BOOK FOURTH

THE CLOSED DOOR

I

The Rencounter by the Pool

The July sun shone over Egdon and fired its crimson heather to scarlet. It was the one season of the year, and the one weather of the season, in which the heath was gorgeous. This flowering period represented the second or noontide division in the cycle of those superficial changes which alone were possible here; it followed the green or young-fern period, representing the morn, and preceded the brown period, when the heathbells and ferns would wear the russet tinges of evening; to be in turn displaced by the dark hue of the winter period, representing night.

Clym and Eustacia, in their little house at Alderworth, beyond East Egdon, were living on with a monotony which was delightful to them. The heath and changes of weather were quite blotted out from their eyes for the present. They were enclosed in a sort of luminous mist, which hid from them surroundings of any inharmonious colour, and gave to all things the character of light. When it rained they were charmed, because they could remain indoors together all day with such

a show of reason; when it was fine they were charmed, because they could sit together on the hills. They were like those double stars which revolve round and round each other, and from a distance appear to be one. The absolute solitude in which they lived intensified their reciprocal thoughts; yet some might have said that it had the disadvantage of consuming their mutual affections at a fearfully prodigal rate. Yeobright did not fear for his own part; but recollection of Eustacia's old speech about the evanescence of love, now apparently forgotten by her, sometimes caused him to ask himself a question; and he recoiled at the thought that the quality of finiteness was not foreign to Eden.

When three or four weeks had been passed thus, Yeobright resumed his reading in earnest. To make up for lost time he studied indefatigably, for he wished to enter his new profession with the least possible delay.

Now, Eustacia's dream had always been that, once married to Clym, she would have the power of inducing him to return to Paris. He had carefully withheld all promise to do so; but would he be proof against her coaxing and argument? She had calculated to such a degree on the probability of success that she had represented Paris, and not Budmouth, to her grandfather as in all likelihood their future home. Her hopes were bound up in this dream. In the quiet days since their marriage, when Yeobright had been poring over her lips, her eyes, and the lines of her face, she had mused and mused on the subject, even

while in the act of returning his gaze; and now the sight of the books, indicating a future which was antagonistic to her dream, struck her with a positively painful jar. She was hoping for the time when, as the mistress of some pretty establishment, however small, near a Parisian Boulevard, she would be passing her days on the skirts at least of the gay world, and catching stray wafts from those town pleasures she was so well fitted to enjoy. Yet Yeobright was as firm in the contrary intention as if the tendency of marriage were rather to develop the fantasies of young philanthropy than to sweep them away.

Her anxiety reached a high pitch; but there was something in Clym's undeviating manner which made her hesitate before sounding him on the subject. At this point in their experience, however, an incident helped her. It occurred one evening about six weeks after their union, and arose entirely out of the unconscious misapplication of Venn of the fifty guineas intended for Yeobright.

A day or two after the receipt of the money Thomasin had sent a note to her aunt to thank her. She had been surprised at the largeness of the amount; but as no sum had ever been mentioned she set that down to her late uncle's generosity. She had been strictly charged by her aunt to say nothing to her husband of this gift; and Wildeve, as was natural enough, had not brought himself to mention to his wife a single particular of the midnight scene in the heath. Christian's terror, in like manner, had tied his tongue on the share he took in

that proceeding; and hoping that by some means or other the money had gone to its proper destination, he simply asserted as much, without giving details.

Therefore, when a week or two had passed away, Mrs. Yeobright began to wonder why she never heard from her son of the receipt of the present; and to add gloom to her perplexity came the possibility that resentment might be the cause of his silence. She could hardly believe as much, but why did he not write? She questioned Christian, and the confusion in his answers would at once have led her to believe that something was wrong, had not one-half of his story been corroborated by Thomasin's note.

Mrs. Yeobright was in this state of uncertainty when she was informed one morning that her son's wife was visiting her grandfather at Mistover. She determined to walk up the hill, see Eustacia, and ascertain from her daughter-in-law's lips whether the family guineas, which were to Mrs. Yeobright what family jewels are to wealthier dowagers, had miscarried or not.

When Christian learnt where she was going his concern reached its height. At the moment of her departure he could prevaricate no longer, and, confessing to the gambling, told her the truth as far as he knew it--that the guineas had been won by Wildeve.

"What, is he going to keep them?" Mrs. Yeobright cried.

"I hope and trust not!" moaned Christian. "He's a good man, and perhaps will do right things. He said you ought to have gied Mr. Clym's share to Eustacia, and that's perhaps what he'll do himself."

To Mrs. Yeobright, as soon as she could calmly reflect, there was much likelihood in this, for she could hardly believe that Wildeve would really appropriate money belonging to her son. The intermediate course of giving it to Eustacia was the sort of thing to please Wildeve's fancy. But it filled the mother with anger none the less. That Wildeve should have got command of the guineas after all, and should rearrange the disposal of them, placing Clym's share in Clym's wife's hands, because she had been his own sweetheart, and might be so still, was as irritating a pain as any that Mrs. Yeobright had ever borne.

She instantly dismissed the wretched Christian from her employ for his conduct in the affair; but, feeling quite helpless and unable to do without him, told him afterwards that he might stay a little longer if he chose. Then she hastened off to Eustacia, moved by a much less promising emotion towards her daughter-in-law than she had felt half an hour earlier, when planning her journey. At that time it was to inquire in a friendly spirit if there had been any accidental loss; now it was to ask plainly if Wildeve had privately given her money which had been intended as a sacred gift to Clym.

She started at two o'clock, and her meeting with Eustacia was hastened by the appearance of the young lady beside the pool and bank which bordered her grandfather's premises, where she stood surveying the scene, and perhaps thinking of the romantic enactments it had witnessed in past days. When Mrs. Yeobright approached, Eustacia surveyed her with the calm stare of a stranger.

The mother-in-law was the first to speak. "I was coming to see you," she said.

"Indeed!" said Eustacia with surprise, for Mrs. Yeobright, much to the girl's mortification, had refused to be present at the wedding. "I did not at all expect you."

"I was coming on business only," said the visitor, more coldly than at first. "Will you excuse my asking this--Have you received a gift from Thomasin's husband?"

"A gift?"

"I mean money!"

"What--I myself?"

"Well, I meant yourself, privately--though I was not going to put it in that way."

"Money from Mr. Wildeve? No--never! Madam, what do you mean by that?" Eustacia fired up all too quickly, for her own consciousness of the old attachment between herself and Wildeve led her to jump to the conclusion that Mrs. Yeobright also knew of it, and might have come to accuse her of receiving dishonourable presents from him now.

"I simply ask the question," said Mrs. Yeobright. "I have been--"

"You ought to have better opinions of me--I feared you were against me from the first!" exclaimed Eustacia.

"No. I was simply for Clym," replied Mrs. Yeobright, with too much emphasis in her earnestness. "It is the instinct of everyone to look after their own."

"How can you imply that he required guarding against me?" cried Eustacia, passionate tears in her eyes. "I have not injured him by marrying him! What sin have I done that you should think so ill of me? You had no right to speak against me to him when I have never wronged you."

"I only did what was fair under the circumstances," said Mrs. Yeobright more softly. "I would rather not have gone into this question at present, but you compel me. I am not ashamed to tell you the honest truth. I was firmly convinced that he ought not to marry

you--therefore I tried to dissuade him by all the means in my power. But it is done now, and I have no idea of complaining any more. I am ready to welcome you."

"Ah, yes, it is very well to see things in that business point of view," murmured Eustacia with a smothered fire of feeling. "But why should you think there is anything between me and Mr. Wildeve? I have a spirit as well as you. I am indignant; and so would any woman be. It was a condescension in me to be Clym's wife, and not a manoeuvre, let me remind you; and therefore I will not be treated as a schemer whom it becomes necessary to bear with because she has crept into the family."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Yeobright, vainly endeavouring to control her anger. "I have never heard anything to show that my son's lineage is not as good as the Vyes'--perhaps better. It is amusing to hear you talk of condescension."

"It was condescension, nevertheless," said Eustacia vehemently. "And if I had known then what I know now, that I should be living in this wild heath a month after my marriage, I--I should have thought twice before agreeing."

"It would be better not to say that; it might not sound truthful. I am not aware that any deception was used on his part--I know there was not--whatever might have been the case on the other side."

"This is too exasperating!" answered the younger woman huskily, her face crimsoning, and her eyes darting light. "How can you dare to speak to me like that? I insist upon repeating to you that had I known that my life would from my marriage up to this time have been as it is, I should have said NO. I don't complain. I have never uttered a sound of such a thing to him; but it is true. I hope therefore that in the future you will be silent on my eagerness. If you injure me now you injure yourself."

"Injure you? Do you think I am an evil-disposed person?"

"You injured me before my marriage, and you have now suspected me of secretly favouring another man for money!"

"I could not help what I thought. But I have never spoken of you outside my house."

"You spoke of me within it, to Clym, and you could not do worse."

"I did my duty."

"And I'll do mine."

"A part of which will possibly be to set him against his mother. It is always so. But why should I not bear it as others have borne it

before me!"

"I understand you," said Eustacia, breathless with emotion. "You think me capable of every bad thing. Who can be worse than a wife who encourages a lover, and poisons her husband's mind against his relative? Yet that is now the character given to me. Will you not come and drag him out of my hands?"

Mrs. Yeobright gave back heat for heat.

"Don't rage at me, madam! It ill becomes your beauty, and I am not worth the injury you may do it on my account, I assure you. I am only a poor old woman who has lost a son."

"If you had treated me honourably you would have had him still." Eustacia said, while scalding tears trickled from her eyes. "You have brought yourself to folly; you have caused a division which can never be healed!"

"I have done nothing. This audacity from a young woman is more than I can bear."

"It was asked for; you have suspected me, and you have made me speak of my husband in a way I would not have done. You will let him know that I have spoken thus, and it will cause misery between us. Will you go away from me? You are no friend!"

"I will go when I have spoken a word. If anyone says I have come here to question you without good grounds for it, that person speaks untruly. If anyone says that I attempted to stop your marriage by any but honest means, that person, too, does not speak the truth. I have fallen on an evil time; God has been unjust to me in letting you insult me! Probably my son's happiness does not lie on this side of the grave, for he is a foolish man who neglects the advice of his parent. You, Eustacia, stand on the edge of a precipice without knowing it. Only show my son one-half the temper you have shown me today--and you may before long--and you will find that though he is as gentle as a child with you now, he can be as hard as steel!"

The excited mother then withdrew, and Eustacia, panting, stood looking into the pool.

II

He Is Set Upon by Adversities; but He Sings a Song

The result of that unpropitious interview was that Eustacia, instead of passing the afternoon with her grandfather, hastily returned home

to Clym, where she arrived three hours earlier than she had been expected.

She came indoors with her face flushed, and her eyes still showing traces of her recent excitement. Yeobright looked up astonished; he had never seen her in any way approaching to that state before. She passed him by, and would have gone upstairs unnoticed, but Clym was so concerned that he immediately followed her.

"What is the matter, Eustacia?" he said. She was standing on the hearthrug in the bedroom, looking upon the floor, her hands clasped in front of her, her bonnet yet unremoved. For a moment she did not answer; and then she replied in a low voice--

"I have seen your mother; and I will never see her again!"

A weight fell like a stone upon Clym. That same morning, when Eustacia had arranged to go and see her grandfather, Clym had expressed a wish that she would drive down to Blooms-End and inquire for her mother-in-law, or adopt any other means she might think fit to bring about a reconciliation. She had set out gaily; and he had hoped for much.

"Why is this?" he asked.

"I cannot tell--I cannot remember. I met your mother. And I will

never meet her again."

"Why?"

"What do I know about Mr. Wildeve now? I won't have wicked opinions passed on me by anybody. O! it was too humiliating to be asked if I had received any money from him, or encouraged him, or something of the sort--I don't exactly know what!"

"How could she have asked you that?"

"She did."

"Then there must have been some meaning in it. What did my mother say besides?"

"I don't know what she said, except in so far as this, that we both said words which can never be forgiven!"

"Oh, there must be some misapprehension. Whose fault was it that her meaning was not made clear?"

"I would rather not say. It may have been the fault of the circumstances, which were awkward at the very least. O Clym--I cannot help expressing it--this is an unpleasant position that you have placed me in. But you must improve it--yes, say you will--for I hate

it all now! Yes, take me to Paris, and go on with your old occupation, Clym! I don't mind how humbly we live there at first, if it can only be Paris, and not Egdon Heath."

"But I have quite given up that idea," said Yeobright, with surprise. "Surely I never led you to expect such a thing?"

"I own it. Yet there are thoughts which cannot be kept out of mind, and that one was mine. Must I not have a voice in the matter, now I am your wife and the sharer of your doom?"

"Well, there are things which are placed beyond the pale of discussion; and I thought this was specially so, and by mutual agreement."

"Clym, I am unhappy at what I hear," she said in a low voice; and her eyes drooped, and she turned away.

