BOOK FIFTH

THE DISCOVERY

I

"Wherefore Is Light Given to Him That Is in Misery"

One evening, about three weeks after the funeral of Mrs. Yeobright, when the silver face of the moon sent a bundle of beams directly upon the floor of Clym's house at Alderworth, a woman came forth from within. She reclined over the garden gate as if to refresh herself awhile. The pale lunar touches which make beauties of hags lent divinity to this face, already beautiful.

She had not long been there when a man came up the road and with some hesitation said to her, "How is he tonight, ma'am, if you please?"

"He is better, though still very unwell, Humphrey," replied Eustacia.

"Is he light-headed, ma'am?"

"No. He is quite sensible now."

"Do he rave about his mother just the same, poor fellow?" continued

Humphrey.

"Just as much, though not quite so wildly," she said in a low voice.

"It was very unfortunate, ma'am, that the boy Johnny should ever ha' told him his mother's dying words, about her being broken-hearted and cast off by her son. 'Twas enough to upset any man alive."

Eustacia made no reply beyond that of a slight catch in her breath, as of one who fain would speak but could not; and Humphrey, declining her invitation to come in, went away.

Eustacia turned, entered the house, and ascended to the front bedroom, where a shaded light was burning. In the bed lay Clym, pale, haggard, wide awake, tossing to one side and to the other, his eyes lit by a hot light, as if the fire in their pupils were burning up their substance.

"Is it you, Eustacia?" he said as she sat down.

"Yes, Clym. I have been down to the gate. The moon is shining beautifully, and there is not a leaf stirring."

"Shining, is it? What's the moon to a man like me? Let it shine--let anything be, so that I never see another day!... Eustacia, I don't know where to look: my thoughts go through me like swords. O, if

any man wants to make himself immortal by painting a picture of wretchedness, let him come here!"

"Why do you say so?"

"I cannot help feeling that I did my best to kill her."

"No, Clym."

"Yes, it was so; it is useless to excuse me! My conduct to her was too hideous--I made no advances; and she could not bring herself to forgive me. Now she is dead! If I had only shown myself willing to make it up with her sooner, and we had been friends, and then she had died, it wouldn't be so hard to bear. But I never went near her house, so she never came near mine, and didn't know how welcome she would have been--that's what troubles me. She did not know I was going to her house that very night, for she was too insensible to understand me. If she had only come to see me! I longed that she would. But it was not to be."

There escaped from Eustacia one of those shivering sighs which used to shake her like a pestilent blast. She had not yet told.

But Yeobright was too deeply absorbed in the ramblings incidental to his remorseful state to notice her. During his illness he had been continually talking thus. Despair had been added to his original

grief by the unfortunate disclosure of the boy who had received the last words of Mrs. Yeobright--words too bitterly uttered in an hour of misapprehension. Then his distress had overwhelmed him, and he longed for death as a field labourer longs for the shade. It was the pitiful sight of a man standing in the very focus of sorrow. He continually bewailed his tardy journey to his mother's house, because it was an error which could never be rectified, and insisted that he must have been horribly perverted by some fiend not to have thought before that it was his duty to go to her, since she did not come to him. He would ask Eustacia to agree with him in his self-condemnation; and when she, seared inwardly by a secret she dared not tell, declared that she could not give an opinion, he would say, "That's because you didn't know my mother's nature. She was always ready to forgive if asked to do so; but I seemed to her to be as an obstinate child, and that made her unyielding. Yet not unyielding: she was proud and reserved, no more... Yes, I can understand why she held out against me so long. She was waiting for me. I dare say she said a hundred times in her sorrow, 'What a return he makes for all the sacrifices I have made for him!' I never went to her! When I set out to visit her it was too late. To think of that is nearly intolerable!"

Sometimes his condition had been one of utter remorse, unsoftened by a single tear of pure sorrow: and then he writhed as he lay, fevered far more by thought than by physical ills. "If I could only get one assurance that she did not die in a belief that I was resentful," he said one day when in this mood, "it would be better to think of than

a hope of heaven. But that I cannot do."

"You give yourself up too much to this wearying despair," said Eustacia. "Other men's mothers have died."

