uneasy movement—

When, suddenly, Meg o’ Birkdale’s shrill and somewhat quavering, yet still powerful voice struck up the air of a familiar knitting-song. It either had broken the spell, or was a secure refuge from embarrassment; for every voice chimed in, while the sturdy figures were rocking to and fro in the swaying, keeping time with busy tossing hands which rose and fell with the old rhythm:

“Twa bonny sheep ’at strayed afield the day,
The mirk November day, the lee-long weary day;—
(Hie, Rockie! run, Rockie, run!)
Twa bonny sheep ’at strayed afield the day;
Fause Helbeck’s tinkle calls across the brae,—
Down Shunnor-fell the mists lurk a’ the way,—
(Run, Rockie, run!)
The fause snow fa’s as fast as blooms i’ May,
Eleven sheep we’n lost the weary day,
And ane we fun’.”

And then, on the next row,—

“Ten sheep we’n lost the lee-long weary day,
And twa we fun’.”

But I had already crossed the court before that second sheep was found, and the chorus only fol-

lowed me upon my way; for, though I meant to seek out Marget presently, I had no mind to be caught there at the window; and I knew well, if I loitered, Naunty Marget's keen eyes would not fail to detect me.

So I stole away from the open window, and stood hesitating. Should I go home? or for awhile into the library,—my usual refuge when the house-keeper was not at my disposal?

Home?—it was an empty sound to me at best. At worst, it was drear and hard as its line of rock-bound cliffs rising up yonder to the southeast of the courtyard where I loitered, and barren as the moor that stretched between. But here the moor was shut out. Glimpses of smooth pastures dotted over with browsing cattle, these limes and oaks gave between breeze-lifted boughs. The moat sweeping about the rising ground where stood the House, and dividing in twain the prim garden with its stiff flower-beds and multiform clipped hedges, was overgrown with shrubs and weeds and blossoming eglantine; and here a crossing of felled trees, all green and mossy, replaced the vanished drawbridge and led into the square paved court. This in former days of danger had been walled, and strengthened by rude arched and turreted portals; but time and neglect had crumbled these,—ivy and lichens had overrun their fragmentary remains. The court was now but a grassy vestibule, inclosed on three sides by the gray mansion itself,

with its steep, uneven roofs, overhanging balconies, and small, pointed watch-tower at every frequent angle added and superadded by successive Lethwaite generations. It *was* all this, I say. I speak in the past; not because the few years passed since then have had power to change Wearithorne, but that to me there is no Wearithorne now.

I am writing of that sunset, however,—not of this; and that sunset, I hesitated but for a moment, then turned to a side-door, and so to the library.

This time it was not the books there I had come to see. With the conversation I had overheard fresh in my mind, I crossed the room straight to where the wide-open bay-window threw a flush of sunset on the two portraits hanging near.

Fifteen years ago, said Meg o' Birkdale,—fifteen years since Mrs. Lethwaite flitted with her bairn from Wearithorne, just when Uncle Kester came back from sea to his old neighborhood, bringing me—a desolate, tiny creature—with him to his home at Mallerstang. Why I always connected that coming and that flitting, I do not know. Marget, from whom I had the story, certainly did not so connect them. But the instincts of childhood have strange wisdom in them sometimes. In all these years, since first my roaming steps had found the way from Mallerstang, I had been stealing in here where the light fell on the portraits, and gazing up with a cold shrinking from the fair,

slight woman whose haughty glance met mine, and with a wondering interest in the sturdy little lad looking at me frankly over his hound.

"Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." Happen, if my Eden of Wearithorne had not been shut out from me by the flaming sword of Uncle Kester's wrath, I might not have crept back so often, a-hungred and a-thirst, into the shadow of the tree of knowledge in the old library there.

And the last draught of stolen waters is the sweetest. That last sunset——

It is fading out so soon in the great, dim library, —the dimmer for its dusky alcoves, and its carven wainscoting of oak, and the high, deep windows in their embrasures. Thrown wide as those windows are, shadows are gathering in too fast, for all my stooping low upon the hearth-rug, with the open page aslant in the fire-glow.

For a pile of books, lying evidently just unpacked before one of the bookcases, had drawn me away from the pictures. No new thing had ever arrived to Wearithorne before, in all my memory of it. And so every volume seemed a herald of the Master's coming. A new book? Many an old one on the walls here was a special friend of mine. But for a new one,—setting aside some "Flower of a Sweet Savor Pluckt in the Meadows of Grace," which Letty would bring

home at rare long intervals from some chance peddling body down the dale,—setting aside these, I did not know so much as the back of a new book.

And now I held one in my hand. I turned to the title-page. Yes, actually,—London, 1822. It seemed to bring the great unknown world there very near to me, in some strange way. I stood gazing at it dreamily; and then I settled myself within the glow of the fire, kindled, I nothing doubted, to drive out the damps by way of preparation for the Master's home-coming,—in some indefinite time.

I had already loitered away my spare half-hour, and risked Uncle Kester's anger. Having been pound foolish, why should I not be penny wise, and gather all the pleasure here I could, before I went home to the gloom of Mallerstang?

For my two eyes are fairly taken captive in the dainty little volume. No wonder I lose myself in it; for as the letters grow confused and dim before me, and I raise my head, it seems the room has taken up the thread of the poem just where the book left off. For all is gloom and silence; on the dark oak beams, and on the panels of the wainscoting, at every movement of my own, or every leaping flame, my

“Shadow still

Glowers about, as it would fill

The room with wildest forms and shades;”

and presently, outside upon the courtyard flags,—

“the still! footfall
Of one returning homewards late.”

Was it outside in the court? or was it the mere echo of the verse I have been reading? I listen,— stoop down closer to the fire-flicker once again, and read on, till now the words are wavering out to one blurred line before me. Why could not the daylight have tarried yet five minutes more, nor “left me dark, upon” — not the legend, but the “Eve of St. Mark”?

I lift my head with a little groan of vexation, pushing my hair back from my brow impatiently with my free hand. And as I lift my head—

Can he have been standing there all this while? When did he come? How did I not hear him? True, I had left the door ajar.

And there he was, standing on the other side of the wide hearth, leaning against the chimney-piece, looking down upon me with a twinkle of suppressed amusement in his eyes.

It was the merest glance I lifted up in my confusion. I dropped my eyes again with just the dimmest image of a strong-built figure in a shooting-jacket, a bronzed, bearded face, and a keen, answering glance that seemed to be reading me through and through.

“Pardon me,” he said, quickly, as I rose from my place on the hearth-rug; “I’d not have startled

you, but thought some spell was on you,—you were so deep in your book.”

“I—I did not know any one was ben,” I stammered. “I only thought to find Naunty Marget, and that I might come in as usual.”

“And so you may,” he hastened to say. Then, as his eyes fell on my dress, kirtle and bodice,—“You come to help the old dame in the house, perhaps?”

“No; but——”

“Well, but?”

“She whiles lets me arrange the books in here, and——” And then I stole a swift glance at my questioner. It lacked courage to risk encountering his, but took a reassuring survey of top-boots, stained, evidently, with a tramp across our moors, and of a stout oaken staff he was twirling idly in his careless hold,—such a rude staff as Uncle Kester himself might use in climbing the fells. No, of course it was not Miles Lethwaite. Some one up from York, about the repairing of the House? I pictured to myself the Master of Wearithorne driving through the long lime-avenue with carriage-and-four and outriders, according to Naunty Marget’s description of the day when his mother had brought the lad to take possession of the estate inherited from his uncle, the old Master, whose only child had some few years before quitted her home with her lover, been disowned, and never more heard of.

"You'll be a stranger here at Wearithorne?" I asserted, rather than asked, my embarrassment vanishing before the moorland splashes on those boots, and my sense of responsibility in Marget's absence prompting me to speak.

"A stranger to Wearithorne? Yes, a stranger," he repeated, slowly. "But you know it well, I have no doubt?"

"It's no late days I've known it; the auld House is an auld friend to me," I answered, complacently. "Naunty Marget lets me arrange the books yonder, and when she goes to the May-tide Fair, at Askrigg, or to the Hawes market whiles on a Tuesday, she'll leave me in charge the day, and I aye spend it in here."

"In this lonely, dusk old room? Surely you might choose some more cheerful spot,—or is it all equally dreary?"

"It's no for a stranger to lightlie Wearithorne," I said, hotly, my cheeks aglow for the honor of the old place. "It's the pride of the country-side. It's many a cheery spot there is about the House; but none so grand as this, to my thinking. And dreary! why, there are the books, and, if one were a bit lonesome, there are the pictures, too."

He had gone forward toward these as I spoke, and he now stood looking at them by the firelight.

"There is a portrait-gallery besides?"

"A grand hall, throng with Lethwaites, besides those four there. Yon proud lady is the Mrs. Leth-

waite now," I added, coming forward, as I had seen Marget do the honors to visitors now and then.

"Yon proud lady!" he repeated, and his eyes had a twinkle in them as they dropped down on mine. "And the lad there, is he proud too?"

"I'm feared he is not proud enough by half,"—the conversation I had overheard round Marget's fireside coming back to me. "That's to say, only I'll none believe it, but they do say he's to put up a mill here in the dale. After biding away this many a year—and it's no a right thing for land-owners like the Lethwaites of Wearithorne to bide away, and leave lands and tenants to go awry, as they are bound to do," I added, decidedly, recalling a sharp complaint which had once, and but once, escaped Naunty Marget,—“after this, for a Lethwaite to come back, and, instead of just guiding the estate, like his forbears——”

I stopped, suddenly aware that I was doing the honors after another fashion than Marget's. A Lethwaite's will was, to her, as little to be questioned as a law of Nature.

"And so a mill is thought a bad prop to a falling house, eh, lassie?"

The tone was grave and thoughtful; but I answered it quickly.

"There's naught tottering about Wearithorne. The Master's coming home with both hands full from foreign parts. And—happen it's you have come to build the mill?" I interrupted myself.

"You are right. I have come to build the mill."

"Are you for guiding the master that gate?" I asked, quickly. Then, seeing him puzzled, "Is it your advice, I mean, leads him to this?"

It was as though my earnestness amused him, for he laughed a little, as he answered,—

"Solely and entirely my advice. I am, I may say, responsible for the whole business."

Certainly this man was to be looked upon in the light of an enemy to all our dale. To thrust his great grinding wheels in here, and ruin the market for our spinning and weaving!

But when I did look up at him, he did not altogether resemble the relentless tyrant I had been figuring to myself, crushing down the whole country-side beneath the groaning weight of his machinery. He would carry out his will; there was that in the strong lines of the face, and the steady light in the gray eyes. But was it like to be a cruel will? Could Adam o' Linn Brig and the others possibly be wrong?

Yes, I hated the man, I said to myself, and I turned from him rather decidedly, when he gave me the last reply. I was moving away, with some murmur of sending Marget to him if he wanted her.

"I saw your old friend some moments ago," he replied. "Don't call her from her knot of gossips, busy knitting over my arrival. You are going? Yes; but first you must forgive me this mill-business, and next you must tell me your

name. You are from the neighborhood,—from some part of the Wearithorne estate, perhaps?"

"I am Nannette o' Kester o' Mallerstang Hag," said I, stopping, with my hand on the latch of the door, and turning, with rather a defiant ignoring of the first demand.

"But what a very long name, lassie! Nannette O'Kester O'Mallerstang Hag! Surely the whole is rather inappropriate. Fie on our dale names! O'Mallerstang Hag!"

I laughed outright, forgetful of my righteous indignation.

"Eh, but that is not my name, of course. I just belong to 'Kester of the Mallerstang Hag—that is the highest point in Helbeck Lund—across the moor yonder."

"Now I begin to understand. You are Kester's Nannette. And the Hag—was that not once a part of the Wearithorne possessions?"

"Mrs. Lethwaite's own,—left to her by the old Master; for she was of the Lethwaite blood, as well as her husband. She let Uncle Kester buy out the Hag years and years ago."

"And what, then, is your surname, Nannette, since it is not o' Kester o' Mallerstang Hag?"

I was puzzled. I had never given a thought to that before. I could only say that I had never heard it,—that Uncle Kester was just Kester o' Mallerstang, as Adam was Adam o' Linn Brig, and Davie, o' Burtree-syke. And in the midst of

my explanation, the latch was lifted under my hand, the door opened, and Marget stood there on the threshold.

Naunty Marget—I see now, as I saw then, the quaint, small figure, in kirtle which made no attempt to hide the buckled shoes and tight blue stockings; and over the kirtle the crimson short-gown, with its kerchief pinned across, as snowy as the high-crowned cap itself. That cap framed in, with its edge of real lace, a face wrinkled and round and rosy as a frosted winter apple,—with somewhat of the tartness of a winter apple, too, in the glint of the eyes beneath bands of hair as white as crinkled hoarfrost, and in the crisp, clear voice.

“Guide us!” she exclaimed, the instant she saw me. “How came the bairn in here? Mester Miles, but I was ye wanna think hard——”

Mester Miles!

I heard but little of the excuses she was offering for my intrusion. “Mester Miles!” Then it was to the Master of Wearithorne himself that I had been explaining his duty, recounting his sins of omission and commission. I stood ready to cry with shame and confusion of face.

That telltale face must have betrayed me; for he was looking down upon me kindly, and saying,—

“Our good Marget is rather hard upon me, in believing me churl enough to be sorry you should

make friends with my books in all this time I have neglected them. I hope you will still come for them at your own pleasure." (Here Marget quietly shook her head at me.)

"There, run away now, child," she said, in speech which, if more audible, was no whit more intelligible than that gesture. "Bide a blink in the spence,—the folk are gone the now,—and I'll set thee part o' the way home."

I heard her, without the most distant intention of waiting for her and perhaps her lecture. I had drawn back when Mr. Lethwaite directed his attention to Marget; and now, catching up my hat where I had let it fall before the pile of books, I stole out of the room.

Glancing over my shoulder as I went, I saw that Miles Lethwaite was stooping for the book I had left upon the hearth-rug. But if I thought, in glancing back thus, to find the Master looking after me, I was mistaken. He had resumed his leaning posture against the mantel, and was speaking to Marget, whirling the leaves of the book over idly while he stood.

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II.

All the wind makes solemn moan,—heart in-chimeth to its tone,
“Deserted.”

Dreary gloaming settleth down,—shutteth out the gleaming town,
Shutteth in the moorland brown

Where the heather lieth dead, and the nest the wild swan fled,
Deserted,
Rattles dry the reeds among, that all greenly overhung
Once, where summer burnie sung.

Hushed that song. The pebbles strown mark the burnie's bed
alone,
Deserted,

And my life its summer race ran from out yon greenwood chase,
And cold gravestones mark its place.

“UNCLE Kester.”

Further than that, even my audacity would not go, unless he held out some reply, as the despot of old extended his sceptre that his maidens might proceed. This despot of Mallerstang—ruler absolute over Letty, the middle-aged maid-of-all-work, and his little niece—was not wont to hold out any very gracious sceptre. But he did grant a hearing after his own fashion.

“Humph!” As who should say, “Women will talk,—it's their infirmity; I'se be indulgent to it this once.”

“Uncle Kester, Wearithorne has gotten its owner back.”

Kester’s pipe fell to the floor with the great start he gave. At which, I glanced across to him curiously.

It was dim there in the house-place. The great chimney, projecting with its two walls five or six feet into the room, threw a black shadow across to me here in the deep-cushioned window. But the light was full on Kester’s heavy, blue-smocked figure in the arm-chair, with old Rockie blinking up between his paws in the opposite wide chimney-corner. The peat-fire glow did not steal out far enough to chase all the shadows over the white stone floor, nor to peer into the space yonder where the cumbrous black-and-gilded dresser, and chest of drawers, and queer, quaint desk, and the benches set out in a square at the far end, were almost lost in the wide emptiness. As for my window, it hardly lessened the gloom, with its checker of diamond-panes on the rocky courtyard in front, and its outlook over the rugged, barren gorge of Helbeck Lund, which sank abruptly down beyond the courtyard. Any time within my memory, if I had glanced across the twilight room, just the same sight would have met me; only, I suppose, in earlier days, Rockie was younger,—never Kester. They were always the same,—those evenings we spent alone together on the Hag,—Letty having departed with the day to her own cottage under-

neath the eastern slope; those evenings when Kester would smoke his pipe steadily on and on, throwing me a word about as often, and after the same fashion, as he, niggard as he was, would throw a bone to Rockie, who, in his corner opposite, had been growing old in patient waiting ever since I could remember.

But certainly it was not often I could remember that any words of mine were of such moment that at them Kester had started and let his pipe fall.

But he recovered himself and it almost before I had space to wonder,—refilled, relighted, and puffed away again, as if his equanimity had been in no wise shaken. Yet that did not blind me. If I had told him Ivelet Hall was opened once again; or if I had brought him any tidings of Davie o' Burtree-syke,—who was Uncle Kester's enemy-in-chief, because his nearest neighbor,—the news would not have won more than another humph, and the pipe would never have been moved thereby. What interest, then, could Wearithorne have for him?

Whether he knew I had not broached the topic merely to let it fall, and shrewdly guessed I would take it up again if left to myself, he did not reply, but lounged with his head against the chair-back, his half-shut eyes turned upward to the beams overhead. I saw his trap, but fell into it deliberately.

“I am thinking you ken all about them, Uncle

Kester. You'll none have forgot the old Squire's time, when the young lady made that flitting with her braw lover from far away. D'you no think it were hard in the old Squire to cast her off, and leave Wearithorne and all to only a cousin, instead of his own granddaughter?—though for sure the Master is of the Lethwaite blood by father and by mother as well. But do you reckon he is come back to stay? And will the House be as gay as the grand places one reads of?"

He answered me, puffing slowly between the words—

"Ye mun tell me first if t' mistress be yon. He's no like to bide there his lone."

"But that I didna hear."

"Ye saw naught o' any leddy there, lass?"

Certainly the subject seemed to interest him, who seldom thought it worth his while to listen to anything I had to say. He was leaning forward for my answer now.

"Nay, I saw naught. He was his lone there in the library. Uncle Kester,"—with a seemingly abrupt change of subject,—“what is my name besides Nannette?"

He pushed his chair back, staring at me hard, staring with a gathering scowl upon his heavy brows.

"Her name? Her name besides Nannette?"

The effect of my question was so disproportionate to the cause, that I was slow to believe

Kester really incensed by it. He must have misunderstood me.

"My surname, I mean," I hastened to explain. "Though we fash ourselves but little with surnames here in the dales, yet I must have one, I suppose; and still I never heard it."

"Who's putten that question to thee?"

There was that in the tone of his voice which made mine shake, as I replied,—

"I was up yonder in the library at Wearithorne, and Mr. Lethwaite asked——"

I broke off for the curse growled out at me. Kester said, furiously,—

"Lethwaite? Up by yon wi' him? Nay, I'se none ha' that, ye daft hempie; t' neb o' ye's ne'er out o' mischief."

"But, Uncle Kester, I was in no mischief. I went up yonder to see Naunty Marget."

"Marget or Lethwaite, housekeeper or master, it's no odds to me. Thou's feel t' weight o' my hand yet, an I catch thee stealing off to Wearithorne, hearkening an' gossiping wi' a when ne'er-do-well gallants as that. Off to thy chamer, now, and keep away fro' Wearithorne, or we's make a moithering mess between us, thou an' I. Now, mind; dunna let my warning leak out o' thy silly head."

For the instant I thought to set him at defiance. But there was no mistaking the scowl that drew the shaggy grizzled brows together, the clenched

grasp that tightened on the arm of the chair, as he raised himself slowly. "Thou's feel t' weight o' my hand yet."

I did not wait for it. I brushed past him, out through the open door, before he could lay hold on me. I heard him stumbling about in the waning firelight, and cursing me while he stumbled, for I had snatched up the one dim candle on the table as I passed, and slammed the door behind me.

My "silly head" was puzzling greatly over it, as I obeyed at least one part of his warning, and went up-stairs to my chamber under the roof. There are but the two stories beneath this old peat thatch. There is many a nook and cranny, however, for the lodging of the wind; and just at an angle in the wide stone stairs, that same free guest rushed past, and blew out my candle.

Many a time, dreading the dark, I would have stolen down-stairs again after a space; for Kester's rages usually soon cooled into the contemptuous indifference with which he would suffer me to creep back, as if unobserved, to my old seat in the chimney-nook.

But to-night I did not dare return, and I threw my latticed window wide, and leaned out for some break in the gloom. But clouds had gathered; there was not even the pale spectre of a shrouded moon to break up the dull gray, and on the moor the low, red glimmer in the peat-huts was already smothered for the night. But presently I caught

a far-off twinkling light among the limes over the moor,—a friendly glance from Wearithorne.

For Wearithorne was my old friend; never Wearithorne to me, but always a sure haven of restful dreams, such as the weary never have. Yet the owners must have found reality in the name, certainly,—the Weary Thorn or stronghold; for it had been left to itself more than twice or thrice for a long stretch of years since its first building, which tradition tells of, by the knight who, weary and restless even in his grave, is said still to haunt the north terrace sometimes on a stormy night. But to me Wearithorne was just an old, dear, peaceful refuge. Afterward, it might have its aching memories; but that night of which I write, I knelt on and watched its cheery light. Would Kester have me shut even that out?

It shut itself out. But it lingered awhile first. It had been shining there like a star. There were no stars then, below or above. But Kester must have found another light, for there was a pallid checker thrown from the house-place across the court beneath. How unusually late Kester was sitting up!

I dare say I had been there long enough for him to think me fallen asleep, for just then he came out into the court, closing the house-door cautiously. If he had given it a bang behind him, my curiosity would never have awakened; but as it was, it started into full life when I saw him stand

looking up at my window, from which I had involuntarily drawn back, and then, with deliberately noiseless tread, take his way across the court.

I watched. He went to the scar's brink, just where my wonted path to Wearithorne stoops like a ladder to the cleugh of Helbeck Lund. Few could have taken that way down the Hag's steep face, save in the giddy plunge the foamy gill makes there. So burly, heavy Kester turned him about—for the more circuitous path down the meadow-slopes behind the Hag, and so round the northern verge of Helbeck Lund? I would see. If it were to Wearithorne, the old clock on the stair must ring out twelve before Kester could return.

Yet perhaps he had come back unseen by me? I could creep down noiselessly, and find out, so that I might not watch in vain.

Rockie just moved his tail and blinked up at me drowsily from the hearth; his master's place opposite was empty, even of his chair. That had been dragged forward to the old desk I had never seen unlocked before. But the lid was up now, and a candle flickered on papers strewn about confusedly.

All in the same handwriting; all with the yellow tinge of time and faded characters. Who respects a letter when the writer's hand is crumbled in the dust? But the soul thus laid bare—Is the curtain of the grave indeed so dense? If other eyes than

mine could ever rest upon these pages, should I sleep on in the grave and never know ?

Perhaps I ought not to have drawn nearer, but it was without intent that my eyes fell on a paper, and saw, in the clear writing that is read at the first glance :

“ My poor little one, who soon will be alone in the world, if you do not come for her——”

Kester had come for me when my mother lay a-dying,—so he had told the neighbors, Marget said. From whom, then, but from my mother, could this defaced fragment of a letter be? I had nothing of hers, not so much as a memory, not so much as a word wrung out from Kester. Should he, then, keep these back from me ?

The candle was sputtering low on the shelf above the desk. So I dropped down on the hearth, to read by the peat-glow, that only made a circle of light about me and left the rest in shade. I stole a timid glance round now and then. But though at first I started at the scamper of a rat behind the wainscot, as I read on, the old, lonely, shadowy room faded far away from me. I was living a new life,—yet in the shadow of a grave.

There was but little in the packet. What there was, I mastered, crouching there and never moving until I had finished all.

I could not read at first. I could but gaze and gaze, as though I saw my mother's hand stretched back to me out of the haze of all these years.

And had I not always been the thing of naught that I was now? My slow tears fell in soft self-pity there where she had pitied me. "My poor little one." No one had ever said such words to me before,—not even my one friend Marget. Perhaps Marget, indeed, never knew I needed them; perhaps she thought that, for the life I led, I required to be hardened, not softened. For herself, she would have scorned a sympathy that found vent in words, and believed honestly in the Psalmist's "rather smite me friendly, and reprove me." And so that tenderness came to me as a revelation.

My mother! I had thought of her now and again,—envied the girls I saw kneeling at the kirk, or walking in the lanes beside broad, comfortable, cheery, country dames, whose slow eyes would take on a smile of pride in resting on them. But I had been wont to put away such thoughts in scorn. I knew Kester,—I knew, too, the whole countryside said he and his brother were just such birds of evil omen as one would look to see fly abroad out of the same nest. I hated Kester. I believed as firmly as our neighbors that a curse was over Malerstang, and no good could come out of it. My mother was linked with it in my mind; for what could she be who could wed a man like Kester?—Kester, whom I scorned even more than I hated,—than I feared. I drew my breath hard, kneeling in the kirk, when I could not choose but hear the

solemn "Honor thy father and thy mother." What honor, but forgetfulness, for mine?

But I read on now, and envied no one any more. My mother, in her unknown grave, was nearer to me than those dames were to the daughters I had watched with wistful gaze at kirk and market-place. My mother! Sleeping on, her eyes shut to the world in which I am alone, surely some dream must come to her of her little one; some thought must creep out to me from her, even curtained in beneath the turf that haps her from me,—in her unknown grave.

I read on, crouching in the dull blaze, and pressing open, on the hearth, those pages where the glow might fall on them. Now and again my other hand stole up to brush away tears that would spring unbidden between me and my mother's words. And then it fell to my side, and I started; for Rockie had thrust his muzzle lovingly against it, edging nearer from his corner. I stroked the shaggy head close to my knee. My mother's tenderness had made me very tender for the moment.

I think even then I would have borne all her words with me always, though that stained and faded packet were replaced in the desk. It is long since I last looked on it, yet I think I could set down its every line as it was written. But of what avail? "Their memorial is perished with them." To what purpose were it to seek to revive it here?

Yet they write themselves down as I glance on

this blank page. I see that letter to Kester, without date or signature, and breaking off as if the hand that penned it had been stopped by the sudden clasp of Death's fingers. And I see the fragment of a journal gayly begun in the quiet of a country life. In the smooth and even flow of such a life the shadow of a passing event is reflected far, as on a placid river a sail throws its magnified semblance nearly across from bank to bank.

A passing event? Nay; but it brooded,—deepened,—presently darkened every page with its undefined shadow of evil to come.

And here a hundred wondering thoughts rushed in to interrupt me. What was Kester's brother, that my mother, such as she was written down here, could have been deceived in him for an instant? Where was the Hall at which he could be a guest? Could he have made his way there as an unknown adventurer? If I dared ask Kester! If!

After this were briefer and briefer entries. No more glowing glimpses of the fells, or of the deepening blush of the ling over the moor; no more jotting down of legend, ballad, or romance; for the girl was living her own. So do we all,—a true romance, even though it seem the dullest prose to passers-by, who read by snatches, as some gust whirls an open leaf. But we can never tell it to another. It would not be our own if we could

hold it out from us, and scan and criticise, and point the moral, as if the experience that made it had not grown to be a part of ourselves.

And then the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death on the last page :

“So near the end, and so alone, save for the little one. ‘Nothing but harshness for me at home,—no love any more,’ I wrote above. The words were prophetic ; but it was I threw off the care I have lived to see was the truest then.

“I have not even heard of my forfeited home—of the old man—for this year past. I have made no inquiry, since I dared not venture back. But I have written to Kester to come to me, and I must hope he will undertake my errand, faithfully, as one will keep a dying message. If he will take my little one to my lost home,—if he who was as a father to me, lives, and will be a father to my child,—I think I should know it, even in the grave.