This indication of an unexpected mine of hope in Eustacia's bosom disconcerted her husband. It was the first time that he had confronted the fact of the indirectness of a woman's movement towards her desire. But his intention was unshaken, though he loved Eustacia well. All the effect that her remark had upon him was a resolve to chain himself more closely than ever to his books, so as to be the sooner enabled to appeal to substantial results from another course in arguing against her whim.

Next day the mystery of the guineas was explained. Thomasin paid them a hurried visit, and Clym's share was delivered up to him by her own hands. Eustacia was not present at the time.

"Then this is what my mother meant," exclaimed Clym. "Thomasin, do you know that they have had a bitter quarrel?"

There was a little more reticence now than formerly in Thomasin's manner towards her cousin. It is the effect of marriage to engender in several directions some of the reserve it annihilates in one.
"Your mother told me," she said quietly. "She came back to my house after seeing Eustacia."

"The worst thing I dreaded has come to pass. Was mother much disturbed when she came to you, Thomasin?"

"Yes."

"Very much indeed?"

"Yes."

Clym leant his elbow upon the post of the garden gate, and covered his eyes with his hand.

"Don't trouble about it, Clym. They may get to be friends."

He shook his head. "Not two people with inflammable natures like theirs. Well, what must be will be."

"One thing is cheerful in it--the guineas are not lost."

"I would rather have lost them twice over than have had this happen."

Amid these jarring events Yeobright felt one thing to be indispensable--that he should speedily make some show of progress in his scholastic plans. With this view he read far into the small hours during many nights.

One morning, after a severer strain than usual, he awoke with a strange sensation in his eyes. The sun was shining directly upon the window-blind, and at his first glance thitherward a sharp pain obliged him to close his eyelids quickly. At every new attempt to look about him the same morbid sensibility to light was manifested, and excoriating tears ran down his cheeks. He was obliged to tie a bandage over his brow while dressing; and during the day it could not be abandoned. Eustacia was thoroughly alarmed. On finding that the case was no better the next morning they decided to send to Anglebury for a surgeon.

Towards evening he arrived, and pronounced the disease to be acute inflammation induced by Clym's night studies, continued in spite of a cold previously caught, which had weakened his eyes for the time.

Fretting with impatience at this interruption to a task he was so anxious to hasten, Clym was transformed into an invalid. He was shut up in a room from which all light was excluded, and his condition would have been one of absolute misery had not Eustacia read to him by the glimmer of a shaded lamp. He hoped that the worst would soon be over; but at the surgeon's third visit he learnt to his dismay that although he might venture out of doors with shaded eyes in the course of a month, all thought of pursuing his work, or of reading print of any description, would have to be given up for a long time to come.

One week and another week wore on, and nothing seemed to lighten the gloom of the young couple. Dreadful imaginings occurred to Eustacia, but she carefully refrained from uttering them to her husband. Suppose he should become blind, or, at all events, never recover sufficient strength of sight to engage in an occupation which would be congenial to her feelings, and conduce to her removal from this lonely dwelling among the hills? That dream of beautiful Paris was not likely to cohere into substance in the presence of this misfortune. As day after day passed by, and he got no better, her mind ran more and more in this mournful groove, and she would go away from him into the garden and weep despairing tears.

Yeobright thought he would send for his mother; and then he thought he would not. Knowledge of his state could only make her the more unhappy; and the seclusion of their life was such that she would hardly be likely to learn the news except through a special messenger. Endeavouring to take the trouble as philosophically as possible, he waited on till the third week had arrived, when he went into the open air for the first time since the attack. The surgeon visited him again at this stage, and Clym urged him to express a distinct opinion. The young man learnt with added surprise that the date at which he might expect to resume his labours was as uncertain as ever, his eyes being in that peculiar state which, though affording him sight enough for walking about, would not admit of their being strained upon any definite object without incurring the risk of reproducing ophthalmia in its acute form.

Clym was very grave at the intelligence, but not despairing. A quiet firmness, and even cheerfulness, took possession of him. He was not to be blind; that was enough. To be doomed to behold the world through smoked glass for an indefinite period was bad enough, and fatal to any kind of advance; but Yeobright was an absolute stoic in the face of mishaps which only affected his social standing; and, apart from Eustacia, the humblest walk of life would satisfy him if it could be made to work in with some form of his culture scheme. To keep a cottage night-school was one such form; and his affliction did not master his spirit as it might otherwise have done.

He walked through the warm sun westward into those tracts of Egdon with which he was best acquainted, being those lying nearer to his old home. He saw before him in one of the valleys the gleaming of whetted iron, and advancing, dimly perceived that the shine came from the tool of a man who was cutting furze. The worker recognized Clym, and Yeobright learnt from the voice that the speaker was Humphrey.

Humphrey expressed his sorrow at Clym's condition, and added; "Now, if yours was low-class work like mine, you could go on with it just the same."

"Yes, I could," said Yeobright musingly. "How much do you get for cutting these faggots?"

"Half-a-crown a hundred, and in these long days I can live very well on the wages."

During the whole of Yeobright's walk home to Alderworth he was lost in reflections which were not of an unpleasant kind. On his coming up to the house Eustacia spoke to him from the open window, and he went across to her.

"Darling," he said, "I am much happier. And if my mother were reconciled to me and to you I should, I think, be happy quite."

"I fear that will never be," she said, looking afar with her beautiful stormy eyes. "How CAN you say 'I am happier,' and nothing changed?"

"It arises from my having at last discovered something I can do, and get a living at, in this time of misfortune."

"Yes?"

"I am going to be a furze and turf-cutter."

"No, Clym!" she said, the slight hopefulness previously apparent in her face going off again, and leaving her worse than before.

"Surely I shall. Is it not very unwise in us to go on spending the little money we've got when I can keep down expenditure by an honest occupation? The outdoor exercise will do me good, and who knows but that in a few months I shall be able to go on with my reading again?"

"But my grandfather offers to assist us, if we require assistance."

"We don't require it. If I go furze-cutting we shall be fairly well off."

"In comparison with slaves, and the Israelites in Egypt, and such people!" A bitter tear rolled down Eustacia's face, which he did not see. There had been _nonchalance_ in his tone, showing her that he

felt no absolute grief at a consummation which to her was a positive horror.

The very next day Yeobright went to Humphrey's cottage, and borrowed of him leggings, gloves, a whet-stone, and a hook, to use till he should be able to purchase some for himself. Then he sallied forth with his new fellow-labourer and old acquaintance, and selecting a spot where the furze grew thickest he struck the first blow in his adopted calling. His sight, like the wings in "Rasselas," though useless to him for his grand purpose, sufficed for this strait, and he found that when a little practice should have hardened his palms against blistering he would be able to work with ease.

Day after day he rose with the sun, buckled on his leggings, and went off to the rendezvous with Humphrey. His custom was to work from four o'clock in the morning till noon; then, when the heat of the day was at its highest, to go home and sleep for an hour or two; afterwards coming out again and working till dusk at nine.

This man from Paris was now so disguised by his leather accoutrements, and by the goggles he was obliged to wear over his eyes, that his closest friend might have passed by without recognizing him. He was a brown spot in the midst of an expanse of olive-green gorse, and nothing more. Though frequently depressed in spirit when not actually at work, owing to thoughts of Eustacia's position and his mother's estrangement, when in the full swing of labour he was cheerfully

disposed and calm.

His daily life was of a curious microscopic sort, his whole world being limited to a circuit of a few feet from his person. His familiars were creeping and winged things, and they seemed to enroll him in their band. Bees hummed around his ears with an intimate air, and tugged at the heath and furze-flowers at his side in such numbers as to weigh them down to the sod. The strange amber-coloured butterflies which Egdon produced, and which were never seen elsewhere, quivered in the breath of his lips, alighted upon his bowed back, and sported with the glittering point of his hook as he flourished it up and down. Tribes of emerald-green grasshoppers leaped over his feet, falling awkwardly on their backs, heads, or hips, like unskilful acrobats, as chance might rule; or engaged themselves in noisy flirtations under the fern-fronds with silent ones of homely hue. Huge flies, ignorant of larders and wire-netting, and quite in a savage state, buzzed about him without knowing that he was a man. In and out of the fern-dells snakes glided in their most brilliant blue and yellow guise, it being the season immediately following the shedding of their old skins, when their colours are brightest. Litters of young rabbits came out from their forms to sun themselves upon hillocks, the hot beams blazing through the delicate tissue of each thin-fleshed ear, and firing it to a blood-red transparency in which the veins could be seen. None of them feared him.

The monotony of his occupation soothed him, and was in itself a

pleasure. A forced limitation of effort offered a justification of homely courses to an unambitious man, whose conscience would hardly have allowed him to remain in such obscurity while his powers were unimpeded. Hence Yeobright sometimes sang to himself, and when obliged to accompany Humphrey in search of brambles for faggot-bonds he would amuse his companion with sketches of Parisian life and character, and so while away the time.

On one of these warm afternoons Eustacia walked out alone in the direction of Yeobright's place of work. He was busily chopping away at the furze, a long row of faggots which stretched downward from his position representing the labour of the day. He did not observe her approach, and she stood close to him, and heard his undercurrent of song. It shocked her. To see him there, a poor afflicted man, earning money by the sweat of his brow, had at first moved her to tears; but to hear him sing and not at all rebel against an occupation which, however satisfactory to himself, was degrading to her, as an educated lady-wife, wounded her through. Unconscious of her presence, he still went on singing:--

"Le point du jour
À nos bosquets rend toute leur parure;
Flore est plus belle à son retour;
L'oiseau reprend doux chant d'amour;
Tout célèbre dans la nature

Le point du jour.

"Le point du jour
Cause parfois, cause douleur extrême;
Que l'espace des nuits est court
Pour le berger brûlant d'amour,
Forcé de quitter ce qu'il aime
Au point du jour!"

It was bitterly plain to Eustacia that he did not care much about social failure; and the proud fair woman bowed her head and wept in sick despair at thought of the blasting effect upon her own life of that mood and condition in him. Then she came forward.

"I would starve rather than do it!" she exclaimed vehemently. "And you can sing! I will go and live with my grandfather again!"

"Eustacia! I did not see you, though I noticed something moving," he said gently. He came forward, pulled off his huge leather glove, and took her hand. "Why do you speak in such a strange way? It is only a little old song which struck my fancy when I was in Paris, and now just applies to my life with you. Has your love for me all died, then, because my appearance is no longer that of a fine gentleman?"

"Dearest, you must not question me unpleasantly, or it may make me

not love you."

"Do you believe it possible that I would run the risk of doing that?"

"Well, you follow out your own ideas, and won't give in to mine when I wish you to leave off this shameful labour. Is there anything you dislike in me that you act so contrarily to my wishes? I am your wife, and why will you not listen? Yes, I am your wife indeed!"

"I know what that tone means."

"What tone?"

"The tone in which you said, 'Your wife indeed.' It meant, 'Your wife, worse luck.'"

"It is hard in you to probe me with that remark. A woman may have reason, though she is not without heart, and if I felt 'worse luck,' it was no ignoble feeling--it was only too natural. There, you see that at any rate I do not attempt untruths. Do you remember how, before we were married, I warned you that I had not good wifely qualities?"

"You mock me to say that now. On that point at least the only noble course would be to hold your tongue, for you are still queen of me, Eustacia, though I may no longer be king of you."

"You are my husband. Does not that content you?"

"Not unless you are my wife without regret."

"I cannot answer you. I remember saying that I should be a serious matter on your hands."

"Yes, I saw that."

"Then you were too quick to see! No true lover would have seen any such thing; you are too severe upon me, Clym--I don't like your speaking so at all."

"Well, I married you in spite of it, and don't regret doing so. How cold you seem this afternoon! and yet I used to think there never was a warmer heart than yours."

"Yes, I fear we are cooling--I see it as well as you," she sighed mournfully. "And how madly we loved two months ago! You were never tired of contemplating me, nor I of contemplating you. Who could have thought then that by this time my eyes would not seem so very bright to yours, nor your lips so very sweet to mine? Two months--is it possible? Yes, 'tis too true!"

"You sigh, dear, as if you were sorry for it; and that's a hopeful

sign."

"No. I don't sigh for that. There are other things for me to sigh for, or any other woman in my place."

"That your chances in life are ruined by marrying in haste an unfortunate man?"

"Why will you force me, Clym, to say bitter things? I deserve pity as much as you. As much?--I think I deserve it more. For you can sing! It would be a strange hour which should catch me singing under such a cloud as this! Believe me, sweet, I could weep to a degree that would astonish and confound such an elastic mind as yours. Even had you felt careless about your own affliction, you might have refrained from singing out of sheer pity for mine. God! if I were a man in such a position I would curse rather than sing."

Yeobright placed his hand upon her arm. "Now, don't you suppose, my inexperienced girl, that I cannot rebel, in high Promethean fashion, against the gods and fate as well as you. I have felt more steam and smoke of that sort than you have ever heard of. But the more I see of life the more do I perceive that there is nothing particularly great in its greatest walks, and therefore nothing particularly small in mine of furze-cutting. If I feel that the greatest blessings vouchsafed to us are not very valuable, how can I feel it to be any great hardship when they are taken away? So I sing to pass the time.

Have you indeed lost all tenderness for me, that you begrudge me a few cheerful moments?"

