

ANTHONY GARSTIN'S COURTSHIP

I



STAMPEDE of huddled sheep, wildly scampering over the slaty shingle, emerged from the leaden mist that muffled the fell-top, and a shrill shepherd's whistle broke the damp stillness of the air. And presently a man's figure appeared, following the sheep down the hillside. He halted a moment to whistle curtly to his two dogs, who, laying back their ears, chased the sheep at top-speed beyond the brow; then, his hands deep in his pockets, he strode vigorously forward. A streak of white smoke from a toiling train was creeping silently across the distance: the great, grey, desolate undulations of treeless country showed no other sign of life.

The sheep hurried in single file along a tiny track worn threadbare amid the brown, lumpy grass; and, as the man came round the mountain's shoulder, a narrow valley opened out beneath him—a scanty patchwork of green fields, and, here and there, a whitewashed farm, flanked by a dark cluster of sheltering trees.

The man walked with a loose, swinging gait. His figure was spare and angular: he wore a battered, black felt hat and clumsy, iron-bound boots: his clothes were dingy from long exposure to the weather. He had close-set, insignificant eyes, much wrinkled, and stubbly eyebrows streaked with grey. His mouth was close-shaven, and drawn by his abstraction into hard and taciturn lines; beneath his chin bristled an unkempt fringe of sandy-coloured hair.

When he reached the foot of the fell, the twilight was already blurring the distance. The sheep scurried, with a noisy rustling, across a flat, swampy stretch, over-grown with rushes, while the dogs headed them towards a gap in a low, ragged wall built of loosely-heaped boulders. The man swung the gate to after them, and waited, whistling peremptorily, recalling the dogs. A moment later, the animals re-appeared, cringing as they crawled through the bars of the gate. He kicked out at them contemptuously, and mounting a stone stile a few yards further up the road, dropped into a narrow lane.

Presently, as he passed a row of lighted windows, he heard a voice call to him. He stopped, and perceived a crooked, white-bearded figure, wearing clerical clothes, standing in the garden gateway.

"Good evening, Anthony. A raw evening this."

"Ay, Mr. Blencarn, it's a bit frittish," he answered. "I've jest bin gittin' a few lambs off t' fell. I hope ye're keepin' fairly, an' Miss Rosa too." He spoke briefly, with a loud, spontaneous cordiality.

"Thank ye, Anthony, thank ye. Rosa's down at the church, playing over the hymns for to-morrow. How's Mrs. Garstin?"

"Nicely, thank ye, Mr. Blencarn. She's wonderful active, is mother."

"Well, good-night to ye, Anthony," said the old man, clicking the gate.

"Good-night, Mr. Blencarn," he called back.

A few minutes later the twinkling lights of the village came in sight, and from within the sombre form of the square-towered church, looming by the roadside, the slow, solemn strains of the organ floated out on the evening air. Anthony lightened his tread: then paused, listening; but, presently, becoming aware that a man stood, listening also, on the bridge some few yards distant, he moved forward again. Slackening his pace, as he approached, he eyed the figure keenly; but the man paid no heed to him, remaining, with his back turned, gazing over the parapet into the dark, gurgling stream.

Anthony trudged along the empty village street, past the gleaming squares of ruddy gold, starting on either side out of the darkness. Now and then he looked furtively backwards. The straight open road lay behind him, glimmering wanly: the organ seemed to have ceased: the figure on the bridge had left the parapet, and appeared to be moving away towards the church. Anthony halted, watching it till it had disappeared into the blackness beneath the churchyard trees. Then, after a moment's hesitation, he left the road, and mounted an upland meadow towards his mother's farm.

It was a bare, oblong house. In front, a whitewashed porch, and a narrow garden-plot, enclosed by a low iron railing, were dimly discernible: behind, the steep fell-side loomed like a monstrous, mysterious curtain hung across the night. He passed round the back into the twilight of a wide yard, cobbled and partially grass-grown, vaguely flanked by the shadowy outlines of long, low farm-buildings. All was wrapped in darkness: somewhere overhead a bat fluttered, darting its puny scream.

Inside, a blazing peat-fire scattered capering shadows across the smooth, stone floor, flickered among the dim rows of hams suspended from the ceiling and on the panelled cupboards of dark, glistening oak. A servant-girl, spread-

ing the cloth for supper, clattered her clogs in and out of the kitchen: old Mrs. Garstin was stooping before the hearth, tremulously turning some girdle-cakes that lay roasting in the embers.

At the sound of Anthony's heavy tread in the passage, she rose, glancing sharply at the clock above the chimney-piece. She was a heavy-built woman, upright, stalwart almost, despite her years. Her face was gaunt and sallow; deep wrinkles accentuated the hardness of her features. She wore a black widow's cap above her iron-gray hair, gold-rimmed spectacles, and a soiled, chequered apron.

"Ye're varra late, Tony," she remarked querulously.

He unloosed his woollen neckerchief, and when he had hung it methodically with his hat behind the door, answered:

"'Twas terrible thick on t' fell-top, an' them two bitches be that senseless."

She caught his sleeve, and, through her spectacles, suspiciously scrutinized his face.

"Ye did na meet wi' Rosa Blencarn?"

"Nay, she was in church, hymn-playin', wi' Luke Stock hangin' roond door," he retorted bitterly, rebuffing her with rough impatience.

She moved away, nodding sententiously to herself. They began supper: neither spoke: Anthony sat slowly stirring his tea, and staring moodily into the flames: the bacon on his plate lay untouched. From time to time his mother, laying down her knife and fork, looked across at him in unconcealed asperity, pursing her wide, ungainly mouth. At last, abruptly setting down her cup, she broke out:

"I wonder ye havn'a mare pride, Tony. For hoo lang are ye goin' t' continue settin' mopin' and broodin' like a seck sheep. Ye'll jest mak yesself ill, an' then I reckon what ye'll prove satisfied. Ay, but I wonder ye hav'na more pride."

But he made no answer, remaining unmoved, as if he had not heard.

Presently, half to himself, without raising his eyes, he murmured:

"Luke be goin' South, Monday."

"Well, ye canna tak' oop wi' his leavin's anyways. It hasna coom t' that, has it? Ye doan't intend settin' all t' parish a laughin' at ye a second occasion?"

He flushed dully, and bending over his plate, mechanically began his supper.

"Wa dang it," he broke out a minute later, "d'ye think I heed t' cacklin' o' fifty parishes? Na, not I," and, with a short, grim laugh, he brought his fist down heavily on the oak table.

"Ye're daft, Tony," the old woman blurted.

"Daft or na daft, I tell ye this, mother, that I be forty-six year o' age this back-end, and there be soom things I will na listen to. Rosa Blencarn's bonny enough for me."