“It is for him this last page is written,—to him I will send this journal, brought with me when I left home. For no other eyes than his. I would have no one else know how my husband and the father of my child forsook me, when for him I was disinherited.”

That last part,—so unlike the blithe beginning,—and, she said, “for no other eyes than his.” While still I knelt there on the hearth, I tore it from the rest, and dropped it on the embers. No other eyes should look on it henceforth.

I watched it smoulder and flare up, then fall back to ashes black as the record it had borne. She said, "I would have no one know." In her words was none of that fierce anger throbbing in me as I flung the paper to the flames. I forgot the traitor to her was my own father. I think I have never rightly remembered it. I remembered only he was traitor to her,—more cruel than even Kester to me. Kester—Kester's brother,—how could she have ever linked her fate with theirs?

The journal had been difficult to make out. Not that it was illegibly written, but that where her lover's name and every other name of person or of place had been set down, the word was erased, and so roughly that oftentimes the sentence or the sense of the page was obscure. There was but the one exception,—the one mention of Kester,—probably overlooked, since it was less legible than the rest; and I had to stoop nearer to the fire to decipher it. No other names remained, but were erased so roughly that one could hardly think it the work of her hand. There were, moreover, blurs and marks upon the pages, that made me suspect Kester of fingering them. Could he have any motive in blotting out those names?

The very thought of Kester startled me. I had forgotten him this while, but I sprang up now, and with a complacent glance at the candle, which would be burnt out in another moment, I went up to my own room.

Perhaps Kester would come in in the dark, lock his desk, and never discover the loss of the packet until—well, I knew Kester went but seldom to that desk. He was not much given to reading anything whatever, and he might not know of the loss for any length of time. I bolted my door fast upon his anger for that night, at all events. Afterward, if he did miss the letters, I would own to having them; for were they not more mine than his? But it was as well to put off that evil hour with a fast-drawn bolt.

I listened for his coming after I was safely there. I had lost my interest in his walk, to Wearithorne or not to Wearithorne. I was waiting only to learn whether he would discover the loss of my packet at once.

The clock struck twelve. I had thrown myself upon the bed, hiding those papers under my pillow, leaning my cheek upon them, listening again and over again, between sleeping and waking, to the words they spoke. And I had fallen asleep, perhaps in the first doze, which always seems to have lasted so long when one is awakened from it; when I started, open-eyed at once. Was that a creaking, an ascending foot?

I lay awake and listened a long time after that, and then I felt assured it must have been Kester's step on the stair which had aroused me. Where could he have been, then, save at Wearithorne?

III.

—the shattered panes patter to the dreary rains,
“Deserted!”

And the wind is whistling shrill, curtains through, the spider still
Droppeth to the window-sill;

And the hospitable door standeth open evermore,
Deserted.

Yet guests enter even there,—underneath the great stone stair
Death-owl hideth from the glare.

WAS I—must I not be—dreaming? What
could it all mean?

Kester had been calling me most vociferously some ten minutes before. And I, with a guilty conscience concerning the porridge, which I had quite forgotten since Letty left it in my charge as she went down to her own cottage, had crept away, hiding myself in the shippon, if not out of reach of Kester's voice, at least beyond that of his heavy hand. Let him fume over the porridge, which was smoked, perhaps. That he should be suppered thus unsavorily, concerned me just as little as that I should go supperless concerned him. For not a doubt but that Uncle Kester would make haste to throw out the last drop of which, scorched or not scorched, I might perhaps have managed to make my evening meal, keen-set as I was with my late ramble and with fasting since a noontide dinner.

But, yet, what was hunger, compared to the need of keeping out of Uncle Kester's sight until his wrath should have time to cool down?

So I had ensconced myself in the shippon, by way of a reprieve, at least. And, perching myself upon the window-ledge in the remotest corner, I was knitting away slowly, in the dark, with a feeling of some sort of companionship in my work in this lonely place.

For it was very lonely now, and quiet. Some weeks ago, if I had crept here in the weird, long dusk, the rocky floor and the old rafters would have given back the patient tramp of auld Crombie and Snowdrop, of Lightfoot and the others, that, since now the summer days came on, had all been turned into the meadow-lands beneath the Hag. Poor dumb beasties! Many's the time, since I were a little one, I've stolen out here in the gloaming, and set the horn lantern down upon this window-ledge, where it made a misty circle of light through the frosty atmosphere, hazy with the warm, fragrant breath of the slow kine; many a time have I crept up near to you, where you stood quietly ruminating, and have laid a rough little head on my two hands upon your shaggy neck, in the dumb, half-conscious reaching out after something like affection. To this day I can never make my way in the twilight over the strip of cobled pavement, leading from the house-place and into the shippon, without feeling again that aching empti-

ness of the child-heart which had not only no love to receive, but none to give.

But that evening it was lonelier in there, and not so lonely. Not a sound broke the stillness around me, unless it were the occasional flapping back, upon a broken hinge, of the shutter of the unglazed window which let in the hoarse, deep mutter of the Helbeck in the gorge beneath the Hag. But to me there came other sounds than of that brawling voice of the stream below,—tones that found their echo somewhere, while I stopped to listen, my hands falling idly with the knitting in my lap, and my cheeks flaming with a sudden flush, as though I were not alone here in the dusk; as though some one were looking down until my lashes drooped again; as though some one were speaking,—common words enough, perhaps.

Weeks had gone by since I was last at Wearithorne, the evening of the Master's home-coming. In those weeks, more than once and again, by beck and syke, along the pasture-lands, and in my errands to the shop auld doited Bess made shift to keep upon the Sedbergh pike, had my path been crossed, by strangely-frequent chance, with the rambling path of Wearithorne's master. Indeed, only last evening—

“Nannette, ye nowt! An ye be ben, an' dun-not answer when I ca' t' ye——”

“Nay, nay, mester,” I heard another voice take up the word, “t' lass is no to t' fore. What for

d'ye want to shout so after her, as it 'ud bring her up fro' t' vera grave, an she were biding quiet in it? We're none wanting a rush o' a lass i' this matter o' ours, I reckon," was added, with a grim chuckle, which I recognized at once as Adam o' Linn Brig's.

"I'm none wanting her," Kester said, sullenly. "I'm nobbut wanting for to win at her, if so be she's bound for hearkening an' spying hereabout."

"Eh, but what ails ye at her, Kester? T' las-sock's well enough; it's very pretty behaved she is, an's bonnier than's good for my Laurie. I'm feared," he added, in an undertone. "Not but what I'm none so set again' t' marriage, neighbor," quickly, as if in answer to something in the other's face: "it's t' missus. But let a-be, let a-be; if we's win through this job thegether, as is friendly, who knows what we's do for to be more friendly and neighborly still?"

"Look ye here, Adam," returned Kester, bringing his stick with heavy emphasis down on the stones (I had peered out cautiously from my window, and saw them just a hand's-cast off, Adam having swung himself on the stone wall fencing in the farmyard, and Kester standing before him), "it'll be best wi'out melling wi' yon lass. Not but what I'd be main glad to get shut on her, and 'ud wish your Laurie joy on his bargain,—which is, mayhap, no worse than another, for women's kittle cattle althegether. But a bargain's a bargain, and there were no question o' t' lass i'

ours. I'se go wi' ye t' length o' yer own foot i' this mill-business, by reason that I hate yon Lethwaite. You and t' other chaps get shut o' t' mill as 'ud steal t' common away fro' ye,—that's yer side o' t' bargain. And I get my grudge on yon Lethwaite,—that's my side. And so we's leave t' lass, as has naught to do wi' it."

I pressed back closer into the shadow, for I could hear how Adam swung himself heavily to the ground. He might pass this window, going homeward down the slope behind the Hag.

"Ye's come down now, then, Kester, and see t' other fellows, an' tell un yersen as how it's a' done,—leastways, ready for making an end on't itsen?" Then, with a hard laugh,—

"I'se warrant yon chap at Wearithorne ill dreams the night, for all he thinks to come blithering an' bothering about i' t' dale, an' to ruin us a' wi'out any trouble to himsen. We's gie him his pains for his payment, an' quarry his building-stone for him to boot. He'll happen wake to think as t' crack o' doom's come for sure, an' t' devil's grup-pit him afore his time."

Kester's laugh was always a sneer.

"Ay, ay. Folk say as it's a sly mouse sleeps i' t' cat's ear, but I am thinking it's a daft one."

Then the slow and tramping tread, which had learned its slowness and its weight on plowed fields and rough moorland pastures; and then silence and solitude.

They were both gone down,—not a soul up here on the Hag but only me.

I listened for a long, long pause; and then I lifted myself from my crouching posture in the shadow, and pushed my hair back from my temples with my two hands. There was such a pressure there,—such a weight of dulness. And I must rouse myself to instant thought. There was no time to be lost.

“I’s e warrant yon chap at Wearithorne ill dreams the night,” had said Adam o’ Linn Brig; and “I’s e go wi’ ye t’ length o’ yer own foot i’ this mill-business, by reason that I hate yon Lethwaite,” had been Kester’s words. What could they mean? Some great injury to the Master of Wearithorne. But at Wearithorne? or at the mill?

As this last query put itself to me, I sank down in a helpless, trembling terror on my old seat in the window. At the mill? And Miles Lethwaite told me, only last evening, that for the past three nights he had been going, secretly, not to alarm his mother, to spend them at the mill; for now that the building was fairly under way, he thought best to keep some watch upon it, as the whole project seemed rather in disfavor in the neighborhood. I had turned away somewhat abruptly from the subject then; for with no one was it in more utter disfavor than with me. But if I had only questioned him,—if I could only know——

I started to my feet. If I could only know!

And was I to sit trembling there, and Miles Lethwaite unwarned? Was I to tarry, shivering over my own fears, when this very moment it might be——

The thought had not had time to complete itself before I had flung wide the shippon-door, had crossed the broad rock-level which spread like a courtyard before the house, and was making my way down from the cliff.

It might be called rather a ladder than a path which clammers down the face of the scar, or hag. For the space of a few yards from the summit it is smooth enough,—too smooth, did not matted ling-and-whin-bushes offer some stay. But then it stoops beneath the brow, and only jutting ledges form a broken sort of stair down to the cleugh of Helbeck Lund. The place is weird and fearful as its name,—shut in by gaunt walls that here are rent in a chasm, there stoop away into a dim, cavelike cleft,—never open out to yield more than a wishful glimpse of the wold beyond. Into the very heart of this fastness has stormed the torrent, only to fall, broken, groaning, struggling, on the cruel crags below. The lingering light creeps with a lurid glint from gash to gash, leaving the untouched gloom the deeper from the contrast. The few long larches in the rocks mingle their wailing sough with the frequent becks, flinging themselves in a wrath-white mist down the cliffs and into the torrent hurrying to escape through the defile to

the head-waters of the Yore,—flinging themselves down where the vines toss their long arms after, and the red wild currant-bushes and the yellow star of Bethlehem draw back from the wind upon some turfy corner of a leaning crag. And past them, down through this dismal place, and over the slippery stepping-stones, I make my way, and now, at last, am on the open moor.

Dreary and desolate enough, that opening of Swaledale toward the western boundary of Hollow Mill Cross. So bleak and bare, where the high moors stretch away on either hand, that cheerful thorpes and villages stop short upon its edge, and leave it to the few and straggling peat-diggers to rear their huts, so many dingy tufts, upon the heath. Hardly anything moves across, unless it be the darker shadow of a cloud; and it might seem they all forgather here, driven by both east and west winds, and in keeping with the mists that brood above, upon the mountains round. The winds have but a barren tract to wail over; but bent and reeds to whistle through, that here and there conceal some pitfall of an inky pool. In this desolate expanse, the home-grounds of Wearithorne show like a wooded island in a waste of storm-dark sea.

But Wearithorne, with its gay lights flashing, starlike, out through the cloudy lime-avenue, is left far enough to the eastward, and I keep on my way, fronting the wind, which has veered round to the west, and is beginning to blow a drizzle in my

face. That is only since I began to cross the moor, and I came down unprotected against such a change. But I never heeded that; only it is such a weary, weary way; and how can I tell but that even now my warning may be late?

I dare not suffer my thoughts to dwell for a moment on that fragment of a conversation overheard. Faint heart must not flag until the errand is discharged. And so I hurry on,—stumbling, sometimes, in the tangled ling, dragging my steps sometimes on a boggy verge,—frightened and shivering and drenched, in the mirkness of the fast-fallen night.

It is almost an instinct leads me on now, so that I hardly deviate from the right path. Once or twice I lose it, but fall into it again, by the blind leading of memory, perhaps. And now at last—

There is no moon up yonder, to show me where I am. The clouds have buried her too deep for that. Yet—as when some sweet soul is hidden away from us on earth—the darkness is less dark for her shining even somewhere beyond sight. And the moon the rain-clouds had hapt away, still lit the dusk enough to show me where I was.

An outcropping of granite rock upon the moorland edge, part of it rent away in a small quarry, and the stone therefrom raised to some little height in the walls of a not yet half-finished building.

I knew the spot so well, from many a long ramble over the moor, that I was at no loss now among

the ruins which strewed all the ground. There was a fringe of low, wind-stunted trees, off on the quarry side, and from these the outer wall of the old castle swept in a broken circle, broken yet more by the fallen, scattered stones having been used in great part for the mill in course of erection. In the midst of that circle, and adjoining the mill, rose the old castle keep, in a square buttressed mass, which had boldly stood against the shock of time; and although the upper story was half crumbled in, yet the two lower ones still held their own, upon their solid sloping base of some dozen feet or more. The topmost wall thrust up against the shifting clouds a splintered pinnacle, which seemed to catch and hold one passing glint of moonlight while I watched. And here before me, when I had gone round to the farther tree-girt side, a steep stone stair, of a score of steps, which I had counted over wellnigh a score of times in my rambles, led up to the first story.

I had paused at the bottom of the flight. And how one loses courage in a pause! As I set my foot on the first step, such a rush of cowardly second-thoughts crowded upon me that I drew it back again, and lingered, leaning on the wooden hand-rail which led up on either side of the flight. Such a rush of false shame, of poor, paltry woman's pride! as if it could ever shame a woman to be leal and brave, and to forget herself, if so she might bring aid to any one.

But the voices in the twilight up at the Hag were dying away from me; and in their stead came a taunting whisper of what Miles Lethwaite would say,—how look at me, coming hither all this way by night, on a fool's errand; for it did seem worse than folly now, as I looked back. Could I have taken up mere vague threats? What was it Kester had said?

I could not remember. For my life, at that one instant, I could not have recalled one word, although they came back to me clearly enough afterward. But as I stood there trembling, all my courage gone, trying to collect my thoughts—as I stood there, suddenly it was as though that sneering laugh of Kester's rang out beside me, and then followed a hoarse chuckle, which I knew for Adam o' Linn Brig's. For one instant I shrank back, believing that I heard them for the second time, and here. But the next moment I knew they were a vivid memory, speaking as plainly as words might, of the hurt it was in the minds of these two men to work on Miles Lethwaite.

At that, with firm, quick step, I straight ran up the stairs, then groped on through the open doorway, which had lost its door long years ago; and so round the square hall, which filled the whole of the lower story; until I found the stair.

I knew how it mounted up, round the wall, in a long, steep, winding way. I had been there once when Nance of Swaledale and her band had pitched

their gypsy tent among the ruins below, and I had forgotten neither the ascent nor the great iron-studded door at the top. And now that I had won up there again, I tapped at it with resolute hand.

There was no answer. I began to wonder whether I could have come all this long way for naught. I had seen no light from the outside—

Yet, as I stooped down nearer to the door, there was a narrow streak of light across the threshold, and I had hardly lifted myself erect again before the heavy door was unbarred, and Miles Lethwaite and I stood face to face.

His lantern he was holding upraised hardly sufficed, in the great square room, to light up the gloom of gray stone walls and floor. But one glance, and that of the briefest, took in the barrenness, where was no furniture, except a large arm-chair, and a table, with a book flung down upon it, in the farthest window. In that window and the other two, deep loopholes all, were improvised plank shutters, where it was clear that, before they were placed there, wind and weather had had free access. For dim though the light, it was enough to show the moss and weather-stains and lichens on the walls, and on the floor leaves whirled about, or rended branches tossed in by the wind. Over yonder, cobweb tapestries swayed down black and heavy, with here a faded leaf, and there a twig, or skeleton of unwary insect. I felt myself not alto-

gether unlike the silly fly that buzzed into the spider's parlor, as Miles Lethwaite paused, looking down into my face with a long, incredulous stare—then drew me in and shut to the door.

“Nannette, what is it? What has happened? What can have brought you here?”

“Nothing has happened, but——”

I was shivering like a very leaf in the blast, and I could not command my voice to answer him.

He wheeled forward his chair, and made me sit down, and I drooped my forehead against the arm of the chair. I was struggling in that pause to be calm, to be clear in what I had to say. And yet, for all my struggling, the fear of him, as he stood beside me, overpowered every other thought. The fear lest, looking up, I should see a lurking doubt that—yes, that I had come hither out of the mere charity one would show to a stranger. For he did not know, I was saying to myself, choosing to forget how full of terrors the way had been to me,—he did not know the lasses of our dales, nor how fine-lady fears were set at naught by them. And he might think——

And he, standing beside me still, touched my bent head, with a light, passing touch.

“Poor child! you are wet through. And I have no fire, not even a glass of wine to drive away the shivering cold.”

I lifted my head, wringing out the dripping masses of hair, loosened by wind and wet, and

twisting them together as I fronted him, rising to my feet,—

“It’s been but dree work, Mr. Lethwaite, winning here through night and rain, and it’s but woman-like, they say, to shake at fears past. I’d none have been for coming out, you’ll know, but there was cause; it’s not for Mallerstang to be un-friends with the House,—ae neighbor must needs serve another,—and——”

“I understand,” he put in, in my pause of hot, blushing confusion. “You would come to me as a neighbor, and none the more readily than to any other neighbor in the dale. Is that it, Nannette?” he asked, with a proud, vexed ring in his voice. “And now, how can I serve you, since you *have* come to me instead of to Adam o’ Linn Brig, or——”

“I’d none have come to you instead of to Adam o’ Linn Brig,” I interrupted him, stung into sudden anger by the tone of his last words,—“never, if it were to ask you to serve me. And you can lightlie me, to think me the lass to be wandering over the moor this gate——”

“How can you so wilfully misunderstand me?” he said, coldly, in the first breathing-space of my burst of indignation. “By what do you judge me the coward to insult any woman who has come to me for protection? For I suppose Kester——”

Kester? Did Miles know? did he suspect? I asked him, hurriedly,—

"What of Kester?"

"Only," with a thrill of pity in his voice, "that the whole country-side rings of his harshness to his little niece. It is said she has been even turned out of doors at night in his mad rages."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Turning out of doors makes no bruises. But he has not turned me out to-night. It is no an errand of my own, but yours, I am come upon."

And, clearly as I have written it down here, I told him all I had overheard, but suddenly be-thought myself in time to keep back names and place; and Miles Lethwaite, looking in my face, forbore to question me.

I had a sharp struggle with myself in that brief pause I made in the midst of my story. A hard, hard struggle. For it was not until I myself had wronged—cruelly wronged—another, not until I yearned in vain for forgiveness, that I learned to forgive. But in those innocent days of mine I was very hard, very bitter and unsparing. Did Kester merit at my hands that I should cloak his guilt?

In the midst of the question came words of Kester's to-night. Scarcely words of kindness, for he had said he would be main glad to be rid of the lass; but something like forbearance he had shown in his bargain with Adam o' Linn Brig. And Adam,—had he not defended me, after a fashion? I was little used to any form of kindness, and this touched

me strangely. And so I told my tale, without a name.

Until I had nearly ended my story, we stood looking calmly in each other's eyes. But when I came to those words of Adam o' Linn Brig's,—“and quarry his building-stone for him,”—Miles started, and averted his gaze from me upon the floor. I saw the grave frown deepen, and the brows knit themselves in thought. Presently he said to me,—

“I can't quite make it out. I have had a watch kept, and the workmen here all day, and no one has been seen about. Now, if these men, or one of them, could have gained access to the sort of cellar under the stair,—but that is impossible. I have had it strongly secured, and the key has never left my own keeping.”

But I was puzzling over some indistinct remembrance; and at last it shaped itself:

“It seems to me, when Nance of Swaledale was gypsying about here with her band, I heard—I heard it said, that when he was a lad—that is—I mean there had been years ago a secret approach, entering underground into this keep; and if any one who knew of it——”

Miles Lethwaite's face had gone quite gray and stern; and he cut me short by grasping my hand hardly gently.

“Come with me,” he said, in a quick, harsh tone,—so harsh that I looked up at him wonderingly, thinking I must have angered him.

But he did not answer my look ; he did not so much as glance my way. He had drawn me to the door, with a determination that would not be gainsaid, and now hurried me down the stairs and out of doors.

I asked him breathlessly what it all meant, when we had reached the foot of the outer flight. But he gave me no reply just then, drawing me on still farther, until we gained the shelter of the fringe of trees.

"I cannot tell what it all means. I must go back, Nannette. Give me your word to remain here in this spot until I return."

"I'll none stay!" I cried out. "Why should I have come here to-night, if, after all, you are going back?—into some danger, I know. You are throwing your life away, —yes, your life—your life! for you do not know how we dales-people can hate,—you do not know——"

"I know how true you dales-people can be," he said, with a lightness which it did not strike me at the moment was forced. "And so I shall trust you, if you give me your word to wait here."

I looked up at him wistfully. If the moon would only peer out now, and let me see if he were really as careless as he appeared, standing there before me. But the moon would not give me any answer ; and Miles Lethwaite was waiting for mine.

"Very well," I said, with some impatience. "But

only for a moment. I'll none wait longer. I must be up at the Hag."

"Only for a moment." He did not wait for my last words, but was gone from me before.

I had sunk down on the trunk of a fallen tree, upon the sodden ground. It was still raining slightly, but I was past caring for a sprinkle more or less. Yet I waited there in a very dissatisfied mood. Dissatisfied with myself. Why had I promised to loiter even for an instant, now that my errand was fulfilled, my warning delivered? Dissatisfied with Miles Lethwaite; for, although I had been in haste to give the warning, I was just a little disappointed by its being so promptly heeded. My hero was always a sort of Jack-the-Giant-killer, who would have been well pleased to beard Kester and Adam and half a dozen others of our dale giants together in their den; and would never have thought of yielding up his own castle before the phantom of a voice. And Miles Lethwaite,— I would have thought—

What, I did not finish to myself; for a new idea flashed across the other, and with such vividness that it startled me from my seat.

Miles was no coward; he had gone back. Had he seen anything, heard anything, that he had brought me away, and then returned to brave the danger there?

Probabilities and improbabilities were forgotten with my promise; and I found myself presently

half-way up the outer stair of the tower. I went more cautiously then,—more timidly. All was so quiet,—so ominously still.

So still. But just as I set foot upon the upper step, there was a sudden violent crash, as of some hurried fall. And when I stopped on the threshold, aware of a heaviness like smoke in the air within, I saw, out of the haze, Miles coming quickly toward me, with the lantern he had first brought down from the upper room.

He extinguished it as he came near, and set it down. Therefore he was close upon me before he observed me. Then,—

“Nannette,” was all he said.

I have heard words from Miles Lethwaite’s lips since then, which even now, in the mere memory, have power to stir my very soul. But never a word which, in the utterance, shook me like that “Nannette.”

Before I knew what he would do, he had his arm about me, and had lifted me, easily as if I were no burden, to the foot of the entrance-stair, and to some little distance beyond the circle of ruins. And then he released me only to draw my arm in his, and to lead me rapidly away across the moor.

Frightened, I knew not why,—submissive and subdued,—I yielded myself to his guidance. I did not question him; and it was not until after some moments that he stopped and looked down into my face in the gray dimness.

"How could you frighten me so horribly, Nanette?"

I drew my hand from his arm in the pause. I had a sense of the unbecoming in being on such terms as this with the Master of Wearithorne. To forgather with its housekeeper had been honor enough for me.

"I don't understand——" I began.

"Listen," said he, interrupting me.

He had caught my two hands in the strong grasp of his right, as he stood fronting the tower.

Nothing to be seen but the gray moor, the gray sky, and a great blot of darker gray on moor and sky, more distant for the darkness of the night. Nothing to be seen, nothing heard, for a long space of waiting, so it seemed.

A long space,—two or three moments,—as long as life, it seemed to me. For although Miles Lethwaite said no more than that one word, "Listen!" yet there was a heavy foreboding, a sense of dread and fear and of fast-coming evil. The very air had a weight in it; the bleak waste of moor and sky was gloom-enshrouded. Fast though Miles Lethwaite kept my two hands, they trembled in his hold. Till, all at once——

A heavy crash,—a long, deep, heavy, awful roll, that boomed back from the far-off mountain-sides like thunder; and a flash of flame, more lurid than lightning, gashing the gray gloom across the moor,—as transitory as the lightning, leaping up

one moment with a wide, fierce blaze, then sinking down again.

And then,—where was the tower, which had darkened against moor and sky?

Presently it was Miles Lethwaite who broke the dreadful hush that followed:

“There was nothing to burn; no fuel for the flame,” he said, in a strange, suppressed voice. “But see, Nannette, they have quarried my stone finely for me.”

“They!”

“I had powder stowed away in the cell there. for the blasting of the granite. I raised the trap-door just now, to find a brushwood fire bursting into full flame as the air rushed down. Some one had kindled it, with some arrangement like a slow-match, perhaps, through the underground entrance. I knew it could take but a moment to reach the inner door, where the powder was stowed away. And so they have blown up the whole concern, my project, mill, tower, and all.”

“They!”

I understood all now. I wrenched my hands out of Miles Lethwaite's hold. Kester! it was my own blood—my very own—had done this thing. Shamed and humbled, I shrank back from the wronged man. It might have been even murder,—and it was Kester's work!

Miles did not heed that sudden gesture of mine.

He had gone on, still in the same tone of suppressed passion :

“ You must give me up the names of these scoundrels, Nannette.”

“ Nay, I’ll none do that,” I broke in, sullenly, turning from him, and beginning my homeward walk. “ It’s for you to find out, if you will,—I’ll none bear you witness. What did you look for, Mr. Lethwaite,—coming here and putting about all the prejudices of the country-side ?” I went on, indignantly, as he fell into the path beside me. “ You might have been ware of the consequences. We dales-folk are none for mills, at the best ; and to set one down just here, with one foot on the common and the other on the old castle ruins we’re proud of, in our way——”

“ But, my little daleswoman,” he answered, as if something in my speech amused him, in spite of his wrath before, “ is it not better to make the old Lethwaite stronghold a refuge in time of trouble for the estate, than to let the whole pass into the hands of strangers ? It may lower a Lethwaite, as you once told me,” he added, with a proud lifting of the head, “ to turn miller ; but an empty purse must needs be filled, you know. And you know, too, I trust, that I would not raise one stone upon another on a foot of ground not mine.”

“ An empty purse !” I had echoed, involuntarily.

“ An empty purse. You have heard, perhaps, that it was once well filled. But I have had losses

since ; and other losses still are imminent, I fear. This spot was the most available for building, and the tower, and those stones of the old wall which were altogether broken down and scattered, made the cost much less. And now, Nannette, do you expect me to sit down quietly under such a wrong as this to-night ? This, which may mean ruin ? Or will you, in simple justice, give me these men's names ?”

There was a long silence before I replied,—a silence during which we were still walking on rapidly across the moor, toward Mallerstang Hag.