"I have still some tenderness left for you."

"Your words have no longer their old flavour. And so love dies with good fortune!"

"I cannot listen to this, Clym--it will end bitterly," she said in a broken voice. "I will go home."

III

She Goes Out to Battle against Depression

A few days later, before the month of August had expired, Eustacia and Yeobright sat together at their early dinner. Eustacia's manner had become of late almost apathetic. There was a forlorn look about her beautiful eyes which, whether she deserved it or not, would have excited pity in the breast of anyone who had known her during the full flush of her love for Clym. The feelings of husband and wife varied, in some measure, inversely with their positions. Clym, the afflicted

man, was cheerful; and he even tried to comfort her, who had never felt a moment of physical suffering in her whole life.

"Come, brighten up, dearest; we shall be all right again. Some day perhaps I shall see as well as ever. And I solemnly promise that I'll leave off cutting furze as soon as I have the power to do anything better. You cannot seriously wish me to stay idling at home all day?"

"But it is so dreadful--a furze-cutter! and you a man who have lived about the world, and speak French, and German, and who are fit for what is so much better than this."

"I suppose when you first saw me and heard about me I was wrapped in a sort of golden halo to your eyes--a man who knew glorious things, and had mixed in brilliant scenes--in short, an adorable, delightful, distracting hero?"

"Yes," she said, sobbing.

"And now I am a poor fellow in brown leather."

"Don't taunt me. But enough of this. I will not be depressed any more. I am going from home this afternoon, unless you greatly object. There is to be a village picnic--a gipsying, they call it--at East Egdon, and I shall go."

"To dance?"

"Why not? You can sing."

"Well, well, as you will. Must I come to fetch you?"

"If you return soon enough from your work. But do not inconvenience yourself about it. I know the way home, and the heath has no terror for me."

"And can you cling to gaiety so eagerly as to walk all the way to a village festival in search of it?"

"Now, you don't like my going alone! Clym, you are not jealous?"

"No. But I would come with you if it could give you any pleasure; though, as things stand, perhaps you have too much of me already. Still, I somehow wish that you did not want to go. Yes, perhaps I am jealous; and who could be jealous with more reason than I, a half-blind man, over such a woman as you?"

"Don't think like it. Let me go, and don't take all my spirits away!"

"I would rather lose all my own, my sweet wife. Go and do whatever you like. Who can forbid your indulgence in any whim? You have all my heart yet, I believe; and because you bear with me, who am in truth

a drag upon you, I owe you thanks. Yes, go alone and shine. As for me, I will stick to my doom. At that kind of meeting people would shun me. My hook and gloves are like the St. Lazarus rattle of the leper, warning the world to get out of the way of a sight that would sadden them." He kissed her, put on his leggings, and went out.

When he was gone she rested her head upon her hands and said to herself, "Two wasted lives--his and mine. And I am come to this! Will it drive me out of my mind?"

She cast about for any possible course which offered the least improvement on the existing state of things, and could find none. She imagined how all those Budmouth ones who should learn what had become of her would say, "Look at the girl for whom nobody was good enough!" To Eustacia the situation seemed such a mockery of her hopes that death appeared the only door of relief if the satire of Heaven should go much further.

Suddenly she aroused herself and exclaimed, "But I'll shake it off. Yes, I WILL shake it off! No one shall know my suffering. I'll be bitterly merry, and ironically gay, and I'll laugh in derision. And I'll begin by going to this dance on the green."

She ascended to her bedroom and dressed herself with scrupulous care. To an onlooker her beauty would have made her feelings almost seem reasonable. The gloomy corner into which accident as much as

indiscretion had brought this woman might have led even a moderate partisan to feel that she had cogent reasons for asking the Supreme Power by what right a being of such exquisite finish had been placed in circumstances calculated to make of her charms a curse rather than a blessing.

It was five in the afternoon when she came out from the house ready for her walk. There was material enough in the picture for twenty new conquests. The rebellious sadness that was rather too apparent when she sat indoors without a bonnet was cloaked and softened by her outdoor attire, which always had a sort of nebulousness about it, devoid of harsh edges anywhere; so that her face looked from its environment as from a cloud, with no noticeable lines of demarcation between flesh and clothes. The heat of the day had scarcely declined as yet, and she went along the sunny hills at a leisurely pace, there being ample time for her idle expedition. Tall ferns buried her in their leafage whenever her path lay through them, which now formed miniature forests, though not one stem of them would remain to bud the next year.

The site chosen for the village festivity was one of the lawn-like oases which were occasionally, yet not often, met with on the plateaux of the heath district. The brakes of furze and fern terminated abruptly round the margin, and the grass was unbroken. A green cattle-track skirted the spot, without, however, emerging from the screen of fern, and this path Eustacia followed, in order to

reconnoitre the group before joining it. The lusty notes of the East Egdon band had directed her unerringly, and she now beheld the musicians themselves, sitting in a blue waggon with red wheels scrubbed as bright as new, and arched with sticks, to which boughs and flowers were tied. In front of this was the grand central dance of fifteen or twenty couples, flanked by minor dances of inferior individuals whose gyrations were not always in strict keeping with the tune.

The young men wore blue and white rosettes, and with a flush on their faces footed it to the girls, who, with the excitement and the exercise, blushed deeper than the pink of their numerous ribbons. Fair ones with long curls, fair ones with short curls, fair ones with love-locks, fair ones with braids, flew round and round; and a beholder might well have wondered how such a prepossessing set of young women of like size, age, and disposition, could have been collected together where there were only one or two villages to choose from. In the background was one happy man dancing by himself, with closed eyes, totally oblivious of all the rest. A fire was burning under a pollard thorn a few paces off, over which three kettles hung in a row. Hard by was a table where elderly dames prepared tea, but Eustacia looked among them in vain for the cattle-dealer's wife who had suggested that she should come, and had promised to obtain a courteous welcome for her.

This unexpected absence of the only local resident whom Eustacia knew

considerably damaged her scheme for an afternoon of reckless gaiety. Joining in became a matter of difficulty, notwithstanding that, were she to advance, cheerful dames would come forward with cups of tea and make much of her as a stranger of superior grace and knowledge to themselves. Having watched the company through the figures of two dances, she decided to walk a little further, to a cottage where she might get some refreshment, and then return homeward in the shady time of evening.

This she did; and by the time that she retraced her steps towards the scene of the gipsying, which it was necessary to repass on her way to Alderworth, the sun was going down. The air was now so still that she could hear the band afar off, and it seemed to be playing with more spirit, if that were possible, than when she had come away. On reaching the hill the sun had quite disappeared; but this made little difference either to Eustacia or to the revellers, for a round yellow moon was rising before her, though its rays had not yet outmastered those from the west. The dance was going on just the same, but strangers had arrived and formed a ring around the figure, so that Eustacia could stand among these without a chance of being recognized.

A whole village-full of sensuous emotion, scattered abroad all the year long, surged here in a focus for an hour. The forty hearts of those waving couples were beating as they had not done since, twelve months before, they had come together in similar jollity. For the time paganism was revived in their hearts, the pride of life was all

in all, and they adored none other than themselves.

How many of those impassioned but temporary embraces were destined to become perpetual was possibly the wonder of some of those who indulged in them, as well as of Eustacia who looked on. She began to envy those pirouetters, to hunger for the hope and happiness which the fascination of the dance seemed to engender within them. Desperately fond of dancing herself, one of Eustacia's expectations of Paris had been the opportunity it might afford her of indulgence in this favourite pastime. Unhappily, that expectation was now extinct within her for ever.

Whilst she abstractedly watched them spinning and fluctuating in the increasing moonlight she suddenly heard her name whispered by a voice over her shoulder. Turning in surprise, she beheld at her elbow one whose presence instantly caused her to flush to the temples.

It was Wildeve. Till this moment he had not met her eye since the morning of his marriage, when she had been loitering in the church, and had startled him by lifting her veil and coming forward to sign the register as witness. Yet why the sight of him should have instigated that sudden rush of blood she could not tell.

Before she could speak he whispered, "Do you like dancing as much as ever?"

"I think I do," she replied in a low voice.

"Will you dance with me?"

"It would be a great change for me; but will it not seem strange?"

"What strangeness can there be in relations dancing together?"

"Ah--yes, relations. Perhaps none."

"Still, if you don't like to be seen, pull down your veil; though there is not much risk of being known by this light. Lots of strangers are here."

She did as he suggested; and the act was a tacit acknowledgment that she accepted his offer.

Wildeve gave her his arm and took her down on the outside of the ring to the bottom of the dance, which they entered. In two minutes more they were involved in the figure and began working their way upwards to the top. Till they had advanced halfway thither Eustacia wished more than once that she had not yielded to his request; from the middle to the top she felt that, since she had come out to seek pleasure, she was only doing a natural thing to obtain it. Fairly launched into the ceaseless glides and whirls which their new position as top couple opened up to them, Eustacia's pulses began to move too

quickly for long rumination of any kind.

Through the length of five-and-twenty couples they threaded their giddy way, and a new vitality entered her form. The pale ray of evening lent a fascination to the experience. There is a certain degree and tone of light which tends to disturb the equilibrium of the senses, and to promote dangerously the tenderer moods; added to movement, it drives the emotions to rankness, the reason becoming sleepy and unperceiving in inverse proportion; and this light fell now upon these two from the disc of the moon. All the dancing girls felt the symptoms, but Eustacia most of all. The grass under their feet became trodden away, and the hard beaten surface of the sod, when viewed aslant towards the moonlight, shone like a polished table. The air became quite still, the flag above the waggon which held the musicians clung to the pole, and the players appeared only in outline against the sky; except when the circular mouths of the trombone, ophicleide, and French horn gleamed out like huge eyes from the shade of their figures. The pretty dresses of the maids lost their subtler day colours and showed more or less of a misty white. Eustacia floated round and round on Wildeve's arm, her face rapt and statuesque; her soul had passed away from and forgotten her features, which were left empty and quiescent, as they always are when feeling goes beyond their register.

How near she was to Wildeve! it was terrible to think of. She could feel his breathing, and he, of course, could feel hers. How badly

she had treated him! yet, here they were treading one measure. The enchantment of the dance surprised her. A clear line of difference divided like a tangible fence her experience within this maze of motion from her experience without it. Her beginning to dance had been like a change of atmosphere; outside, she had been steeped in arctic frigidity by comparison with the tropical sensations here. She had entered the dance from the troubled hours of her late life as one might enter a brilliant chamber after a night walk in a wood. Wildeve by himself would have been merely an agitation; Wildeve added to the dance, and the moonlight, and the secrecy, began to be a delight. Whether his personality supplied the greater part of this sweetly compounded feeling, or whether the dance and the scene weighed the more therein, was a nice point upon which Eustacia herself was entirely in a cloud.

People began to say "Who are they?" but no invidious inquiries were made. Had Eustacia mingled with the other girls in their ordinary daily walks the case would have been different: here she was not inconvenienced by excessive inspection, for all were wrought to their brightest grace by the occasion. Like the planet Mercury surrounded by the lustre of sunset, her permanent brilliancy passed without much notice in the temporary glory of the situation.

As for Wildeve, his feelings are easy to guess. Obstacles were a ripening sun to his love, and he was at this moment in a delirium of exquisite misery. To clasp as his for five minutes what was another

man's through all the rest of the year was a kind of thing he of all men could appreciate. He had long since begun to sigh again for Eustacia; indeed, it may be asserted that signing the marriage register with Thomasin was the natural signal to his heart to return to its first quarters, and that the extra complication of Eustacia's marriage was the one addition required to make that return compulsory.

Thus, for different reasons, what was to the rest an exhilarating movement was to these two a riding upon the whirlwind. The dance had come like an irresistible attack upon whatever sense of social order there was in their minds, to drive them back into old paths which were now doubly irregular. Through three dances in succession they spun their way; and then, fatigued with the incessant motion, Eustacia turned to quit the circle in which she had already remained too long. Wildeve led her to a grassy mound a few yards distant, where she sat down, her partner standing beside her. From the time that he addressed her at the beginning of the dance till now they had not exchanged a word.

"The dance and the walking have tired you?" he said tenderly.

"No; not greatly."

"It is strange that we should have met here of all places, after missing each other so long."

"We have missed because we tried to miss, I suppose."

"Yes. But you began that proceeding--by breaking a promise."

"It is scarcely worth while to talk of that now. We have formed other ties since then--you no less than I."

"I am sorry to hear that your husband is ill."

"He is not ill--only incapacitated."

"Yes: that is what I mean. I sincerely sympathize with you in your trouble. Fate has treated you cruelly."

She was silent awhile. "Have you heard that he has chosen to work as a furze-cutter?" she said in a low, mournful voice.

"It has been mentioned to me," answered Wildeve hesitatingly. "But I hardly believed it."

"It is true. What do you think of me as a furze-cutter's wife?"

"I think the same as ever of you, Eustacia. Nothing of that sort can degrade you: you ennoble the occupation of your husband."

"I wish I could feel it."

"Is there any chance of Mr. Yeobright getting better?"

"He thinks so. I doubt it."