"Ay, bonny enough—I've na patience wi' ye. Bonny enough—tricked oot in her furbelows, gallivantin' wi' every royster fra Pe'rith. Bonny enough—that be all ye think on. She's bin a proper parson's niece—the giddy, feckless creature, an' she'd mak' ye a proper sort o' wife, Tony Garstin, ye great, fond booby."

She pushed back her chair, and, hurriedly clattering the crockery, began to clear away the supper.

"T'hoose be mine, t' Lord be praised," she continued in a loud, hard voice, "an' as long as He spare me, Tony, I'll na' see Rosa Blencarn set foot inside it."

Anthony scowled, without replying, and drew his chair to the hearth. His mother bustled about the room behind him. After a while she asked :

"Did ye pen t' lambs in t' back field?"

"Na, they're in Hullam bottom," he answered curtly.

The door closed behind her, and by-and-by he could hear her moving overhead. Meditatively blinking, he filled his pipe clumsily, and pulling a crumpled newspaper from his pocket, sat on over the smouldering fire, reading and stolidly puffing.

II

The music rolled through the dark, empty church. The last, leaden flicker of daylight glimmered in through the pointed windows, and beyond the level rows of dusky pews, tenanted only by a litter of prayer-books, two guttering candles revealed the organ-pipes, and the young girl's swaying figure.

She played vigorously. Once or twice the tune stumbled; and she recovered it impatiently, bending over the key-board, showily flourishing her wrists as she touched the stops. She was bare-headed (her hat and cloak lay beside her on a stool). She had fair, fluffy hair, cut short behind her neck; large, round eyes, heightened by a fringe of dark lashes; rough, ruddy cheeks, and a rosy, full-lipped, unstable mouth. She was dressed quite simply, in a black, close-fitting bodice, a little frayed at the sleeves. Her hands and neck were coarsely fashioned: her comeliness was brawny, literal, unfinished, as it were.

When at last the ponderous chords of the Amen faded slowly into the

twilight, flushed, breathing a little quickly, she paused, listening to the stillness of the church. Presently a small boy emerged from behind the organ.

"Good evenin', Miss Rosa," he called, trotting briskly away down the aisle.

"Good night, Robert," she answered, absently.

After a while, with an impatient gesture, as if to shake some importunate thought from her mind, she rose abruptly, pinned on her hat, threw her cloak round her shoulders, blew out the candles, and groped her way through the church, towards the half-open door. As she hurried along the narrow pathway, that led across the churchyard, of a sudden, a figure started out of the blackness.

"Who's that?" she cried, in a loud, frightened voice.

A man's uneasy laugh answered her.

"It's only me, Rosa. I didna think t' scare ye. I've bin waitin' for ye, this hoor past."

She made no reply, but quickened her pace. He strode on beside her.

"I'm off, Monday, ye know," he continued. And, as she said nothing,

"Will ye na stop jest a minnit. I'd like t' speak a few words wi' ye before I go, an to-morrow I hev t' git over t' Scarsdale betimes," he persisted.

"I don't want t' speak wi' ye: I don't want ever to see ye agin. I jest hate the sight o' ye." She spoke with a vehement, concentrated hoarseness.

"Nay, but ye must listen to me. I will na be put off wi' fratchin speeches." And, gripping her arm, he forced her to stop.

"Loose me, ye great beast," she broke out.

"I'll na hould ye, if ye'll jest stand quiet-like. I mean t' speak fair t' ye, Rosa."

They stood at a bend in the road, face to face, quite close together. Behind his burly form stretched the dimness of a grey, ghostly field.

"What is't ye hev to say to me? Hev done wi' it quick," she said sullenly.

"It be jest this, Rosa," he began with dogged gravity. "I want t' tell ye that ef any trouble comes t' ye after I'm gone—ye know t' what I refer—I want t' tell ye that I'm prepared t' act square by ye. I've written out on an envelope my address in London. Luke Stock, care o' Purcell & Co., Smithfield Market, London."

"Ye're a bad, sinful man. I jest hate t' sight o' ye. I wish ye were dead."

"Ay, but I reckon what ye'd ha best thought o' that before. Ye've changed yer whistle considerable since Tuesday. Nay, hould on," he added, as she struggled to push past him. "Here's t' envelope."

She snatched the paper, and tore it passionately, scattering the fragments on to the road. When she had finished, he burst out angrily :

"Ye cussed, unreasonable fool."

"Let me pass, ef ye've nought mare t' say," she cried.

"Nay, I'll na part wi' ye this fashion. Ye can speak soft enough when ye choose." And seizing her shoulders, he forced her backwards, against the wall.

"Ye do look fine, an' na mistake, when ye're jest ablaze wi' ragin'," he laughed bluntly, lowering his face to hers.

"Loose me, loose me, ye great coward," she gasped, striving to free her arms.

Holding her fast, he expostulated :

"Coom, Rosa, can we na part friends ?"

"Part friends, indeed," she retorted bitterly. "Friends wi' the likes o' you. What d'ye tak me for? Let me git home, I tell ye. An' please God I'll never set eyes on ye again. I hate t' sight o' ye."

"Be off wi' ye, then," he answered, pushing her roughly back into the road. "Be off wi' ye, ye silly. Ye canna say I hav na spak fair t' ye, an' by goom, ye'll na see me shally-wallyin this fashion agin. Be off wi' ye : ye can jest shift for yerself, since ye canna keep a civil tongue in yer head."

The girl, catching at her breath, stood as if dazed, watching his retreating figure ; then, starting forward at a run, disappeared up the hill, into the darkness.

III

Old Mr. Blencarn concluded his husky sermon. The scanty congregation, who had been sitting, stolidly immobile in their stiff, Sunday clothes, shuffled to their feet, and the pewful of school-children, in clamorous chorus, intoned the final hymn. Anthony stood near the organ, absently contemplating, while the rude melody resounded through the church, Rosa's deft manipulation of the key-board. The rugged lines of his face were relaxed to a vacant, thoughtful limpness, that aged his expression not a little : now and then, as if for reference, he glanced questioningly at the girl's profile.

A few minutes later, the service was over, and the congregation sauntered out down the aisle. A gawky group of men remained loitering by the church door : one of them called to Anthony ; but, nodding curtly, he passed on, and strode away down the road, across the grey, upland meadows, towards home. As soon as he had breasted the hill, however, and was no longer visible from

below, he turned abruptly to the left, along a small, swampy hollow, till he had reached the lane that led down from the fellside.

He clambered over a rugged, moss-grown wall, and stood, gazing expectantly down the dark, disused roadway: then, after a moment's hesitation, perceiving nobody, seated himself beneath the wall, on a projecting slab of stone.