"That doesn't make the loss of mine less. Yet it is less the loss than the circumstances of the loss. I sinned against her, and on that account there is no light for me."

"She sinned against you, I think."

"No, she did not. I committed the guilt; and may the whole burden be upon my head!"

"I think you might consider twice before you say that," Eustacia replied. "Single men have, no doubt, a right to curse themselves as much as they please; but men with wives involve two in the doom they pray down."

"I am in too sorry a state to understand what you are refining on," said the wretched man. "Day and night shout at me, 'You have helped to kill her.' But in loathing myself I may, I own, be unjust to you, my poor wife. Forgive me for it, Eustacia, for I scarcely know what I do."

Eustacia was always anxious to avoid the sight of her husband in such

a state as this, which had become as dreadful to her as the trial scene was to Judas Iscariot. It brought before her eyes the spectre of a worn-out woman knocking at a door which she would not open; and she shrank from contemplating it. Yet it was better for Yeobright himself when he spoke openly of his sharp regret, for in silence he endured infinitely more, and would sometimes remain so long in a tense, brooding mood, consuming himself by the gnawing of his thought, that it was imperatively necessary to make him talk aloud, that his grief might in some degree expend itself in the effort.

Eustacia had not been long indoors after her look at the moonlight when a soft footstep came up to the house, and Thomasin was announced by the woman downstairs.

"Ah, Thomasin! Thank you for coming tonight," said Clym when she entered the room. "Here am I, you see. Such a wretched spectacle am I, that I shrink from being seen by a single friend, and almost from you."

"You must not shrink from me, dear Clym," said Thomasin earnestly, in that sweet voice of hers which came to a sufferer like fresh air into a Black Hole. "Nothing in you can ever shock me or drive me away. I have been here before, but you don't remember it."

"Yes, I do; I am not delirious, Thomasin, nor have I been so at all. Don't you believe that if they say so. I am only in great misery at

what I have done: and that, with the weakness, makes me seem mad. But it has not upset my reason. Do you think I should remember all about my mother's death if I were out of my mind? No such good luck. Two months and a half, Thomasin, the last of her life, did my poor mother live alone, distracted and mourning because of me; yet she was unvisited by me, though I was living only six miles off. Two months and a half--seventy-five days did the sun rise and set upon her in that deserted state which a dog didn't deserve! Poor people who had nothing in common with her would have cared for her, and visited her had they known her sickness and loneliness; but I, who should have been all to her, stayed away like a cur. If there is any justice in God let Him kill me now. He has nearly blinded me, but that is not enough. If He would only strike me with more pain I would believe in Him for ever!"

"Hush, hush! O, pray, Clym, don't, don't say it!" implored Thomasin, affrighted into sobs and tears; while Eustacia, at the other side of the room, though her pale face remained calm, writhed in her chair. Clym went on without heeding his cousin.

"But I am not worth receiving further proof even of Heaven's reprobation. Do you think, Thomasin, that she knew me--that she did not die in that horrid mistaken notion about my not forgiving her, which I can't tell you how she acquired? If you could only assure me of that! Do you think so, Eustacia? Do speak to me."

"I think I can assure you that she knew better at last," said Thomasin. The pallid Eustacia said nothing.

"Why didn't she come to my house? I would have taken her in and showed her how I loved her in spite of all. But she never came; and I didn't go to her, and she died on the heath like an animal kicked out, nobody to help her till it was too late. If you could have seen her, Thomasin, as I saw her--a poor dying woman, lying in the dark upon the bare ground, moaning, nobody near, believing she was utterly deserted by all the world, it would have moved you to anguish, it would have moved a brute. And this poor woman my mother! No wonder she said to the child, 'You have seen a broken-hearted woman.' What a state she must have been brought to, to say that! and who can have done it but I? It is too dreadful to think of, and I wish I could be punished more heavily than I am. How long was I what they called out of my senses?"

"A week, I think."

"And then I became calm."

"Yes, for four days."

"And now I have left off being calm."

"But try to be quiet: please do, and you will soon be strong. If you

could remove that impression from your mind--"

"Yes, yes," he said impatiently. "But I don't want to get strong. What's the use of my getting well? It would be better for me if I die, and it would certainly be better for Eustacia. Is Eustacia there?"

"Yes."