At last I spoke ; very humbly, very low :

“ It *is* simple justice, this you require of me. But how is it possible for me to obey you ?”

I broke off there. I hated Kester ; but such revenge as this ?

“ If I have risked anything to save you to-night——” I cried out, passionately.

He stopped me. I have no doubt that in that wild outburst of mine, that quivering, desperate voice, he heard and understood the truth. The whole dark, shameful truth.

“ I owe you my very life, Nannette. I cannot thank you for such a risk as yours ; but I can be silent from all questioning.”

The words were few, and quietly enough spoken. But they were very full to me,—so full, that any words after them must have seemed empty and vain. And so we went on in almost utter silence,

the whole way, round to the slopes behind the Hag. For it was too dark now for my path through Helbeck Lund. We turned into the longer path about; and then I would suffer him to go with me no farther.

"We must part here," I said. "And, Mr. Lethwaite, you will promise me that no one shall know of all this; no one shall know how you were warned away from the tower?"

"Only my mother, Nannette. My life is worth much, very much, to her; and she must know what you have done."

I shook my head in silence. But he would not take my refusal so.

"For a mere whim, Nannette, to be so unkind to me, so cold! For a mere whim, to deprive my mother of knowing——"

I interrupted him. The cold, proud smile of Mrs. Lethwaite, as I had been used to seeing it in her picture, came between me and his words, and gave me courage to keep to my point,—for my own sake, I said; and so I wrested his consent from him. And then I added good-night. I would steal up to the Hag alone; no fear that I had been missed all this while. And Mrs. Lethwaite must have heard the explosion,—all the country-side would be agate,—and she would be sadly alarmed and anxious until he came to Wearithorne.

Still, he had not moved, for all my urging.

"One moment, Nannette."

But I had sprung to a grassy crag beyond reach of his outstretched hand, and I did not stay or loiter at his bidding.

I hurried on, without a pause, until I had nearly gained the ascent, and the dull range of the unlighted homestead rose above me on the edge. Looking back then, where lifting shadows let the moon go free for a brief space, I saw him still standing below and gazing after me.

IV.

Beneath the rose, beneath the rose,
The sloping shadowy banks between,
The laughter-trilling brooklet flows——
She wandered in the noon repose
From yon green bowers where maidens glean,
And village-lads, the vintage-rows.
Dark eyes that shy through fringes gleam
Their answer to the young knight's vows,
Nor heed the shadow on the boughs,
Nor hollow murmur of the stream——
Small fingers fast which his inclose
Beneath the rose, beneath the rose.

VINTAGE-ROWS and purple harvests!—there is a glow in the mere words, of which our north-country dales know nothing. Yet these, too, are gay enough sometimes in their own way,—even our Mallerstang itself, one morning some two sunshiny months after that night of the finding of my mother's letters.

I remember that morning so well. Nay, as I look up from my seat in this deep window, I do not remember; I am living it again.

Sunset now is slanting up the cliff; but then it was the early sunlight fell across the broad rock-level to the rambling old farm-house, buttressed with projecting stones at every gable, and crouched

low that the winds may pass overhead, and not wrestle with it as they wrestle with the few bare trees, and even the whin-bushes on the cliff's steep northwestern side. Crouched low, its deep-set, diamond-paned windows glittering irregularly all over the irregular face, and glaring back at the sunrise, like red, sunken eyes, out from beneath a shag of thatch, which red moss here, and green-and-golden vetch and lichen there, had patch by patch undertaken to repair. For Kester was a having man, and spent nor penny nor time but on his sheep and horses and horned cattle pastured on the slopes behind; and on dairy, shippon, and barn,—the only straight line in the farm-house building,—with the farm-yard about them, where, until the summer days come in, the sober kine are standing about in dull content. But a discontent that farm-yard was to me in those old days. The crag itself is so grand; the house picturesque in its quaintness; passing beautiful the moors away beyond the rugged cleugh in front; the glorious gray-and-purple fells that topple one above another in the rear, behind our pasture-slopes. But that farm-yard thrust its homeliness in my face, till I would turn aside to yonder pile of Druid-stones, the circle of which had been long since broken into for the building of this house. Since first I found my way into the library at Wearithorne, and filled my silly head out of the old romances there, yonder great square mass has been my donjon-keep;

those lower ranges are wassail-hall and ladye's bower, where ivy curtains the empty casement-space; and the banner is that one pine,—the only tree above here on the cliff, which yet is not all gray, thanks to the ivy knotted everywhere. Those old, old dreams! The days are weariful in which one dreams no more.

Just behind Mallerstang Hag is a declivity, and then a rise to the height of Moss-Edge, a long, narrow summit, where we always cut our peat for fring. About its base, and stretching out to eastward, our pasture-fields are of those billowy slow swells and hollows which in my fancy have always been associated with a heavy but not stormy sea. There are no abrupt, breathless descents here, as on the face of Helbeck Lund. All is gentle, calm, and peaceful, although in reality the declivities sink to low valleys, and the summits rise to no mean heights. With the sultry shimmer on the downs, and the blue haze of distance on the highest fells, and white sheep browsing over down and fell, one might imagine the billows of the sea, shifting slowly, calmly, one down-sinking for another still to take its place. At least, I remember to have heard Kester say so once; and he, being far enough from imaginative, and having been a sailor all his youth, I am inclined to think must have been exact.

But this day the browsing sheep were not scattered over down and fell, to break the purpled

heather with a dash of white, like foam. They were all gathered where the slow, cozy stream, which we of the dales call a syke, winds sullen and broad about the base of Moss-Edge, hiding through the reeds and snowy overstooping burtree boughs. And Davie o' Burtree-syke, who lives just at the southern base of Moss-Edge, where the stream is creeping northward before it turns due west with fuller sweep and greater haste to lose itself in the torrent of Helbeck Lund,—bluff Davie was there, and Adam o' Linn Brig with all his household, and two or three households more.

For it was the busy season, and my one gay yearly festivity, our own sheep-washing; for Kester would never let me to the sheep-washings and shearings at Linn Brig and elsewhere. Even Kester's unpopularity was set aside now, and the neighbors flocked to his club, as he in his turn went to theirs, and his doors were set wide, and his table groaned with the weight of a mighty banquet. There was true thrift in that, and Kester knew it.

Letty and I, and Adam's Elsy, and lile Nanny from Rivelin, had been busied in the noontide rest with bearing round the cans of sweetened rum-and-milk to the tired men. Nanny and Elsy were smiling and nodding, with a jest and a gibe for every one, and a box on the ear, perhaps, for a saucier or a bolder lad. But, in spite of my girlish satisfaction at the merrymaking and the rustic court paid me

by Laurie o' Linn Brig and one or two others, my anticipations were never altogether pleasurable. For Laurie and the rest did not appear to have spirit enough, as I thought,—perhaps, indeed, liking enough,—boldly to run counter to the prejudice against Mallerstang, and join the lonely lassie on her way from kirk or fair. They had been rather blind some Sundays past, upon the road; it was not to be desired now that they should glance with any show of bashful admiration.

And to-day, especially, something in the whole scene jarred upon me. Perhaps, as Kester said, my visits to Wearithorne wrought me little good. The companionship of the men and women of the book-world there wearied me with the life and manners and surroundings which fell to my lot. And then, in these last two months, glimpses into another than that book-world, or than this of Mallerstang, were opening to me. Faint, far-away glimpses into that other world,—Fool's Paradise it may be, yet the wisest ones have crossed its boundaries and stumbled blindly into it. And I, who was never otherwise, loitering along the adjacent border-land, might well stray unawares across. Friendship,—Miles Lethwaite's friendship—

I lifted my eyes suddenly, with something not far removed from scorn, upon young Laurie, as I was roused from my reverie by a compliment of the broadest. And forthwith I raised my empty can upon my head, and followed the syke's beck-

oning, round a clump of drooping alders, beyond sight and sound of the merrymakers.

It was meet for taking up a broken reverie there, winding slowly and more slowly with the windings of the broadening, reed-fringed stream, and plucking handfuls of the blossoms under-foot, when I would stoop from the level sweep of sunshine over the outlying pasture-fields.

And to-day still reverie and idle thoughts were bound together with that journal of my mother's. These two months it had been my constant, secret companion, and now I had drawn it forth, too precious ever to be laid out of my own safe-keeping, and, in turning over the earlier leaves, had chanced upon a ballad there. There was a ring about it like the ring of an old air I had heard Marget sing,—a wild air of these dales,—it almost seemed the sullen beck took up the refrain :

Over the moorland the river is creeping,
 Darkly and sullenly, down to the sea;
 Only a chill under-current is threeping,
 There where the rushes are shivering dree.
 Shivering, quivering through the late gloaming,
 Sweeping their tarnished brown garments aside,
 Shuddering back to make room for one coming,—
 Weird for that chuckle thrills on through the tide,—
 Bowing the head,—
 Rustling apart to make room for the dead.

Over the moorland the gowans and heather
 Nod their gude-morn——

"Gude-morn!"

The salutation behind me was so sudden that I nearly dropped the milk-can from my head, with the great start I gave. I turned, my arm upraised to steady it, and stood face to face with Miles Lethwaite.

As well as I might, beneath that odd head-gear, I made my stiff little courtesy, and would have gone my way past him without more ado. I had come to the path which crossed over from Stockdale to the upper edge of Helbeck Lund, and so on into Swaledale. That way led his steps to Wearithorne; I would fain, in my shyness, that they had passed straight on, nor paused for me.

But they did pause, and fell in with mine along the margin of the stream.

"I could wish I had not given you gude-morn just then," he said; "you have cut short your song so suddenly."

"It's like Marget may pleasure you, if you bid her," I returned. "It is an old tune I've heard from her since I was a little one."

"And you like the old songs dearly well?"

"They are gey sweet, I think."

"I think so too," he said, looking at me. "But do you like the old rhymes better than the new ones? Those, for instance, you were reading in the library that evening when I came upon you unawares?"

The allusion turned me hot and cold in a breath,

half minded to brush past, and so escape facing him.

"No, you are not to flit from me so," he remonstrated. "Surely I deserve better at your hands, if only for the meekness with which I that evening received that sharp speech of yours about the erring absentee master of Wearithorne."

"I'm main and sorry," broke from me, impatiently, "that you did at last remember Wearithorne. You might have left me yet a little time to be as happy as I could."

"And how does my home-coming mar your happiness?"

"Wearithorne was the one blithe spot in my life," I answered, with as much resentment as if Wearithorne were mine and he had robbed me of it.

"Poor child! what life can yours be, when a lonely hour in a dark old library is the one bright spot in it?"

"What life?" I reiterated. "An you have heard old Kester's name, you might know fast enough what life."

If I brushed one unbidden tear furtively away, I am afraid I was caught in the act. He was graver as he said,—

"Why should Wearithorne be less to you now? Nannette, it should be more to you. Only let me tell my mother how but for you, that night——"

"No, no. I hold you by your promise then."

He yielded slowly and reluctantly.

"At least you will come to Marget, as usual? Surely, you know the library is open to you. And my mother will welcome you there."

If there were a half-pause of doubt—the slightest of slight hesitations—in the close of his speech, perhaps he hardly knew it, so quickly my words came in as an interruption:

"You are very good. But I could not go, of course."

He bent his head for a glimpse of the face under the broad black shadow of my hat. But he would not find any false pride there. Some intuitive feeling kept me back from throwing myself on Mrs. Lethwaite's gratitude. And, gratitude set aside, what could I expect from her? I was not overwise in those days, certainly; yet I knew a gracious welcome from the mistress at Wearithorne was not to be looked for by a Nannette o' Kester o' Mallerstang, going in and out of the library on the rash permission of the young master.

"You are a sunny-tempered little soul, as you are proud," said Miles then, watching me. "But if you will not come to Wearithorne library, Wearithorne library must come to you."

"That it must not; Uncle Kester'll never like it."

Miles Lethwaite looked at me steadily and significantly.

"Why are you so sure he would not like me?"

"He,—he likes nobody at all."

"Not even his niece Nannette?"

"Not even his niece Nannette."

"A singular Uncle Kester, indeed. But for once, this evening, only to bring the book."

I shook my head.

"This evening Uncle Kester 'll be no that good-humored, seeing all the rum-and-milk, berry pasties, and good legs of mutton and sweet-pies have stolen out of his larder the day. Even I shun crossing Uncle Kester when he has been whiles so over-hospitable. But,—could you bring the book here instead? and leave it for me, in among the ferns, just here at this old hurtree's root?"

With the request came the sense of its hardihood. But I was reassured by Miles's

"Not leave it,—you must come for it, and we'll make it an hour earlier than sunset, then."

We were walking on together silently, retracing my path now; and there where I had idly dropped them, a knot of daisies and purple loosestrife lay, and campion-pinks, and the pimpnel that shuts its blue eyes fast when rain is gathering.

"The world may find the spring in following her,"

Miles said, as his glance had followed mine to the bloom-strewn sod. "Only, it is a very April-spring, Nannette, I find in you."

"Naunty Marget calls April a right-down silly month," I put in, "laughing at the sad, greeting at the glad, like the Bible-children in the market-place——"

The word was cut short ; for in the midst, my foot slipped on the oozy bank ; and, in putting up both hands to save the milk-pail, I dropped the packet all this while held hidden in the folds of my kirtle.

Miles Lethwaite stooped for it. But I was before him, had caught it up, and with a glance half confused, half laughing, over my shoulder, I sprang past him.

He was too quick for me. He stood before me in the narrow way, between the water and the oozy bottom-land.

"Not so fast, Nannette. I'll not steal more of your secret. I've seen a corner of it peeping from the folds of your dress ever since we turned."

"It's no a secret," I began,—then colored and hesitated, remembering that it was.

"Pardon me,"—and I could feel how he was watching,—"I did not mean to annoy you."

"You—you do not annoy me." And then I lifted my head.

I knew what he imagined, and my thought flashed back to Laurie and his fellows with swift scorn. I never stopped to consider what mattered to me anything Miles Lethwaite might imagine. He should not think *that* of me. And as I looked up into the bronzed, bearded face above me, there was something in it gave me sudden courage. I was not afraid of him ; and I was afraid of Kester. Might not this man help me, by his counsel at least, and his judgment ?

"It is no secret," I said again, "but a perplexity." And I held my packet, journal and letter, out to him.

"A perplexity in which I can help you?"

I nodded. "I think you can. I'm feared to question Uncle Kester."

It might have seemed strange to Miles Lethwaite that I should have turned to him so almost without hesitation. For he could not understand how he was never a stranger to me; how I had spent many a half-hour of my lonely life, looking up dreamily and wonderingly to the boy whose glance met mine in the library at Wearithorne. And when I raised my head just then, and met the same frank, earnest eyes, it was as if I had come to an old friend for aid.

The explanation I had to preface with was brief. And then he loosed the riband, leaning on his arm beside me, where I took my seat on a mossy knoll above the stream.

He read on without comment till he had ended all.

"What will ever Uncle Kester say?" I sighed, folding the papers together. "He'll flyte at me so——"

"Stay," Miles said, detaining me as I knotted the faded riband fast again. "It is not clear to me that any one of these belongs to Kester or to you."

I half rose.

"If you think I would deceive you——" I began, hotly.

He turned round on me his grave face, in which there was a something—a sudden shade of care, a troubled thoughtfulness—unwonted there.

"You know I do not think that, Nannette. But there is more in this matter than one can see all at once. Have you confidence enough in me to trust them all with me?"

I put them all into his hands without a word. Neither did he say anything to assure me of their safety.

There we lingered, he and I, together. It did not appear to suggest itself to either of us that time was wearing on, or that there was any reason for our going our several ways. In truth, it was so sweet down there. The beck was winding its green riband out at our feet,—winding it slowly, in among the stooping boughs and reed-fringed banks, as loth to draw away into the shadow of the cliffs, whose dark reflections must blot out the smiling of the sky. Miles Lethwaite had pushed his hat lower on his brows, and was looking from its covert straight into my face, where I sat on the knoll somewhat above him. And for me—I could but look away—could not keep back the hot flush I felt coming and going in my cheeks. And through the hush, the burn,

"As through the glen it wimpl't,"

rang out faint and low some hint of a time to come, when he and I should have traced out my mother's story, as the winding of the stream from the hidden spring into the outer sunshine. And then,—then, if my mother were indeed as she seemed written down, would I, because of being Kester's niece, be so far from the Master of Wearithorne that we should not clasp friendly hands?

For as yet, if in the gurgle any chime of bells rang out for another hand-clasping, it was but very faintly, and I did not understand even while I listened.

At last Miles spoke :

“Nannette, what have you thought about these papers? What have you imagined they led to?”

“If you only wouldn't ask me!”

“Yet I do ask.”

“I think they are written by my mother, and I think—you will laugh, perhaps, Colonel Lethwaite, but I do think my mother was a lady. How she came to marry Uncle Kester's brother, that I cannot tell. But I feel sure, at least, she was a lady.”

“And if you should be disappointed, Nannette? If these letters, after all, lead to nothing for you? If Kester should some way have gotten them in his keeping, not from your mother, but from Wearithorne? I do not say it is so; but it strikes me as more than possible.”

It was such a sudden blow, the mere suggestion

of that possibility, that for the moment I forgot the paper I had burned,—the paragraph with Kester's name, which linked the whole with Kester. I looked up to Miles piteously, my lip quivering as I tried to speak. Looked up, but could hardly see his face for the swift tears in my eyes. So I was taken altogether by surprise when he suddenly stooped and kissed my quivering mouth.

I dashed away the tears with a hand which trembled only in my wrath. I sprang to my feet and stood facing him, no longer embarrassed, but startled out of all bashfulness. This was the gentleman whom I had trusted? Why, even Laurie would not have been so rude as that.

Miles, too, had risen, and stood before me, his own color heightened as that which burned in my hot cheeks, but his eyes looking straightway into mine. Straightway, and frankly, as if he was by no means ashamed of what he had done.

"I could not help it, Nannette," he said, boldly. "There's no use in expecting a fellow to help it when you put up such a face as that, and so like a distressed child's. Could I help seeing it is lovely? and could I help loving it?"

I forgot all about the letters,—forgot everything but my passionate indignation,—and turned from him without a word. I sprang in among the alder-boughs; sprang past him when he would have stopped me. So near the dub was our quiet trysting-place, that a few swift movements brought

me in full view. I was very sure he would not follow me there.

And presently I, watching, saw the alder-boughs round the green cove shake as with one brushing through them. Then I knew that he was gone.

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For not a sun o'er earth e'er rose or set,
But traced some furrow set by sin or sorrow :
The past's pale ghost still haunts the coming morrow,
The shortest life hath something to forget.

DAYS had worn away, and Sunday with them, and even then I had seen nothing more of Miles Lethwaite. The Lethwaite pew was in the moorside kirk of Bowbridge, not far off upon the Swale; while Letty and I were wont to repair together on our shaggy dun ponies all the long way to Sedbergh,—I having a fancy for the humble old Firbank chapel on its rocky ledge hard by; Letty, half Friend, half "Methodee," as she was, stopping at the meeting below, where alone of all the country-side the "pure word" was dispensed.

So long ago, that common words in speaking of those days have a far-off echo in them. Yet how the time between vanishes, while I am glancing over this book, worn and faded now!—not only worn and faded, but bearing some stains of long ago. For it lay on the marge of the syke, under the burtree, for days and nights,—so did my wrath hold out. But on the Thursday after our sheep-washing, Kester sent me up to Moss-Edge for the peats. And as I crossed the syke, I could not

choose but wonder if Miles had come there again,—had brought the book he promised. So, before I thought I had fairly determined what to do, I found myself following the course of the stream, until I came where Miles and I had parted.

And the book was there, just peeping out from among the ferns. The dews had soaked it where it lay; the dainty binding was defaced and blurred; and as I opened it, two leaves were shredded out beneath my touch.

I went away with it guiltily, as if it were a friend I had hurt by my neglect. And so I bore it up the hillside and laid it down upon a rock to dry in the sunshine. As I turned the leaves, a marginal line caught my attention, and I bent above the open page,—the same over which I was crouching on the hearth in the library at Wearithorne, when its master coming home had found me there, poring over that fragment of the "Eve of St. Mark," much as the Bertha of whom I was there reading pores over her "curious volume, patched and torn." Here and there in the poem a stanza underlined hinted how Miles Lethwaite had stood and watched, while I

" Leaned forward with bright, drooping hair,
And slant book, full against the glare."

And then on the margin,—happen no eyes but mine could trace them now, so blurred the pencilled words,—two lines from the poem over the leaf:

“What can I do to drive away
Remembrance from my eyes?”

Had Miles written that when he came to the syke and found I had failed to keep the tryst? I would not say yes, even to myself. Yet I bent over the page, until with a sudden flush I sprang up and remembered that in this way hardly would the peats be stacked.

It was pleasant work enough, this that I had before me all the day. This fell belonged to Mal-lerstang, so Kester went shares with no one on it, as many of the neighbors did upon the fells; but the whole “peat-pot” of Moss-Edge was his in his own right. It was his custom to go up for a summer day to cut the peats, and then send me on the next, to follow the traces of his spade, and to prop one piece of turf rooflike against another, that the wind in blowing through, might dry them. It was easy work enough,—merry work enough, too, sometimes it was made,—for I had seen Bessy o’ Stockdale and her next neighbor Elsy following their brothers’ spades on Shunnor Fell, and making a frolic out of the long day’s labor. But Kester and I never worked thus together. The sight of me often irked him; and he would rather come hither alone to do his part of cutting, and send me afterward to my lighter task of setting the peats up. That which Kester preferred in this, I too preferred assuredly. So many hours in sullen silence would have been formidable; but upon such a morn-

ing as this to wander forth over the lofty heath, and bide all day long in the open air, with only the lark floating above me, or the bees' hum in the ling,—that, indeed, was worth a whole week's bending over knitting, which would never grow familiar in my hands.

It was so pleasant to be wandering there over the broad, flat moss,—to breathe the breezy aromatic scent,—to watch the shimmer of the vapor rising in the sun across the black peat-pot,—to leave my work and idly stand upon the brow, leaning over the stone wall which here divides the peat-moss from the highest in-take up the fell-side, where the sheep were pasturing.

I never go there now but that tranquil day is over me again. I am listening to the lowings from the pastures round,—to the gurgle of the syke glinting down through the burtree thicket in the westward hollow between Moss-Edge and our Mallerstang Hag. I see, as I saw then, Letty's bit cottage nestled close beneath the Hag, with its one spreading apple-tree, and its half-acre of prawd potato-ground; and opposite, the white, broad farmhouse of Davie o' Burtree-syke. And I see, too, all the lights and shades where Eastern Stockdale sweeps its billowy undulations to the fells that bar them back, with views above the lesser, nearer heights, of Houghill and Bowfells to the southwest, Shunnor and Lovely-Seat to the east, and between their broad, full swells the cloudy brows of

“Penyghent and Ingleborough,
The highest hills all England thorough,”

according to our proud dale rhyme.

But all at once I started and drew back from my place on the wall. For moorland and fell and beck no longer were all my own in their unbroken solitude. There was some one coming even now, around the northern base of this same fell.

I would have known him even at a greater distance. Would have known him even had he not ridden along that syke as perhaps no other man would ride, checking his horse and coming slowly, thoughtfully along, in the self-same track I had taken when I met him there. He neared that bur-tree clump,—when suddenly he flung himself out of the saddle, and I saw him treading down the ferns here and there, as though to find out anything that might lie hidden in their keeping. I knew well enough he would find nothing. And then, remounting, he looked back, toward a wreath of smoke from Mallerstang chimney, “a frown upon the atmosphere.” Looked, and, taking off his hat, waved it with a triumphant flourish.

He did not think that wave might have been answered near at hand,—here on the fell's brow, in the midst of the dark lines of peat. But he put spurs to his horse and dashed off at full speed; and I caught one glimpse, and then another, as he passed up Stockdale toward the road to Hawes and Askrigg.

It was Thursday, market-day at Askrigg; and, accustomed to the habits of the country-people round me, I leaped to my conclusion. He was bound there, and was safe for all day, since the ride was long. And I,—should I lose such an opportunity? I would not go near Wearithorne while I might meet him; but now that he was away, why should I not see Naunty Marget, question her, and beg her to question Kester about those letters and my mother?

Those peats had not the power to hold me back. No sign of rain in all the sky,—to-morrow would do as well for them, besides giving me another breezy hill-top holiday. I was not sufficiently in awe of Kester to be bound down to any task by the thought of him.

And so I turned my back on the sods awaiting me, and straight went down the fell-side, to the margin of the syke.

I too followed it; but in the contrary direction from that which Miles Lethwaite had taken. I too paused when I came to the spot where he had dismounted; but not quite with the purpose he had had. I stooped and laid the book near where he had stooped to look for it. The hoof-print of his horse was yet upon the oozy sod, and there I deftly bent down the ferns around, not to conceal, but to make it appear they had concealed, the book. I too waved my hat; not toward Mallerstang, but in the direction of the road by which he had gone

by. I did not altogether fancy that triumphant wave of his. Now, if luck would but have it, that he should return this way! If Hob o' the Hurst, or any other of the canny "fairishes" of these haunted wolds, would but direct Miles's glance, and while it yet was light enough to see! I could but trust to such luck and such friendly offices.

The way by which Miles had come, though quite as direct for his ride as the regular Swaledale road, was somewhat longer to Wearithorne than my wonted path through Helbeck Lund. But what it took in length it made up in ease; and I was soon across the open moor that stretched between Helbeck Lund and Wearithorne; soon on the avenue to the House.

They were so bright, those glowing lines of limes, that I forgot half my dulness as they arched above, and made the air musical with bees and heavy with the scent of light-winged blossoms.

But about the house there was a gloom now as of those old days passed away,—a strange hush over all the place. No door set hospitably wide; shutters were closed here and there. A something of foreboding stole over me, and very quietly and timidly I went round to Naunty Marget's wing, to find it closed; and when I opened the door, no one within.

No sound as I passed in. I began to think the house was left unto me desolate.

I went through the kitchen into the dairy, back again, and into the library at last.

But, as I stood there wondering, I heard a step without.

Naughty Marget's step; but it was not like her to draw back with so agitated a start.

"Well-a-day! Who'd ha' thought o' seeing the lass here?" And her voice fairly broke down, and one tear after another coursed its way down her wrinkled cheeks.

I drew her, unresisting, into the library, and seated her in an arm-chair, taking from her the tray she was carrying. There were the remains of an invalid's breakfast upon it; thus much I took in at a glance before I set it down. Illness, then, perhaps,—but not death,—had crossed the threshold before me. I knelt down at Naughty's side and took those withered hands, so strangely passive now, wont to be quick and helpful and full of energy, in both my own.

"Naughty, what is it? You must tell me,—you must let me help you."

But the hands were wrung from me,—wrung in a passionate, helpless anguish.

"Thou canna help me, bairn; thou mun go back. Thou's no call here,—not thou, not thou, o' a' ithers."

"And why not I, Naughty? Do you think I'd leave you in your trouble? Is it the fever? Is it Mrs. Lethwaite who is ill? Come, tell me,—bet-

ter sune as syne. Because, if you do not, here I stay in any case."

And as I knelt there still at her side, I folded my arms very resolutely, yet with something of an appalled sense of my hardihood. For certainly I had never before ventured to brave Marget; and I would not have been surprised had she taken me quietly by the arm and marched me out of doors, as I had seen her do a froward child.

But she did nothing of the kind. She only turned her head and looked at me fixedly. And then she rocked herself to and fro in great distress and indecision, half moaning to herself the while.