Overhead hung a sombre, drifting sky. A gusty wind rollicked down from the fell—huge masses of chilly gray, stripped of the last night's mist. A few dead leaves fluttered over the stones, and from off the fellside there floated the plaintive, quavering rumour of many bleating sheep.

Before long, he caught sight of two figures coming towards him, slowly climbing the hill. He sat awaiting their approach, fidgetting with his sandy beard, and abstractedly grinding the ground beneath his heel. At the brow they halted: plunging his hands deep into his pockets, he strolled sheepishly towards them.

"Ah! good day t' ye, Anthony," called the old man, in a shrill, breathless voice. "'Tis a long hill, an' my legs are not what they were. Time was when I'd think nought o' a whole day's tramp on t' fells. Ay, I'm gittin' feeble, Anthony, that's what 'tis. And if Rosa here wasn't the great, strong lass she is, I don't know how her old uncle 'd manage;" and he turned to the girl with a proud, tremulous smile.

"Will ye tak my arm a bit, Mr. Blencarn? Miss Rosa 'll be tired, likely," Anthony asked.

"Nay, Mr. Garstin, but I can manage nicely," the girl interrupted sharply.

Anthony looked up at her as she spoke. She wore a straw hat, trimmed with crimson velvet, and a black, fur-edged cape, that seemed to set off mightily the fine whiteness of her neck. Her large, dark eyes were fixed upon him. He shifted his feet uneasily, and dropped his glance.

She linked her uncle's arm in hers, and the three moved slowly forward. Old Mr. Blencarn walked with difficulty, pausing at intervals for breath. Anthony, his eyes bent on the ground, sauntered beside him, clumsily kicking at the cobbles that lay in his path.

When they reached the vicarage gate, the old man asked him to come inside.

"Not jest now, thank ye, Mr. Blencarn. I've that lot o' lambs t' see to before dinner. It's a grand marnin', this," he added, inconsequently.

"Uncle's bought a nice lot o' Leghorns, Tuesday," Rosa remarked. Anthony met her gaze; there was a grave, subdued expression on her face this morning, that made her look more of a woman, less of a girl.

"Ay, do ye show him the birds, Rosa. I'd be glad to have his opinion on 'em."

The old man turned to hobble into the house, and Rosa, as she supported his arm, called back over her shoulder:

"I'll not be a minute, Mr. Garstin."

Anthony strolled round to the yard behind the house, and waited, watching a flock of glossy-white poultry that strutted, perkily pecking, over the grass-grown cobbles.

"Ay, Miss Rosa, they're a bonny lot," he remarked, as the girl joined him.

"Are they not?" she rejoined, scattering a handful of corn before her.

The birds scuttled across the yard with greedy, outstretched necks. The two stood, side by side, gazing at them.

"What did he give for 'em?" Anthony asked.

"Fifty-five shillings."

"Ay," he assented, nodding absently.

"Was Dr. Sanderson na seein' o' yer father yesterday?" he asked, after a moment.

"He came in t' forenoon. He said he was jest na worse."

"Ye knaw, Miss Rosa, as I'm still thinkin' on ye," he began abruptly, without looking up.

"I reckon it ain't much use," she answered shortly, scattering another handful of corn towards the birds. "I reckon I'll never marry. I'm jest weary o' bein' courted——"

"I would na weary ye wi' courtin'," he interrupted.

She laughed noisily.

"Ye are a queer customer, an na mistake."

"I'm a match for Luke Stock anyway," he continued fiercely. "Ye think nought o' takin' oop wi' him—about as ranty, wild a young feller as ever stepped.

The girl reddened, and bit her lip.

"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Garstin. It seems to me ye're mighty hasty in jumpin' t' conclusions."

"Mabbee I kin see thing or two," he retorted, doggedly.

"Luke Stock's gone to London, anyway."

"Ay, an' a powerful good job too, in t' opinion o' some folks."

"Ye're jest jealous," she exclaimed, with a forced titter. "Ye're jest jealous o' Luke Stock."

"Nay, but ye need na fill yer head wi' that nonsense. I'm too deep set on ye t' feel jealousy," he answered, gravely.

The smile faded from her face, as she murmured :

"I canna mak ye out, Mr. Garstin."

"Nay, that ye canna. An' I suppose it's natural, considerin' ye're little more than a child, an' I'm a'most old enough to be yer father," he retorted, with blunt bitterness.

"But ye know yer mother's took that dislike t' me. She'd never abide the sight o' me at Houtsey."

He remained silent a moment, moodily reflecting.

"She'd jest ha' t' git ower it. I see nought in that objection," he declared.

"Nay, Mr. Garstin, it canna be. Indeed it canna be at all. Ye'd best jest put it right from yer mind, once and for all."

"I'd jest best put it off my mind, had I? Ye talk like a child!" he burst out, scornfully. "I intend ye t' coom t' love me, an' I will na tak ye till ye do. I'll jest gō on waitin' for ye, an', mark my words, my day 'ull coom at last."

He spoke loudly, in a slow, stubborn voice, and stepped suddenly towards her. With a faint, frightened cry she shrank back into the doorway of the hen-house.

"Ye talk like a prophet. Ye sort o' skeer me."

He laughed grimly, and paused, reflectively scanning her face. He seemed about to continue in the same strain ; but, instead, turned abruptly on his heel, and strode away through the garden gate.

IV

For three hundred years there had been a Garstin at Houtsey : generation after generation had tramped the gray stretch of upland, in the spring-time scattering their flocks over the fell-sides, and, at the "back-end," on dark, winter afternoons, driving them home again, down the broad bridle-path, that led over the "raise." They had been a race of few words, "keeping themselves to themselves," as the phrase goes ; beholden to no man, filled with a dogged, churlish pride—an upright, old-fashioned race, stubborn, long-lived, rude in speech, slow of resolve.

Anthony had never seen his father, who had died one night, upon the fell-top, he and his shepherd, engulfed in the great snowstorm of 1849. Folks had said that he was the only Garstin, who had failed to make old man's bones.