"I was quite surprised to hear that he had taken a cottage. I thought, in common with other people, that he would have taken you off to a home in Paris immediately after you had married him. 'What a gay, bright future she has before her!' I thought. He will, I suppose, return there with you, if his sight gets strong again?"

Observing that she did not reply he regarded her more closely. She was almost weeping. Images of a future never to be enjoyed, the revived sense of her bitter disappointment, the picture of the neighbours' suspended ridicule which was raised by Wildeve's words, had been too much for proud Eustacia's equanimity.

Wildeve could hardly control his own too forward feelings when he saw her silent perturbation. But he affected not to notice this, and she soon recovered her calmness.

"You do not intend to walk home by yourself?" he asked.

"O yes," said Eustacia. "What could hurt me on this heath, who have nothing?"

"By diverging a little I can make my way home the same as yours. I shall be glad to keep you company as far as Throope Corner." Seeing that Eustacia sat on in hesitation he added, "Perhaps you think it unwise to be seen in the same road with me after the events of last summer?"

"Indeed I think no such thing," she said haughtily. "I shall accept whose company I choose, for all that may be said by the miserable inhabitants of Egdon."

"Then let us walk on--if you are ready. Our nearest way is towards that holly-bush with the dark shadow that you see down there."

Eustacia arose, and walked beside him in the direction signified, brushing her way over the damping heath and fern, and followed by the strains of the merrymakers, who still kept up the dance. The moon had now waxed bright and silvery, but the heath was proof against such illumination, and there was to be observed the striking scene of a dark, rayless tract of country under an atmosphere charged from its zenith to its extremities with whitest light. To an eye above them their two faces would have appeared amid the expanse like two pearls on a table of ebony.

On this account the irregularities of the path were not visible, and Wildeve occasionally stumbled; whilst Eustacia found it necessary to perform some graceful feats of balancing whenever a small tuft

of heather or root of furze protruded itself through the grass of the narrow track and entangled her feet. At these junctures in her progress a hand was invariably stretched forward to steady her, holding her firmly until smooth ground was again reached, when the hand was again withdrawn to a respectful distance.

They performed the journey for the most part in silence, and drew near to Throope Corner, a few hundred yards from which a short path branched away to Eustacia's house. By degrees they discerned coming towards them a pair of human figures, apparently of the male sex.

When they came a little nearer Eustacia broke the silence by saying, "One of those men is my husband. He promised to come to meet me."

"And the other is my greatest enemy," said Wildeve.

"It looks like Diggory Venn."

"That is the man."

"It is an awkward meeting," said she; "but such is my fortune. He knows too much about me, unless he could know more, and so prove to himself that what he now knows counts for nothing. Well, let it be: you must deliver me up to them."

"You will think twice before you direct me to do that. Here is a man

who has not forgotten an item in our meetings at Rainbarrow: he is in company with your husband. Which of them, seeing us together here, will believe that our meeting and dancing at the gipsy-party was by chance?"

"Very well," she whispered gloomily. "Leave me before they come up."

Wildeve bade her a tender farewell, and plunged across the fern and furze, Eustacia slowly walking on. In two or three minutes she met her husband and his companion.

"My journey ends here for tonight, reddleman," said Yeobright as soon as he perceived her. "I turn back with this lady. Good night."

"Good night, Mr. Yeobright," said Venn. "I hope to see you better soon."

The moonlight shone directly upon Venn's face as he spoke, and revealed all its lines to Eustacia. He was looking suspiciously at her. That Venn's keen eye had discerned what Yeobright's feeble vision had not--a man in the act of withdrawing from Eustacia's side--was within the limits of the probable.

If Eustacia had been able to follow the reddleman she would soon have found striking confirmation of her thought. No sooner had Clym given her his arm and led her off the scene than the reddleman turned

back from the beaten track towards East Egdon, whither he had been strolling merely to accompany Clym in his walk, Diggory's van being again in the neighbourhood. Stretching out his long legs, he crossed the pathless portion of the heath somewhat in the direction which Wildeve had taken. Only a man accustomed to nocturnal rambles could at this hour have descended those shaggy slopes with Venn's velocity without falling headlong into a pit, or snapping off his leg by jamming his foot into some rabbit burrow. But Venn went on without much inconvenience to himself, and the course of his scamper was towards the Quiet Woman Inn. This place he reached in about half an hour, and he was well aware that no person who had been near Throope Corner when he started could have got down here before him.

The lonely inn was not yet closed, though scarcely an individual was there, the business done being chiefly with travellers who passed the inn on long journeys, and these had now gone on their way. Venn went to the public room, called for a mug of ale, and inquired of the maid in an indifferent tone if Mr. Wildeve was at home.

Thomasin sat in an inner room and heard Venn's voice. When customers were present she seldom showed herself, owing to her inherent dislike for the business; but perceiving that no one else was there tonight she came out.

"He is not at home yet, Diggory," she said pleasantly. "But I expected him sooner. He has been to East Egdon to buy a horse."

"Did he wear a light wideawake?"

"Yes."

"Then I saw him at Throope Corner, leading one home," said Venn drily. "A beauty, with a white face and a mane as black as night. He will soon be here, no doubt." Rising and looking for a moment at the pure, sweet face of Thomasin, over which a shadow of sadness had passed since the time when he had last seen her, he ventured to add, "Mr. Wildeve seems to be often away at this time."

"O yes," cried Thomasin in what was intended to be a tone of gaiety. "Husbands will play the truant, you know. I wish you could tell me of some secret plan that would help me to keep him home at my will in the evenings."

"I will consider if I know of one," replied Venn in that same light tone which meant no lightness. And then he bowed in a manner of his own invention and moved to go. Thomasin offered him her hand; and without a sigh, though with food for many, the reddleman went out.

When Wildeve returned, a quarter of an hour later, Thomasin said simply, and in the abashed manner usual with her now, "Where is the horse, Damon?"

"O, I have not bought it, after all. The man asks too much."

"But somebody saw you at Throope Corner leading it home--a beauty, with a white face and a mane as black as night."

"Ah!" said Wildeve, fixing his eyes upon her; "who told you that?"

"Venn the reddleman."

The expression of Wildeve's face became curiously condensed. "That is a mistake--it must have been some one else," he said slowly and testily, for he perceived that Venn's countermoves had begun again.

IV

Rough Coercion Is Employed

Those words of Thomasin, which seemed so little, but meant so much, remained in the ears of Diggory Venn: "Help me to keep him home in the evenings."

On this occasion Venn had arrived on Egdon Heath only to cross to the

other side: he had no further connection with the interests of the Yeobright family, and he had a business of his own to attend to. Yet he suddenly began to feel himself drifting into the old track of manoeuvring on Thomasin's account.

He sat in his van and considered. From Thomasin's words and manner he had plainly gathered that Wildeve neglected her. For whom could he neglect her if not for Eustacia? Yet it was scarcely credible that things had come to such a head as to indicate that Eustacia systematically encouraged him. Venn resolved to reconnoitre somewhat carefully the lonely road which led along the vale from Wildeve's dwelling to Clym's house at Alderworth.

At this time, as had been seen, Wildeve was quite innocent of any predetermined act of intrigue, and except at the dance on the green he had not once met Eustacia since her marriage. But that the spirit of intrigue was in him had been shown by a recent romantic habit of his: a habit of going out after dark and strolling towards Alderworth, there looking at the moon and stars, looking at Eustacia's house, and walking back at leisure.

Accordingly, when watching on the night after the festival, the reddleman saw him ascend by the little path, lean over the front gate of Clym's garden, sigh, and turn to go back again. It was plain that Wildeve's intrigue was rather ideal than real. Venn retreated before him down the hill to a place where the path was merely a deep groove

between the heather; here he mysteriously bent over the ground for a few minutes, and retired. When Wildeve came on to that spot his ankle was caught by something, and he fell headlong.

As soon as he had recovered the power of respiration he sat up and listened. There was not a sound in the gloom beyond the spiritless stir of the summer wind. Feeling about for the obstacle which had flung him down, he discovered that two tufts of heath had been tied together across the path, forming a loop, which to a traveller was certain overthrow. Wildeve pulled off the string that bound them, and went on with tolerable quickness. On reaching home he found the cord to be of a reddish colour. It was just what he had expected.

Although his weaknesses were not specially those akin to physical fear, the species of _coup-de-Jarnac_ from one he knew too well troubled the mind of Wildeve. But his movements were unaltered thereby. A night or two later he again went along the vale to Alderworth, taking the precaution of keeping out of any path. The sense that he was watched, that craft was employed to circumvent his errant tastes, added piquancy to a journey so entirely sentimental, so long as the danger was of no fearful sort. He imagined that Venn and Mrs. Yeobright were in league, and felt that there was a certain legitimacy in combating such a coalition.

The heath tonight appeared to be totally deserted: and Wildeve, after looking over Eustacia's garden gate for some little time, with a cigar

in his mouth, was tempted by the fascination that emotional smuggling had for his nature to advance towards the window, which was not quite closed, the blind being only partly drawn down. He could see into the room, and Eustacia was sitting there alone. Wildeve contemplated her for a minute, and then retreating into the heath beat the ferns lightly, whereupon moths flew out alarmed. Securing one, he returned to the window, and holding the moth to the chink, opened his hand. The moth made towards the candle upon Eustacia's table, hovered round it two or three times, and flew into the flame.

Eustacia started up. This had been a well-known signal in old times when Wildeve had used to come secretly wooing to Mistover. She at once knew that Wildeve was outside, but before she could consider what to do her husband came in from upstairs. Eustacia's face burnt crimson at the unexpected collision of incidents, and filled it with an animation that it too frequently lacked.

"You have a very high colour, dearest," said Yeobright, when he came close enough to see it. "Your appearance would be no worse if it were always so."

"I am warm," said Eustacia. "I think I will go into the air for a few minutes."

"Shall I go with you?"

"O no. I am only going to the gate."

She arose, but before she had time to get out of the room a loud rapping began upon the front door.

"I'll go--I'll go," said Eustacia in an unusually quick tone for her; and she glanced eagerly towards the window whence the moth had flown; but nothing appeared there.

"You had better not at this time of the evening," he said. Clym stepped before her into the passage, and Eustacia waited, her somnolent manner covering her inner heat and agitation.

She listened, and Clym opened the door. No words were uttered outside, and presently he closed it and came back, saying, "Nobody was there. I wonder what that could have meant?"

He was left to wonder during the rest of the evening, for no explanation offered itself, and Eustacia said nothing, the additional fact that she knew of only adding more mystery to the performance.

Meanwhile a little drama had been acted outside which saved Eustacia from all possibility of compromising herself that evening at least. While Wildeve had been preparing his moth-signal another person had come behind him up to the gate. This man, who carried a gun in his hand, looked on for a moment at the other's operation by the window,

walked up to the house, knocked at the door, and then vanished round the corner and over the hedge.

"Damn him!" said Wildeve. "He has been watching me again."

As his signal had been rendered futile by this uproarious rapping Wildeve withdrew, passed out at the gate, and walked quickly down the path without thinking of anything except getting away unnoticed. Half-way down the hill the path ran near a knot of stunted hollies, which in the general darkness of the scene stood as the pupil in a black eye. When Wildeve reached this point a report startled his ear, and a few spent gunshots fell among the leaves around him.

There was no doubt that he himself was the cause of that gun's discharge; and he rushed into the clump of hollies, beating the bushes furiously with his stick; but nobody was there. This attack was a more serious matter than the last, and it was some time before Wildeve recovered his equanimity. A new and most unpleasant system of menace had begun, and the intent appeared to be to do him grievous bodily harm. Wildeve had looked upon Venn's first attempt as a species of horse-play, which the reddleman had indulged in for want of knowing better; but now the boundary line was passed which divides the annoying from the perilous.

Had Wildeve known how thoroughly in earnest Venn had become he might have been still more alarmed. The reddleman had been almost

exasperated by the sight of Wildeve outside Clym's house, and he was prepared to go to any lengths short of absolutely shooting him, to terrify the young innkeeper out of his recalcitrant impulses. The doubtful legitimacy of such rough coercion did not disturb the mind of Venn. It troubles few such minds in such cases, and sometimes this is not to be regretted. From the impeachment of Strafford to Farmer Lynch's short way with the scamps of Virginia there have been many triumphs of justice which are mockeries of law.

About half a mile below Clym's secluded dwelling lay a hamlet where lived one of the two constables who preserved the peace in the parish of Alderworth, and Wildeve went straight to the constable's cottage. Almost the first thing that he saw on opening the door was the constable's truncheon hanging to a nail, as if to assure him that here were the means to his purpose. On inquiry, however, of the constable's wife he learnt that the constable was not at home. Wildeve said he would wait.

The minutes ticked on, and the constable did not arrive. Wildeve cooled down from his state of high indignation to a restless dissatisfaction with himself, the scene, the constable's wife, and the whole set of circumstances. He arose and left the house. Altogether, the experience of that evening had had a cooling, not to say a chilling, effect on misdirected tenderness, and Wildeve was in no mood to ramble again to Alderworth after nightfall in hope of a stray glance from Eustacia.