I caught the burden of her murmured words. They were strange words for Naunty Marget, who never faltered in all her life before, I dare avouch.

"What mun I do? What mun I do? What luck could wise the bairn the gate here?"

"Mrs. Lethwaite is ill, Marget?" I asked her, suddenly.

"Ay, she is ill."

"And Colonel Lethwaite,—he is away, and does not know it?"

"No, he kens na it."

"And,—Marget, the servants are all gone?"

"A' but Mally; she's a-gate."

Now Mally, leer and careless Mally, was more than Letty's half-sister in helplessness on an emergency. Therefore it was easy enough to come to the conclusion which prompted my next question:

"You have been sitting up all night with Mrs. Lethwaite, Naunty?"

What a start she gave, and how her lips moved with a swift denial! But that denial must have been a falsehood, for it could not pass the threshold of those lips.

She might have known she could not break through the habit of truth at this late day. But she merely attempted it faintly, and sat mute. The attempt suggested my next words:

"Mrs. Lethwaite does not wish her son to know how ill she is?" I went on, in my cross-examination.

Marget said never a word, and so that question was answered. I did not care to put any more. I would make my comment on them now.

"You know well enough, Naunty, that, with no one but Mally about you, you cannot keep the knowledge of Mrs. Lethwaite's illness from her son. You cannot do everything for her yourself. What you have to do, is just to let me stay and help you."

"Ne'er be in me, then," she said, sullenly. "Thou's niver win at her."

I spoke no more, but I deliberately untied the riband of my hat, and rose, and laid it on the table.

She looked up at me in amazement. "What has come over the bairn?" she muttered; and then, in a changed voice, "She doesna speak of hersel',—thissen's none her way. It have been put intil her

heart, and I munna stand in her light, poor bairn. It's no for me to keep a' the keys at my own girdle. I'se nobbut stand aside and let things go as they will; I durstna direct them."

There was no more opposition to my will, but she sat a moment still in silence, and then said, in a firmer tone,—

"Ye mun know, dearie, yesterday there came ill news. The great Lunnon house where the Maister's money were, has failed; there is ruin at the door."

"Oh, Naunty, ruin? Must Wearithorne be sold,—pass away from the Lethwaites?"

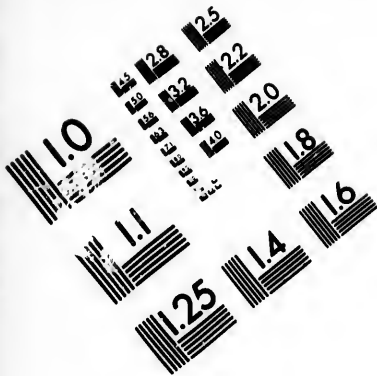
"Out no! None so bad as thattens. But a' nobbut Wearithorne mun go, and we make shift to be near and saving. The news came yester-morn, and Mrs. Lethwaite paid that fine French maid o' hers at after, and packed her off with a' the ithers but Mally and me. She can keep us two, poor leddy."

"And it is this that has made her ill, Naunty?"

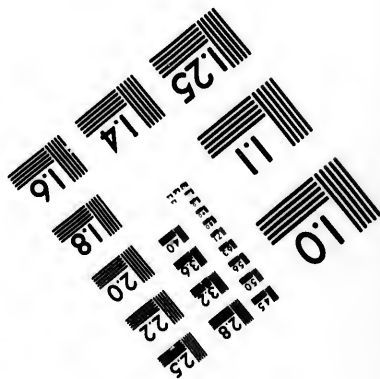
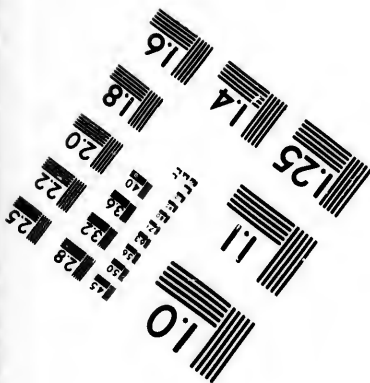
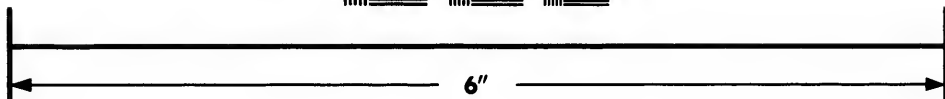
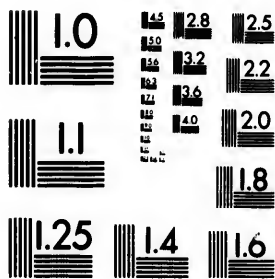
She looked at me, and her lips moved. But, after all, she was silent for a moment. Then she said,—

"She seemed to bear up well, just at the first. A' yesterday she went about, a bit pale like, but calm an' douce, and that full o' thought for iverything. But last evening she and Maister Miles were in the library in the gloaming, and presently she came to her own chainer, for a' the world as





**IMAGE EVALUATION
TEST TARGET (MT-3)**



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white and scared like as if she'd trysted wi' a ghost. And then she fainted dead away, and when I brought her to at last, she bade me mint nothing o't to Maister Miles, but say as she were weary and had gone to rest. Poor dear," she added, under her breath,—“poor dear, to rest! And I watched by her a' the lee-lang night.”

What Naunty Marget had heard in her vigil through that lee-lang night I did not know then, nor do I now. Word of it has never crossed her lips nor mine. But I think she caught from her mistress's incoherent speech just a hint of the truth. A hint of some wrong done to Nannette of the Hag. More than that I do not believe she understood. If she had guessed what that wrong was, and whose blood ran in my veins, I doubt not she would have been altogether true to me. As it was, her love for me must have been strong, when it could make her “stand aside and let things go as they would;” when she “durstna direct them,” even though undirected they might bring harm to a Lethwaite. My poor auld Marget! At this day, and looking calmly back upon it all, I can see that it was pain and grief to her not to be altogether true to me.

“Ye see just how it is,” she went on, with obvious effort: “Maister Miles he be gone to the lawyer at Askrigg for to settle up the business some gate. An' the mistress she wanna ha' him ken she's no that well. It's oftentimes she dunna come

down o' morning, and so the Maister dunna think strange. I reckon mysel' she's gotten a shock she wunna be the better of so soon as she believes; but she thinks she's be up again to-morn. I'se sore wore out wi' watching a' the night, and 'll be the better o' your help, lassie."

"I'll go now, then," I said.

But she put out her hand to detain me, and a frightened look came into her eyes. Yet she checked herself, and said, —

"The drops ye mun gie her, an she bids ye, are on the bit stand by the window. Happen, as the room is darkened, she wunna ken the bairn from me."

This was added half to herself, as if in self-justification for suffering me to take her place. But she did not withdraw the permission, and I went away to my post.

The room was very dark, as she had said, and the invalid in a deep slumber, so that I had sat a long time in the window unobserved. Even when she stirred at length, and called in a faint voice for Marget to give her the drops again, I obeyed in silence, and without her observing that it was not Marget who came to her.

But presently, still without moving, she bade me bathe her forehead with the cologne on the dressing-table. And I had but touched her brow lightly twice or thrice, when she put up her hand and caught mine.

"This is surely not Marget," she said, turning to look at me. "Is it you, Mally?" Then, as her eyes grew accustomed to the dim light, she said, fretfully,—

"I told Marget I would have no other servant than Mally. Mally surely ought to give all the assistance she requires. One would think things might go right for just one day, when one is ill."

"But I'm none your servant, Mrs. Lethwaite," said I from my window to which I had retreated. "I only came to see Naunty Marget, and I reckoned you would let me take her place for an hour or so."

"Naunty Marget? I did not know she had a niece."

"No, madam, but she has been rare and kind to me, and I've aye called her so. I am niece to Kester o' Mallerstang Hag."

"Kester!"

The name came from her in a low, frightened gasp. She raised herself upon her arm, crying out, breathlessly,—

"Come here, girl,—put the window open wide, and come here, quick!"

I hurriedly threw the shutters wide,—the sash was already raised,—for I thought she was faint for air. Marget,—if she were but here! But Mrs. Lethwaite caught my arm as I was passing.

"Don't call any one," she said, faintly. "Don't leave me."

I knelt beside the couch, and raised her head. She was gasping painfully for breath, and with my free hand I moistened her brow and cheeks and lips with the cologne. She was staring up at me with a horror-stricken expression which alarmed me. Then her eyes fell, and she lay awhile silent and motionless. But just as I began to hope her fallen asleep, she spoke again:

“Do you know if Colonel Lethwaite is gone to Askrigg?”

“I heard Marget say so.”

“And he cannot be here for some hours yet?”

“Hardly before sunset, I should think, and he has aught to detain him there.”

“Then, Annot——”

“Nannette, my name is, Mrs. Lethwaite.” I do not think she heard. She went straight on:

“I must speak to you before he comes. Go and lock the door first, that we may not be interrupted.”

I obeyed in silence, wondering greatly as I did so. Strange as it seems to me now in looking back, I had not the faintest suspicion of the subject upon which she wished to speak to me. Had she taken some fancy to me,—was perhaps going to offer me Mally's place and feared the girl might come in while we were talking it over? I drew the bolt more noisily than was at all necessary, and came back to my place with something of indignation. If that were what she had to say

to me, she might as well leave the door wide, for Mally certainly would have no reason to complain if she should overhear my answer.

But the first words startled me:

"Annot, you know my son Miles?"

The blood rushed to my face, and a hundred wild ideas to my brain. The one that remained when I faltered out my "Yes," was that the lady was about to rebuke me for presumption.

Yet, through all my confusion, there came a glow of satisfaction at the thought of that volume lying among the ferns upon the margin of the beck.

"And what do you think of him, then?" she asked next, after a pause.

I had not put that question to myself, and it was not likely I would be prepared with an answer for her.

"Come here,—near me, Annot,—near, where I can see your face."

"Mrs. Lethwaite," I broke in, passionately, "an you have aught to say to me of your son, you must say on. I will listen. But an you think to spy upon me while you speak, you are mistaken in me. Your son will tell you how we parted,—he will do me the justice to tell you I have played no such daft ploy as to seek to lessen the distance between us. You have no right to think——"

"That you love Miles?"

The question fairly took my breath away. The indignant denial died upon my lips. I sat there voiceless, breathless, bewildered, and trembling,—powerless utterly to refute that which she had said. For her words were as a revelation to me.

“Annot——”

“My name is no Annot,” I broke in, bitterly. “I am just Nannette o’ Kester o’ Mallerstang. Look at my hands, Mrs. Lethwaite,” I said, braving her utmost scrutiny, and coming forward in the light: “they are sunburnt and toil-hardened. Look at them beside your own! Do you think I am blind to the difference? Do you think I do not know that like joins hands with like? And do you think these hands are so weak and so uncertain, they will stretch out for that beyond their reach?”

She caught my hand in hers, and looked at it, and then wistfully up into my face.

“At least,” she said, in a quivering tone, “the little hand—sun-browned it is—not over-gentle, and not so soft as it should be,—but it does not look as if it would clutch so tenaciously after its own rights that it would not heed how it defaced and spoiled the life of others.”

“I do not understand you,” I said, coldly. “An you mean I’ll spoil your life by seeking to have any claim on your son, you may rest satisfied. It’s like, the word he has spoken was a mere nothing, with which gentlemen may dare to

lightlie simple country-lasses. I set no store by it. Only"—and I felt the angry blood rush to my brow again—"bid him ken how it needed not his mother to come between and part us; for before she spoke I had put away from me——"

"Softly, little one,"—she drew me, passive, down upon the low seat by her couch: "you must not let his mother's awkwardness work hurt to Miles."

I stared at her. Could I have heard aright? Was this proud mother wooing the peasant-girl in her son's stead? She must have read incredulity in my face, for she said, quickly,—

"Cannot you understand his happiness may be dearer to me than any pride of birth or station?"

"No," I answered, looking full into her eyes. "I cannot understand it; and I don't believe it." For I saw she quailed from my gaze, and I was not blind to the forced smile on her lips. The very clasp of her soft fingers over mine was shrinking and reluctant. This woman was constraining herself to act a part, and it went hard with her. She was too proud to throw herself into it fully; she could not repress all betrayal of her shrinking from me; and as I said out my abrupt speech, I could plainly see she quailed.

"An Colonel Lethwaite knows of this——"

"He does not know," she faltered.

"Then he can speak for himself,—can have my answer from myself. But," I added, rising, "as I

misdoubt he has anything to ask which will require an answer from me, I think you will find it wiser to be silent on what we have said."

"And this is all you have to say to me?"

"All. But this," added I, in an after-thought: "you will say to your son, touching some papers he has of mine, that I wish him to return them to me. I shall learn all I want from another person. I'll not be beholden to him for aught of trouble about them."

"Those papers," she said, with evident effort,— "my son showed them me last evening in the library. What are they, do you think?" Then, quickly, as she interpreted aright my surprised glance, "Surely you cannot count it strange they interest me, when my son loves you,—ay, for all you say?"

"They are written by my mother's hand, and they show she held another rank from mine. I believe that of them. I believe, too, I shall track out through them her name and her life."

"How will you track them out?"

"I'll never rest until I do it, Mrs. Lethwaite."

"It is hardly a woman's work, dear. Why not keep them until you are my son's wife, and then let him——"

"Mrs. Lethwaite," I cried, suddenly, "those papers are something to you. The reading of them was in some strange way a shock to you. Their being mine makes you——not wish—but

seem to wish—me married to your son. What does it mean? You would do well to tell me the truth. For I will find it elsewhere.”

A sharp moan, as of some creature entrapped, forced her white lips apart.

“What motive you may have for this,” I went on, pursuing my advantage, “I cannot of course tell now, but I will fathom it,—that I give you my word.”

She grasped my dress as I was passing her.

“Stay,—for Heaven’s sake, hear what I must say to you!”

It was impossible to turn my back on her appeal. I stood still beside her, but did not offer to sit down.

“Say on,” I said, “but, I warn you, speak the truth. Your words will be spent breath else. Don’t dream I did not see you were playing me false, even now.”

She turned her face from me, but she answered,—
“I will——”

“The truth, Mrs. Lethwaite; I’ll none be deceived. It shall go hard but I will find some one who will read it for me in those papers. Keep silence if you will; but, if you speak, you shall tell me all.”

“I will,” she moaned. “The whole truth, which I had not thought to utter to a soul. I would rather die than speak it, but I would not rather see Miles ruined. And if you take those papers from

him, and put them into other hands to be pushed to the uttermost, you will surely ruin him."

"Ruin him? But how?"

"Will you force me to say every word? Can you not understand?" she stammered, with white lips.

I would not understand. I would have the whole truth from her. The whole truth.

"They prove Wearithorne yours, my son beggared. Worse than beggared; for the fortune I brought has all been lost, and it is only through this estate we can hope to pay off heavy debts the sudden loss involves us in."

"Wearithorne mine?"

"Is it possible you cannot comprehend? A lawyer would not be so dull,"—impatently. "Those papers you gave Miles, if sifted, prove you the daughter of Annot Lethwaite, who must inherit the estate before Miles, to whom it was willed in default of any other heir."

"Go on."

I saw she had nerved herself to tell me the story, and I would have it from her lips, even to the uttermost.

"Annot Lethwaite," she went on at my bidding, "after her rash marriage with one Fraser,—of whom nobody knows anything, but that he resigned suddenly from the army somewhere in the colonies, to avoid being dismissed,—was disowned by her grandfather, who yet in a death-bed repentance left the

whole estate to her, or to her children if she had any, and to my son unless they appeared. The old man died in the full belief that he had no other heir than Miles."

I could easily credit that. Marget had often told me the old Master of Wearithorne was dead some months before Kester brought me to this neighborhood. But I did not think of this now. I was dizzy and confused. There was but one thought clear in this chaos. Kester,—what was he to me? I put the question shrinkingly, I so feared the reply.

"Nothing," Mrs. Lethwaite answered me. "He knew your mother as a tenant's son might know the young lady of the Hall. And it was his sloop which carried them away to Scotland. And when she died, she trusted him to bring her child here, to claim the estate of Wearithorne."

"And why did he not claim it for me?"

She was silent. It was not until I had repeated my question that she said, very low,—

"Can you not understand? Mallerstang,—Kester Holme coveted it,—and I—— It was the price of his treachery to you."

"Then Kester never bought it? Did your son suspect this, Mrs. Lethwaite?" for I seemed coming to an explanation of Kester's unsparing hatred.

"He has suspected, not me, but Kester. He thinks I have been defrauded, and has tried to get from Kester some clearer account of the bargain

than mine. Kester has kept me in perpetual terror," she ended, with a weary sigh, "ever since that first unhappy night I came back to Wearithorne."

"And Kester, then, is nothing to me?"

"Nothing."

I could have found it in my heart just then to thank her, as if hers were the boon of parting me from Kester. But there was a sudden revulsion of feeling when she leaned forward and touched me.

"Why have you told me this now?" I asked, coldly.

She only looked up at me piteously. But I had no pity for her. I had been aching too long with my own grievous hurt to feel another's just now. And she knew I had no pity, and she faltered,—

"It is because Miles suspects,—not the whole truth, God of mercy, not the whole!—but that these papers give a clue to Annot Lethwaite and her child. He does not know she was your mother, but thinks the papers must have fallen into Kester's hands, not through your mother, but in some other way, from the House here. Miles suspects; and Miles is not one to shut his eyes and keep the estate."

"And if his eyes were opened he might see your guilt as well as his loss. And still I do not see why you have told me this. I am sure you do not expect me to forget,—to go back to the old life,—the old wretchedness?"

"If you were his wife,—if you withheld the papers,—if you spared to ruin his mother——"

I said not one word in answer. I knew she was looking to me for it, though while I stood still there beside her, my eyes were fixed upon the floor. If I spared!

Presently she said, in quivering tones, "Annot, if Kester is not, Miles is of your blood."

"I see that. Well?"

"And for his sake you will forgive?"

I drew away from her, and began to pace the floor restlessly. Forgive? I was possessed with a wild desire to turn upon some one,—to bring down retribution for my long suffering.

"Forgive? I'll no harm your son, Mrs. Lethwaite," I said. "I'll no touch one acre of the lands he has thought his——"

"Oh, Annot, how can I ever thank you?"

"Stay, and hear me out," I interrupted her. "I'll no touch one acre of the lands he has thought his. But for you and Kester,—you both shall feel how I have suffered."

"What do you mean?" she questioned, faintly.

I stopped short in my restless pacing of the room, and came and stood beside her. "See," I said, putting out my hand again upon her own, as white as the fair coverlet on which it lay,—“is this the hand of a Lethwaite? An hour ago I said it was not fit to mate with such an one as yours; is it whiter, smoother, softer, since? And is it this

only, my life has marred for me? Do you think naught but my hands are grown hard in it? Do you think a word of yours can make a Lethwaite of me? It is dree work you have wrought,—work past your mending.”

Her other hand stole up, and covered her face from me, where it lay upon the pillow. Other than that stealthy movement, she made none.

I went on, more vehemently still :

“A very dog will turn and rend again when he is trampled down. And in what am I better? Not in the rearing, certainly. An Rockie, up yonder at Mallerstang, has been banned and cursed at, flung out of the road, beaten, frightened, till he has covered shivering away out of sight and hearing,—I have no less. An he had a caress, or a kind word, so had not I. An he had a full meal now and then, and lay down in satisfied content, it was never so with me. I was cursed and hated,—starved in heart and brain. I could rather forgive Kester even every blow he has struck me, than forgive you the blank and hopelessness of all these years. If every softer feeling has been crushed out of me, to you and Kester do I owe it all. Can you look for aught from me, than that I should discharge my debt in full to both of you?”

I stopped short. less for an answer, than that breath failed me; less that I had poured forth all my wrongs, than that I lacked voice to tell them in. And no answer came to me. When I

looked down on my enemy before me, there was something in the listless drooping of the arm across the face, in the white parting of the lips, that startled me. I sprang to the bell and rang it wildly. It seemed an hour's weary while before Marget came in, and found me kneeling by the couch, trying to chafe some life into the poor cold hands.

Not that there was any pity in me, even then, for the guilty woman before me. Only a certain remorse and a vague terror of death. It did not tend to soften me that Marget sent me straightway from the room. I do not know if she meant to be harsh; but probably she blamed me, as well she might, for the state in which she found her mistress. Certainly she ordered me out, very shortly and authoritatively. But I crept back to ask, with awed and bated breath,—

“Will she get better, Marget? Is it a swoon?”

She turned upon me sharply:

“What iver art doing here? Hast not done mischief enow e'enow, but thou mun still be lingering? I'm woe for ye, lass,—an ye ha' killed the mistress wi' yer pingling clavers, it's over late to take the rue. That wanna lift her fro' the narrow bed back to her son. Nay, whisht!—away wi' ye!—go thy ways back to Mallerstang. There's trouble enow i' the house the day,—I wanna ha' ye add to 't.”

This last drop of bitterness I owed yonder

woman, too,—that my one friend should turn from me to her.

Marget never heeded that I did not obey her, further than to move away to the dressing-room, just within which I crouched down, out of sight. Mally was there to help her now; and, for all my anxiety, I was not quite able to brave Marget's anger. Out of sight I crouched down, waiting, listening to footsteps coming and going,—taking no note of time, in my one long, breathless dread. For the footsteps were as stealthy, the voices were as hushed, as in the chamber of death.

Until there came a heavier tread,—a stir,—a suppressed murmur.

I pushed the door wider, and pressed forward, and glanced within.

Everything about the room is engraved on my memory in lines of pain time has no power to blot out. The flushed, unresting face upon the pillow,—Marget bending above,—Miles, his bronzed face of an ashen pallor, his lip quivering suddenly, as the sufferer's high, sharp voice rang out,—

“Miles too! And I have ruined him,—the shame, the shame!—he'll never bear——”

“Eh, but begone, for Heaven's sake, Maister Miles!” I heard Marget whisper: “ye see the mistress gets mair an' mair out o' her head when she sets eyes upon ye. Go; an there be any change, I'se come for ye, poor lad.”

He did not go; but he drew apart, into the shadow of the curtain, in the recess, out of sight of Mrs. Lethwaite. I was so near him I might almost have touched him with an outstretched hand; but he never saw me. His eyes were fixed upon the ground, and about his mouth were such lines of suffering as I had seen nothing of before. For I was not used to the sight of emotion, beyond that of anger sometimes in old Kester. And what was this I had done? Had my harshness given the death-blow to this woman? Had it brought this pain to Miles Lethwaite's face?

"Poor lad!" had Marget said,—ruined in substance, spoiled of even his mother's love and of his faith in her. Was it I who should work him this? I?

I stole out from my place. But, softly as I drew near, Mrs. Lethwaite's eyes unclosed and looked straight up to mine, with such unutterable horror of fear in them that I was prepared for the cry panted forth:

"Have mercy!—Miles,—if he should know——"

"She's wandering," Marget said.

But was this wandering? She never moved her eyes from mine; they never lost that agony of dread. But there was recognition of me, too,—or so I thought. And, acting on the impulse of this thought, I stooped suddenly, and with my lips close to her ear, I whispered what I had come back to say:

"Miles shall not know. Only trust all to me. I will—ay, I promise to destroy every one of those papers. Miles shall never know. Will not that comfort you?"

Poor soul! That comfort found its way even then, in her disordered brain. She repeated the words after me, in a wondering sort of way, under her breath, faintly, and so low that only I, bending down to her, could hear:

"Miles shall not know,—shall never know."

Repeated them over and over again. And they calmed her, and she lay upon my arm, still looking up into my eyes, still clinging to my hand, until her gaze grew less and less wild and strange. And in awhile she fell into a troubled sleep, still resting on my arm.

Miles quitted the room then, at Marget's second bidding. As he passed my chair he lingered,—he even spoke my name in a low voice.

But I would not look up. A passionate indignation throbbed within me. It was as though they were all leagued against me,—all,—Marget, Mrs. Lethwaite, Miles,—and that promise of mine to Mrs. Lethwaite was as a fetter binding me down hand and foot.

And so, unanswered, he passed out.

At first not even pity and remorse could overcome the repulsion with which I felt her resting on me. But in the long watch that followed, during which I dared not move for fear of breaking the

light, uncertain slumber,—in that watch, it almost seemed that she was changed to me.

If one would lose the spirit of enmity, let one not receive a kindness at a foe's hand, but do one. Let a woman watch alone in the stillness, above a sufferer's couch, and see what wrath can survive that. The helpless droop of the poor head upon my arm, the yearning appeal of the eyes upraised to mine,—truly, when my enemy fell into deep unbroken sleep at last, and I ventured to lay her down upon her pillow, she had conquered. She had conquered,—she, and not the thought of Miles which had brought me back to her. She,—pity for, I had almost said sympathy with, her. And in the days that came after—the days she filled with cruel wrong—I never more was able quite to put away the sense of that head lying helplessly against my breast, of those wan eyes pleading so to mine. For we may forget a kindness done to us,—may even repay it with yet further injury; but a kindness we have done will throw some gleam of sunshine into our darkest thoughts, and brighten them with something of forgiveness for the one who works us hurt.

When I had laid her softly down upon the pillow, Marget came and drew me away.

“Go now, bairn,—go,” she whispered me; “I wanna ha’ her see thee here when she wakes. It’s over late now, and thou mun be home.”

Passively I obeyed, and left the room. There

was no good-night exchanged between Marget and me. It would have been a farewell had I spoken it. But I had no heart to say the word. Something had come between us; the old familiar tone was gone, and there was a soreness on my part, as if she had not been true to me. But, indeed, if truth to me involved falsehood to a Lethwaite, I had little right to look for it.

I had almost forgotten Miles Lethwaite the while. But I must find him now; must claim from him those papers I had promised to destroy. Should I find him in the library?

Going in, again for one instant I forget Miles Lethwaite. For, as I enter, the sun's rays, slanting through the west window, fall so full upon a portrait that I pause to look at it.

I find more in that pictured face now than I have ever been able to read there before. More than pride, than coldness. An unscrupulous will in the slight yet firm curves of the lips,—a will which had not hesitated to sacrifice me when occasion served. Would it ever hesitate again? For it is not hard to understand that her agony but now was not remorse for the wrong to me,—was rather fear of the retribution to follow after wrong. And back upon me come, as though written down in the soft lines of that fair face, the wrongs I have suffered,—the wretched days of Mallerstang,—the nights when I have sobbed myself asleep in childish fears and dread and loneliness,—the hopes and

longings all a dreary blank. There is not even any comfort in the memory of the hours here at Wearithorne,—how they were stolen from old Kester,—how they were paid for in blows when I returned at night, or in words wellnigh as hard to bear, when something in my face, as I grew up to womanhood, made his hand fall and his voice rise instead. And Marget,—that is still the bitterest thought of all, as I stand there and watch my enemy's haughty smile fade out in the dusk.

And then I see there is a candle burning in the secretary's dim recess,—the secretary lid is down, and his chair drawn up to it. A packet of letters tied with a green riband is pushed aside, as if he had laid it there; but he is not heeding it. His arms are folded on the desk, and his head is bowed down upon them.

He does not stir until the rustle of my dress comes close to him. And then he raises his head and looks at me.

Whether I were Marget, or Mally, or Nannette, he would never have heeded at that moment. I know that at a glance. There is nothing in his haggard eyes but the speechless agony of suspense; and I see the firm lips quiver under the brown beard,—quiver, without one audible word. But I know well the question they would put. And I answer it:

“She is sleeping quietly and peacefully. The

fever has almost passed away. She will awake restored. You need not fear."

"Nannette!"