After his death, Jake Atkinson, from Ribbleshead in Yorkshire, had come to live at Houtsey. Jake was a fine farmer, a canny bargainer, and very handy among the sheep, till he took to drink, and roystering every week with

the town wenches up at Carlisle. He was a corpulent, deep-voiced, free-handed fellow : when his time came, though he died very hardly, he remained festive and convivial to the last. And for years afterwards, in the valley, his memory lingered : men spoke of him regretfully, recalling his quips, his feats of strength, and his choice breed of Herdwicke rams. But he left behind him a host of debts up at Carlisle, in Penrith, and in almost every market town—debts that he had long ago pretended to have paid with money that belonged to his sister. The widow Garstin sold the twelve Herdwicke rams, and nine acres of land : within six weeks she had cleared off every penny, and for thirteen months, on Sundays, wore her mourning with a mute, forbidding grimness : the bitter thought that, unbeknown to her, Jake had acted dishonestly in money matters, and that he had ended his days in riotous sin, soured her pride, imbued her with a rancorous hostility against all the world. For she was a very proud woman, independent, holding her head high, so folks said, like a Garstin bred and born ; and Anthony, although some reckoned him quiet and of little account, came to take after her as he grew into manhood.

She took into her own hands the management of the Houtsey farm, and set the boy to work for her along with the two farm servants. It was twenty-five years now since his uncle Jake's death : there were gray hairs in his sandy beard ; but he still worked for his mother, as he had done when a growing lad.

And now that times were grown to be bad (of late years the price of stock had been steadily falling ; and the hay-harvests had drifted from bad to worse) the widow Garstin no longer kept any labouring men ; but lived, she and her son, year in and year out, in a close, parsimonious way.

That had been Anthony Garstin's life—a dull, eventless sort of business, the sluggish incrustation of monotonous years. And until Rosa Blencarn had come to keep house for her uncle, he had never thought twice on a woman's face.

The Garstins had always been good church-goers, and Anthony, for years, had acted as churchwarden. It was one summer evening, up at the vicarage, whilst he was checking the offertory account, that he first set eyes upon her. She was fresh back from school at Leeds : she was dressed in a white dress : she looked, he thought, like a London lady.

She stood by the window, tall and straight and queenly, dreamily gazing out into the summer twilight, whilst he and her uncle sat over their business. When he rose to go, she glanced at him with quick curiosity ; he hurried away, muttering a sheepish good-night.

The next time that he saw her was in church on Sunday. He watched her shyly, with a hesitating, reverential discretion; her beauty seemed to him wonderful, distant, enigmatic. In the afternoon, young Mrs. Forsyth, from Longscale, dropped in for a cup of tea with his mother, and the two set off gossiping of Rosa Blencarn, speaking of her freely, in tones of acrimonious contempt. For a long while he sat silent, puffing at his pipe; but, at last, when his mother concluded with, "She looks t'me fair stuck-ooop, full o' toonish airs an' graces," despite himself, he burst out: "Ye're jest wastin' yer breath wi' that cackle. I reckon Miss Blencarn's o' a different clay from us folks." Young Mrs. Forsyth tittered immoderately, and the next week it was rumoured about the valley that "Tony Garstin was gone lunny over t' parson's niece."

But of all this he knew nothing—keeping to himself, as was his wont, and being, besides, very busy with the hay harvest—until one day, at dinner-time, Henry Sisson asked if he'd started his courting; Jacob Sowerby cried that Tony'd been too slow in getting to work, for that the girl had been seen spooning in Crosby Shaws with Curbison the auctioneer, and the others (there were half a dozen of them lounging round the hay-waggon) burst into a boisterous guffaw. Anthony flushed dully, looking hesitatingly from the one to the other; then slowly put down his beer-can, and, of a sudden, seizing Jacob by the neck, swung him heavily on the grass. He fell against the waggon-wheel, and when he rose the blood was streaming from an ugly cut in his forehead. And henceforward Tony Garstin's courtship was the common jest of all the parish.

As yet, however, he had scarcely spoken to her, though twice he had passed her in the lane that led up to the vicarage. She had given him a frank, friendly smile; but he had not found the resolution to do more than lift his hat. He and Henry Sisson stacked the hay in the yard behind the house, there was no further mention made of Rosa Blencarn; but all day long Anthony, as he knelt thatching the rick, brooded over the strange sweetness of her face, and on the fell-top, while he tramped after the ewes over the dry, crackling heather, and as he jogged along the narrow, rickety road, driving his cartload of lambs into the auction mart.

Thus, as the weeks slipped by, he was content with blunt, wistful ruminations upon her indistinct image. Jacob Sowerby's accusation, and several kindred innuendoes let fall by his mother, left him coolly incredulous; the girl still seemed to him altogether distant; but from the first sight of her face he had evolved a stolid, unfaltering conception of her difference from the ruck of her sex.

But one evening, as he passed the vicarage, on his way down from the fells, she called to him, and with a childish, confiding familiarity, asked for advice concerning the feeding of the poultry. In his eagerness to answer her as best he could, he forgot his customary embarrassment, and grew, for the moment, almost voluble, and quite at his ease in her presence. Directly her flow of questions ceased, however, the returning perception of her rosy, hesitating smile, and of her large, deep eyes looking straight into his face, perturbed him strangely, and, reddening, he remembered the quarrel in the hay-field, and the tale of Crosby Shaws.

After this, the poultry became a link between them—a link which he regarded in all seriousness, blindly unconscious that there was aught else to bring them together, only feeling himself in awe of her, because of her schooling, her townish manners, her ladylike mode of dress. And soon, he came to take a sturdy, secret pride in her friendly familiarity towards him. Several times a week he would meet her in the lane, and they would loiter a moment together; she would admire his dogs, though he assured her earnestly that they were but sorry curs; and once, laughing at his staidness, she nicknamed him “Mr. Churchwarden.”

That the girl was not liked in the valley he suspected, curtly attributing her unpopularity to the women’s senseless jealousy. Of gossip concerning her he heard no further hint; but instinctively, and partly from that rugged, natural reserve of his, shrank from mentioning her name, even incidentally, to his mother.

Now, on Sunday evenings, he often strolled up to the vicarage, each time quitting his mother with the same awkward affectation of casualness; and, on his return, becoming vaguely conscious of how she refrained from any comment on his absence, and appeared oddly oblivious of the existence of parson Blencarn’s niece.

She had always been a sour-tongued woman; but, as the days shortened, with the approach of the long winter months, she seemed to him to grow more fretful than ever; at times it was almost as if she bore him some smouldering, sullen resentment. He was of stubborn fibre, however, toughened by long habit of a bleak, unruly climate; he revolved the matter in his mind deliberately, and when, at last, after much plodding thought, it dawned upon him that she resented his acquaintance with Rosa Blencarn, he accepted the solution with an unflinching phlegm, and merely shifted his attitude towards the girl, calculating each day the likelihood of his meeting her, and making, in her presence, persistent efforts to break down, once for all, the barrier of his own

timidity. He was a man not to be clumsily driven, still less, so he prided himself, a man to be craftily led.

It was close upon Christmas time before the crisis came. His mother was just home from Penrith market. The spring-cart stood in the yard, the old gray horse was steaming heavily in the still, frosty air.