Thus far the reddleman had been tolerably successful in his rude contrivances for keeping down Wildeve's inclination to rove in the evening. He had nipped in the bud the possible meeting between Eustacia and her old lover this very night. But he had not anticipated that the tendency of his action would be to divert Wildeve's movement rather than to stop it. The gambling with the guineas had not conduced to make him a welcome guest to Clym; but to call upon his wife's relative was natural, and he was determined to see Eustacia. It was necessary to choose some less untoward hour than ten o'clock at night. "Since it is unsafe to go in the evening," he said, "I'll go by day."

Meanwhile Venn had left the heath and gone to call upon Mrs. Yeobright, with whom he had been on friendly terms since she had learnt what a providential countermove he had made towards the restitution of the family guineas. She wondered at the lateness of his call, but had no objection to see him.

He gave her a full account of Clym's affliction, and of the state in which he was living; then, referring to Thomasin, touched gently upon the apparent sadness of her days. "Now, ma'am, depend upon it," he said, "you couldn't do a better thing for either of 'em than to make yourself at home in their houses, even if there should be a little rebuff at first."

"Both she and my son disobeyed me in marrying; therefore I have no interest in their households. Their troubles are of their own making." Mrs. Yeobright tried to speak severely; but the account of her son's state had moved her more than she cared to show.

"Your visits would make Wildeve walk straighter than he is inclined to do, and might prevent unhappiness down the heath."

"What do you mean?"

"I saw something tonight out there which I didn't like at all. I wish your son's house and Mr. Wildeve's were a hundred miles apart instead of four or five."

"Then there WAS an understanding between him and Clym's wife when he made a fool of Thomasin!"

"We'll hope there's no understanding now."

"And our hope will probably be very vain. O Clym! O Thomasin!"

"There's no harm done yet. In fact, I've persuaded Wildeve to mind his own business."

"How?"

"O, not by talking--by a plan of mine called the silent system."

"I hope you'll succeed."

"I shall if you help me by calling and making friends with your son. You'll have a chance then of using your eyes."

"Well, since it has come to this," said Mrs. Yeobright sadly, "I will own to you, reddleman, that I thought of going. I should be much happier if we were reconciled. The marriage is unalterable, my life may be cut short, and I should wish to die in peace. He is my only son; and since sons are made of such stuff I am not sorry I have no other. As for Thomasin, I never expected much from her; and she has not disappointed me. But I forgave her long ago; and I forgive him now. I'll go."

At this very time of the reddleman's conversation with Mrs. Yeobright at Blooms-End another conversation on the same subject was languidly proceeding at Alderworth.

All the day Clym had borne himself as if his mind were too full of its own matter to allow him to care about outward things, and his words now showed what had occupied his thoughts. It was just after the mysterious knocking that he began the theme. "Since I have been away today, Eustacia, I have considered that something must be done to heal up this ghastly breach between my dear mother and myself. It troubles

me."

"What do you propose to do?" said Eustacia abstractedly, for she could not clear away from her the excitement caused by Wildeve's recent manoeuvre for an interview.

"You seem to take a very mild interest in what I propose, little or much," said Clym, with tolerable warmth.

"You mistake me," she answered, reviving at his reproach. "I am only thinking."

"What of?"

"Partly of that moth whose skeleton is getting burnt up in the wick of the candle," she said slowly. "But you know I always take an interest in what you say."

"Very well, dear. Then I think I must go and call upon her."... He went on with tender feeling: "It is a thing I am not at all too proud to do, and only a fear that I might irritate her has kept me away so long. But I must do something. It is wrong in me to allow this sort of thing to go on."

"What have you to blame yourself about?"

"She is getting old, and her life is lonely, and I am her only son."

"She has Thomasin."

"Thomasin is not her daughter; and if she were that would not excuse me. But this is beside the point. I have made up my mind to go to her, and all I wish to ask you is whether you will do your best to help me--that is, forget the past; and if she shows her willingness to be reconciled, meet her half-way by welcoming her to our house, or by accepting a welcome to hers?"

At first Eustacia closed her lips as if she would rather do anything on the whole globe than what he suggested. But the lines of her mouth softened with thought, though not so far as they might have softened; and she said, "I will put nothing in your way; but after what has passed it is asking too much that I go and make advances."

"You never distinctly told me what did pass between you."

"I could not do it then, nor can I now. Sometimes more bitterness is sown in five minutes than can be got rid of in a whole life; and that may be the case here." She paused a few moments, and added, "If you had never returned to your native place, Clym, what a blessing it would have been for you!... It has altered the destinies of--"

"Three people."

"Five," Eustacia thought; but she kept that in.

V

The Journey across the Heath

Thursday, the thirty-first of August, was one of a series of days during which snug houses were stifling, and when cool draughts were treats; when cracks appeared in clayey gardens, and were called "earthquakes" by apprehensive children; when loose spokes were discovered in the wheels of carts and carriages; and when stinging insects haunted the air, the earth, and every drop of water that was to be found.

In Mrs. Yeobright's garden large-leaved plants of a tender kind flagged by ten o'clock in the morning; rhubarb bent downward at eleven; and even stiff cabbages were limp by noon.

It was about eleven o'clock on this day that Mrs. Yeobright started across the heath towards her son's house, to do her best in getting reconciled with him and Eustacia, in conformity with her words to the

reddleman. She had hoped to be well advanced in her walk before the heat of the day was at its highest, but after setting out she found that this was not to be done. The sun had branded the whole heath with his mark, even the purple heath-flowers having put on a brownness under the dry blazes of the few preceding days. Every valley was filled with air like that of a kiln, and the clean quartz sand of the winter water-courses, which formed summer paths, had undergone a species of incineration since the drought had set in.

In cool, fresh weather Mrs. Yeobright would have found no inconvenience in walking to Alderworth, but the present torrid attack made the journey a heavy undertaking for a woman past middle age; and at the end of the third mile she wished that she had hired Fairway to drive her a portion at least of the distance. But from the point at which she had arrived it was as easy to reach Clym's house as to get home again. So she went on, the air around her pulsating silently, and oppressing the earth with lassitude. She looked at the sky overhead, and saw that the sapphirine hue of the zenith in spring and early summer had been replaced by a metallic violet.

Occasionally she came to a spot where independent worlds of ephemerons were passing their time in mad carousal, some in the air, some on the hot ground and vegetation, some in the tepid and stringy water of a nearly dried pool. All the shallower ponds had decreased to a vaporous mud amid which the maggoty shapes of innumerable obscure creatures could be indistinctly seen, heaving and wallowing with enjoyment.

Being a woman not disinclined to philosophize she sometimes sat down under her umbrella to rest and to watch their happiness, for a certain hopefulness as to the result of her visit gave ease to her mind, and between important thoughts left it free to dwell on any infinitesimal matter which caught her eyes.

Mrs. Yeobright had never before been to her son's house, and its exact position was unknown to her. She tried one ascending path and another, and found that they led her astray. Retracing her steps, she came again to an open level, where she perceived at a distance a man at work. She went towards him and inquired the way.

The labourer pointed out the direction, and added, "Do you see that furze-cutter, ma'am, going up that footpath yond?"

Mrs. Yeobright strained her eyes, and at last said that she did perceive him.

"Well, if you follow him you can make no mistake. He's going to the same place, ma'am."

She followed the figure indicated. He appeared of a russet hue, not more distinguishable from the scene around him than the green caterpillar from the leaf it feeds on. His progress when actually walking was more rapid than Mrs. Yeobright's; but she was enabled to keep at an equable distance from him by his habit of stopping whenever

he came to a brake of brambles, where he paused awhile. On coming in her turn to each of these spots she found half a dozen long limp brambles which he had cut from the bush during his halt and laid out straight beside the path. They were evidently intended for furze-faggot bonds which he meant to collect on his return.

The silent being who thus occupied himself seemed to be of no more account in life than an insect. He appeared as a mere parasite of the heath, fretting its surface in his daily labour as a moth frets a garment, entirely engrossed with its products, having no knowledge of anything in the world but fern, furze, heath, lichens, and moss.

The furze-cutter was so absorbed in the business of his journey that he never turned his head; and his leather-legged and gauntleted form at length became to her as nothing more than a moving handpost to show her the way. Suddenly she was attracted to his individuality by observing peculiarities in his walk. It was a gait she had seen somewhere before; and the gait revealed the man to her, as the gait of Ahimaaz in the distant plain made him known to the watchman of the king. "His walk is exactly as my husband's used to be," she said; and then the thought burst upon her that the furze-cutter was her son.

She was scarcely able to familiarize herself with this strange reality. She had been told that Clym was in the habit of cutting furze, but she had supposed that he occupied himself with the labour only at odd times, by way of useful pastime; yet she now beheld him as

a furze-cutter and nothing more--wearing the regulation dress of the craft, and thinking the regulation thoughts, to judge by his motions. Planning a dozen hasty schemes for at once preserving him and Eustacia from this mode of life she throbbingly followed the way, and saw him enter his own door.

At one side of Clym's house was a knoll, and on the top of the knoll a clump of fir trees so highly thrust up into the sky that their foliage from a distance appeared as a black spot in the air above the crown of the hill. On reaching this place Mrs. Yeobright felt distressingly agitated, weary, and unwell. She ascended, and sat down under their shade to recover herself, and to consider how best to break the ground with Eustacia, so as not to irritate a woman underneath whose apparent indolence lurked passions even stronger and more active than her own.

The trees beneath which she sat were singularly battered, rude, and wild, and for a few minutes Mrs. Yeobright dismissed thoughts of her own storm-broken and exhausted state to contemplate theirs. Not a bough in the nine trees which composed the group but was splintered, lopped, and distorted by the fierce weather that there held them at its mercy whenever it prevailed. Some were blasted and split as if by lightning, black stains as from fire marking their sides, while the ground at their feet was strewn with dead fir-needles and heaps of cones blown down in the gales of past years. The place was called the Devil's Bellows, and it was only necessary to come there on a March or November night to discover the forcible reasons for that name. On the

present heated afternoon, when no perceptible wind was blowing, the trees kept up a perpetual moan which one could hardly believe to be caused by the air.

Here she sat for twenty minutes or more ere she could summon resolution to go down to the door, her courage being lowered to zero by her physical lassitude. To any other person than a mother it might have seemed a little humiliating that she, the elder of the two women, should be the first to make advances. But Mrs. Yeobright had well considered all that, and she only thought how best to make her visit appear to Eustacia not abject but wise.

From her elevated position the exhausted woman could perceive the roof of the house below, and the garden and the whole enclosure of the little domicile. And now, at the moment of rising, she saw a second man approaching the gate. His manner was peculiar, hesitating, and not that of a person come on business or by invitation. He surveyed the house with interest, and then walked round and scanned the outer boundary of the garden, as one might have done had it been the birthplace of Shakespeare, the prison of Mary Stuart, or the Château of Hougomont. After passing round and again reaching the gate he went in. Mrs. Yeobright was vexed at this, having reckoned on finding her son and his wife by themselves; but a moment's thought showed her that the presence of an acquaintance would take off the awkwardness of her first appearance in the house, by confining the talk to general matters until she had begun to feel comfortable with them. She came

down the hill to the gate, and looked into the hot garden.

There lay the cat asleep on the bare gravel of the path, as if beds, rugs, and carpets were unendurable. The leaves of the hollyhocks hung like half-closed umbrellas, the sap almost simmered in the stems, and foliage with a smooth surface glared like metallic mirrors. A small apple tree, of the sort called Ratheripe, grew just inside the gate, the only one which throve in the garden, by reason of the lightness of the soil; and among the fallen apples on the ground beneath were wasps rolling drunk with the juice, or creeping about the little caves in each fruit which they had eaten out before stupefied by its sweetness. By the door lay Clym's furze-hook and the last handful of faggot-bonds she had seen him gather; they had plainly been thrown down there as he entered the house.

VI

A Conjuncture, and Its Result upon the Pedestrian

Wildeve, as has been stated, was determined to visit Eustacia boldly, by day, and on the easy terms of a relation, since the reddleman had spied out and spoilt his walks to her by night. The spell that

she had thrown over him in the moonlight dance made it impossible for a man having no strong puritanic force within him to keep away altogether. He merely calculated on meeting her and her husband in an ordinary manner, chatting a little while, and leaving again. Every outward sign was to be conventional; but the one great fact would be there to satisfy him: he would see her. He did not even desire Clym's absence, since it was just possible that Eustacia might resent any situation which could compromise her dignity as a wife, whatever the state of her heart towards him. Women were often so.

He went accordingly; and it happened that the time of his arrival coincided with that of Mrs. Yeobright's pause on the hill near the house. When he had looked round the premises in the manner she had noticed he went and knocked at the door. There was a few minutes' interval, and then the key turned in the lock, the door opened, and Eustacia herself confronted him.

Nobody could have imagined from her bearing now that here stood the woman who had joined with him in the impassioned dance of the week before, unless indeed he could have penetrated below the surface and gauged the real depth of that still stream.

"I hope you reached home safely?" said Wildeve.

"O yes," she carelessly returned.

"And were you not tired the next day? I feared you might be."