The shaking voice is an appeal I cannot withstand. I go swiftly to him,—laying my two hands in his right outstretched to me.

He draws me nearer, with that strong right hand, and with those earnest eyes. Until I kneel beside, and hide my face from him, upon the desk where his was bowed but now.

His large palm closes over my two trembling hands. But he makes no other sign. Perhaps his thought is not half with me even now. But that I am something to him at such a moment—Nay, something? By that firm clasp in which he holds me fast, I know—

He interrupts me, saying, still in that shaken tone,—

"Glad tidings of great joy. The angels always brought them, you know. And my little Nannette has come to me in my hour of great darkness. She will never go away again?"

I lifted my head. But before our eyes met, I caught the proud, still glance of Mrs. Lethwaite from her place on the wall opposite.

In my excited mood, I could almost fancy her lip curled with a more scornful, sneering smile. Was she to stand between us?

Perhaps Miles felt me tremble. For he repeated his question, forcing me to look at him.

But I hardly saw him. I saw, instead, the distance that lay between us, now that I was never to be Annot of Wearithorne to him, but just Nannette o' Mallerstang. What if he should remember this presently?—it is so easy to stoop lightly, on the impulse of a moment, to a thing he knows within his reach.

“She will never go away again?”

It was not that voice, tender and true, I answered, but the fear which had been whispering to me. For I rose up, disengaging myself, and replying, in defiance of the tears still on my lashes,—

“Ay, but she must go away, and that at once. You see, I have forgotten Kester,”—I could not bring my lips to utter “Uncle Kester” just then,—“but one cannot forget always.”

He looked at me, disconcerted and puzzled. I knew I had perplexed him,—that he could not tell whether I had not understood at all; or whether I had come to him at his appeal, in the mere sympathy of a thoughtless, childlike impulse. That was as I would have it. If he really cared, let him speak again. Not to-night, but in a cooler, calmer time.

As I half turned aside, my glance fell on the packet. I put my hand out for it, saying, with apparent carelessness,—

“An it's your will, I think I'll take my letters back with me.”

But he intercepted me.

“Leave them with me, Nannette, a short while

longer. I meant to take them with me to Askrigg to-day, to mail them there for my lawyer in London. But on second thoughts, and at my mother's suggestion, it seemed safer to write to him first, to insure his receiving them. You must let me hold them till I get his opinion as to what is best to do."

"No, no,"—still carelessly,—"I've changed my mind. I'll not play at bogle-about-the-bush with such a slender clue as that."

"But it is no slender clue. I at least am bound to follow it up."

"Will you give me my own letters, Colonel Lethwaite?" cried I, waxing impatient. "If I list to take them, who is to say me nay? I'll make shift to rest satisfied as I am. What matter if my mother were a lady? That will never make me any other than just Nannette o' Mallerstang."

"It will not make you any other," he said, very gently. "If it could, I would regret the day that ever placed those letters in my keeping. But I will tell you frankly, Nannette, I do not think they are your mother's. I more than suspect the clue leads altogether another way."

"Another way?" I faltered.

"Nannette,"—almost pleadingly,—"you do not imagine it is not painful to me to gainsay you? It is painful every way. If I am right in my belief, it may be I shall be utterly ruined. And if I am wrong,—if these papers put you in possession of an estate,—do you think I shall feel nothing, see-

ing you removed apart from me? I am a poor man this day: do you think I am generous enough to wish you a rich woman, parted from me by wide lands and all the troops of lovers they will bring?"

I had nothing to answer to that. He went on, not waiting, indeed, for any answer:

"But all that is nothing to the purpose. What I have to consider is this: the papers certainly do furnish some clue, and I have written to a lawyer that I hold them. I am responsible for them, seeing of your own free will you gave them into my keeping."

"But I who was free to give, am free to reclaim."

The packet lay before me, still knotted with the riband, but bound about with a strip of paper too. If I had looked closely enough to see what that strip was,—but I hardly noticed it at all, in looking at him while he spoke:

"I am sorry if you are angry with me, but that will not alter the case. A heavier responsibility rests upon me in those papers than you know. They shall be returned to you; but first, that responsibility I mean to discharge."

Perhaps it was a strange sort of smile I forced to my lips; but I did force one, and pushed the papers back to him, and said, as lightly as I could, that he must take his own way,—I could see it was of no use to combat his will.

"Of no use at all," he said, lightly in his turn; then earnestly,—

"Why are you so unkind to-night? You must know how your distrust pains me."

I answered nothing. He said again:

"You yourself gave me the papers willingly enough. Why have you changed?"

And still no answer. And leaning forward on his arm, and looking in my face, he asked me,—

"Because you have not forgiven me that morning by the syke?"

I turned away my head:

"If I had been one of your grand ladies,—if I had stood side by side with you, instead of below,—you would never have done that."

"I would, Nannette."

At that thrill in his voice I flashed up one glance at him. It answered me more clearly than his words had. He added, after a pause,—

"And then, too, you were such a child in your tears. Nannette, if you knew——"

But I was not to know; for Mally's entrance cut him short. She brought more lights, and proceeded to draw the curtains. I felt her curious gaze, as she passed close by me where I stood beside the secretary. Miles observed it too, for he frowned over the letters, and pushed his chair back.

"That will do, Mally," he said, impatiently. "Take your candles out to the dining-room. I shall not be in here again this evening."

"Please, sir," the girl asked, "then shall I no bar in the windows for the night?"

"Very well," abruptly.

"And wunna ye be fain for dinner now?" she persisted.

He turned to me, asking, in a low voice, if I would stay. Then, as I hurriedly shook my head, he said to Mally,—

"Just put off dinner for an hour yet."

She lingered, adjusting first one piece of furniture, then another. I saw she was curious to discover why I was here with the Master. He saw it too; and once I divined from his sudden flush and gesture that he was about to order her out angrily. But he checked himself, rearranging letters and papers, and thrusting that packet—I saw where he thrust it—in the lowest of the left-hand shelves.

Suddenly he turned to me,—that book still lay upon the secretary.

"My horse's hoof struck on this, down by Bur-tree-syke, this evening. It can be no one's but yours, and you must let me return it to you."

I could not keep down the burning color from mounting to my very temples, but I did summon hardihood to play my little hypocritical part of surprise and regret at the weather-beaten appearance of the volume he put into my hands. "It looks indeed as if it had been in the very 'drip of summer rains' it sings of," said I, glancing over a page, and warily avoiding that which he had marked.

He had put the lid up again before he gave me

the book. But he had not remembered to remove the key. As I saw it still in the lock, a wild idea flashed across my mind,—an idea I caught at heedlessly, and which banished every other thought. He had come nearer to me where I stood beside the light, and I took up the candle and moved away to a sofa between the windows. There I seated myself, supporting the candlestick on the back of the sofa. That he was surprised by my sudden defiance of appearances I could see by his slight glance toward Mally, who had not yet quitted the room. But as she closed the door behind her, he came and took his seat beside me on the sofa.

What I said to him I do not know, and I hardly knew then. My brain was giddy with the thought that had driven me to the sofa. I was breathless, impatient,—turning over the leaves at random,—making random comments on them, too, and reading aloud, here a line and there a line, after an aimless, disconnected, witless fashion enough, I dare say. At least, I know my wits were wandering very far, and my laugh startled myself with its unnatural ring. I saw Miles looking at me in a mazed way.

“What do you mean by mocking so, Nannette? But mock on, if you will, at rhymed and written love, so you believe that mine——”

The start with which his words brought me back from my own thoughts was involuntary

enough. But that in that start I should have let the candle fall to the floor, broken and extinguished,—if that were involuntary, at least I made no movement to avoid it. And Miles and I were left in darkness.

Of course the accident cut short his sentence. He had started forward in the impulsive attempt to save the light, as it shook in my hold. And I drew myself away, and had glided across the room, as he exclaimed,—

“Nannette, where are you? I cannot find you.”

I knew so well the place of every article of furniture about that room, that I need hardly have knocked over his chair before the secretary, as I made some incoherent reply about a tinder-box. But the truth was, the falling of that chair came in most opportunely to drown a slight grating noise there at the secretary.

“A tinder-box? One moment,—I can strike a light,” he answered me.

I had the lid of the secretary down. But it was hurriedly put up again, the key and the packet hastily concealed in my dress, and I standing near him, when he stooped for the candle.

But I had done my work right well. The broken wick just sputtered, and the spark went out.

“What matter?” I said, carelessly. “I have my hat, and you were going to the dining-room,

—you'll no distract Naunty Marget by putting off dinner?"

"Ay, but I will. You do not think I am to let you go back to Mallerstang alone?"

"But I am going up to Mrs. Lethwaite first."

"You will let me know, then, when you are ready." And he followed my groping way out into the hall.

But I had not taken more than two or three steps up the stairs when he stopped me:

"One moment, Nannette."

He had come forward to the balustrade, while I paused above him. No light burned there, either; but it was less dark than the library, though dim enough. But Miles Lethwaite's face was very clear to me,—is very clear to me now, in the dusky hall, with the full moon peering in at the narrow loop-hole windows. I see how the moon-beams fell through the small, round panes, in tessellated figures, on the stone pavement, crossed now and again by the shadow of a lime-bough without. I see the mirk corners, the rude arch overhead, the great stone stair, with its quaintly-carven balustrade,—and across that balustrade, Miles Lethwaite's earnest face turned toward me, over the mediæval grin of the dragon that curls its amplitude of scales about the abutment at the stair-foot. Miles Lethwaite's face——

"I want you to think over what I have said to you to-night," he went on. "I shall not ask you

now what you think of it. I only beseech you—Nannette, I believe, with all my soul, you are truthful, frank as a mere child. I have been perhaps overhasty for you. I cannot look for you to know your own heart certainly so soon. But you will try to know it? You will be honest and open with me? Nay, then, I will not keep you now."

For I had made an involuntary movement which he took for impatience. It was not impatience,—it was pain,—indecision. Honest and open? And what was I doing? Must I not tell him?

"I have been selfish," he said, his whole face changing as he saw me leaning there before him, downcast and drooping. "I forgot all the watching my darling has had. If anything could have made her dearer, it must have been this watching by my mother's side."

"You love your mother very dearly?" I asked, breathlessly.

"As one loves the one sure good of one's life."

"And how if you should ever find her—not sure,—not good——"

He smiled, for all reply. But when with some impatience I put the question again, he answered me, gravely,—

"You have told me you cannot remember your mother, Nannette, so you do not understand."

Ay, but I did understand. I dared not tell him then. Without another word, gropingly, wearily,

I turned away. For his sake, as for his mother's, my lips were sealed, my promise must be kept.

Miles let me go. But when I glanced back midway in the ascent, I saw him standing still where I had left him. It pained me, I could not have said why, to see how he watched.

I did go up to Mrs. Lethwaite's room; but not to see her lying there with closed eyes, as I had left her. It was Mally sleeping at her post,—no slumberer was on the bed. But as I crept noiselessly to the door of the dressing-room, the outer door of the chamber was opened as noiselessly, and there was the faint gleam of a shaded lamp, and the flitting out of a white dressing-robe.

As I stood still there in the shadow, she passed the outer door of the dressing-room. And as she passed, I caught from the hand upraised to shade the lamp the glitter of a bunch of keys.

Why my suspicions should have been so quick!y roused by that, I do not know. But roused they were; and her stealthy way of peering forward into the hall, where darkness showed the housekeeper's preoccupation, did not give the lie to them.

And so I followed, cautious as herself,—drawing back now and again round an angle or into a dusky alcove when she turned with anxious glance behind her. For I would know whether indeed she meant me this treachery.

She was ghostly as any wraith, in that white trailing robe of hers, and she glided on as stilly,

one transparent hand shading the night-lamp, the other catching by balustrade and wall, until she reached the library and went in.

She had not altogether closed the door behind her, and I pushed it wider, standing on the threshold.

She was leaning heavily against the secretary, holding the lamp high, while one after another of a bunch of keys she tried to fit in the lock. I knew her meaning well; yet, for all, I could but watch her admiringly. The slight yet stately figure in the flowing dress,—the shapely head, with its half-knotted, half-fallen mass of golden hair (we Lethwaites have many of us those goldlocks borrowed from the far-off Annot, the Scots peasant-girl),—the dark-blue eyes kindling in her eagerness, and the proud lips scarlet as the fever-flush on either cheek. My enemy was fair and soft and lovely. Nature does not always set down her index clearly feature by feature, but blots out with a soft line or a flush of color the ugly list of traits which we would write upon the face.

Mrs. Lethwaite heaved an impatient sigh, as one by one she let the keys fall back upon the ring. Would not one fit?

One, at the last. It turned easily enough in the lock, and she let the lid down.

Ay, she had stooped straight to the lowest of the left-hand shelves. There were but two or three loose papers on it now. She unfolded and glanced

over them rapidly; then she let her hand fall to her side, in still dismay.

I waited until then, and then I left my place,—not noiselessly, for I had no wish to startle her,—and stood before her as she turned.

The speechless shame in her down-falling eyes would of itself have told me what she had come there to seek.

“And you could not even trust me?” I said to her, bitterly. “You are not satisfied to let me rob myself, but you must rob me. I have the packet safe here, Mrs. Lethwaite. You may go back and rest,—I shall keep my word to you.”

She did not think to answer me,—what could she say? She only moved to obey me.

But so shaken was she, so unnerved by all the full hours had brought her, that in taking up the lamp, her trembling hand let it fall. There was a quick, sharp crash of broken glass, and we were left in darkness.

The crash must have sounded through the door she had left ajar. For I heard another open, from the dining-room, I felt assured.

“He is coming,” I said, hurriedly. “Go out to meet him. Don’t let him come in,—say something to him,—anything,—only don’t let him find out I am here. All will be well then. Quick!”

While I spoke, I had locked the secretary, and thrust the bunch of keys into her hand. She had just time to reach the door and close it behind

her, when I saw a flicker of light creep across the threshold, and I heard Miles say,—

“You here? What has happened?”

And she answered him,—I heard her laugh,—

“Very little, Miles. Only Mally has let fall the lamp on the library floor. You must not say anything of it to her,” she added, in a prudent afterthought; “she is distressed enough about the carpet already.”

“Hang the carpet! Marget told me the girl was sitting with you. How came she to leave you? Did you need anything, and come down to find her? My poor little thoughtless mother, you must be taken better care of. I’ll have that maid of yours back.”

“Nay, you shall fill her place, Miles, and take me to my room. It was not Mally’s fault, dear. I sent her for—a scent-bottle I had left in the library, and she was so long, I thought she did not quite know where to find it.”

“Was not Nannette with you?”

“Nannette went home some time ago.”

“Went home alone?”

I heard them mount the stairs together, and again Mrs. Lethwaite’s voice at her chamber-door:

“Do not come in, Miles. Say good-night here.”

Ay, do not come in and find poor Mally sleeping at her watch. “Say good-night here.”

I do not wait for more. I steal out, and across

the court, noiselessly as any ghost might do. And then I hurry on, with swift foot, yet oppressed by the sense of falsehood. How lightly it had fallen from her lips! but it weighs hard upon my conscience, that falsehood I have listened to quietly enough, spoken for me.

And now I have reached the edge of Helbeck Lund, where the beck flows about the moorland edge. Beneath my foot the rocks shelve fast to a black abysmal pool, from the neighborhood of which the very pines themselves straggle back beyond dark crags upon the farther side. It is a dismal spot to stay in, but time wears heavily until I have discharged my promise.

So I sink down on a ledge that overhangs the water, and begin to loose the band about my letters. My letters!—and I feel as guilty as though I were a midnight thief who had stolen in and robbed the Master. My fingers tremble so that I can hardly loose the knot. Something fluttered beyond my reach in the night-breeze. Only a crisp strip of paper binding these together. The riband would have gone too, but I grasp at it. For it would be a clue. I must take surer care of the letters. And one by one I tear them to mere shreds, and, stooping, place the handful on the hurrying current of the stream. It will carry them forever far beyond the ken of Miles Lethwaite.

My task is done. I rise, setting my face homeward now. Slowly and wearily. It is all done.

And though I know not yet the fulness of that all, the rugged way is harder than I have ever known it in the days gone by. Harder and drearier,—beset with strange sounds in the rustling of the wind, and the startling grating of some bough of shrub or tree against the walls of Helbeck Lund. The waters darken more and more, yet with no distinct overshadowing. Down from the blasted pine above me, clatter and grate two last linked cones, until the ripple closes over them blackly. Only that break in the stillness,—or if a gust just stirs the branches overhead, it so soon dies. Only that,—but the beck hurrying on with its strange moan, as of some wild, fierce creature in pain and terror of escape.

I strive to summon back the fleeting sense of triumph with which I stole away from Wearithorne with those papers in my possession. I strive to rejoice that I have made a great sacrifice for Miles, and that my hand has turned aside a heavy blow from him. But I can remember only my deceit. And when I steal up to my chamber, past the house-place where Kester has fallen asleep over the fire,—when I lean from the window and watch the turret-light which flickers out above the limes from Wearithorne,—somehow my ear is filled with the hoarse moaning of that beck. What is there in it? Yet when my head is on my pillow, waking thoughts and dreams go on to that dreary monotone.

VI.

It faded slowly, the crimson flushes
 Wavering long on the sedges there,—
Adown the green hollow, amid the rushes
 The burn glints on through the alders fair;

And there below me the moorland purples
 And shines and glooms to the broad white sea :
But now as then though the moor-cock hirples,
 His note no more rings the same to me.

KESTER had given me leave to take Brownie and ride to the Hawes market the Tuesday after that evening at Wearithorne. He was rare and indulgent that day, for we were yet in the midst of our second cheese-making. Letty was nearer midsummer than May, in getting to it; but for me, I was wont to be fain for the cool dairy, in among the fragrant white-brimmed pans ranged where the floor was hollowed in the rock. But that day I had had enough of the setting of the milk and the pressing in the cheese-vat,—enough of the salting of the curd and putting it back into the press for the night. It had stormed heavily yesterday, and the air was so fresh and sweet with rain and sunshine that I had grown restless within-doors. Then, too, I had much finished knitting-work upon my hands, and was more than usually

desirous of changing the coarse ribbed textures of gray and blue—the jackets and bump-caps of my weary winter's industry—into dainty ribands and a bit of real lace for the bodice of my Sunday gown. Last Sunday I could not find it in my heart to go to the kirk at all. But next Sunday I would brave everything, and venture to the moorside chapel. I must see Miles,—meet his glance, cold, or angry, or contemptuous, as it might be. I had avoided him all this week, even stealing away down to Moss-Edge Hollow one evening when I spied him climbing Helbeck Lund, only to meet Kester at the Hag. Miles must have found out the loss of the packet ere this; and I never imagined he could fail to suspect me. I shrank guiltily from meeting him; but at the kirk could be no danger of his taxing me; and I could judge at a glance how to be prepared to meet him.

I had been to Hawes,—had quit myself of my heavy bundle, and received in return a package for which there was ample room in my apron pocket. So I was left free to clamber, followed on a more prudent footing by my faithful Brownie, along the ways which bordered on the Swale, and which required here and there, besides the wary foot, hands quick to catch at rocky wall or overhanging shrub when once the regular flagged path was deviated from. To-day I could not go quietly along. I was restless and impatient; and when the roar of Har-draw Force drew nearer, sounding through its

echoing walls, I hurried thither, knowing the fall of water would be grand indeed, after the swelling of last night's storm.

I had been there some time, sinking down upon a rock, and hiding my face in my hands, after the first glance. There was something in the clamor of the waters which drowned the voice of care within me. I sat there, listening idly, as if I might listen thus forever, and so forget.

The rushing cataract had swept down rocks and rent trees from the mountain-sides. They ground against the crags, and fell with separate splash into the swirl below. Fell now and again like a foot-step drawing near,—the fall of some sharp tread upon the path behind——

I started up.

For there was a tread upon that path. The rent walls here shut me in, as in a cave, down into which, a hundred feet below, thundered the force in one free leap. Long ledges crept behind the curtaining cataract, and then swept up to join the old Roman road that still keeps its foothold on the cliffs above. And there a horseman was approaching along the flagged way, which, though over-smooth and slippery after a rain, was often thus used rather than the rugged modern road.

He threw his bridle over a projecting shrub near where I had tethered Brownie, and came forward to meet me. To meet me, who cast a troubled glance around, and then, seeing no possible escape,

resumed my seat and waited with bent head and quivering breath.

I had not long to wait. He was at my side, was speaking my name in a glad, quick tone that had no displeasure in it.

"I thought I should never find you again. I have tried to meet you everywhere,—even ventured up to your Hag, with such a reception from your courteous uncle that I resolved not to go again, lest the visit work harm to the niece. But to-day I was thoroughly out of patience, and broke that resolve."

"To-day?"

"An hour or two ago. As luck would have it, I again met Kester,—in better humor, for although he scowled on hearing I had a message from my mother to you, yet he growled out the information that you were gone to Hawes."

"A message from your mother?" I said, quickly, looking up at him for the first time.

"Well, yes,—I suppose I was free to say a message, when Kester would call me to account. She was asking Marget this morning if you had been up at the House. I am sure she would wish to thank you for your kindness to her."

"She'll be bravely again?" I asked. Not, it must be confessed, altogether because I cared to know, but because the question seemed a natural way of filling up the pause.

"My poor mother has been sadly shaken by

her illness. She was unnerved last night and this morning by a household trouble. I took it upon me to interfere in her province, and dismiss Mally rather abruptly yesterday, and my mother was quite upset by it."

"Mally? Oh, I am sorry for that!" I cried. "I hardly know her myself, but she's half-sister to our Letty, and troth-plight with Davie o' Burtreesyke. I think she was laying by out of her wage for her wedding bravery."

"Laying by on rather an extensive scale," he said, gravely. "She robbed me of a large bank-note."

"Robbed! Why, Letty knew naught of it this morning, I'm sure."

"No; for the girl begged for silence till she could get away, out of sight of all who knew her. It need not have been mentioned at all, but that Marget knows, and the gardener was brought up about the loss."

"Poor lass!" I said, with a strange sort of fellow-feeling. True, I had robbed myself in robbing him. "Could you no forgive her after she had confessed?"

"She would not confess; but still persisted she had found the note on the moor. Whereas, there has been no one but Marget in the house, and her honesty is above suspicion. Besides which, I have not been able to find the key of the secretary, where the note was, since the evening you were at

Wearithorne, Nannette. I had the note in my hand then; she was watching, and must have looked where I put it. My mother found her in the room again, too, that same night; and I remembered afterward I had left the key in the lock of the secretary. Why the girl was mad enough to deny the theft, I can't see."

I was sorely puzzled. How could she have stolen that note, while I had the key? But then the key Mrs. Lethwaite had——. A vision of merry, comely Mally rose before me, and I said, regretfully,—

"I am so sorry! Poor Mally, she was that pretty—— Do you think Davie could forgive her? Where, think you, she'll be gone?"

"She would only say she could find work in some factory; she has worked in one before, she told me. But, wherever she may be, she is in no want. I took care of that. As for her, her only care seemed to be to leave no clue behind her."

"I am so sorry! But could you none have forgiven her, Colonel Lethwaite? You had your note again"

"Nannette, how shall I tell you why I could not forgive her?" he asked, after a pause, as he threw himself on the rock 'at my feet, leaning on his arm, and looking up at me. "How shall I tell you? It was not only the note. The note was folded round that packet of yours, ready to be sent to London with it. The girl must have been

hurried, and just seized the packet as it stood,— kept the money, and destroyed the papers. Perhaps that is why she won't own to the theft, but still persists—— Nannette, for God's sake, what is it? Are you ill?"

For I reel suddenly in my seat, and all grows black before me. But I have just strength to lean against the wall, back from his outstretched arm. I am dizzy with the whirl of the raging torrent,— dazzled with the iris-sparkle of the sun-touched spray. The stooping shrubs and jutting rocks seem tossing about there in the eddy—— If he had not caught me back——

"Nannette, I had not thought you cared so much. How shall I ever forgive myself for such a loss?"

"Mally," I strove to say,— "Mally,—I——"

"My little tender-hearted darling!"

The words stab me so, that the sudden pang gives me strength to raise myself almost fiercely. He does not understand me,—how, indeed, should he?—but interprets the gesture his own way.

"You must not be angry with me, Nannette,— the girl is not worth that. Why, she did not show as much emotion at her own detection and dismissal, as you are showing now for her."

It is not so much those words that rouse me to self-control, with the quick sense of danger,— not so much those words, as that I, facing the waterfall, see a shadow steal across the sunshine

dancing on the stream. A shadow, indistinct and broken by the falling mist; but, as I think, the shadow of a man. And, listening intently, I hear, or fancy I hear, a tread which mingles with the rushing of the waters.

There is nothing strange in that. I am not the only one of all the country-folk who would go even out of the way to see Hardraw Force after such a storm as this last night. And I know there is a turn in the rock just where I first saw the shadow,—a turn which leads behind the waterfall pouring over its projecting bed above, and creeps under by a long ledge that sweeps round to this side. I watch a moment; but when no one comes forth along that ledge, a sense of insecurity steals over me. Who knows?—might no one creep within hearing of us here? That which I have to say to Miles must be said to him alone.

And so I rise, and murmur something of time pressing. He rises too, and follows till we reach the regular path, where we both mount our horses.

We ride on, now through the open lanes, now deep in the heart of dells, where dogwood boughs fling white rents across the gloom and the breath of birch and brier-rose steals out to us. Only the steady tramp of the horses is heard through the rustling of the wood, the summer hum of insects, the distant outpouring of a lark's song. And now we are upon the meadow-lands of Stockdale, passing there a tumbrel-car drawn by its four horses

in a line, the blue-smocked driver knitting away too busily to give us more than one brief curious glance as we pass by. And here an urchin or two, laiking and making holiday with mimic mill-wheels in a tiny stream.

Brownie will not go at any steady gait to-day. I throw care behind me in a mad gallop most of the way. Miles follows my lead, after a vain effort or two to make me talk.

I cannot talk. I am striving all the while to come to a determination. Shall I confess all to Miles now and here?—or am I not rather bound to see Mrs. Lethwaite,—to let her be the first to confess, if so she choose? Striving, not the more successfully that, whenever I glance toward him, I meet his eyes, keeping back nothing, but telling their full tale. For Miles did not know me. Even my shrinking from him he interpreted after his own fashion, my unreasonable tenderness of sympathy with Mally—as he judged it—making me yet truer woman in his sight. And how can I bear to undeceive him?

I do not know what impelled me to glance back at that moment. Mere instinct? For, as I did so, I saw a man in the distance, crossing the Hawes road into the thicket. It was but an instant; yet it was enough for me to recognize Kester. I could understand now why he told Miles which way I had gone. He himself had followed to spy upon us. I could at least be thankful he had discovered nothing.

Miles stopped my wild speed after that. He caught my bridle, and said to me,—

“Nannette, you are not going to gallop after this mad fashion till we are at Mallerstang? I have something to say to you.”

“I can hear you very well. Brownie is restive: let the bridle loose, pray, Colonel Lethwaite.”

He only drew it tighter; and while Brownie, glad enough to stop, fell into a walk, Miles said, with clouded brow,—

“Is the pain you keep me in nothing to you? You, so tender-hearted for others, why are you so hard to me? Nannette, you shall speak to me! You cannot go back to Mallerstang and leave me so.”

“I’d none go back to Mallerstang now, an I might go on first to Wearithorne. I have an errand there, to Mrs. Lethwaite.”

“She knows nothing further of the girl,” he said, answering, as he believed, the meaning of my hesitating speech. “I shall be more than glad, however, to have you come to Wearithorne. But, Nannette, I have asked you a question,—I suppose you will let me have my answer at the House?”