"I reckon ye've come fast. T' ould horse is over hot," he remarked bluntly, as he went to the animal's head.

She clambered down hastily, and, coming to his side, began breathlessly :

"Ye ought t' hev coom t' market, Tony. There's bin pretty goin's on in Pe'rith to-day. I was helpin' Anna Forsyth t' choose six yards o' sheetin' in Dockroy, when we sees Rosa Blencarn coom oot o' t' "Bell and Bullock" in company wi' Curbison and young Joe Smethwick. Smethwick was fair reelin' drunk, and Curbison and t' girl were a-houldin' on t' him, to keep him fra fallin', and then, after a bit, he puts his arm round t' girl t' stiddy hisself, and that fashion they goes off, right oop t' public street——"

He continued to unload the packages, and to carry them, mechanically, one by one, into the house. Each time, when he reappeared, she was standing by the steaming horse, busy with her tale.

"An' on t' road hame we passed t' three on' em in Curbison's trap, with Smethwick leein' in t' bottom, singin' maudlin' songs. They were passin' Dunscale village, an' t' folks coom runnin' oot o' houses t' see 'em go past——"

He led the cart away towards the stable, leaving her to cry the remainder after him across the yard.

Half an hour later he came in for his dinner. During the meal not a word passed between them, and directly he had finished he strode out of the house. About nine o'clock he returned, lit his pipe, and sat down to smoke it over the kitchen fire.

"Where've ye bin, Tony?" she asked.

"Oop t' vicarage, courtin'," he retorted defiantly, with his pipe in his mouth.

This was ten months ago : ever since he had been doggedly waiting. That evening he had set his mind on the girl, he intended to have her ; and while his mother gibed, as she did now upon every opportunity, his patience remained grimly unflagging. She would remind him that the farm belonged to her, that he would have to wait till her death before he could bring the hussy to Houtsey : he would retort that as soon as the girl would have him, he intended taking a small holding over at Scarsdale. Then she would give way, and for a while piteously upbraid him with her old age, and with the memory of all the

years she and he had spent together, and he would comfort her with a display of brusque, evasive remorse.

But, none the less, on the morrow, his thoughts would return to dwell on the haunting vision of the girl's face, while his own rude, credulous chivalry, kindled by the recollection of her beauty, stifled his misgivings concerning her conduct.

Meanwhile she dallied with him, and amused herself with the younger men. Her old uncle fell ill in the spring, and could scarcely leave the house. She declared that she found life in the valley intolerably dull, that she hated the quiet of the place, that she longed for Leeds, and the exciting bustle of the streets; and in the evenings she wrote long letters to the girl-friends she had left behind there, describing with petulant vivacity her tribe of rustic admirers. At the harvest-time she went back on a fortnight's visit to friends; the evening before her departure she promised Anthony to give him her answer on her return. But, instead, she avoided him, pretended to have promised in jest, and took up with Luke Stock, a cattle-dealer from Wigton.

V

It was three weeks since he had fetched his flock down from the fell.

After dinner he and his mother sat together in the parlour: they had done so every Sunday afternoon, year in and year out, as far back as he could remember.

A row of mahogany chairs, with shiny, horse-hair seats, were ranged round the room. A great collection of agricultural prize-tickets were pinned over the wall; and, on a heavy, highly-polished sideboard, stood several silver cups. A heap of gilt-edged shavings filled the unused grate: there were gaudily-tinted roses along the mantelpiece, and, on a small table by the window, beneath a glass-case, a gilt basket filled with imitation flowers. Every object was disposed with a scrupulous precision: the carpet and the red-patterned cloth on the centre-table were much faded. The room was spotlessly clean, and wore, in the chilly winter sunlight, a rigid, comfortless air.

Neither spoke, or appeared conscious of the other's presence. Old Mrs. Garstin, wrapped in a woollen shawl, sat knitting: Anthony dozed fitfully on a stiff-backed chair.

Of a sudden, in the distance, a bell started tolling. Anthony rubbed his eyes drowsily, and, taking from the table his Sunday hat, strolled out across the

dusky fields. Presently, reaching a rude wooden seat, built beside the bridle-path, he sat down and relit his pipe. The air was very still : below him a white, filmy mist hung across the valley : the fell sides, vaguely grouped, resembled hulking masses of sombre shadow ; and, as he looked back, three squares of glimmering gold revealed the lighted windows of the square-towered church.

He sat smoking ; pondering, with placid and reverential contemplation, on the Mighty Maker of the world—a world majestically and inevitably ordered ; a world where, he argued, each object—each fissure in the fells, the winding course of each tumbling stream—possesses its mysterious purport, its inevitable signification. . . .

At the end of the field two rams were fighting ; retreating, then running together, and, leaping from the ground, butting head to head and horn to horn. Anthony watched them absently, pursuing his rude meditations.

. . . And the succession of bad seasons, the slow ruination of the farmers throughout the country, were but punishment meted out for the accumulated wickedness of the world. In the olden time God rained plagues upon the land : nowadays, in His wrath, He spoiled the produce of the earth, which, with His own hands, He had fashioned and bestowed upon men.

He rose and continued his walk along the bridle-path. A multitude of rabbits scuttled up the hill at his approach ; and a great cloud of plovers, rising from the rushes, circled overhead, filling the air with a profusion of their querulous cries. All at once he heard a rattling of stones, and perceived a number of small pieces of shingle bounding in front of him down the grassy slope.

A woman's figure was moving among the rocks above him. The next moment, by the trimming of crimson velvet on her hat, he had recognized her. He mounted the slope with springing strides, wondering the while how it was she came to be there, that she was not in church playing the organ at afternoon service.

Before she was aware of his approach, he was beside her.

" I thought ye'd be in church—— " he began.

She started : then, gradually regaining her composure, answered, weakly smiling :

" Mr. Jenkinson, the new schoolmaster, wanted to try the organ."

He came towards her impulsively : she saw the odd flickers in his eyes as she stepped back in dismay.

" Nay, but I will na harm ye," he said. " Only I reckon what 'tis a special

turn o' Providence, meetin' wi' ye oop here. I reckon what ye'll hev t' give me a square answer noo. Ye canna dilly-dally everlastingly."

He spoke almost brutally; and she stood, white and gasping, staring at him with large, frightened eyes. The sheep-walk was but a tiny threadlike track: the slope of the shingle on either side was very steep: below them lay the valley; distant, lifeless, all blurred by the evening dusk. She looked about her helplessly for a means of escape.