"I was rather. You need not speak low--nobody will overhear us. My small servant is gone on an errand to the village."

"Then Clym is not at home?"

"Yes, he is."

"O! I thought that perhaps you had locked the door because you were alone and were afraid of tramps."

"No--here is my husband."

They had been standing in the entry. Closing the front door and turning the key, as before, she threw open the door of the adjoining room and asked him to walk in. Wildeve entered, the room appearing to be empty; but as soon as he had advanced a few steps he started. On the hearth rug lay Clym asleep. Beside him were the leggings, thick boots, leather gloves, and sleeve-waistcoat in which he worked.

"You may go in; you will not disturb him," she said, following behind. "My reason for fastening the door is that he may not be intruded upon by any chance comer while lying here, if I should be in the garden or upstairs."

"Why is he sleeping there?" said Wildeve in low tones.

"He is very weary. He went out at half-past four this morning, and has been working ever since. He cuts furze because it is the only thing he can do that does not put any strain upon his poor eyes." The contrast between the sleeper's appearance and Wildeve's at this moment was painfully apparent to Eustacia, Wildeve being elegantly dressed in a new summer suit and light hat; and she continued: "Ah! you don't know how differently he appeared when I first met him, though it is such a little while ago. His hands were as white and soft as mine; and look at them now, how rough and brown they are! His complexion is by nature fair, and that rusty look he has now, all of a colour with his leather clothes, is caused by the burning of the sun."

"Why does he go out at all?" Wildeve whispered.

"Because he hates to be idle; though what he earns doesn't add much to our exchequer. However, he says that when people are living upon their capital they must keep down current expenses by turning a penny where they can."

"The fates have not been kind to you, Eustacia Yeobright."

"I have nothing to thank them for."

"Nor has he--except for their one great gift to him."

"What's that?"

Wildeve looked her in the eyes.

Eustacia blushed for the first time that day. "Well, I am a questionable gift," she said quietly. "I thought you meant the gift of content--which he has, and I have not."

"I can understand content in such a case--though how the outward situation can attract him puzzles me."

"That's because you don't know him. He's an enthusiast about ideas, and careless about outward things. He often reminds me of the Apostle Paul."

"I am glad to hear that he's so grand in character as that."

"Yes; but the worst of it is that though Paul was excellent as a man in the Bible he would hardly have done in real life."

Their voices had instinctively dropped lower, though at first they had taken no particular care to avoid awakening Clym. "Well, if that means that your marriage is a misfortune to you, you know who is to blame," said Wildeve.

"The marriage is no misfortune in itself," she retorted with some little petulance. "It is simply the accident which has happened since that has been the cause of my ruin. I have certainly got thistles for figs in a worldly sense, but how could I tell what time would bring forth?"

"Sometimes, Eustacia, I think it is a judgment upon you. You rightly belonged to me, you know; and I had no idea of losing you."

"No, it was not my fault! Two could not belong to you; and remember that, before I was aware, you turned aside to another woman. It was cruel levity in you to do that. I never dreamt of playing such a game on my side till you began it on yours."

"I meant nothing by it," replied Wildeve. "It was a mere interlude. Men are given to the trick of having a passing fancy for somebody else in the midst of a permanent love, which reasserts itself afterwards just as before. On account of your rebellious manner to me I was tempted to go further than I should have done; and when you still would keep playing the same tantalizing part I went further still, and married her." Turning and looking again at the unconscious form of Clym, he murmured, "I am afraid that you don't value your prize, Clym... He ought to be happier than I in one thing at least. He may know what it is to come down in the world, and to be afflicted with a great personal calamity; but he probably doesn't know what it is to lose the woman he loved."

"He is not ungrateful for winning her," whispered Eustacia, "and in that respect he is a good man. Many women would go far for such a husband. But do I desire unreasonably much in wanting what is called life--music, poetry, passion, war, and all the beating and pulsing that are going on in the great arteries of the world? That was the shape of my youthful dream; but I did not get it. Yet I thought I saw the way to it in my Clym."

"And you only married him on that account?"

"There you mistake me. I married him because I loved him, but I won't say that I didn't love him partly because I thought I saw a promise of that life in him."

"You have dropped into your old mournful key."

"But I am not going to be depressed," she cried perversely. "I began a new system by going to that dance, and I mean to stick to it. Clym can sing merrily; why should not I?"

Wildeve looked thoughtfully at her. "It is easier to say you will sing than to do it; though if I could I would encourage you in your attempt. But as life means nothing to me, without one thing which is now impossible, you will forgive me for not being able to encourage you."

"Damon, what is the matter with you, that you speak like that?" she asked, raising her deep shady eyes to his.

"That's a thing I shall never tell plainly; and perhaps if I try to tell you in riddles you will not care to guess them."

Eustacia remained silent for a minute, and she said, "We are in a strange relationship today. You mince matters to an uncommon nicety. You mean, Damon, that you still love me. Well, that gives me sorrow, for I am not made so entirely happy by my marriage that I am willing to spurn you for the information, as I ought to do. But we have said too much about this. Do you mean to wait until my husband is awake?"

"I thought to speak to him; but it is unnecessary. Eustacia, if I offend you by not forgetting you, you are right to mention it; but do not talk of spurning."

She did not reply, and they stood looking musingly at Clym as he slept on in that profound sleep which is the result of physical labour carried on in circumstances that wake no nervous fear.

"God, how I envy him that sweet sleep!" said Wildeve. "I have not slept like that since I was a boy--years and years ago."

While they thus watched him a click at the gate was audible, and a

knock came to the door. Eustacia went to a window and looked out.

Her countenance changed. First she became crimson, and then the red subsided till it even partially left her lips.

"Shall I go away?" said Wildeve, standing up.

"I hardly know."

"Who is it?"

"Mrs. Yeobright. O, what she said to me that day! I cannot understand this visit--what does she mean? And she suspects that past time of ours."

"I am in your hands. If you think she had better not see me here I'll go into the next room."

"Well, yes: go."

Wildeve at once withdrew; but before he had been half a minute in the adjoining apartment Eustacia came after him.

"No," she said, "we won't have any of this. If she comes in she must see you--and think if she likes there's something wrong! But how can I open the door to her, when she dislikes me--wishes to see not me, but

her son? I won't open the door!"

Mrs. Yeobright knocked again more loudly.

"Her knocking will, in all likelihood, awaken him," continued Eustacia, "and then he will let her in himself. Ah--listen."

They could hear Clym moving in the other room, as if disturbed by the knocking, and he uttered the word "Mother."

"Yes--he is awake--he will go to the door," she said, with a breath of relief. "Come this way. I have a bad name with her, and you must not be seen. Thus I am obliged to act by stealth, not because I do ill, but because others are pleased to say so."

By this time she had taken him to the back door, which was open, disclosing a path leading down the garden. "Now, one word, Damon," she remarked as he stepped forth. "This is your first visit here; let it be your last. We have been hot lovers in our time, but it won't do now. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Wildeve. "I have had all I came for, and I am satisfied."

"What was it?"

"A sight of you. Upon my eternal honour I came for no more."

Wildeve kissed his hand to the beautiful girl he addressed, and passed into the garden, where she watched him down the path, over the stile at the end, and into the ferns outside, which brushed his hips as he went along till he became lost in their thickets. When he had quite gone she slowly turned, and directed her attention to the interior of the house.

But it was possible that her presence might not be desired by Clym and his mother at this moment of their first meeting, or that it would be superfluous. At all events, she was in no hurry to meet Mrs. Yeobright. She resolved to wait till Clym came to look for her, and glided back into the garden. Here she idly occupied herself for a few minutes, till finding no notice was taken of her she retraced her steps through the house to the front, where she listened for voices in the parlour. But hearing none she opened the door and went in. To her astonishment Clym lay precisely as Wildeve and herself had left him, his sleep apparently unbroken. He had been disturbed and made to dream and murmur by the knocking, but he had not awakened. Eustacia hastened to the door, and in spite of her reluctance to open it to a woman who had spoken of her so bitterly, she unfastened it and looked out. Nobody was to be seen. There, by the scraper, lay Clym's hook and the handful of faggot-bonds he had brought home; in front of her were the empty path, the garden gate standing slightly ajar; and, beyond, the great valley of purple heath thrilling silently in the

sun. Mrs. Yeobright was gone.

Clym's mother was at this time following a path which lay hidden from Eustacia by a shoulder of the hill. Her walk thither from the garden gate had been hasty and determined, as of a woman who was now no less anxious to escape from the scene than she had previously been to enter it. Her eyes were fixed on the ground; within her two sights were graven--that of Clym's hook and brambles at the door, and that of a woman's face at a window. Her lips trembled, becoming unnaturally thin as she murmured, "'Tis too much--Clym, how can he bear to do it! He is at home; and yet he lets her shut the door against me!"

In her anxiety to get out of the direct view of the house she had diverged from the straightest path homeward, and while looking about to regain it she came upon a little boy gathering whortleberries in a hollow. The boy was Johnny Nunsuch, who had been Eustacia's stoker at the bonfire, and, with the tendency of a minute body to gravitate towards a greater, he began hovering round Mrs. Yeobright as soon as she appeared, and trotted on beside her without perceptible consciousness of his act.

Mrs. Yeobright spoke to him as one in a mesmeric sleep. "'Tis a long way home, my child, and we shall not get there till evening."

"I shall," said her small companion. "I am going to play marnels afore supper, and we go to supper at six o'clock, because father comes home. Does your father come home at six too?"

"No, he never comes; nor my son either, nor anybody."

"What have made you so down? Have you seen a ooser?"

"I have seen what's worse--a woman's face looking at me through a window-pane."

"Is that a bad sight?"

"Yes. It is always a bad sight to see a woman looking out at a weary wayfarer and not letting her in."

"Once when I went to Throope Great Pond to catch effets I seed myself looking up at myself, and I was frightened and jumped back like anything."

..."If they had only shown signs of meeting my advances half-way how well it might have been done! But there is no chance. Shut out! She must have set him against me. Can there be beautiful bodies without hearts inside? I think so. I would not have done it against a neighbour's cat on such a fiery day as this!"

"What is it you say?"

"Never again--never! Not even if they send for me!"

"You must be a very curious woman to talk like that."

"O no, not at all," she said, returning to the boy's prattle. "Most people who grow up and have children talk as I do. When you grow up your mother will talk as I do too."

"I hope she won't; because 'tis very bad to talk nonsense."

"Yes, child; it is nonsense, I suppose. Are you not nearly spent with the heat?"

"Yes. But not so much as you be."

"How do you know?"

"Your face is white and wet, and your head is hanging-down-like."

"Ah, I am exhausted from inside."

"Why do you, every time you take a step, go like this?" The child in speaking gave to his motion the jerk and limp of an invalid.

"Because I have a burden which is more than I can bear."

The little boy remained silently pondering, and they tottered on side by side until more than a quarter of an hour had elapsed, when Mrs. Yeobright, whose weakness plainly increased, said to him, "I must sit down here to rest."

When she had seated herself he looked long in her face and said, "How funny you draw your breath--like a lamb when you drive him till he's nearly done for. Do you always draw your breath like that?"

"Not always." Her voice was now so low as to be scarcely above a whisper.

"You will go to sleep there, I suppose, won't you? You have shut your eyes already."

"No. I shall not sleep much till--another day, and then I hope to have a long, long one--very long. Now can you tell me if Rimsmoor Pond is dry this summer?"

"Rimsmoor Pond is, but Oker's Pool isn't, because he is deep, and is never dry--'tis just over there."

"Is the water clear?"

"Yes, middling--except where the heath-croppers walk into it."

"Then, take this, and go as fast as you can, and dip me up the clearest you can find. I am very faint."

She drew from the small willow reticule that she carried in her hand an old-fashioned china teacup without a handle; it was one of half a dozen of the same sort lying in the reticule, which she had preserved ever since her childhood, and had brought with her today as a small present for Clym and Eustacia.

The boy started on his errand, and soon came back with the water, such as it was. Mrs. Yeobright attempted to drink, but it was so warm as to give her nausea, and she threw it away. Afterwards she still remained sitting, with her eyes closed.

The boy waited, played near her, caught several of the little brown butterflies which abounded, and then said as he waited again, "I like going on better than biding still. Will you soon start again?"

"I don't know."

"I wish I might go on by myself," he resumed, fearing, apparently, that he was to be pressed into some unpleasant service. "Do you want me any more, please?"

Mrs. Yeobright made no reply.

"What shall I tell mother?" the boy continued.

"Tell her you have seen a broken-hearted woman cast off by her son."

Before quite leaving her he threw upon her face a wistful glance, as if he had misgivings on the generosity of forsaking her thus. He gazed into her face in a vague, wondering manner, like that of one examining some strange old manuscript the key to whose characters is undiscoverable. He was not so young as to be absolutely without a sense that sympathy was demanded, he was not old enough to be free from the terror felt in childhood at beholding misery in adult quarters hitherto deemed impregnable; and whether she were in a position to cause trouble or to suffer from it, whether she and her affliction were something to pity or something to fear, it was beyond him to decide. He lowered his eyes and went on without another word. Before he had gone half a mile he had forgotten all about her, except that she was a woman who had sat down to rest.