I made no reply other than an inarticulate murmur, which perhaps he took for a yes. But I dashed off at once, and we rode full speed together, all the way to Wearithorne.

“An it’s about Mally,” Marget said, when I

told her I must speak with the mistress, "Letty mid ha' done better, an 'twere her sent ye. What for dunna she come hersel' ? But dunna bide a minute, lass,—the mistress be no that well, and mun be quiet."

Mrs. Lethwaite was lying on the sofa in her dressing-room. She did indeed look no that well, but she sat up when I came, and put her hand out to me, as quietly as if she had been expecting me.

As indeed her first words showed she had. I did not feel free to take the chair she offered, and stood leaning against the back, when she began :

"I knew you would be here. Is it not wretched,—this that has grown out of your coming that dreadful evening ? Miles would not listen to me ; I tried to save the poor girl all I could."

"All you could, Mrs. Lethwaite ? Did you tell your son everything ?"

"Everything ? What do you mean ? When you charged me not to let him know you were here !"

"Everything, Mrs. Lethwaite. Not only that I was here, but why I was here, and why you went down to the library."

She sank back on the sofa, gazing at me incredulously.

"You know, Annot," she said, slowly, "I could not tell him that. Where were the use of your promise to me then ? If he understood you and I were both in the library that night to take those

letters, he would understand the rest fast enough, and what interest I at least had in them."

"He would,—and he ought, Mrs. Lethwaite. Mally shall not be ruined for us."

"What would you do, then? Break your word to me, and lay bare all my guilt to Miles?"

The voice was so wild with terror—she turned so white and red all in a breath—that I was frightened. I answered her, quickly,—

"No,—my word to you is given, and the papers are destroyed. It's no for me to tell him, but for you."

She laughed,—a short, hard laugh :

"For me? And do you think I have kept the secret all these years,—have risked so much, suffered so much,—to give it up to-day when the proofs against me exist no longer? You must believe me weak indeed."

"Strong, to bear the burden yourself. But weak or strong, I tell you, Mrs. Lethwaite, Mally shall not bear it."

"The papers are destroyed." I think those words had brought back her courage. For a flush came into her white cheeks, and she said, scornfully,—

"Are you prepared to take it from her, then? For I am not. But if you will, you may tell my son how you tampered with the papers in his private secretary. I shall have nothing to do with it. I am not weary of Miles's love."

I brushed past her, without another word. But

before I could reach the door, she was there first, —was leaning against it trembling, stretching out imploring hands to me :

“Annot, what would you do?”

“Let me pass, Mrs. Lethwaite.”

“I dare not. I will not let you ruin me,—yourself. I will not let you ruin Miles.”

“I will not ruin him. Everything shall be his. But I will clear Mally. I will show him what you are,—into what you would plunge me,” I answered her, in the white heat of quiet wrath.

“And will that serve you in good stead,—to have no mercy on his mother? I tell you, Annot, it is not loss of the estate, it is his mother’s shame would ruin Miles.”

There was a thrill of triumph in her voice that made me long to thrust her from my path, and to go down and tell Miles all. But in spite of myself I felt she spoke truth. Ruin Miles? Mally’s ruin was but a dim shadow, seen against the midnight gloom I might bring down on him.

If Mrs. Lethwaite saw her advantage, she was wary in not showing me she did. She clung to my hands, to my dress, she besought me to spare her only for Miles’s sake. And I remembered no more any suffering save that which would be his.

“Would be.” “Must be” had changed to that already. And now, when I caught a footstep on the stair, I stood no longer hesitating.

“Let me go, Mrs. Lethwaite: he is coming. I

dare not face him now. Nay, let me go,—have I not given you my word I won't betray you?"

She stood aside. I heard that step again. I had the door wide in an instant, crossed the corridor, and fled down the other stairway at the opposite end of the hall. Only to brush against Miles Lethwaite at the foot.

"I thought you were coming up the other way," I cried, taken unawares.

"And meant to avoid me by this? That was Marget who passed me here. Nannette, is it so?—do you really wish to avoid me?—do you object to my going with you back toward Mallerstang?"

I looked at him,—and I heard Marget's heavy tread again. Here, where we had parted on the stair that night, he was standing before me; I saw he did not mean to move until he had more than just that one answer. And I suspected Marget was coming down to interrupt; I knew she would not think it canny in me to be lingering here with the Master. I'd not face her.

So, in a moment more, we were walking together under the limes, Miles insuring against such a wild gallop as our ride hither by passing his own horse without so much as a glance, as we crossed the court. I did not let him mount me upon Brownie, as he proposed, meaning to walk beside me; but we both went on, on foot.

I never now tread the path I trode that day with Miles; but I know it as if I had crossed it yester-

day. I think the lonely seas must be like our moors; taking their tone from the skies, and gloomy or bright as those are frowning or smiling. A drear, heart-breaking, hopeless stretch I have seen that same heath. But certainly, that gloaming, over the undulating sweep, broken here and there by a stooping hollow with the peat-tinged quiet waters of a gill, there was a cloudless sky. A sky so cloudless and so soft in its gray-blue that it hardly caught a glance, and seemed all emptied of its majesty. It paled yet more where the moors rounded like a globe to the horizon, and the sun-rays and the yellow gorse in-wove with purpling ling. I remember all so well,—the faint sweet marish odors as we crushed the grasses under-foot,—the hum of insects in those grasses,—the whirr of wings and twitter of the nestward flight of birds,—the hoarser breeze-borne din of rooks in the oaks behind Wearithorne. These sounds filled up our pauses as we walked; the moorland was not drear that hour.

I looked back then, and brighter than elsewhere the sinking sun was turning all those honied limes of Wearithorne to gold. And brighter than elsewhere, as I glance back to-day, the glow of memory falls upon that hour when the last red troubled flush of sunset sank away into the dull gloom of after-life. Looking back! There is but a mirk comfort in it, after all. There are always more or less of tear-mists hovering between us and the far

horizon of the past, even when that past has been, as mine before that day, an even surface, unmarked by those bold, sunny heights and sinking, darksome clefts where one most naturally expects gathering mists.

We went on at no laggard pace, however. If I had dared, I would have sprung on Brownie, would have snatched the bridle from Miles's hold, and never drawn rein till I was safe under the shadow of Mallerstang. But I do not dare. I must linger, and hear what Miles has to say to me. And he is not long in saying it:

"I told you I would wait for an answer to my question. Do you mean not to give it? Is it to be always so between us?"

"Always so?"

"You know I love you, Nannette,—is that why you are so cold to me?"

"It is you are cold,—hard as the nether millstone,—it's fearsome!" I cried, vehemently. "Have you ne'er done wrong, that you can no forgive?"

"Nannette," with passing tenderness, "have I frightened you with Mally's story? Do you think I shall be cold—hard—ever to you?"

"An 'twere I had done what you say Mally has, and you were Davie, troth-plight with her,"—I say it faintly, stammeringly,—"you—could you forgive?"

"But you are not Mally. Why make such an uncomfortable pretense?"

I look up in his face despairingly. Would he never suspect anything, unless I put it in cruel words? I could not put it in words.

"What if you ever found I had deceived you?" I asked.

"I shall not be afraid of your deceiving me."

"But if I should?"

He was silent. I persisted in my question.

"Why do you say such things?" he asked me, lightly.

"What do you think,—will Davie aye forgive you lass?"

"Not if your forgiveness means love, Nannette."

"Eh, just hearken to that! And you are not hard,—not you!"

"Not hard," he answered me. "If this had been a swift temptation which overcame the girl,—but it was not that. She had time enough to think, time enough to remember."

And I,—had I not time enough to think, time enough to remember, how my guilty silence was condemning the innocent? And I went on:

"If—poor heart, if she deceived him for his own sake,—because she'd have helped him?"

"Worse and worse."

"It may be worse and worse,—it may be desperately wicked," I cried, with a sob in my voice, which I wonder now did not bring my pleading home to me, even to his unsuspecting ear,—"it may be worse and worse, but it was done for love

of him. And what is love, if it cannot atone for all things?"

He looked at me gravely. He said,—

"If a man still loved a woman through his scorn of her,—I do not say it is impossible,—the love must be a mere ignoble thing of passion and of habit. Not the love, Nannette, which I bring you."

I had no answer to the sudden pleading of his voice, and the hand outstretched to me fell at his side without response from mine. How could I answer him? Even the half-confession which was on my vacillating lips but now, must implicate Mrs. Lethwaite,—must harm Miles,—must—ay, that was it—must injure me with him. I set them fast together. Nay, what care had I for Mally? She had borne her trouble not so heavily, Miles said; while I—

"Nannette, you do not love me, after all?"

The words were not spoken until after a long pause. So long a pause, that during it the way had gone by unobserved, and when his voice startled me into looking up, I saw we had reached the beck under the shadow of Moss-Edge, and I was almost home.

Not love him, after all?

"Do you then care so much?" I asked.

"Care so much?" he repeated, with subdued passion; "I wish to Heaven I did not care!—I doubt you are worth my caring; but if all this is mere vain coquetry, at least tell me so now."

I had not meant to tell him,—it must have been something in my suddenly uplifted face that gave his doubt the lie. But I drew back from him.

“Stay,—if—if I do love you, there is something parts us as yet,—for a time.”

“Nothing shall part us.”

Nothing? But what if afterward he ever learned? I did fear Miles Lethwaite,—the darkness in me feared the light. It seemed no easy thing now, here with him, as it had seemed while up there Mrs. Lethwaite’s hands clasped mine, to hold my peace for her sake or for his,—to suffer Mally’s ruin and yet put my hand in this man’s as a wife should. My right hand, with a lie in it. Would he ever forgive me if he found it out? If I dared tell him now,—if Mally could be righted—

And Miles ruined?

Ay, ruined every way.

For what had Miles said? How his tone, his words, came back to me:

“You have told me you cannot remember your mother. So you do not understand.”

But by the remembrance of that hour when, crouching by the fire-light in the house-place, I first read my mother’s journal, I did understand the blow the truth confessed must deal him. And for me, who had schemed to deceive him, to act out my little part there in the library, to creep back like a thief in the night after that packet— For him? “Worse and worse,” he had said to that.

And if he could not trust me after that, must he not yield Wearithorne to me the heiress, and go forth from it ruined? Ruined every way, perhaps, if I now told him all. And instead, I clutched at a vague hope. I would put him off now, merely for the present; and who knows what time might do for me? It was a weak temporizing,—the vaguest of all hopes, that by waiting I might hear good news of Mally, and so keep my secret with a quiet heart. I was as one who tries to stay a drifting boat just where diverging currents sweep. I might have rushed on confession, as over rapids, which must ruin me or Miles; or I might have turned determinedly, and floated down the smoother-seeming tide of silence, as Miles's wife. But to wait between the two,—to yield to neither current,—I was mad enough to dream it possible.

And so, when he said again,—

“Nothing shall part us——”

“Can you no have patience with me?” I cried. “Can you no wait a little, little while? I can tell you nothing now, but that there is something stands between us yet.”

“It is Kester? Are you going to suffer him to part us?”

I answered him with a pitiful evasion:

“I'm none going to suffer any one to part us. An you'd but wait,—but trust——”

My voice shook there. I, to require of him to trust me, when I meant that he should wait until

I could deceive him with a stiller conscience! I think my shame must have glowed scarlet in my cheeks, when he replied,—

“As to trusting you, that is as easy as to trust my own good faith. But this is a hard thing you ask of me, Nannette,—this waiting. How long is it to last?”

“I can tell you nothing yet,” I cried out, desperately, “but that we are parted once for all, unless you can have patience with me.”

“Nannette,”—catching my two hands eagerly,—“why should there be a mystery between us? Why should you not be frank with me, and let me help you?”

I shook my head, looking up at him speechlessly in my terror. Would he wring the truth from me, whether I would or no?

“My darling has dwelt morbidly upon some trifle, till it has grown out of all proportion to the truth,” he said, tenderly. “I take it upon me without hearing it, since you so shrink from speaking.”

“A trifle? Look at me, Miles,—tell me what trifle I would suffer to wrench me apart from you, when it is like wrenching apart body and soul!”

He must have seen in my face that I spoke truth; for he urged me no more after that. He must have seen it in my face, he stood so long time looking down into it silently.

"Nannette, it is Kester,—it is your fear of him, stronger than your love of me. Why should you stay in his power? Only come to me——"

Again I shook my head for all reply.

And then he said, with slow effort,—

"What would you have me do, then?"

A great dread rushed upon me. It was cruel in its selfishness, perhaps,—but for my life I could not have kept back its utterance:

"Only do not forget me."

He smiled a weary, haggard smile, not looking at me. And then we both with one consent resumed our walk; for we had stopped short on the margin of the beck.

We went on silently until we neared the northern base of Moss-Edge, where Burtree-syke sweeps round to enter Helbeck Lund. Not far off was the cove where once before we had parted, I springing away flushed and angry from his kiss. Perhaps Miles too remembered it. For when I paused there, he but took my hands in his. And then:

"Nannette," he said, "I do not ask more, since you shrink from it. I trust you. But in your turn remember this. It is impossible to me to forget you. It is impossible to me to love you less than now, and how I love you now you know right well. I will give you time,—will come again."

"No," I interposed, hurriedly, "you'll no come. You'll no give me the battle to fight over again."

"Not come? Never come?"

I was silent. I had not dreamed of putting away the future from me.

"I will not deceive you, Nannette. No words of yours could make me promise that. But my affairs and my mother's health require that we should go to London for the winter. We leave in a few weeks, and I will give you till then."

"Until you come back in the spring," I cried out, eagerly; "you'll no seek me once till then."

"So be it," was the slow answer. "I will wait,—wait a long time, if you will."

What was a month—a winter—to make or mar all Mally's and my future? A dreary foreboding crept over me. A long time? I faltered out,—

"All a life, Miles?"

"No, for my love is stronger than the thing that parts us, let that be what it may."

Even I then hardly knew how strong that thing was. I had stepped, as he spoke, over the crossing of the stream just there. Our hands fell apart as I did so. For a few paces we walked on, on either side of the syke, slowly, sadly, looking in each other's eyes the farewell we could not speak. Then my path turned up the side of Mallerstang, and I followed it.

So we were parted.

VII.

'Tis but a summer's day, I ween.

This morn the sunlight tangled through
The forest-boughs that crossed the blue,
And we were wandering, I and you,
Where all the fulness of that sheen
Smiled on the daisied turf between.

'Tis but a summer day, I ween.

To-night the moonlight, smiling cold,
Just peers from out her cloudy hold,—
The daisies now no more unfold,—
One moonbeam trembles, us between,
The ghost of what the day hath been.

'Tis but a summer day, I ween.

Why should we strive to make it more?
It must be so, and was of yore,—
The night comes, and the day is o'er,
And hopes that glowed with sunny sheen
Now flit like moon-pale ghosts between.

KESTER came home soon after me, for all the world like a thunder-cloud, lowering and sullen with the pent-up wrath which was to break in storm. I was in no mood to heed his black looks, as he flung himself into the great arm-chair on the hearth, where winter and summer he was wont to sit. Letty was giving her last glance to the porridge; and when she took her basket on her arm, prepared to depart, I followed, round to

the shippon-door in the rear, with a last question about the morrow's churning.

As I lingered idly in the doorway, watching the dusk creep slowly up and up from the deep-shadowed meadow-land between Moss-Edge and the Hag,—creep slowly up and up, as the last gilding of the sunset faded out upon the opposite cliffs,—I saw a man advance out of the shadow.

At first my heart beat wildly and fast ; but almost stood still when I saw it was not Miles, but Mally's lover, and he had joined Letty. And now at last Letty must hear the story of the theft.

Yet it was not of Letty I was thinking ; of Letty, with her cold, still ways, her set and formal saws, and pious phrases to improve the occasion for whatsoever befell any one. "It's none to be helped," was, to her stolid philosophy of insensibility, sufficient and good reason to cease lament, for herself or others. Ah, it is those things which can be helped, over which it is weakness to grieve, for strong will, not tears, will set them right. Letty would not grieve overmuch for her young sister. But that man——

If only I might see his face. I could see he was walking along dejectedly enough, head bent, and hesitating gait, as if in his perplexity and grief he did not heed his way. And a great awe crept over me. This man,—this lover of poor Mally's,—what though he was middle-aged, uncouth, rough,—was it the blow I had dealt, he staggered under now ?

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I could not answer the question, yet I could not put it by. I stood and watched them, till they passed on, out of sight. I had seen Letty give one passing start, which checked her footsteps for an instant; but she then went on at the same pace as before. Surely the tidings could not have moved her very greatly. Yet there was a great awe upon me; and I went slowly and wearily within-doors when those two had passed behind the nook where Letty's cottage hid from sight.

Kester scowled at me as I drew near. But a heavier gloom than his displeasure was upon me, and I went about my household duties, recking nothing of him. There was no word between us; and when the porridge and the oat-cake were upon the table, and I bade him to it, I received no syllable in return, the only answer being the grating of his chair as he drew it forward over the stone floor, and the speedy disappearance of the dainty little sad-cakes Letty's skilful fingers had prepared.

There was silence throughout the meal, which indeed I only forced myself to taste, when I saw Kester's eyes upon me curiously. I made a feint of busying myself with the porridge; but Kester's "humph!" as he rose at last, and passed by my seat on his return to his own place on the hearth, showed he had seen through my effort. He did not say anything for some time thereafter: not until I had put everything by in its place again, and, all my

household duties finished, had taken my accustomed place in the chimney-corner with my knitting. But the monotonous click, click, annoyed me inexpressibly. My hands fell in my lap; and, after a time, I laid my work aside, and went and stood in the open doorway.

It was such a clear, bright night,—for it was night at last. The very breath of the pure air upon my brow gave me new life. I would just wander forth to the scar's brink——

I had not taken three steps before a heavy hand was laid upon my shoulder. Kester whirled me back with his strong arm into the house-place, and then, slamming the door fast, and leaning against it, he assailed me with such a storm of abuse, I wonder at myself now that I did not quail before it.

But I stood there in the patience of indifference, until his wrath had exhausted his words. Exhaust itself it did not; but he came to a stop at length for sheer want of breath.

“What is to do now?” I asked him, quietly enough. “What have I done but stand an instant in the court for fresh air?”

“For fresh air, forsooth! Ye good-for-naught madling, to think to deceive me that gate! In the court! Was't in the court thou were the day? Was't for fresh air thou were daikering by Har-draw Force?”

“The Master of Wearithorne met me there,” I forced myself to answer as carelessly as I could.

"It was no tryst, none of my seeking, and it is no like we shall meet again."

"Nay, that it isna," he said, scornfully. "I'se take tent o' that. An I see aught more o' 't, I promise thee I'se fettle it. An naught else wanna serve ye but such bonny behavior as that, I'se ha'e ye bound out fast enow i' Manchester. There's factories there as 'll tame down the spirit o' any hussy whatsomdever, wi' their click-clack wheels and such like running gear. So mind what I say, lass,—ye'se flit fro' Mallerstang that day I see thee forgather wi' that callant again."

"Nay, I'll no flit fro' Mallerstang, at any odds."

There was something in the quiet assurance of my manner which startled him. He looked at me, puzzled by it.

"I'll no flit fro' Mallerstang," I said again, more positively than before, as I watched the effect of my words. "Kester Holme knows well he has no right to send me here and there,—he has no power whatever over me. Let him remember this. I mean to bide here quietly—*silently*—so long as I am left free and at peace. But if I am not so left——"

"Ay, and what then, thou saucy witch?"

I could see he was greatly startled. I could see the ruddy hue had left his weather-beaten cheek, and his lips were set together after the effort that one sentence cost him. For I had never before braved him thus within his reach. I could see he

was perplexed with wondering what I could have heard from Miles Lethwaite; and yet he spoke with would-be carelessness, lest after all it might be I knew nothing, and this was but a new phase of my wilfulness.

“What then? Kester Holme, you had some papers bound with a green riband——”

My voice shook there; for he glared at me, and for the moment I was in bodily terror. In truth, in thus setting him at defiance I was daring more than I had thought. The power of a bold, bad man thus brought to bay,—what should hold him from silencing my mocking voice then and forever? Who could ever know the secret of the lonely night here?

As my eyes sought the floor, they fell upon a stain in the soft white stone, beside my foot. Here, half a century ago, on one morning after a wild night, a pool of blood was found, and a thick clot of golden hair; but never a trace more. I looked down at the spot and drew my foot back from it. Kester,—did he see it too? And what should stand between me and a fate like this?

Silence fell; deep, awful silence. Through it came the slow tick of the great clock on the stair,—the shriek of the wind about the northern gable,—the sharp whirr of the gases pent up in the peats, as they blazed and flickered out, and left the shadows to grow longer, creeping hither about me and Kester, but not blotting out that stain on the white

stone. And then the hush was broken by Kester's voice, hoarse, and deep, and indistinct, as the first muttering of a storm :

" Papers bound wi' a green riband, had I ? Eh ? "

I could not answer. I was speechless, breathless.

" Ye'll none hae gotten thoe papers ? "

No words could hold a direr threat than those. How should I answer them ?

In the brief pause when this thought came to me, I could not drop my gaze from Kester's lowering scowl. I could see he was watching me in fury hardly held back for the moment. And as I still stood voiceless, shivering and ready to sink and cower there before him in my abject terror, he strode across the space between us.

Only the nearness of the peril could have roused me to such sudden strength. For I thrust the great heavy oak table between us, as if it had been a toy, and with an instant's respite there, behind it, faced the danger before me.

The danger,—Kester's fierce, keen, cruel eyes,—the scornful smile in them,—the unsparing look that watched me as a cat a mouse. I might elude him for the instant,—after that, I was his prey. 'Twas but to reach out after me——

Everything—all the past, all the future—came to me as one swift thought. The past,—I owed Mrs. Lethwaite little faithfulness, yet I could not betray Miles's mother to this man. The future,—Mallerstang was drear and lone, and yet no other

spot could ever be home to me ; was it not, too, in sight of Wearithorne ? And how to keep Mrs. Lethwaite's secret and my home ?

But I forgot it all,—Mrs. Lethwaite, my own home, even my fear and dread of Kester's violence,—when now his mocking taunt fell on my ear :

“Are ye for telling me where is the packet now ? Eh, but we'n gotten a braw lass here,—a rush of a lass as can brave auld Kester to his face and ne'er a bit shivery nor feared,—not she !”

“And if I am,” I cried, letting go prudence, everything, in my unthinking passion,—“if I am feared, it shall profit you nothing. It's just my poor, weak body that's feared,—it's not myself. For what have I to dread ? What but the fearsome blank life is to me ? Nay, you can make my body shrink and shiver,—you can make it cry out with pain,—you can strike it down dead, if you will. But you'll no make me, myself, tell where that green-riband packet is.”

“Will I no ? We'se see.”

He flung himself round to get at me ; but that barrier stood me in good stead. I flitted round it, from his reach.

And then a quick thought struck me. I hardly so much as glanced round, while I spoke again :

“I wonder how you can fashion to forget that packet, Kester ? I could forget it, happen, an you'd let me bide in quiet up here at the Hag. But it's beyond your reach,—nay, an you killed me, you

would never win at it. And I ware you of it, Kester,—I ware you of it, an you'll no let me be."

I knew the words would goad him into rage greater than before. And though, even as I stopped, with furious strength he dashed the heavy table from between us, I was not unprepared. For I had edged nearer and nearer to the door,—it was swift work to fling it open and rush out.

I could hardly have been afraid of Kester's heavier movement overtaking me after that. Yet I sprang half-way across the court, listening for the sound of his steps after me.

But I did not hear them. I stopped short on the brink, listening instead to the loud shutting of the door, and to the heavy bolts drawn behind me.

Was I turned off now, once and forever? Yet I was glad to hear those bolts grating between me and the perii I had been in.

Yet it was no light thing to pass the night out here alone. I crept noiselessly round to the other side of the house, tried door and window, but in vain. They were all fast, as I might have known, but that I had hoped against hope. For it was methodical Letty's way to secure everything but the house-place before she went to her own home.

When I came back, and paused in the courtyard, it was with no thought of the morrow, or of the morrows after that. I only thought of the long night to be passed unsheltered. And Marget?

But half true to me as she had been, yet I turned to her now as to a sure refuge.

The early moonlight and the last lingering of the late twilight were enough to guide me while I made my way down through Helbeck Lund, over the moor, and under the limes that shelter Wearithorne.

I never thought to find any one with Marget, she was so usually alone. And I had crossed the court to her pleasant room in the left projecting wing, before I heeded that the knitting-song within was not carried by her shaking treble alone. Some special gossip, then,—Mally's story, perhaps——

I turned away with a fierce gasp of pain.

In the library, the curtains were not yet drawn, and I could see Mrs. Lethwaite sitting in the soft glow of the wax-lights. She looked pale and worn, as the full blaze fell upon her. But very fair, for all. I could see that presently in Miles's face, as he came into the room.

He leaned on the back of her chair, and she shifted her position slightly, and looked up at him. That long, full look,—I forgave my enemy much as I watched it and saw the smile come into Miles's weary eyes. For her love was great. Could mine ever have filled its place to him?

It was very bitter, gazing in on all that light and glow. Not many days ago, I would have watched with as little thought of any part I might have in

it, as one from a mean garret looks up at the moon and is the gladder for her splendor. But to-night——

To-night there is an angry sense of banishment upon me. And still Miles leans against her chair, —still he stoops to her with words I cannot catch. And I grow very weary. Perhaps my position is a restless one, there on my foothold of the knotted ivy, and half clinging to the window-ledge. I grow so weary,—I draw back——

It is but a moment; and then Mrs. Lethwaite rises and drops the curtains. Is that the instinct of her enmity? Shutting me out into the dark this night,—coming between, as she had come between to throw the shadow of her guilt across my way?

A shadow crosses the curtains once or twice; and then I watch no more.

VIII.

Sister, hark! atween the trees cometh naught but summer
breeze?—

All is gone!

Summer breezes come and go,—Hope doth never wander so,—
No, nor evermore doth Woe.

Dear, that hour,—it seemed my tread stamped the grave-mould
on hopes dead;—

All is gone!

Was I cold?—I did not weep; tears are spray from founts not
deep;

My heart lies in frozen sleep.

Sister, pray for me. Thine eyes gleam like God's own midnight
skies;—

All is gone!

Tuneless are my spirit's chords; I but look up, like the birds,
And trust Christ to say the words.

IS there in every life a time on which one dares
not dwell,—a dreadful monotony of existence,
in which is no hope of the future, no peace of the
present, and dreariest of all it is to turn and look
back on the past? I have read that life is not so
unequally measured out to us as we would think,
—that as the heart alone knoweth its own bitter-
ness, so we cannot say this man has suffered most
—that has wellnigh escaped pain and loss. It may

be so; and yet I think few have passed through so drear a stretch of days as those which widened themselves out to weeks and months since that night I wandered back from Wearithorne.

Down to the lonely Helbeck Lund I had crept back,—had even fallen asleep, beneath the cover of a rock, through part of the long hours until daybreak.

At any other time I might have been afraid,—have started at the grating of a dead branch down the crags, or the near sougning of the wind like a deep breath about me. I would have quaked when the moon went down behind those cliffs,—I would have listened motionless, and watched with frightened, straining eyes for something to cross the dense darkness. For though I was sometimes wont to go to and fro after nightfall, it was seldom without a sense of superstitious dread. But that night I dreaded nothing. It was as if nothing more might ever befall me. And after a time I slept the sleep of utter weariness of body and soul.