"Miss Rosa," he continued, in a husky voice, "can ye na coom t' think on me. Think ye, I've bin waitin' nigh upon two year for ye. I've watched ye tak oop, first wi' this young fellar, and then wi' that, till soomtimes my heart's fit t' burst. Many a day, oop on t' fell-top, t' thought o' ye's nigh driven me daft, and I've left my shepherdin' jest t' set on a cairn in t' mist, picturin' an' broodin' on yer face. Many an evenin' I've started oop t' vicarage, wi' t' resolution t' speak right oot t' ye; but when it coomed t' point, a sort o' timidity seemed t' hould me back, I was that feared t' displease ye. I know I'm na scholar, an' mabbe ye think I'm rough-mannered. I know I've spoken sharply to ye once or twice lately. But it's jest because I'm that mad wi' love for ye: I jest canna help myself soomtimes—"

Ha waited, peering into her face. She could see the beads of sweat above his bristling eyebrows: the damp had settled on his sandy beard: his horny fingers were twitching at the buttons of his black Sunday coat.

She struggled to summon a smile; but her underlip quivered, and her large dark eyes filled slowly with tears.

And he went on:

"Ye've coom t' mean jest everything to me. Ef ye will na hev me, I care for nought else. I canna speak t' ye in phrases: I'm jest a plain, unscholarly man: I canna wheedle ye, wi' cunnin' after t' fashion o' toon folks. But I can love ye wi' all my might, an' watch over ye, and work for ye better than any one o' em——"

She was crying to herself, silently, while he spoke. He noticed nothing, however: the twilight hid her face from him.

"There's nought against me," he persisted "I'm as good a man as one on 'em. Ay, as good a man as any one on 'em," he repeated defiantly, raising his voice.

"It's impossible, Mr. Garstin, it's impossible. Ye've been very kind to me——" she added, in a choking voice.

"Wa dang it, I didna mean t' mak ye cry, lass," he exclaimed, with a softening of his tone. "There's nought for ye t' cry ower."

She sank on to the stones, passionately sobbing in hysterical and defenceless despair. Anthony stood a moment, gazing at her in clumsy perplexity: then, coming close to her, put his hand on her shoulder, and said gently:

"Coom, lass, what's trouble? Ye can trust me."

She shook her head faintly.

"Ay, but ye can though," he asserted, firmly. "Come, what is 't?"

Heedless of him, she continued to rock herself to and fro, crooning in her distress:

"Oh! I wish I were dead! . . . I wish I could die!"

—"Wish ye could die?" he repeated. "Why, whatever can 't be that's troublin' ye like this? There, there, lassie, give ower: it 'ull all coom right, whatever it be——"

"No, no," she wailed. "I wish I could die! . . . I wish I could die!"

Lights were twinkling in the village below; and across the valley darkness was draping the hills. The girl lifted her face from her hands, and looked up at him with a scared, bewildered expression.

"I must go home: I must be getting home," she muttered.

"Nay, but there's sommut mighty amiss wi' ye."

"No, it's nothing . . . I don't know—I'm not well . . . I mean it's nothing . . . it'll pass over . . . you mustn't think anything of it."

"Nay, but I canna stand by an see ye in sich trouble."

"It's nothing, Mr. Garstin, indeed it's nothing," she repeated.

"Ay, but I canna credit that," he objected, stubbornly.

She sent him a shifting, hunted glance.

"Let me get home . . . you must let me get home."

She made a tremulous, pitiful attempt at firmness. Eyeing her keenly, he barred her path: she flushed scarlet, and looked hastily away across the valley.

"If ye'll tell me yer distress, mabbe I can help ye."

"No, no, it's nothing . . . it's nothing."

"If ye'll tell me yer distress, mabbe I can help ye," he repeated, with a solemn, deliberate sternness. She shivered, and looked away again, vaguely, across the valley.

"You can do nothing: there's nought to be done," she murmured, drearily.

"There's a man in this business," he declared.

"Let me go! Let me go!" she pleaded, desperately.

"Who is't that's bin puttin' ye into this distress?" His voice sounded loud and harsh.

"No one, no one. I canna tell ye, Mr. Garstin. . . . It's no one," she protested weakly. The white, twisted look on his face frightened her.

"My God!" he burst out, gripping her wrist, "an' a proper soft fool ye've made o' me. Who is't, I tell ye? Who's t' man?"

"Ye're hurtin' me. Let me go. I canna tell ye."

"And ye're fond o' him?"

"No, no. He's a wicked, sinful man. I pray God I may never set eyes on him again. I told him so."

"But ef he's got ye into trouble, he'll hev t' marry ye," he persisted with a brutal bitterness.

"I will not. I hate him!" she cried fiercely.

"But is he *willin'* t' marry ye?"

"I don't know . . . I don't care . . . he said so before he went away . . . But I'd kill myself sooner than live with him."

He let her hands fall and stepped back from her. She could only see his figure, like a sombre cloud, standing before her. The whole fellside seemed still and dark and lonely. Presently she heard his voice again:

"I reckon what there's one road oot o' yer distress."

She shook her head drearily.

"There's none. I'm a lost woman."

"An' ef ye took me instead?" he said eagerly.

"I—I don't understand——"

"Ef ye married me instead of Luke Stock?"

"But that's impossible—the—the——"

"Ay, t' child. I know. But I'll tak t' child as mine."

She remained silent. After a moment he heard her voice answer in a queer, distant tone:

"You mean that—that ye're ready to marry me, and adopt the child?"

"I do," he answered doggedly.

"But people—your mother——?"

"Folks 'ull jest know nought about it. It's none o' their business. T' child 'ull pass as mine. Ye'll accept that?"

"Yes," she answered, in a low, rapid voice.

"Ye'll consent t' hev me, ef I git ye oot o' yer trouble."

"Yes," she repeated, in the same tone.

She heard him draw a long breath.

"I said 't was a turn o' Providence, meetin' wi ye oop here," he exclaimed, with half-suppressed exultation.

Her teeth began to chatter a little : she felt that he was peering at her, curiously, through the darkness.

"An' noo," he continued briskly, "ye'd best be gettin' home. Give me ye're hand, an' I'll stiddy ye ower t' stones."

He helped her down the bank of shingle, exclaiming : "By goom, ye're stony cauld." Once or twice she slipped : he supported her, roughly gripping her knuckles. The stones rolled down the steps, noisily, disappearing into the night.

Presently they struck the turfed bridle-path, and, as they descended, silently, towards the lights of the village, he said gravely :

"I always reckoned what my day 'ud coom."

She made no reply ; and he added grimly :

"There'll be terrible work wi' mother over this."

He accompanied her down the narrow lane that led past her uncle's house. When the lighted windows came in sight he halted.

"Good-night, lassie," he said kindly. "Do ye give ower distressin' yeself."

"Good-night, Mr. Garstin," she answered, in the same low, rapid voice, in which she had given him her answer up on the fell.