Mrs. Yeobright's exertions, physical and emotional, had well-nigh prostrated her; but she continued to creep along in short stages with long breaks between. The sun had now got far to the west of south and stood directly in her face, like some merciless incendiary, brand in hand, waiting to consume her. With the departure of the boy all visible animation disappeared from the landscape, though the

intermittent husky notes of the male grasshoppers from every tuft of furze were enough to show that amid the prostration of the larger animal species an unseen insect world was busy in all the fullness of life.

In two hours she reached a slope about three-fourths the whole distance from Alderworth to her own home, where a little patch of shepherd's-thyme intruded upon the path; and she sat down upon the perfumed mat it formed there. In front of her a colony of ants had established a thoroughfare across the way, where they toiled a never-ending and heavy-laden throng. To look down upon them was like observing a city street from the top of a tower. She remembered that this bustle of ants had been in progress for years at the same spot--doubtless those of the old times were the ancestors of these which walked there now. She leant back to obtain more thorough rest, and the soft eastern portion of the sky was as great a relief to her eyes as the thyme was to her head. While she looked a heron arose on that side of the sky and flew on with his face towards the sun. He had come dripping wet from some pool in the valleys, and as he flew the edges and lining of his wings, his thighs, and his breast were so caught by the bright sunbeams that he appeared as if formed of burnished silver. Up in the zenith where he was seemed a free and happy place, away from all contact with the earthly ball to which she was pinioned; and she wished that she could arise uncrushed from its surface and fly as he flew then.

But, being a mother, it was inevitable that she should soon cease to ruminate upon her own condition. Had the track of her next thought been marked by a streak in the air, like the path of a meteor, it would have shown a direction contrary to the heron's, and have descended to the eastward upon the roof of Clym's house.

VII

The Tragic Meeting of Two Old Friends

He in the meantime had aroused himself from sleep, sat up, and looked around. Eustacia was sitting in a chair hard by him, and though she held a book in her hand she had not looked into it for some time.

"Well, indeed!" said Clym, brushing his eyes with his hands. "How soundly I have slept! I have had such a tremendous dream, too: one I shall never forget."

"I thought you had been dreaming," said she.

"Yes. It was about my mother. I dreamt that I took you to her house to make up differences, and when we got there we couldn't get in,

though she kept on crying to us for help. However, dreams are dreams. What o'clock is it, Eustacia?"

"Half-past two."

"So late, is it? I didn't mean to stay so long. By the time I have had something to eat it will be after three."

"Ann is not come back from the village, and I thought I would let you sleep on till she returned."

Clym went to the window and looked out. Presently he said, musingly, "Week after week passes, and yet mother does not come. I thought I should have heard something from her long before this."

Misgiving, regret, fear, resolution, ran their swift course of expression in Eustacia's dark eyes. She was face to face with a monstrous difficulty, and she resolved to get free of it by postponement.

"I must certainly go to Blooms-End soon," he continued, "and I think I had better go alone." He picked up his leggings and gloves, threw them down again, and added, "As dinner will be so late today I will not go back to the heath, but work in the garden till the evening, and then, when it will be cooler, I will walk to Blooms-End. I am quite sure that if I make a little advance mother will be willing to forget

all. It will be rather late before I can get home, as I shall not be able to do the distance either way in less than an hour and a half. But you will not mind for one evening, dear? What are you thinking of to make you look so abstracted?"

"I cannot tell you," she said heavily. "I wish we didn't live here, Clym. The world seems all wrong in this place."

"Well--if we make it so. I wonder if Thomasin has been to Blooms-End lately. I hope so. But probably not, as she is, I believe, expecting to be confined in a month or so. I wish I had thought of that before. Poor mother must indeed be very lonely."

"I don't like you going tonight."

"Why not tonight?"

"Something may be said which will terribly injure me."

"My mother is not vindictive," said Clym, his colour faintly rising.

"But I wish you would not go," Eustacia repeated in a low tone. "If you agree not to go tonight I promise to go by myself to her house tomorrow, and make it up with her, and wait till you fetch me."

"Why do you want to do that at this particular time, when at every

previous time that I have proposed it you have refused?"

"I cannot explain further than that I should like to see her alone before you go," she answered, with an impatient move of her head, and looking at him with an anxiety more frequently seen upon those of a sanguine temperament than upon such as herself.

"Well, it is very odd that just when I had decided to go myself you should want to do what I proposed long ago. If I wait for you to go tomorrow another day will be lost; and I know I shall be unable to rest another night without having been. I want to get this settled, and will. You must visit her afterwards: it will be all the same."

"I could even go with you now?"

"You could scarcely walk there and back without a longer rest than I shall take. No, not tonight, Eustacia."

"Let it be as you say, then," she replied in the quiet way of one who, though willing to ward off evil consequences by a mild effort, would let events fall out as they might sooner than wrestle hard to direct them.

Clym then went into the garden; and a thoughtful languor stole over Eustacia for the remainder of the afternoon, which her husband attributed to the heat of the weather.

In the evening he set out on the journey. Although the heat of summer was yet intense the days had considerably shortened, and before he had advanced a mile on his way all the heath purples, browns, and greens had merged in a uniform dress without airiness or graduation, and broken only by touches of white where the little heaps of clean quartz sand showed the entrance to a rabbit-burrow, or where the white flints of a footpath lay like a thread over the slopes. In almost every one of the isolated and stunted thorns which grew here and there a night-hawk revealed his presence by whirring like the clack of a mill as long as he could hold his breath, then stopping, flapping his wings, wheeling round the bush, alighting, and after a silent interval of listening beginning to whirr again. At each brushing of Clym's feet white miller-moths flew into the air just high enough to catch upon their dusty wings the mellowed light from the west, which now shone across the depressions and levels of the ground without falling thereon to light them up.

Yeobright walked on amid this quiet scene with a hope that all would soon be well. Three miles on he came to a spot where a soft perfume was wafted across his path, and he stood still for a moment to inhale the familiar scent. It was the place at which, four hours earlier, his mother had sat down exhausted on the knoll covered with shepherd's-thyme. While he stood a sound between a breathing and a moan suddenly reached his ears.

He looked to where the sound came from; but nothing appeared there save the verge of the hillock stretching against the sky in an unbroken line. He moved a few steps in that direction, and now he perceived a recumbent figure almost close at his feet.

Among the different possibilities as to the person's individuality there did not for a moment occur to Yeobright that it might be one of his own family. Sometimes furze-cutters had been known to sleep out of doors at these times, to save a long journey homeward and back again; but Clym remembered the moan and looked closer, and saw that the form was feminine; and a distress came over him like cold air from a cave. But he was not absolutely certain that the woman was his mother till he stooped and beheld her face, pallid, and with closed eyes.

His breath went, as it were, out of his body and the cry of anguish which would have escaped him died upon his lips. During the momentary interval that elapsed before he became conscious that something must be done all sense of time and place left him, and it seemed as if he and his mother were as when he was a child with her many years ago on this heath at hours similar to the present. Then he awoke to activity; and bending yet lower he found that she still breathed, and that her breath though feeble was regular, except when disturbed by an occasional gasp.

"O, what is it! Mother, are you very ill--you are not dying?" he cried, pressing his lips to her face. "I am your Clym. How did you

come here? What does it all mean?"

At that moment the chasm in their lives which his love for Eustacia had caused was not remembered by Yeobright, and to him the present joined continuously with that friendly past that had been their experience before the division.

She moved her lips, appeared to know him, but could not speak; and then Clym strove to consider how best to move her, as it would be necessary to get her away from the spot before the dews were intense. He was able-bodied, and his mother was thin. He clasped his arms round her, lifted her a little, and said, "Does that hurt you?"

She shook her head, and he lifted her up; then, at a slow pace, went onward with his load. The air was now completely cool; but whenever he passed over a sandy patch of ground uncarpeted with vegetation there was reflected from its surface into his face the heat which it had imbibed during the day. At the beginning of his undertaking he had thought but little of the distance which yet would have to be traversed before Blooms-End could be reached; but though he had slept that afternoon he soon began to feel the weight of his burden. Thus he proceeded, like Aeneas with his father; the bats circling round his head, nightjars flapping their wings within a yard of his face, and not a human being within call.

While he was yet nearly a mile from the house his mother exhibited

signs of restlessness under the constraint of being borne along, as if his arms were irksome to her. He lowered her upon his knees and looked around. The point they had now reached, though far from any road, was not more than a mile from the Blooms-End cottages occupied by Fairway, Sam, Humphrey, and the Cantles. Moreover, fifty yards off stood a hut, built of clods and covered with thin turves, but now entirely disused. The simple outline of the lonely shed was visible, and thither he determined to direct his steps. As soon as he arrived he laid her down carefully by the entrance, and then ran and cut with his pocketknife an armful of the dryest fern. Spreading this within the shed, which was entirely open on one side, he placed his mother thereon; then he ran with all his might towards the dwelling of Fairway.

Nearly a quarter of an hour had passed, disturbed only by the broken breathing of the sufferer, when moving figures began to animate the line between heath and sky. In a few moments Clym arrived with Fairway, Humphrey, and Susan Nunsuch; Olly Dowden, who had chanced to be at Fairway's, Christian and Grandfer Cantle following helter-skelter behind. They had brought a lantern and matches, water, a pillow, and a few other articles which had occurred to their minds in the hurry of the moment. Sam had been despatched back again for brandy, and a boy brought Fairway's pony, upon which he rode off to the nearest medical man, with directions to call at Wildeve's on his way, and inform Thomasin that her aunt was unwell.

Sam and the brandy soon arrived, and it was administered by the light of the lantern; after which she became sufficiently conscious to signify by signs that something was wrong with her foot. Olly Dowden at length understood her meaning, and examined the foot indicated. It was swollen and red. Even as they watched the red began to assume a more livid colour, in the midst of which appeared a scarlet speck, smaller than a pea, and it was found to consist of a drop of blood, which rose above the smooth flesh of her ankle in a hemisphere.

"I know what it is," cried Sam. "She has been stung by an adder!"

"Yes," said Clym instantly. "I remember when I was a child seeing just such a bite. O, my poor mother!"

"It was my father who was bit," said Sam. "And there's only one way to cure it. You must rub the place with the fat of other adders, and the only way to get that is by frying them. That's what they did for him."

"'Tis an old remedy," said Clym distrustfully, "and I have doubts about it. But we can do nothing else till the doctor comes."

"'Tis a sure cure," said Olly Dowden, with emphasis. "I've used it when I used to go out nursing."

"Then we must pray for daylight, to catch them," said Clym gloomily.

"I will see what I can do," said Sam.

He took a green hazel which he had used as a walking-stick, split it at the end, inserted a small pebble, and with the lantern in his hand went out into the heath. Clym had by this time lit a small fire, and despatched Susan Nunsuch for a frying-pan. Before she had returned Sam came in with three adders, one briskly coiling and uncoiling in the cleft of the stick, and the other two hanging dead across it.

"I have only been able to get one alive and fresh as he ought to be," said Sam. "These limp ones are two I killed today at work; but as they don't die till the sun goes down they can't be very stale meat."

The live adder regarded the assembled group with a sinister look in its small black eye, and the beautiful brown and jet pattern on its back seemed to intensify with indignation. Mrs. Yeobright saw the creature, and the creature saw her: she quivered throughout, and averted her eyes.

"Look at that," murmured Christian Cantle. "Neighbours, how do we know but that something of the old serpent in God's garden, that gied the apple to the young woman with no clothes, lives on in adders and snakes still? Look at his eye--for all the world like a villainous sort of black currant. 'Tis to be hoped he can't ill-wish us! There's folks in heath who've been overlooked already. I will never kill

another adder as long as I live."

"Well, 'tis right to be afeard of things, if folks can't help it," said Grandfer Cantle. "'Twould have saved me many a brave danger in my time."

"I fancy I heard something outside the shed," said Christian. "I wish troubles would come in the daytime, for then a man could show his courage, and hardly beg for mercy of the most broomstick old woman he should see, if he was a brave man, and able to run out of her sight!"

"Even such an ignorant fellow as I should know better than do that," said Sam.

"Well, there's calamities where we least expect it, whether or no. Neighbours, if Mrs. Yeobright were to die, d'ye think we should be took up and tried for the manslaughter of a woman?"

"No, they couldn't bring it in as that," said Sam, "unless they could prove we had been poachers at some time of our lives. But she'll fetch round."

"Now, if I had been stung by ten adders I should hardly have lost a day's work for't," said Grandfer Cantle. "Such is my spirit when I am on my mettle. But perhaps 'tis natural in a man trained for war. Yes, I've gone through a good deal; but nothing ever came amiss to me

after I joined the Locals in four." He shook his head and smiled at a mental picture of himself in uniform. "I was always first in the most galliantest scrapes in my younger days!"

"I suppose that was because they always used to put the biggest fool afore," said Fairway from the fire, beside which he knelt, blowing it with his breath.

"D'ye think so, Timothy?" said Grandfer Cantle, coming forward to Fairway's side with sudden depression in his face. "Then a man may feel for years that he is good solid company, and be wrong about himself after all?"