When Letty came, and I heard the lowing of the cows up in the farm-yard, and knew Kester must be gone to the milking in the Moss-Edge pasture, I climbed up the cliff and into the house, and so to my chamber, easily eluding Letty's observation as she sat with face turned from me on her milking-stool. And when Kester returned to breakfast, I came down and took my seat at the table in such a way that Letty never suspected my forcible

ejection last night. - But although I put a bold face on it, I did it with a quaking heart. It may be my seeming boldness served me in good stead; for though Kester stared much, and scowled more, he spoke never a word. Never a word then, and never a word afterward upon the subject. For, when all is said, I think he was not absolutely without some sense of justice. I saw that, some months after.

But first the autumn and the winter passed. Not once in all that time did I see Miles or Mrs. Lethwaite, and but twice or thrice Marge^c climbed up the Hag to visit me. She never asked me why I came no longer to the Hall. She was changed greatly to me. No more biting words, nor sharp, quick gibes; no more taking me roundly to task for this or that. Instead, she spoke but little, and that of the country news alone; and would sit following my every movement with a strangely wistful gaze. She irked me in those days. It was as if she would draw my secret out of me, with those keen eyes of hers; as if she would force me to cry out with my pain. How much she knew I cannot tell. Perhaps she too had pain to bear; perhaps if I had given voice to mine, and made her sure of it, she would have told me something I could see was on her lips to tell me more than once. But, be that as it may, her coming did but sting me with a memory of all I had lost. Even Marget's steady friendship. Marget, Mrs. Lethwaite, Miles,

—all had some one dearer than myself,—and I stood so alone. And Marget, seeing that I willed to stand alone, and that her coming was no comfort to me, seldom came.

I went no more over the old path across the moor. I went nowhere beyond Mallerstang and Stockdale; and, as Miles went away so soon (I had contrived to avoid the farewell he came up to Mallerstang to say to me), I hardly saw him at a distance after our parting.

It was in early springtime that I heard the Master was at Wearithorne again. And it was in early springtime that another change came to my life. No real change to me, it is true; yet, for all that, startling and great enough.

It was the March Cattle-fair at Sedbergh, and Kester was always a-gate then, whether he would buy or sell or not. On no other occasions was he to be found where it was throng with folk; but he seldom missed a fair in all the neighborhood, lest he should miss the driving of a bargain.

And so he had gone over on foot to Sedbergh, and coming back had left the main road for a short cut 'cross fells. The early spring twilight set in with fog and mist, and the storm rose by midnight. I sat up alone in the house-place, to let Kester in. Rain and wind pattered and wailed along the pave, but his footsteps were not heard. Kester never came home that night. As the gray morning wore away to noon, I became more and more concerned,

thinking perhaps he had money with him, and remembering to have seen two doubtful-looking men with pedlar's packs wandering the day before, down on the road between Kirkby Stephen and Sedbergh. I took Rockie with me; and after long two hours' wandering off the main road, where, of course, if anything had happened, he must have been seen ere this,—after long two hours' wandering over the gray, wet fells and through the dreary, hopeless drizzle, Rockie and I found Kester Holme.

There at the western foot of Barfell. Lying on the heather-bank, face downward in the ling.

And that was all was ever known of that last night of Kester's life. Whether the mists closed round him and bewildered him,—whether those doubtful-looking men had met with him,—no one could say. There was not even reason to arrest them on the possibility. I only know that the men who at my bidding bore him home to Mallerstang found no money about him. But I cannot say. Kester was sure-footed mountaineer enough; but the mists upon these fells lurk on the edges of the overhanging cliffs, and many a year have swallowed up their prey.

It is a dreary thing,—a house of mourning like to that at Mallerstang. Where is the presence of real grief, there comes the self-absorption which shuts out the sights and sounds of death. Poor Kester's face I could not look upon; and shuddered as I watched beside the body all the night. And

then the bier brought in,—the awful sounds that followed when the coffin was nailed down, and the poor soul shut out forever from earth. How the sounds below jarred on me then! They were suppressed, it is true,—less hilarious, and of a graver tone, as fitted the house of mourning. But still there was something of merriment, as must needs be among a throng of good neighbors with abundance of good cheer, and but scant love and regret for the man whom they were presently to carry to his other home. I drew a freer breath when Letty and I stood at the shippon door and watched the funeral procession winding down the hill. It is a cruel custom, this, of the women-folk of the house biding at home. I could not leave one whom I loved, to go with strangers his last journey,—I must needs follow him until the turf shuts down between us, and the rest is Christ's to lead him on.

Letty told me, as we stood out of view there in the door,—told me, smoothing her snowy apron down over her sad-colored gown, and bridling as she said it, even while the last of the procession could be seen yet winding down the hill,—that, though all this had not happened, she could not have been much longer here with Kester. And when I bluntly asked her why, regardless of her simper and her conscious smile, she told me she'd hae gotten a man o' her own soon to keep and fend for,—Davie o' Burtree-syke was to go up to-morn to speak to the parson about the speerings :

“Eh, but ye mun come over, lass, to see the brave new inside plenishing Davie ’ll hae gotten. Nobbut I’ve a deal o’ my own, below there i’ the cottage; but Davie’s house is a rare and fine one, choose whatever ye’d put against it. And Davie, he’s a douce auld-farrand body. He kens my bit twa prawd acres o’ potato ground wad join no that ill to his Far-acre field across the syke; and he sees it were a kittle cast to be making marlocks at a feckless lass, i’stead o’ taking to himsel’ a ’sponsible body to guide the house. Davie an’ me, we dunna talk a deal o’ rubble, but we’s ’gree reeght well, for a’.”

I looked her full in the face, then turned away, and went up to my own room, and there wept bitterly. Wept long and bitterly, while the time passed away, and the procession long since reached the churchyard. I wept for many things. For my own shamed and darkened life,—for poor forgotten Mally,—for all the changed and short-lived memories of this poor world, where I might well be blotted out from Miles’s thoughts, as Mally from her lover’s. And through all, I wept for Kester, painful tears of pity for his fate.

And the neighbors said I had done well, when the will was opened, and it was found he had left Mallerstang and all to me.

The third day was a Sunday; and I, restless and impatient of the quiet of the house,—for Letty took the whole day to herself,—determined on church-

going. Not because there was any comfort there for me; but simply because I must see faces round me; because I was so shut out from all, in my drear isolation, that I could not see them round me otherwise than so.

But before I had made ready for my walk, there was another motive in it. I would go to church, but not with Letty; I would steal away to the little moorside kirk,—would see Miles Lethwaite, myself unseen by him, this once.

Or what if I were seen? I would know in a glance whether I were receiving measure for measure,—whether the cup of bitterness my hand had suffered to be pressed to Mally's lips, my own must now drink of.

I would not tread the old familiar way down the Hag's front, but descended on the Moss-Edge side, and followed up the syke until it swept round into Helbeck Lund. I crossed it there, and then a trickling feeder of the Swale, and was on the lone moor, gazing, afar off to my left, on the home-grounds of Wearithorne, the one knot of trees in all that neighborhood, which for all that bears the name of Swaledale Forest. In full leaf when I had seen them last,—now there was in all the gray and brown of naked boughs and swelling buds but a break or two of fir-dusk green. I might have known it would be so; and yet the change came on me with a shock, as when one looks on the gray touch of time in a loved face one has not seen for years.

I crossed the Swale where Bowbridge flings its slight arch over. And leaving behind the clump of cottages, I came to the knoll where the kirk hides its gray tower in the churchyard yews.

It was a long walk, and I had undertaken it but late, so that the choir fiddle and bassoon were shrilling out their uttermost as I went in. I entered so softly that my coming made no stir in the congregation, wont to turn and gaze perhaps more fixedly than grander folk. And yet they were not inattentive, those simple folk, though here and there a woman hushed her baby on her breast with a croon not quite inaudible. But I took no heed of them that day, more than of a dash of brilliant color in the dresses, through the "dim religious light," and of the mingled fragrance of the May, with the yellow gorse, and the southernwood, not only "lads'-love and lasses'-delight," but held to by the hardy hand of many a gray-haired shepherd.

I stole to my seat in an unoccupied pew near the door. A pew manifestly encouraging a delinquent late-comer such as I; for it is high, and curtained from observation, while it has a full view of the uncurtained modernized pews before it. As my glance wandered over them, I was not long in finding Miles.

He was standing during the chant, his head bent slightly, his eyes fixed on the ground,—fallen into a reverie so profound that the rustle of his mother's

dress, as she took her seat when the music died away, roused him with a start.

She gave him a soft smile of reproof, and I saw him look into her eyes with homage in his own. Truly she was an angel of goodness to the loyal son. And I, who knew her well,—even I could almost be deceived as I sat watching her, and saw her manifest devotion, and the strict attention she paid even to the curate's sermon, of which I heard no word beyond the text: "First be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

"First be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." That same thought had stood between me and prayer for many a night and day. Would Heaven accept my gift of adoration, while I owed Mally the debt of restitution of the fair name I had stolen from her? And for all,—for all my remorse, for all my suffering,—I would not pay that debt. What right had I, then, to come here and offer any gift upon the altar of the House of Prayer? Yet Mrs. Lethwaite was praying,—not hypocritically, I fully believe, but as if her prayers were penance for her evil deeds. I, shrinking prayerless in my corner, caught her clear "We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord," responsive to:

"That it may please Thee to defend, and provide for, the fatherless children, and widows, and all who are desolate and oppressed."

Her clear, unshaken tones. It was a mockery more cruel than that of the Apostle's Christian who says to the cold and hungry, "Depart in peace; be ye warmed and filled." For her own hand it was that had made me desolate and oppressed. And not me only, but Mally——

I forgot Mrs. Lethwaite there, and only remembered my crime. I covered my face with my hands, and sank back in my own corner. So far my own in its curtained isolation; that I forgot even the voices round me. So far my own, shut in yet more completely by my thoughts, that I started as violently as if I had thought myself alone in the kirk, when something softly brushed my hands.

I let them fall, and looked up, trembling at I knew not what. To find a dimpled arm stretched out to me over the back of the pew in front; and a spicy breath of sweet-gale that just had touched my cheek.

The little one had clambered up while the mother knelt at prayers, and had thrust aside the curtains till her rosy face peeped through. As I looked up at her now, the roses were all over dimples with delight. In her innocence of sorrow, she had thought, most like, that I, with my hands up before my face, was playing at bo-peep with her. But some sense of the sacred place was present with her, for she shook her sunny head at me.

"Mammy say, 'Be quiet wi' 'ee—whisht!'" she

said, in her shrill whisper, laying down the law for me.

I leaned across to the red, childish lips, which met mine with brief coy resistance. And then I knelt there beneath her, and the little hand played with my hair, my kerchief, and fell softly on my neck. That night, when I let my hair down in my lonely room, I found a knot of sweet-gale fast in its braids. I have it now, laid away in my Prayer-book, at the Litany.

I was not praying then. I only knelt there, strangely soothed and softened as the time went by. I gave no heed to what passed round me after that, until I was startled by the rush of feet, and lifted my head to see the congregation pouring down the aisle.

My first thought was of making my escape before the Lethwaites should come this way. But too late. The congregation, composed of the peasants of the dale, made room for them to pass, and Mrs. Lethwaite came down the aisle, leaning on her son's arm, and giving here a smile and there a nod to more than one pensioner of the House's bounty. Mrs. Lethwaite is of those who cultivate courtesy to all men after the manner of the juggler I once saw at Sedbergh Fair, who, by sleight of hand and the slowness of one's eye to detect him, raises a crop of flowers beneath one's glance. But they are naught. The outward blooming of true courtesy springs from seeds of kindness fast

bedded in the heart. And Mrs. Lethwaite had not those.

Me I do not think she saw, as she swept by. But Miles, by some chance, turned at the door, and our eyes met.

With so brief a glance, that I read nothing in his. I only saw he moved on more quickly with his mother; and I was not slow to interpret that. The fullest retribution was fallen upon me. The parting from Miles,—what was that—the never seeing him—compared to seeing him turn thus from me? Fool that I was, to court the blow I might be sure would fall!

I crept out from my place, the last of all the congregation. But when I was half-way down the walk that sloped to the gate, I saw there was quite a little crowd about it. The Lethwaite carriage was just driving off, but three or four shandries and spring-carts waited behind for those of the country-side who were not too far to come again to the evening service. Those who were, for the most part were lingering in the kirkyard, settling into family conclave round the luncheon-basket, or lounging upon wall or sunny mound. I, wishing to avoid recognition and comment from the loiterers at the gate, turned aside into a lonely corner, waiting.

Very soon the mid-day sun, triumphing over the late coolness of the morning, made a weariness of idly wandering among the graves; and I was fain

to rest, withdrawn a space, yet where the babble of children's voices reached me, though the solemn church stood half between.

How tranquil it was here! The droning hum of an early bee that had mistaken the summer in the sky-blue sweep of violets over the grave at my foot, seemed a soft echo of the beck that just beyond the mossy wall leaped down the sheer steep that wall overhung, to join the Swale beyond. The faint flush of the moor broadened about me here; but farther, Helbeck Lund rose gaunt and bare; and farther yet, Penyghent and Whernside massed their burly forms where the glen opens to the southward. I had followed it to them, forcing my gaze away from the Lethwaite carriage on the white road to which the beck dances up gaily, to shrink coyly back again. And then I had stooped for a handful of those violets from the grave. I was kneeling there, plucking at them mechanically, so absorbed in my thoughts that I was just conscious, not mindful, of some one standing with folded arms against the outside of the kirkyard wall: Till now he swung himself over, and it flashed upon me who it was.

I was not facing him, and so I gathered one more blossom, and then rose, as if I were not conscious of his neighborhood.

He hesitated an instant; then he followed me out of the gate. I walked on at my usual not laggard pace, knowing well enough that however

I might hasten he would overtake me, if that were his will. And he did overtake me on the bridge,—joined me, and said, quietly, as though we had met yesterday,—

“You will let me walk home with you?”

“I thought you had driven home with Mrs. Lethwaite,” I said, by way of a commonplace to reply to his.

“I told her you were here, and I must see you. Your black dress and your white face would have haunted me else. I hope you are not angry with me for venturing to follow you?”

“That the black dress and the white face may haunt you no longer,” I made answer, bitterly. “You would say a word of sympathy, so that when you go your way apart, you may forget both. I thank you, Colonel Lethwaite; but I need no sympathy. Kester Holme,” I added, recklessly, “was no such friend to me that the color will not come to my cheeks before many days.”

“Nanaette, how unforgiving you are!”

“I am unforgiving!” cried I, in my blind passion. “I have been oppressed, wronged, tempted, till I’m woe for myself,—there’s none else to greet for me. I am unforgiving! An I’d dared to pray this morning, kneeling in yon kirk, I must have prayed those fiery cries of David for revenge upon his enemies. For retribution,—ay, though it fell on my own head as well. It is hard, hard, I should suffer alone of all the evil-doers.”

I was not thinking of poor Kcster then, but of the mother of this man beside me. My eyes were wandering yonder where her carriage glanced by glimpses through the gray avenue of Wearithorne, as I set foot on the bridge here.

It was not strange Miles should misunderstand me,—it would not have been strange if he had shrunk back from me in disgust. But he did not so. He drew my hand in his arm, with so much tenderness in his vast pity, that I was not angry with him for it.

He did not speak at once; and we moved on, for I had stopped short where he joined me on the bridge. We had passed some distance on the moor before he said, leaving rebuke to my own softened feelings, which he must have read in humbled look and manner,—

“You can never suffer alone. Your pain is mine.”

My pain? My guilt never could be his, and that was still the fiercest pang of all.

“Let me go,” I moaned. “I am not worth your care,—nay, you yourself have said it.”

“I was mad then. God knows I have suffered enough since to blot out even such words as those. You forgot them then, Nannette,—forgive them now. And see,—my darling, see if in your heart you can find nothing but forgiveness for me.”

Low on my knees since then have I prayed

oftentimes that no such temptation as that might ever again assail me. For how could I stand against it? I had nearly yielded then, with the thought that, Kester dead, and Mrs. Lethwaite silent for her own sake, Miles might never know, in taking me, that he took a false-witness to his arms.

Miles might never know. I looked up into his face that stooped toward me,—his true eyes, in which no thought was kept back from me. Could my married eyes answer them back with a life-long lie? Would they never veil themselves in shame when his should praise me pure and true, and I remember Mally? Would they not at some unwary moment yield up all my secret, and then have to meet his sudden gaze of scorn?

I bent my head, and swifter than thought my lips just touched his hand. Just touched it, humbly, and in homage to his worthiness. But—

“Nannette! From you!” he cried, almost angrily.

I wrenched myself free from him.

“Stay,” I said, striving to steady my faltering voice. “I will not attempt to deceive you. I can not be your wife.”

“Can not, Nannette? Say will not, rather.”

“Will not, then.”

“And why?”

It well might seem to him he had just cause for anger. It well might seem I had been trifling

with him, with shameless coquetry. I could see this, so could understand his tone.

"Tell me what you mean," he asked me, presently. "It is some morbid fancy has taken hold upon you."

"Some fancy!"

"Tell it me."

If I had but told him, at all hazards, at the first! But now that Mally was ruined utterly,—now that it was too late to save her,—that her sister and her lover were false to her,—now, how could I tell Miles? And if I were his wife, and if one day he should see my hand in Mally's ruin, could I bear the change that surely would creep in his love,—the scorn of me,—the self-scorn if he still could love me on? This parting—anything—were better far than that.

He grasped my hands, and drew me to him, closer yet.

"Speak out, child. Do not keep me in such torment."

The voice was not Miles's voice, in its hoarse impatience.

"I can not speak out. I dare not tell you anything."

"Dare not?"

His face was gray in its strange pallor. He searched my soul through and through with those keen eyes of his that held my own so fast. If I might have slunk away from them, abased and

wretched that I was! But I had to front my fate with what courage I might.

With what courage? I shook and trembled there before him.

"Dare not? Nannette, have you been false to me? Can there be anything that binds you to another man?"

I was so innocent of such a wrong to him, that I forgot all else. And he saw I was innocent. For the cloud had passed from him even before I answered him:

"None else. I was ne'er bounden to any man."

"Ay. To me, Nannette."

I felt my strength all leaving me. I said hurriedly, catching at the pledge, as at some stay,—

"Never to you. I—I'll make my vow here now, —I'll none be your wife."

He lost patience then.

"Is it possible to understand you? You are free to marry me,—if ever your fear of Kester parted us, that is over, and dead nor living can stand between us. You have kept me waiting in such patience as I might, till now——"

"You have forgotten I told you we were parted," I interrupted him.

"I remember one thing. It is you who have forgotten. Till you deny it, I will never give you up. I remember you said you loved me."

"Did I say that? But I tell you now——"

"For God's sake, speak the truth. What motive

can you have for playing fast-and-loose with me? Why did you look at me so, when I turned at the church-door even now? No cry could have called me back more clearly. And why did you—— What can you mean? Your very kiss is here,—do women stoop thus in mere caprice?"

"Let me go," I gasped.

I saw then how the angry blood burned in his brow; and he drew his breath hard through his set teeth. Presently he spoke:

"I will let you go. But I will have the truth first. Do you mean you have played me false all this while, and never loved me? It is this you mean? Answer me,—it is this?"

"It is this."

For my life, I could have done no more than repeat the falsehood he put into my mouth. I could not have collected the words myself. Only one thought I could grasp,—one instinct, rather,—the blind instinct of self-preservation. I must end this,—escape from him the shortest way,—not bring down the worst ruin on my head. For if I do not escape, he will wring from me all the truth.

"You mean, then," he says, speaking in a strange set tone, "you mean you have trifled with me all this while? And now that I am hardly Master even of Wearithorne,—that poverty is come upon me,—you mean you have given me the shy glance and blush,—ay, and now a look—— Nannette, if they did not mean you loved me, then they lied to me."

It is harder than I had thought. That last strikes home, and I cry out, in reckless bitterness of pain,—

“It is so easy for you to know all the truth,—to judge me,—to condemn me as you condemned poor Mally, innocent though she was.”

“You speak confidently.”

Confidently? Desperately, rather. For in spite of resolves, in spite of fears, I can not part from him in silence so. I say,—

“Ay, for,—it was I,—I took those papers.”

“You!”

He looked at me as if I had suddenly gone mad. I stood there, clenching my hands together in the endeavor to speak out, clearly and firmly and fully:

“I took them. You remember that evening in the library, when you followed me to the sofa?”

“I remember.”

“I meant to do it even then,”—but my breath failed there, as I glanced at him.

He did not speak at once. When he did, his voice was very low, very stern:

“I can not believe it. You, to ruin the girl, body and soul, perhaps!”

“You must believe it, when I tell you how I took them.”

“That same night?”

“That same night.”

“But there was no time. Mally was in the

library—and then my mother. I locked the door just after I took her up-stairs again. She told me then you had gone home.”

He said it doubtingly, as if my story were altogether incredible,—as if I myself had made some strange mistake. He said it wistfully, eagerly, as if beseeching me to say he was right.

I hesitated. Then I said,—

“Your mother did not see me in her dressing-room.”

For the woman was his mother. I had looked up into his set face. I had done harm enough. Let me at least leave him his faith in her.

“It was before that,” I began again, “there in the library,—the candle did not fall by accident,—and in the dark I made sure of the papers.”

“Nannette, you had those papers when we stood together in the hall that night? You had those papers when I told you how I trusted you, and prayed you to be true with me?”

“Even then,” I answered, steadily. “And I destroyed them, and lost your bank-note—I did not know what it was then—on the moor’s edge where Mally said she found it.”

He turned away from me without a word.

He would have left me so. But I,—I fling myself in his path,—I catch at his arm,—I call his name in a wild sob:

“Miles, Miles, it was for love of you I did it.”

He unwinds my clinging fingers scornfully.

"For love of me! How often do you think to deceive me?"

"It is the truth!" I cry. "It was because those papers might take Wearithorne from you."

"Now we have it!"

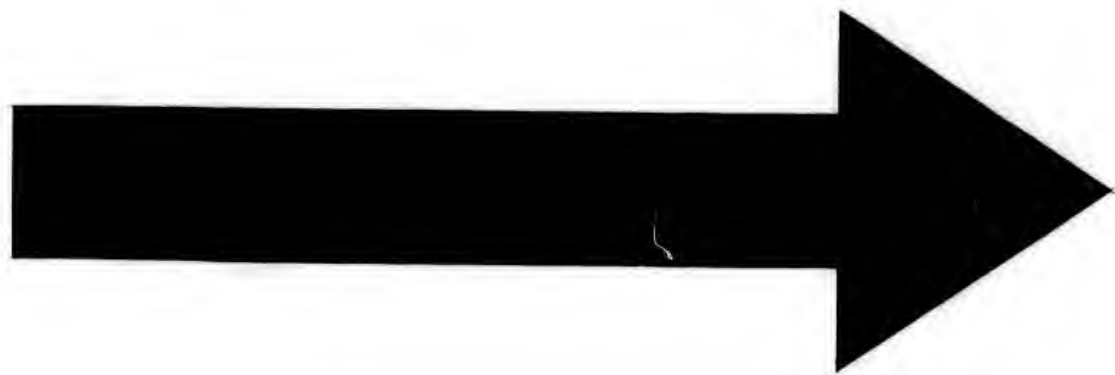
He stoops and looks me full in the eyes for the first time. And he goes on, with slow contempt:

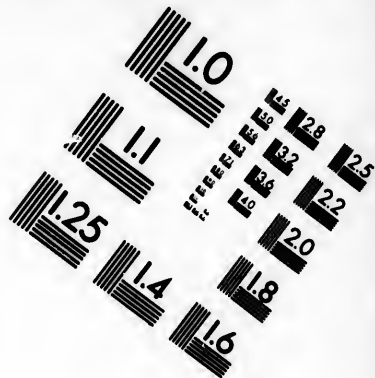
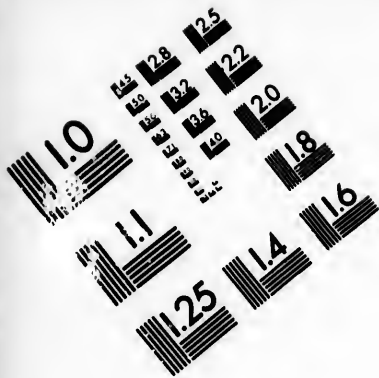
"I begin to understand it now. You had great care for the Master of Wearithorne. You were willing to wait a month,—two months,—until spring,—to see if this search after the lost heir would spend itself. And since it has not,—since it is still impossible to say I shall not go forth penniless from the old place to-morrow or next year,—since it is impossible to say that, you are ready at last to say instead, 'I played you false,—I never loved you.'"

"I was false to you then, Miles Lethwaite,—false to you only then. For I have always loved you. Nay, but you shall hear me! You cannot leave me so."

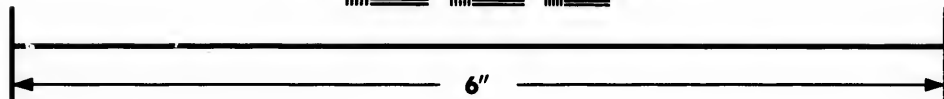
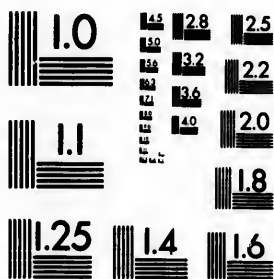
In my quick movement,—for he is going from me, quitting me without one farewell word or glance,—the little knot of violets I had gathered from the grave falls from my bosom at his foot. I see his glance follow them. And he sets his heel upon them, grinding them down into the moist sod. At that, I steal one look up to his white, passionate face. It is all over with me now.

Yet I say, faintly,—





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"If you could believe me——"

"If I could believe you! What am I to believe? I am free to choose, indeed,—your words now, —your words ten moments since,—your little comedy in the library that night,—your tragedy now?"

Then, when he has no answer, very coldly:

"Nannette, I have been a fool once in my life, but I am not altogether mad."

I did not answer him one word. Perhaps I could literally not have moved, have spoken. I was as one paralyzed by the horror of a blow that is to fall.¹

It was not long in falling. He turned sharply on his heel and strode away. But while I still stood there, stunned utterly, he turned again, came near to me, and took my face in his two hands, looking full into it.

I did not seem to care,—not feel. I heard the beck ring out beside us there. My eyes, uplifted, not to Miles, took note of a swallow waving his flight overhead, the one blot on the blue. I remember that slow, floating motion. I never shall forget the breath of the white woodruff in which a bee was humming at our feet. They were all so far from me; I was so far from myself that I remember even wondering what it would be tomorrow, when I could think, could feel. I even heard Brownie treading down and cropping the tufted grass along the marge, a few yards off. But

more clearly than that, I remember listening to the beck, whose gurgle came, a mockery of mirth, between his words:

“What could one trust, if not such eyes as these,—so frank a seeming brow,—lips that show as pure and truthful as a child’s? But I will let you go, as you have said. And one day,—I know it even now,—one day I shall find it in my heart to be glad you have denied me that wretched love in which is no trust.”

I did not blench, not quail. Passive and mute and still, I never stirred the while he kissed me on lips, cheeks, and brow. Kissed me, not tenderly, reverently, as he had the once before, but with a passion which left me faint and breathless when suddenly he put me from him.

I, too, went my way, slowly and painfully, beyond the beck, toward home. I did not heed that Brownie followed,—that he thrust his head against my shoulder as we went. Brute sympathy and love,—we reach out after them with a caress in our careless hands, in hours of hope, or gladness, or light-heartedness. But in the dark——

It was so dark there in the noontide. I could hardly see Miles passing by, along the farther side, where the beck stretched out between. So wide, it seemed to my reeling senses to yawn between us as a gulf. No arm might reach across it now. No passionate word, no cry of pain, draw either of us over.