"We're man an' wife plighted now, are we not?" he blurted timidly.

She held her face to his, and he kissed her on the cheek, clumsily.

VI

The next morning the frost had set in. The sky was still clear and glittering : the whitened fields sparkled in the chilly sunlight : here and there, on high, distant peaks, gleamed dainty caps of snow. All the week Anthony was to be busy at the fell-foot, wall-building against the coming of the winter storms : the work was heavy, for he was single-handed, and the stone had to be fetched from off the fell-side. Two or three times a day he led his rickety, lumbering cart along the lane that passed the vicarage gate, pausing on each journey to glance furtively up at the windows. But he saw no sign of Rosa Blencarn ; and, indeed, he felt no longing to see her : he was grimly exultant over the remembrance of his wooing of her, and over the knowledge that she was his. There glowed within him a stolid pride in himself : he thought of the others who had courted her, and the means by which he had won her seemed to him a fine stroke of cleverness.

And so he refrained from any mention of the matter ; relishing, as he

worked, all alone, the days through, the consciousness of his secret triumph, and anticipating, with inward chucklings, the discomforted cackle of his mother's female friends. He foresaw, without misgiving, her bitter opposition : he felt himself strong ; and his heart warmed towards the girl. And when, at intervals, the brusque realization that, after all, he was to possess her, swept over him, he gripped the stones, and swung them, almost fiercely, into their places.

All around him the white, empty fields seemed slumbering, breathlessly. The stillness stiffened the leafless trees. The frosty air flicked his blood : singing vigorously to himself he worked with a stubborn, unflagging resolution, methodically postponing, till the length of wall should be completed, the announcement of his betrothal.

After his reticent, solitary fashion, he was very happy, reviewing his future prospects with a plain and steady assurance, and, as the week-end approached, coming to ignore the irregularity of the whole business ; almost to assume, in the exaltation of his pride, that he had won her honestly ; and to discard, stolidly, all thought of Luke Stock, of his relations with her, of the coming child that was to pass for his own.

And there were moments too, when, as he sauntered homewards through the dusk at the end of his day's work, his heart grew full to overflowing of a rugged, superstitious gratitude towards God in Heaven who had granted his desires.

About three o'clock on the Saturday afternoon he finished the length of wall. He went home, washed, shaved, put on his Sunday coat ; and, avoiding the kitchen, where his mother sat knitting by the fireside, strode up to the vicarage.

It was Rosa who opened the door to him. On recognizing him she started, and he followed her into the dining-room. He seated himself, and began, brusquely :

"I've coom, Miss Rosa, t' speak t' Mr. Blencarn."

Then added, eyeing her closely :

"Ye're lookin' sick, lass."

Her faint smile accentuated the worn, white look on her face.

"I reckon ye've been frettin' yerself," he continued, gently, "leein' awake o' nights, hev'n't yee, noo?"

She smiled vaguely.

"Well, but ye see I've coom t' settle t' whole business for ye. Ye thought mabbe that I was na a man o' my word."

"No, no, not that," she protested, "but—but—"

"But what then?"

"Ye must not do it," Mr. Garstin I must just bear my own trouble the best I can——" she broke out.

"D'ye fancy I'm takin' ye oot of charity? Ye little reckon the sort o' stuff my love for ye's made of. Nay, Miss Rosa, but ye canna draw back noo."

"But ye cannot do it, Mr. Garstin. Ye know your mother will na have me at Houtsey I could na live there with your mother I'd sooner bear my trouble alone, as best I can She's that stern is Mrs. Garstin. I couldn't look her in the face I can go away somewhere I could keep it all from uncle."

Her colour came and went: she stood before him, looking away from him, dully, out of the window.

"I intend ye t' coom t' Hootsey. I'm na lad: I reckon I can choose my own wife. Mother'll hev ye at t' farm, right enough: ye need na distress yeself on that point——"

"Nay, Mr. Garstin, but indeed she will not, never I know she will not She always set herself against me, right from the first."

"Ay, but that was different. T' case is all changed, noo," he objected, doggedly.

"She'll support the sight of me all the less," the girl faltered.

"Mother'll hev ye at Hootsey—receive ye willin' of her own free wish—of her own free wish, d'ye hear. I'll answer for that."

He struck the table with his fist, heavily. His tone of determination awed her: she glanced at him hurriedly, struggling with her irresolution.

"I knaw hoo t' manage mother. An' now," he concluded, changing his tone, "is yer uncle about t' place."

"He's up the paddock, I think," she answered.

"Well, I'll jest step oop and hev a word wi' him."

"Ye're ye will na tell him."

"Tut, tut, na harrowin' tales, ye need na fear, lass. I reckon ef I can tackle mother, I can accommodate myself t' parson Blencarn."

He rose, and coming close to her, scanned her face.

"Ye must git t' roses back t' yer cheeks," he exclaimed, with a short laugh, "I canna be takin' a ghost t' church."

She smiled tremulously, and he continued, laying one hand affectionately on her shoulder:

"Nay, but I was but jestin'. Roses or na roses, ye'll be t' bonniest bride-

in all Coomberland. I'll meet ye in Hullam lane, after church time, to-morrow," he added, moving towards the door.

After he had gone, she hurried to the backdoor furtively. His retreating figure was already mounting the gray upland field. Presently, beyond him, she perceived her uncle, emerging through the paddock gate. She ran across the poultry yard, and mounting a tub, stood watching the two figures as they moved towards one another along the brow, Anthony vigorously trudging, with his hands thrust deep in his pocket; her uncle, his wideawake tilted over his nose, hobbling, and leaning stiffly on his pair of sticks. They met; she saw Anthony take her uncle's arm: the two, turning together, strolled away towards the fell.

She went back into the house. Anthony's dog came towards her, slinking along the passage. She caught the animal's head in her hands, and bent over it caressingly, in an impulsive outburst of almost hysterical affection.

VII

The two men returned towards the vicarage. At the paddock gate they halted, and the old man concluded:

"I could not hev wished a better man for her, Anthony. Mabbe the Lord 'll not be minded to spare me much longer. After I'm gone Rosa 'll hev all I possess. She was my poor brother Isaac's only child. After her mother was taken, he, poor fellow, went altogether to the bad, and until she came here she mostly lived among strangers. It's been a wretched sort of childhood for her—a wretched sort of childhood. Ye'll take care of her, Anthony, will ye not? . . . Nay, but I could not hev wished for a better man for her, and there's my hand on 't."

"Thank ee, Mr. Blencarn, thank ee," Anthony answered huskily, gripping the old man's hand.

And he started off down the lane, homewards.