"Never mind that question, Grandfer. Stir your stumps and get some more sticks. 'Tis very nonsense of an old man to prattle so when life and death's in mangling."

"Yes, yes," said Grandfer Cantle, with melancholy conviction. "Well, this is a bad night altogether for them that have done well in their time; and if I were ever such a dab at the hautboy or tenor-viol, I shouldn't have the heart to play tunes upon 'em now."

Susan now arrived with the frying-pan, when the live adder was killed and the heads of the three taken off. The remainders, being cut into lengths and split open, were tossed into the pan, which began hissing and crackling over the fire. Soon a rill of clear oil trickled from

the carcases, whereupon Clym dipped the corner of his handkerchief into the liquid and anointed the wound.

VIII

Eustacia Hears of Good Fortune, and Beholds Evil

In the meantime Eustacia, left alone in her cottage at Alderworth, had become considerably depressed by the posture of affairs. The consequences which might result from Clym's discovery that his mother had been turned from his door that day were likely to be disagreeable, and this was a quality in events which she hated as much as the dreadful.

To be left to pass the evening by herself was irksome to her at any time, and this evening it was more irksome than usual by reason of the excitements of the past hours. The two visits had stirred her into restlessness. She was not wrought to any great pitch of uneasiness by the probability of appearing in an ill light in the discussion between Clym and his mother, but she was wrought to vexation; and her slumbering activities were quickened to the extent of wishing that she had opened the door. She had certainly believed that Clym was awake,

and the excuse would be an honest one as far as it went; but nothing could save her from censure in refusing to answer at the first knock. Yet, instead of blaming herself for the issue she laid the fault upon the shoulders of some indistinct, colossal Prince of the World, who had framed her situation and ruled her lot.

At this time of the year it was pleasanter to walk by night than by day, and when Clym had been absent about an hour she suddenly resolved to go out in the direction of Blooms-End, on the chance of meeting him on his return. When she reached the garden gate she heard wheels approaching, and looking round beheld her grandfather coming up in his car.

"I can't stay a minute, thank ye," he answered to her greeting. "I am driving to East Egdon; but I came round here just to tell you the news. Perhaps you have heard--about Mr. Wildeve's fortune?"

"No," said Eustacia blankly.

"Well, he has come into a fortune of eleven thousand pounds--uncle died in Canada, just after hearing that all his family, whom he was sending home, had gone to the bottom in the _Cassiopeia_; so Wildeve has come into everything, without in the least expecting it."

Eustacia stood motionless awhile. "How long has he known of this?" she asked.

"Well, it was known to him this morning early, for I knew it at ten o'clock, when Charley came back. Now, he is what I call a lucky man. What a fool you were, Eustacia!"

"In what way?" she said, lifting her eyes in apparent calmness.

"Why, in not sticking to him when you had him."

"Had him, indeed!"

"I did not know there had ever been anything between you till lately; and, faith, I should have been hot and strong against it if I had known; but since it seems that there was some sniffing between ye, why the deuce didn't you stick to him?"

Eustacia made no reply, but she looked as if she could say as much upon that subject as he if she chose.

"And how is your poor purblind husband?" continued the old man. "Not a bad fellow either, as far as he goes."

"He is quite well."

"It is a good thing for his cousin what-d'ye-call-her? By George, you ought to have been in that galley, my girl! Now I must drive on. Do

you want any assistance? What's mine is yours, you know."

"Thank you, grandfather, we are not in want at present," she said coldly. "Clym cuts furze, but he does it mostly as a useful pastime, because he can do nothing else."

"He is paid for his pastime, isn't he? Three shillings a hundred, I heard."

"Clym has money," she said, colouring, "but he likes to earn a little."

"Very well; good night." And the captain drove on.

When her grandfather was gone Eustacia went on her way mechanically; but her thoughts were no longer concerning her mother-in-law and Clym. Wildeve, notwithstanding his complaints against his fate, had been seized upon by destiny and placed in the sunshine once more. Eleven thousand pounds! From every Egdon point of view he was a rich man. In Eustacia's eyes, too, it was an ample sum--one sufficient to supply those wants of hers which had been stigmatized by Clym in his more austere moods as vain and luxurious. Though she was no lover of money she loved what money could bring; and the new accessories she imagined around him clothed Wildeve with a great deal of interest. She recollected now how quietly well-dressed he had been that morning: he had probably put on his newest suit, regardless of damage by briars

and thorns. And then she thought of his manner towards herself.

"O I see it, I see it," she said. "How much he wishes he had me now, that he might give me all I desire!"

In recalling the details of his glances and words--at the time scarcely regarded--it became plain to her how greatly they had been dictated by his knowledge of this new event. "Had he been a man to bear a jilt ill-will he would have told me of his good fortune in crowing tones; instead of doing that he mentioned not a word, in deference to my misfortunes, and merely implied that he loved me still, as one superior to him."

Wildeve's silence that day on what had happened to him was just the kind of behaviour calculated to make an impression on such a woman. Those delicate touches of good taste were, in fact, one of the strong points in his demeanour towards the other sex. The peculiarity of Wildeve was that, while at one time passionate, upbraiding, and resentful towards a woman, at another he would treat her with such unparalleled grace as to make previous neglect appear as no discourtesy, injury as no insult, interference as a delicate attention, and the ruin of her honour as excess of chivalry. This man, whose admiration today Eustacia had disregarded, whose good wishes she had scarcely taken the trouble to accept, whom she had shown out of the house by the back door, was the possessor of eleven thousand pounds--a man of fair professional education, and one who

had served his articles with a civil engineer.

So intent was Eustacia upon Wildeve's fortunes that she forgot how much closer to her own course were those of Clym; and instead of walking on to meet him at once she sat down upon a stone. She was disturbed in her reverie by a voice behind, and turning her head beheld the old lover and fortunate inheritor of wealth immediately beside her.

She remained sitting, though the fluctuation in her look might have told any man who knew her so well as Wildeve that she was thinking of him.

"How did you come here?" she said in her clear low tone. "I thought you were at home."

"I went on to the village after leaving your garden; and now I have come back again: that's all. Which way are you walking, may I ask?"

She waved her hand in the direction of Blooms-End. "I am going to meet my husband. I think I may possibly have got into trouble whilst you were with me today."

"How could that be?"

"By not letting in Mrs. Yeobright."

"I hope that visit of mine did you no harm."

"None. It was not your fault," she said quietly.

By this time she had risen; and they involuntarily sauntered on together, without speaking, for two or three minutes; when Eustacia broke silence by saying, "I assume I must congratulate you."

"On what? O yes; on my eleven thousand pounds, you mean. Well, since I didn't get something else, I must be content with getting that."

"You seem very indifferent about it. Why didn't you tell me today when you came?" she said in the tone of a neglected person. "I heard of it quite by accident."

"I did mean to tell you," said Wildeve. "But I--well, I will speak frankly--I did not like to mention it when I saw, Eustacia, that your star was not high. The sight of a man lying wearied out with hard work, as your husband lay, made me feel that to brag of my own fortune to you would be greatly out of place. Yet, as you stood there beside him, I could not help feeling too that in many respects he was a richer man than I."

At this Eustacia said, with slumbering mischievousness, "What, would you exchange with him--your fortune for me?"

"I certainly would," said Wildeve.

"As we are imagining what is impossible and absurd, suppose we change the subject?"

"Very well; and I will tell you of my plans for the future, if you care to hear them. I shall permanently invest nine thousand pounds, keep one thousand as ready money, and with the remaining thousand travel for a year or so."

"Travel? What a bright idea! Where will you go to?"

"From here to Paris, where I shall pass the winter and spring. Then I shall go to Italy, Greece, Egypt, and Palestine, before the hot weather comes on. In the summer I shall go to America; and then, by a plan not yet settled, I shall go to Australia and round to India. By that time I shall have begun to have had enough of it. Then I shall probably come back to Paris again, and there I shall stay as long as I can afford to."

"Back to Paris again," she murmured in a voice that was nearly a sigh. She had never once told Wildeve of the Parisian desires which Clym's description had sown in her; yet here was he involuntarily in a position to gratify them. "You think a good deal of Paris?" she added.

"Yes. In my opinion it is the central beauty-spot of the world."

"And in mine! And Thomasin will go with you?"

"Yes, if she cares to. She may prefer to stay at home."

"So you will be going about, and I shall be staying here!"

"I suppose you will. But we know whose fault that is."

"I am not blaming you," she said quickly.

"Oh, I thought you were. If ever you SHOULD be inclined to blame me, think of a certain evening by Rainbarrow, when you promised to meet me and did not. You sent me a letter; and my heart ached to read that as I hope yours never will. That was one point of divergence. I then did something in haste... But she is a good woman, and I will say no more."

"I know that the blame was on my side that time," said Eustacia. "But it had not always been so. However, it is my misfortune to be too sudden in feeling. O, Damon, don't reproach me any more--I can't bear that."

They went on silently for a distance of two or three miles, when

Eustacia said suddenly, "Haven't you come out of your way, Mr. Wildeve?"

"My way is anywhere tonight. I will go with you as far as the hill on which we can see Blooms-End, as it is getting late for you to be alone."

"Don't trouble. I am not obliged to be out at all. I think I would rather you did not accompany me further. This sort of thing would have an odd look if known."

"Very well, I will leave you." He took her hand unexpectedly, and kissed it--for the first time since her marriage. "What light is that on the hill?" he added, as it were to hide the caress.

She looked, and saw a flickering firelight proceeding from the open side of a hovel a little way before them. The hovel, which she had hitherto always found empty, seemed to be inhabited now.

"Since you have come so far," said Eustacia, "will you see me safely past that hut? I thought I should have met Clym somewhere about here, but as he doesn't appear I will hasten on and get to Blooms-End before he leaves."

They advanced to the turf-shed, and when they got near it the firelight and the lantern inside showed distinctly enough the form of

a woman reclining on a bed of fern, a group of heath men and women standing around her. Eustacia did not recognize Mrs. Yeobright in the reclining figure, nor Clym as one of the standers-by till she came close. Then she quickly pressed her hand upon Wildeve's arm and signified to him to come back from the open side of the shed into the shadow.

"It is my husband and his mother," she whispered in an agitated voice. "What can it mean? Will you step forward and tell me?"

Wildeve left her side and went to the back wall of the hut. Presently Eustacia perceived that he was beckoning to her, and she advanced and joined him.

"It is a serious case," said Wildeve.

From their position they could hear what was proceeding inside.

"I cannot think where she could have been going," said Clym to some one. "She had evidently walked a long way, but even when she was able to speak just now she would not tell me where. What do you really think of her?"

"There is a great deal to fear," was gravely answered, in a voice which Eustacia recognized as that of the only surgeon in the district. "She has suffered somewhat from the bite of the adder; but it is

exhaustion which has overpowered her. My impression is that her walk must have been exceptionally long."

"I used to tell her not to overwalk herself this weather," said Clym, with distress. "Do you think we did well in using the adder's fat?"

"Well, it is a very ancient remedy--the old remedy of the viper-catchers, I believe," replied the doctor. "It is mentioned as an infallible ointment by Hoffman, Mead, and I think the Abbé Fontana. Undoubtedly it was as good a thing as you could do; though I question if some other oils would not have been equally efficacious."

"Come here, come here!" was then rapidly said in anxious female tones; and Clym and the doctor could be heard rushing forward from the back part of the shed to where Mrs. Yeobright lay.

"Oh, what is it?" whispered Eustacia.

"'Twas Thomasin who spoke," said Wildeve. "Then they have fetched her. I wonder if I had better go in--yet it might do harm."

For a long time there was utter silence among the group within; and it was broken at last by Clym saying, in an agonized voice, "O Doctor, what does it mean?"

The doctor did not reply at once; ultimately he said, "She is sinking

fast. Her heart was previously affected, and physical exhaustion has dealt the finishing blow."

Then there was a weeping of women, then waiting, then hushed exclamations, then a strange gasping sound, then a painful stillness.

"It is all over," said the doctor.

Further back in the hut the cotters whispered, "Mrs. Yeobright is dead."

Almost at the same moment the two watchers observed the form of a small old-fashioned child entering at the open side of the shed. Susan Nunsuch, whose boy it was, went forward to the opening and silently beckoned to him to go back.

"I've got something to tell 'ee, mother," he cried in a shrill tone. "That woman asleep there walked along with me today; and she said I was to say that I had seed her, and she was a broken-hearted woman and cast off by her son, and then I came on home."

A confused sob as from a man was heard within, upon which Eustacia gasped faintly, "That's Clym--I must go to him--yet dare I do it? No: come away!"

When they had withdrawn from the neighbourhood of the shed she said

huskily, "I am to blame for this. There is evil in store for me."

"Was she not admitted to your house after all?" Wildeve inquired.

"No; and that's where it all lies! Oh, what shall I do! I shall not intrude upon them: I shall go straight home. Damon, good-bye! I cannot speak to you any more now."

They parted company; and when Eustacia had reached the next hill she looked back. A melancholy procession was wending its way by the light of the lantern from the hut towards Blooms-End. Wildeve was nowhere to be seen.