When the weary day wore by to evening, I roused myself, and went to milk the cattle lowing in the yard. I had but set the milking-pails beside the gate, and was stooping to unlatch it, stretching first my hand to Jetty, with the salt I had brought for her, when I heard a footstep on the court-yard rock.

I so nearly faced her, that I did not need to turn my head, in order to see who was coming. And, as if I had not seen her, I continued to lean over the wall, and to give my hand to Jetty. She should see me as I was,—the milkmaid, not the Lethwaite.

“Annot!”

The voice was shaking and irresolute. I turned and faced her.

“Annot, I have climbed up all this way to speak with you. Will you not come in with me, somewhere that we may talk quietly?”

“Say on, Mrs. Lethwaite. Mallerstang Hag is lonely enough. We shall not be overheard, unless by Jetty here.”

If I was insolent, it must be owned, at least, I had good cause. Why should she come to seek me now,—now when it was all too late to save me from the gulf into which she had suffered me to plunge?

But if I was insolent, she was strangely humble. She came and stood beside me, leaning against the wall, too, but at safe distance from Jetty’s

suddenly lifted horns. I had stooped for another handful of salt, and kept my face to Jetty still.

"Annot, what have you done to my son?" Mrs. Lethwaite asked me, suddenly, after a pause.

"What have I done to your son, Mrs. Lethwaite?"

"I know he went back to the church to you, Annot. He came home looking wellnigh as if his death-blow had been struck him. A mother's eyes cannot be blinded." I have come to you to know why it is so with him."

I did not turn toward her, but spoke very quietly:

"Your son loves me, Mrs. Lethwaite."

I heard her draw her breath hard. Then she said, as quietly as I had,—

"Well?"

"And I told him to-day I would never be his wife."

Another long breath; I knew that was a sigh of relief. But softer thoughts prevailed, and she said, presently,—

"Miles loves you very truly, Annot."

"Not more truly than I him."

"How, then, can you bear to make him wretched?"

"Because I do love him," I answered her. "Because I have some regard for his honor."

"His honor?"

I turned upon her then with bitter emphasis:

"His honor. Is not the wife's the husband's? Is it, do you think, no taint on him to give his name to a thief and a false-witness?"

"For Heaven's sake, Annot!"

I could see she was greatly shocked. Perhaps she had not accustomed herself to face the truth,—to put it in those words. But I had, and I repeated them again.

"How can you say such dreadful things?" she asked, with changing color.

"Because they are the truth. Because I will not shame a man like Miles Lethwaite by blinding my own eyes with a lie. Because I cannot stand beside him as a wife should, with no concealment between me and him."

She was leaning there against the stone wall, averted from me. Yet I could see how ashen pale she was, how her lip quivered in the dainty profile, and how the slender, gloved hands trembled, folded together on the wall. Were softer thoughts for Miles and me then warring with her care for self? I did not know the woman even yet. I remembered how she had clung to me in her hour of suffering, how her head had lain upon my arm, her restless fingers clasped my own. A softer feeling stole over me,—a wild hope,—and at its bidding I spoke:

"There is but one way, Mrs. Lethwaite. If Miles could know all! If you would tell him all! He might forgive me then, for your sake, seeing how

the wrong was done and unconfessed for you. He must forgive you, for you are his mother,—you too sinned for him. Ah! if you would——”

My passionate pleading was cut short by the slightest of involuntary shrugs of Mrs. Lethwaite's stately shoulders. It said plainly enough that she was listening with impatience, and with not one movement of sympathy. And, as I broke off, she turned her cold face slowly round to me:

“You, then, would deal him a heavier blow than all?” she said. “Can you think his mother's honor touches him less nearly than his wife's? But it is in your power, of course, yourself to tell him all. Only remember, I did not bid you do this wrong to the girl Mally. You might have cleared her. All I bound you to was your promise to spare Miles. It was not for me to betray you. It was not I lost the note for which she was found guilty. I had nothing to do with that wrong.”

Was it even so? Before my weary eyes—weary with striving to find my way through the thick darkness—flashed back every scene when I had watched mother and son together,—every glance of trustful, loving admiration I had seen him give her. Could there in truth be any heavier blow than this? And she had had nothing to do with this wrong? Literally, it was true. I had seen to-day that it was possible to clear Mally without implicating Mrs. Lethwaite. Seen to-day,—too late. Might I not have seen before, had not self-love

blinded me? Poor Mally! Her part in all this—her right to exculpation—had been forgotten in the tumult of selfish personal feeling and in the longing to shield Miles from pain. And then:

“Your promise, Annot!” Mrs. Lethwaite cried, her face and manner changing as my silence alarmed her. “Have you forgotten that? And will you break it? Annot! Annot! have mercy,—not for my sake, but for Miles’s. You promised me——”

“And I shall keep my promise.”

I did not think it needful—as it would be vain—to humiliate myself by telling her how I had already kept it this day. I will not repeat the fervent thanks which followed,—the implorings, striving to be cordial, yet faltering in every breath, that I would forget all, would come to her, and let her show her gratitude all her life long to her son’s wife. They filled me then with pent-up fury, as even now they make my lip quiver, my hand shake with wrath while I set this down. It is but a black record, that which writes down all this time. But this one whiter line there is in it,—that there was no regret for my confession, but only cold disdain, as I listened to all her prayers, all her promises that even as I had kept her secret, so would she keep mine,—that Miles should never know aught of his wife——

I drew my hands away from her at that last word, and turned my back on her, and went my way into the house-place, letting the door slam to

behind me. It was not lady-like ; it was not courteous. But what else was one to expect from a Nannette o' Kester o' Mallerstang ? Standing as I did upon the hearth, yet where the window gave me a full view, myself unseen, of Mrs. Lethwaite, I could read that thought in her face.

Her glance just wandered over the homely house ; then to the milking-stool and pail-standing where I had set them down. Then her eyes fell to her gloved hand,—the hand mine, perhaps, had stained in her clasping. And, with a faint smile of calm disdain upon her haughty lips, she moved on, across the courtyard, picking her dainty way down the rough steep. Perhaps it was as well,—her Miles could not long regret a little rustic, rude and simple and untaught as this.

I X.

Never a moment
Silence, night or day,—
Can there be quiet
Under churchyard clay?
Will not her footfall
Among the grasses sweep,
And shake my heart beneath,
And wake from sleep?

IN the light of to-day, as clear and broad it floods my window here in the sunset and throws its unsparing glare full on the record, I have written the last page of my life. It ended there. The remainder is but such a waiting as of the souls under the altar, crying, How long? how long?

Prisoners of hope. But what is still for me to hope,—or yet to fear? When a deluge has once swept over one's life and covered even its serenest heights, there is little need of a bow of promise to tell one at last, from the dispersing clouds, that no storm again may desolate as that has desolated. Over the bleak waste now, storm after storm might roll, and find there nothing to uproot.

In the light of to-day, I have stood face to face with my past, and have blinded my eyes no more. Mally,—Mally's wrong—— The shadow of Wear-

thorne vanishes from between me and the truth, like the misty scene of a dream out of which I am awakened. But the wrong to Mally darkens in the light, a tangible reality, the darker for the years that stretch between.

How many years ago? They would not count by decades; they have not dimmed the gold of my hair, greatly faded out the color from my cheek. The mirror told me that, this morning, when I sought another answer to my query if I yet were growing old. How long? how long? I have so many years to live, with my frame the mountain air has braced; my step as active up the mountain paths; my pulse that beats as strongly, never fluttering, nor failing me. And with my weary heart.

And yet I have no right to so weak lamentation and complaining:

“The thorns which I have reaped, are of the tree
I planted; they have torn me, and I bleed.
I should have known what fruit would spring from such a seed.”

They have torn me, and I bleed; and yet life has not all been one wide, gaping wound. I have had no right to expect balm of soothing; and yet balm has come to me.

It is an easy life I lead. My cheery little maid-of-all-work comes up day by day from her mother's cottage which once was Letty's, hard by Davie o' Burtree-syke's, down in the dale below; I have occupation enough in directing my shepherd, and in

the superintendence of my dairy,—which superintendence in cheese-making season develops into more activity; and I aye go up alone to Moss-Edge for a day or two after the peat-cutting. I have many a volume of my own, too, now, besides this stained and weather-beaten, lying always here upon my desk. And now and then in the lone evenings Marget brings her knitting-work, and, though the talk between us is constrained, she manages to let fall some word of her latest tidings of the Master of Wearithorne. She came oftenest after he had gone back to his regiment in India, and that awful dread of battle was upon us. But seldomer, now that the war is over, and we are once more breathing freely, and with honors and promotion he is again in London, where his mother braves it with the bravest of the ladies there.

But there is yet a greater soothing than the hush of my daily life can bring. It is the comfort in my power to give to here and there a suffering soul around me. Yet in this there is the same pang which strikes through everything in my whole life. I never give away a bannock or a half-crown—I never smooth a pillow for the aching temples of a sufferer—I never kneel beside a death-bed with a last prayer for the parting soul—without a memory of one whose honest portion in this world I stole away,—whose pillow my hand made all rough with thorns,—whose parting soul, perhaps, may ere now have fainted away in the worn body, with no friend

to give a word of help or comforting. And yet, what can I do? Once the path was clear enough, but when I shut my eyes to it, I lost it.

I tried to find it again, indeed, before I sat down helplessly in this still life of mine. I went to Manchester,—to Halifax,—to York,—spending drear months in trying to glean tidings of poor Mally in the factories. Here and there I found Miles had been before me; but Mally I never found. The Hag was altogether unbearable to me in those days. It was haunted by the memory of my wrong to her, and I went forth, hoping to leave that memory behind me. But it would not be left behind. It followed me out into the great bustling world, and, when I thought it gone, made its presence known in some trivial daily occurrence. I might have looked that so it would be. There is a twice-told tale of Naunty Marget's, of the goblin Hob-o'-th'-Hurst, who by his uncanny pranks drove the old farmer forth at last from the homestead. Away jogged the good man, his worldly possessions all heaped up round him in his tumbrel-car,—jogged on, and met a neighbor by the way. "And so, Kit, ye're flitting?" called the neighbor. "Ay, ay, we's flutting," cried Hob's voice, with hollow echo, from the churn. So we were flitting, that haunting memory and I,—until like the farmer I turned and gat me back to the familiar roof-tree, wearily resolved no more to flee that inevitable fellowship.

And so the days go on. But aching doubts will come in now and then, and shake my very soul. Doubts stronger sometimes, and with yet a fiercer pang, since I have set down all upon these pages. I thought, when I began, to bring out brighter memories around me. But the darker shadows creep in closer round the setting sun, yonder beyond the dusky line of Helbeck Lund. There is one golden glory lingering yet. One golden memory of Miles's love. It lights these pages as it shines across them even now. And now I close the book. The after-leaves are blanks. No new page to be turned, until Death's own hand turn it, writing there : -

The End.

I NEVER thought to have turned another page in my life's story. I thought it was to flow on silently to the great Finis. I laid my book away, here in my desk, and the days came and went, as I looked for them still to come and go until the end. But just one week ago to-day—

One week ago to-day. How long it seems! I could believe it years, since I came home in the early sunset from my ramble down in Helbeck Lund.

I did not know why my spirits flagged as I clambered up the steep. I only felt the vague dulness stealing over me, and saw that it was growing dark, and shivered in the chilly air, and knew the dreary home-coming awaiting me. Not even old Rockie now, to watch whining for me on the height. There was a feeble flicker from the house-place,—too feeble to bring good cheer. No one to be seen,—nothing heard, unless my own foot on the rocky court, and the hoarse waters down below the Hag; or, as I neared the house, the occasional stamping of the one cow still for convenience kept up in the straw-littered farm-yard.

A faint flicker from the house-place,—the door of the house-place open wide. I quickened my pace at that. I had let my little maid go home an hour ago, and myself had closed the door behind me after her. How came it open, then? My threshold was not greatly oftener crossed than Kester's in the time before.

As I paused on it, I saw a figure crouched before the low peat fire on the hearth. At the sound of my footfall, the rustle of my dress, she started up, staggered toward me a few steps, and fell to the floor in a half swoon.

I had dragged forward one of the benches to the fire, raised the poor shadowy burthen on it, and was kneeling beside, chafing the thin, cold hands, before I knew her. For then the lids lifted themselves wearily, and the ghost of Mally stared out on me, hollow-eyed and wan.

I do not know what I said, what I did. It was absolute terror seized upon me. If the girl had come back in her winding-sheet, the grave-mould clinging to her shroud and hair, the grave-damps to her wasted hand, my heart could not have sunk within me in more helpless horror. Till the gasping voice roused me:

“Letty would none o' me; and Davie,—I couldna stay to hae him fleeer at me. I'se gae back the gate I came to-morn, but I reckoned thou's let me rest here for a gliff.”

I could not answer her. Unless it were an answer

to bring down my pillow there for her, to wrap her warmly,—she was shivering in the summer evening air,—and to give her the cup of tea which she drank eagerly, famishingly,—holding my hand the while, and murmuring, as she sank back on her pillow,—

“Eh, but thou’s rare an’ good, lass,—rare an’ good.”

Rare an’ good! The faint voice stabbed me through with an exceeding bitter pang. I could have bowed down there before her and confessed all. But I saw she could not bear it. And, as the lashes drooped again over the white cheeks, I stole out into the open air.

The girl was more than weary, I could see that right well. She shivered, yet there was a burning heat about her hand, a strange bright glitter in her eyes, that made me sure it would be morrows more than one before she could go back the gate she came. Something must be done for her more than I knew how to do.

But how could I leave her alone, to go so far as even the nearest apothecary? And Letty,—if I went down to her, could she be prevailed upon to do my errand for me? She could better do it than my own little maid below there; and if she hesitated, at this moment I felt strong enough to prove to her Mally’s innocence with my own guilt.

With this resolve, I went round to that side of the

Hag which sloped down to Moss-Edge Hollow. The sun had sunk now below Helbeck Lund. Its glow was still on the Hag's brow, but the long shadows drifted longer on these eastern slopes. Not so dark, however, but that I could see half-way down the descent some one—a man—standing indistinct in the gray dusk.

I readily imagined he could be no other than Davie o' Burtree-syke, driven hither, perhaps, by the calm, discursive sermon I could figure Letty preaching while she stirred the "parritch," with poor Mally for her text. Driven out, perhaps, with sheer weariness,—perhaps with a mournful memory of the girl,—certainly with pity enough in him to do my bidding for her. I stood a moment on the brow, shading my eyes with my hand from the glow here, the better to see into the dusk there. Should I call or beckon him up? The shorter way would be to go down to him.

The shorter way, especially if one took it as I did. For I ran swiftly down the slope, and was almost close upon him, when he lifted himself from his lounging posture against the rock and turned to front me directly.

No Davie o' Burtree-syke,—but Miles Lethwaite.

He lifted his hat with grave courtesy, and would have moved away. But I sprang forward then. He would help me. I dared not shrink, and wait for other aid.

"Colonel Lethwaite, I—I did not know you,—I thought— How can I ask you?—but I must have help. Some one—yes, it is Mally—is up yonder at the Hag, ill, dying perhaps. I have no one to send for a doctor, and I dare not leave her."

"Mally!"

I wrung my hands impatiently.

"If you would go!"

He quitted me without another word.

I did not stay to watch him. I knew so well he was gone for help. I went up again to the house-place, and began my helpless, weary watch.

I believe, even then, wellnigh hopeless as well. I sat there by her side, and never moved my eyes from her still face. She slept, and there was nothing heard in the room but her fluttering, irregular breathing, the crackling of the blazing peat now and again, the rushing of the beck down in the Lund, and the tick-tick of the old clock on the stair. After a time, that ticking seemed to rise up and drown all the others. Was it measuring out the moments of poor Mally's life? Even now,—was she breathing even now?

I was leaning toward her, listening fearfully,—listening so intently that I never heard, until a step was close behind me. I turned then, and saw Miles Lethwaite.

"I sent a trusty messenger," he said, in a subdued tone. "You cannot blame me if I could not leave you here alone."

Blame him? But I did not venture to thank him. I only dropped my face against Mally's pillow, hiding it there from him.

And my remorseful fear for the faint life breathing out here beside me was even stronger than the sense of Miles's nearness. Life in the presence of Death,—how it all sinks to nothingness!

I had almost forgotten he was there, until, as time went by, he came to me, not touching me, but bending near, and saying low,—

“It is the doctor's step, no doubt. Be yourself, Nannette; be calm and strong to meet him.”

I was calm. My trouble lay too deep to ruffle my manner. I stood waiting at the foot of the bench until the doctor should come in and give his verdict.

What did he say? How could I listen to it? I only know—I remembered it afterward, though I hardly was aware of it then—that Miles suddenly came close to me, putting his arm across the chair-back before which I stood. Was there something in my face to call him there? I only know that I did brace myself to hear every word of the directions the doctor gave. They were few enough. “It will not be for long,” I heard him say.

I stood there still, and listened to his step passing out on the stone court. And then Miles came again, and said to me,—

“He says she can be moved. Shall I carry her up-stairs for you?”

I could not answer him, but for reply took up the candle and the pillow when he raised her in his arms and followed me out from the house-place up to my own room. He laid her gently on the bed there, while I set the candle near, upon my desk.

"Do you know what is to be done for her?" he asked me as we stood together by the bed.

Mechanically I repeated all the doctor had said.

"That is right. And now I will go send Marget to you. She will help you, will stay with you until——"

He broke off there. He could not say to me, "until Mally dies." I put in, hurriedly,—

"Not to-night,—to-morrow; but to-night I must be alone. No, do not urge me. I tell you I shall go mad if I am not left in quiet."

"To-morrow morning, then."

In turning, he brushed against the desk upon its stand. It shook unsteadily; I reached out to stop the candle, and the book which aye lies on my desk was jostled to the floor.

He stooped for it; I hardly heeded. But when I saw his start as he replaced it, I knew it was my poor little weather-stained volume of poems,—his sole gift of long ago.

Let it be. What if he did see how it was treasured? I was past caring now.

He had put the book down as if it had stung him. But I was past being stung by that. There

was nothing I took reckoning of, save the changes in the wan face on the pillow.

And so I did not clearly know when Miles quitted me. I did not know anything that night, but, strangely enough, the hours for the powders the doctor had left me. I heard when the stair-clock rang them out, and I moved then—never any time but then—from my crouching posture down by Mally's bedside,—from my watching of her with eyes wide and dry.

And then the candle flickered in the socket, and grew wan in the gray dawn that stole in through the half-shut window. Mally was sleeping now, and I crept out, down-stairs. He said he would send Marget this morning. Would she be coming now? For, standing up there at that window, I had caught sight of an indistinct shadow, as of some one just moving along the corner of the house.

“Marget, is it you?”

I was standing on the outer threshold of the house-place, leaning against the door-post, for a dizziness came over me, and I was fain to steady myself there. When the shadow hesitated; came direct this way; and:

“Is there any change?” Miles Lethwaite asked me, quickly.

I shook my head, and then I faltered,—

“Marget will not come to me?”

“Surely she will. I have no doubt she will be here presently.”

"But if she does not? O, why did you not bring her?"

He did not answer. And looking up at him, his worn face, his hair and beard and dress damp with the night-dews and the morning mists, I saw he had shared my watch with me,—he without, I within. The first sob that had come to me in all my dry-eyed misery throbbed in my throat then; but I choked it back. It was not for me to weep for Mally.

"Did you know you were watching with a murderer?" I asked, in a voice which sounded hollow and strange to my own ears.

"I know," he said.

He would not cloak my guilt to my own eyes nor his; but he did not turn from me at that word. There was a yearning pain in his eyes that met mine steadily. I knew if he condemned me, there was a bitterness as of condemning himself. Why should any words more be spoken between us? I turned to go to my place up-stairs again.

But there fell another footstep up the court. Marget's? The doctor's returning? For it was a heavier than a woman's tread.

And then a man came slowly round the gable. He brushed past me into the house-place, stood there looking round as if he had expected to find some one, and then turned to me abruptly:

"Hae ye, too, sent her off?"

No need for me to press my finger on my lips as I motioned him to follow. That he understood

me at once, I could see from the sudden paling of his sunburnt face. He followed me with labored noiselessness up the stone stairs, and on, through the door of my room which I had left unclosed.

But, noiseless though we were, the girl stirred while we stood there beside her. Her eyes wandered round the room; then fixed themselves on him.

It was a long, still gaze, wistful and wondering, and never changing. But his eyes that answered it, changed every instant with the angry, scornful, pitying thoughts that thronged each other in them.

And she spoke,—I hear the faint, low, quivering tones even yet:

“I kenned he’d look at me so. I thought I’d hid mysel’ so as he’d ne’er find me out. How could he win here o’ this wise, to threep it at me? Will the fever hae him, too?—he be clemmed an’ drouthed like me.”

Then with a sharp, quick wail:

“*He* ne’er looked so at me,—it is his spirit! It grows so dark here under the sod,—but I can see the corpse they streaked beside me last night i’ the damp cellar. Davie, man! didna one say ‘at Letty an’ thou,—I—I dunna rightly know,—I’s that wore out——”

Slower and slower the words came,—lower and lower,—and the lids drooped again over the tired eyes. Davie stirred then for the first time. He set his teeth hard, and I heard him mutter,—

"Nay, I'll none forgie her. She've a spoiled my life an' her own,—I'll none forgie her."

At that she opened her eyes again. They sought him with that same strange, wistful gaze. I think now, she had not heard, not understood. But I could bear it no longer. As he was turning away sharply, hurriedly, afraid to trust himself, I put my hand on his sleeve :

"You have nothing to forgive her. It is I spoiled your life and hers."

He stared at me, and would have moved away, as if it were not worth his while to listen to a girl's vain babble. But I did not remove my clasp. He should hear what I had to say :

"It is I. Mally is innocent. She never took the money. It was I,—I took it away."

"You!"

The fury gathering in his eyes would have made me tremble at another moment. Now, it seemed there was nothing left for me to fear. But the word was a threat. He shook off my hand; his face was dark with rage. But I did not quail because of that. It was because I saw, blacker and more appalling than ever, the fulness of my wrong.

My shuddering limbs refused to support me. The room reeled before me. I was fain to sink down on the chair Miles placed for me, when he came forward and stood between Davie and me.

I think I had even then passed away from Davie's mind as entirely as if I had never been. He had

turned to Mally again, standing near, but not stooping toward her, and never moving his eyes from the still face.

He never stirred, save now and then a strong, sharp shudder shook his powerful frame as if it had been a leaf. He stood there still; until at last:

“Lassie!” he said, brokenly,—“little lassie! say but ye forgie me!”

Her blue eyes looked up to his, but there came no answer into them. Was she already so near the opening gate of the spirit-land that she could only look back her last upon a distant, indistinct, and shadowy earth, all its voices dying off from her on her far height?

“Little lassie!”

The words groaned forth again were the only words that broke the stillness. We stood there, never moving, any of us. It seemed a long time passed away, and then another stealthy tread came up the stair, and Marget was among us.

And we waited in the silent chamber; waited until it should be the chamber of death. We all of us felt that hush. We all of us felt that we and our earthly agitations and emotions were as nothing here. There is a time for grief,—there is a time for remorse,—but that time is not the tranquil death-hour.

After awhile her glance roved restlessly about the room, and her lips moved. Just moved,—so faint and still the slow words came:

"Will they ne'er rest, the weary, weary wheels? They's wear my life out, wi' their click-clack, click-clack, on an' on. O, I think an Davie kenned——"

It was the stair-clock, ticking out the weary seconds as they went. Not many more of that poor life to measure now. For Marget had gone forward suddenly, had raised the head on her strong arm——

I think I went stupid after that. I can hardly remember anything, save of moving about mechanically at Marget's bidding; until this morning.

Marget and I had been passing in and out of the house-place, where the neighbors were assembled for the burying, and bearing in the beef and beer and burial-buns to the little tables set out here and there. I had been back and forth, never seeing any one there, never hearing anything; until:

"Ay, Letty be a sponisible body enow, an' 'twere a vast o' pity as Mally werena one o' t' sort. Ye see, a' her trouble were o' the web o' her own weaving. It were a very deal o' money——"

"Ay, ay."

I set my tray down suddenly. I glanced over where Davie stood alone in the deep window, his rugged profile gray and stern and still as if he had been struck with death. He had not heard the lowered comment, any more than Mally in her coffin half seen through the open door into the inner room. Would he not hear,—not speak to

right her? Ah, I think he knew just then but of one wrong to her,—the short-coming of his own faith.

I gathered all my strength. I went forward, standing before them all, yet seeing nothing but that half-open door, and stern, still Davie, his lone in the window.

“It was never Mally took that money,—it was I——”

I never heeded the stir and comment round me, —the curious questions,—the sneers looked and uttered. I stood in the midst of them all, alone, as I had always been. When I felt my hand drawn in a strong arm; and, leaning upon Miles, I faced them.

“It is not for us to judge, who are not as God, to know the whole,” he said, his voice overbearing all the tumult. And, while there fell sudden silence, he led me away, shutting the door fast between me and their judgment.

It was very good in Miles, I felt,—very noble and true-hearted. But it was pain to me to lean on him thus, feeling all the while, as I was feeling, that it was out of his great compassion, nowise out of his trust in me, that he had spoken for me. I drew my arm from his as we reached the foot of the stairs, and would have gone without a pause up to my chamber. But he stopped me.

“It is not for us to judge,” he said again. “I feel that bitterly enough to-day. But you, Nan-

nette,—have you judged me and condemned me utterly?"

I could not speak. I stood there, leaning on the balustrade, shivering and trembling as I listened to him. They were far-off tones,—the voice of love calling across the Valley of the Shadow of Death. It cannot always call us back.

He laid his palm on my hand that rested on the balustrade, while he said, huskily,—

"My darling shall not think now, but rest. I will come for my answer to-morrow. God in heaven have her in His keeping!"

In heaven, in His keeping?

The house is very quiet now. Marget, too, went to the burying,—coming up one moment to my room, stooping over and covering me where I lay on the bed, and saying, tenderly, she would be back very soon to stay with me. I moved a little from her as she spoke, and hid my folded hands from hers beneath the pillow. For if indeed this throbbing pulsing in wrist and temples means the fever, why should she stay with me yet?

I have been up since they all left, leaning over my desk, adding these few pages. For the stillness was unbearable as I lay there, thinking, thinking. Miles bade me not think, but rest. How is it in the grave? Is there no thought in that long rest?

My good auld Naunty Marget left my Prayer-

book on the bed beside me, open at the Burial Service. She must have known the words well, it would speak to me:

“In the midst of life we are in death: of whom may we seek for succor, but of Thee, O Lord, who for our sins art justly displeased?”

“Yet, O Lord God most holy, O Lord most mighty, O holy and most merciful Saviour, deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death.

“Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts; shut not Thy merciful ears to our prayer; but spare us, Lord most holy, O God most mighty, O holy and merciful Saviour, Thou most worthy Judge eternal.”

Is there, then, forgiveness for me? Mally's lips have closed for evermore without that word; but has God let her send this message from her grave?

Life were worth living so,—or death worth dying.

Which is mine?

Marget can tell me, it's like. She'll no be much longer now. So I must close my book,—lay it away. It were such an old, old friend. I'll wait,—and bid her destroy it, if——

How the letters swim before me!—the room grows dizzy. If Miles——

THE END.

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