His heart was full of a strange, rugged exaltation. He felt with a swelling pride that God had intrusted to him this great charge—to tend her; to make up to her, tenfold, for all that loving care, which, in her childhood, she had never known. And together with a stubborn confidence in himself, there welled up within him a great pity for her—a tender pity, that, chastening with his passion, made her seem to him, as he brooded over that lonely childhood of hers, the more distinctly beautiful, the more profoundly precious. He pictured to himself, tremulously, almost incredulously, their married life—

in the winter, his return home at nightfall to find her awaiting him with a glad, trustful smile ; their evenings, passed together, sitting in silent happiness over the smouldering logs ; or, in summer-time, the mid-day rest in the hay fields when, wearing perhaps a large-brimmed hat fastened with a red ribbon beneath her chin, he would catch sight of her, carrying his dinner, coming across the upland.

She had not been brought up to be a farmer's wife : she was but a child still, as the old parson had said. She should not have to work as other men's wives worked : she should dress like a lady, and on Sundays, in church, wear fine bonnets, and remain, as she had always been, the belle of all the parish.

And, meanwhile, he would farm as he had never farmed before, watching his opportunities, driving cunning bargains, spending nothing on himself, hoarding every penny that she might have what she wanted. . . . And, as he strode through the village, he seemed to foresee a general brightening of prospects, a sobering of the fever of speculation in sheep, a cessation of the insensate glutting, year after year, of the great winter marts throughout the North, a slackening of the foreign competition followed by a steady revival of the price of fatted stocks—a period of prosperity in store for the farmer at last. . . . And the future years appeared to open out before him, spread like a distant, glittering plain, across which, he and she, hand in hand, were called to travel together. . . .

And then, suddenly, as his iron-bound boots clattered over the cobbled yard, he remembered, with brutal determination, his mother, and the stormy struggle that awaited him.

He waited till supper was over, till his mother had moved from the table to her place by the chimney corner. For several minutes he remained debating with himself the best method of breaking the news to her. Of a sudden he glanced up at her : her knitting had slipped on to her lap : she was sitting, bunched of a heap in her chair, nodding with sleep. By the flickering light of the wood fire, she looked worn and broken : he felt a twinge of clumsy compunction. And then he remembered the piteous, hunted look in the girl's eyes, and the old man's words when they had parted at the paddock gate, and he blurted out :

“ I doot but what I'll hev t' marry Rosa Blencarn after all.”

She started, and blinking her eyes, said :

“ I was jest takin' a wink o' sleep. What was 't ye were saying, Tony ?”

He hesitated a moment, puckering his forehead into coarse rugged lines, and fidgeting noisily with his tea cup. Presently he repeated :

"I doot but what I'll hev t' marry Rosa Blencarn after all."

She rose stiffly, and stepping down from the hearth, came towards him.

"Mabbe I did na hear ye aright, Tony." She spoke hurriedly, and though she was quite close to him, steadying herself with one hand clutching the back of his chair, her voice sounded weak, distant almost.

"Look oop at me. Look oop into my face," she commanded fiercely.

He obeyed sullenly.

"Noo oot wi 't. What's yer meanin', Tony?"

"I mean what I say," he retorted doggedly, averting his gaze.

"What d'ye mean by sayin' that ye've *got* t' marry her?"

"I tell yer I mean what I say," he repeated dully.

"Ye mean ye've bin an' put t' girl in trouble?"

He said nothing; but sat staring stupidly at the floor.

"Look oop at me, and answer," she commanded, gripping his shoulder and shaking him.

He raised his face slowly, and met her glance.

"Ay, that's aboot it," he answered.

"This 'll na be truth. It 'll be jest a piece o' wanton trickery?" she cried.

"Nay, but 't is truth," he answered deliberately.

"Ye will na swear t' it?" she persisted.

"I see na necessity for swearin'."

"Then ye canna swear t' it," she burst out triumphantly.

He paused an instant; then said quietly:

"Ay, but I'll swear t' it easy enough. Fetch t' Book."

She lifted the heavy, tattered Bible from the chimney-piece, and placed it before him on the table. He laid his lumpish fist on it.

"Say," she continued with a tense tremulousness, "say, I swear t' ye mother, that 't is t' truth, t' whole truth, and noat but t' truth, s'help me God."

"I swear t' ye, mother, it's truth, t' whole truth, and nothin' but t' truth, s'help me God," he repeated after her.

"Kiss t' Book," she ordered.

He lifted the Bible to his lips. As he replaced it on the table, he burst out into a short laugh:

"Be ye satisfied noo?"

She went back to the chimney corner without a word.

The logs on the hearth hissed and crackled. Outside, amid the blackness the wind was rising, hooting through the firs, and past the windows.

After a long while he roused himself, and drawing his pipe from his pocket almost steadily, proceeded leisurely to pare in the palm of his hand a lump of black tobacco.

"We'll be asked in church Sunday," he remarked bluntly.

She made no answer.

He looked across at her.

Her mouth was drawn tight at the corners: her face wore a queer, rigid aspect. She looked, he thought, like a figure of stone.

"Ye're not feeling poorly, are ye, mother?" he asked.

She shook her head grimly: then, hobbling out into the room, began to speak in a shrill, tuneless voice.

"Ye talked at one time o' takin' a farm over Scarsdale way. But ye'd best stop here. I'll no hinder ye. Ye can have t' large bedroom in t' front, and I'll move ower to what used to be my brother Jake's room. Ye know I've never had no opinion of t' girl, but I'll do what's right by her, ef I break my sperrit in t' doin' on't. I'll mak' t' girl welcome here: I'll stand by her proper-like: mebbe I'll finish by findin' soom good in her. But from this day forward, Tony, ye're na son o' mine. Ye've dishonoured yeself: ye've laid a trap for me—ay, laid a trap, that's t' word. Ye've brought shame and bitterness on yer ould mother in her old age. Ye've made me despise t' varra seet o' ye. Ye can stop on here, but ye shall niver touch a penny of my money; every shillin' of't shall go t' yer child, or to your child's children. Ay," she went on, raising her voice, "ay, ye've got yer way at last, and mebbe ye reckon ye've chosen a mighty smart way. But time 'ull coom when ye'll regret this day, when ye eat oot yer repentance in doost an' ashes. Ay, Lord 'ull punish ye, Tony, chastise ye properly. Ye'll learn that marriage begun in sin, can end in nought but sin. Ay," she concluded, as she reached the door, raising her skinny hand prophetically, "ay, after I'm deed an' gone, ye mind ye o' t' words o' t' apostle—'For them that hev sinned without t' law, shall also perish without t' law.'"

And she slammed the door behind her.

HUBERT CRACKANTHORPE.