"It would be better for you, Eustacia, if I were to die?"

"Don't press such a question, dear Clym."

"Well, it really is but a shadowy supposition; for unfortunately I am going to live. I feel myself getting better. Thomasin, how long are you going to stay at the inn, now that all this money has come to your husband?"

"Another month or two, probably; until my illness is over. We cannot get off till then. I think it will be a month or more."

"Yes, yes. Of course. Ah, Cousin Tamsie, you will get over your trouble--one little month will take you through it, and bring something to console you; but I shall never get over mine, and no consolation will come!"

"Clym, you are unjust to yourself. Depend upon it, aunt thought kindly of you. I know that, if she had lived, you would have been reconciled with her."

"But she didn't come to see me, though I asked her, before I married, if she would come. Had she come, or had I gone there, she would never have died saying, 'I am a broken-hearted woman, cast off by my son.' My door has always been open to her--a welcome here has always awaited her. But that she never came to see."

"You had better not talk any more now, Clym," said Eustacia faintly from the other part of the room, for the scene was growing intolerable to her.

"Let me talk to you instead for the little time I shall be here," Thomasin said soothingly. "Consider what a one-sided way you have of looking at the matter, Clym. When she said that to the little boy you had not found her and taken her into your arms; and it might have been uttered in a moment of bitterness. It was rather like aunt to say things in haste. She sometimes used to speak so to me. Though she did not come I am convinced that she thought of coming to see you. Do you suppose a man's mother could live two or three months without one forgiving thought? She forgave me; and why should she not have forgiven you?"

"You laboured to win her round; I did nothing. I, who was going to

teach people the higher secrets of happiness, did not know how to keep out of that gross misery which the most untaught are wise enough to avoid."

"How did you get here tonight, Thomasin?" said Eustacia.

"Damon set me down at the end of the lane. He has driven into East Egdon on business, and he will come and pick me up by-and-by."

Accordingly they soon after heard the noise of wheels. Wildeve had come, and was waiting outside with his horse and gig.

"Send out and tell him I will be down in two minutes," said Thomasin.

"I will run down myself," said Eustacia.

She went down. Wildeve had alighted, and was standing before the horse's head when Eustacia opened the door. He did not turn for a moment, thinking the comer Thomasin. Then he looked, started ever so little, and said one word: "Well?"

"I have not yet told him," she replied in a whisper.

"Then don't do so till he is well--it will be fatal. You are ill yourself."

"I am wretched... O Damon," she said, bursting into tears, "I--I can't tell you how unhappy I am! I can hardly bear this. I can tell nobody of my trouble--nobody knows of it but you."

"Poor girl!" said Wildeve, visibly affected at her distress, and at last led on so far as to take her hand. "It is hard, when you have done nothing to deserve it, that you should have got involved in such a web as this. You were not made for these sad scenes. I am to blame most. If I could only have saved you from it all!"

"But, Damon, please pray tell me what I must do? To sit by him hour after hour, and hear him reproach himself as being the cause of her death, and to know that I am the sinner, if any human being is at all, drives me into cold despair. I don't know what to do. Should I tell him or should I not tell him? I always am asking myself that. O, I want to tell him; and yet I am afraid. If he find it out he must surely kill me, for nothing else will be in proportion to his feelings now. 'Beware the fury of a patient man' sounds day by day in my ears as I watch him."

"Well, wait till he is better, and trust to chance. And when you tell, you must only tell part--for his own sake."

"Which part should I keep back?"

Wildeve paused. "That I was in the house at the time," he said in a

low tone.

"Yes; it must be concealed, seeing what has been whispered. How much easier are hasty actions than speeches that will excuse them!"

"If he were only to die--" Wildeve murmured.

"Do not think of it! I would not buy hope of immunity by so cowardly a desire even if I hated him. Now I am going up to him again. Thomasin bade me tell you she would be down in a few minutes. Good-bye."

She returned, and Thomasin soon appeared. When she was seated in the gig with her husband, and the horse was turning to go off, Wildeve lifted his eyes to the bedroom windows. Looking from one of them he could discern a pale, tragic face watching him drive away. It was Eustacia's.

II

A Lurid Light Breaks In upon a Darkened Understanding

Clym's grief became mitigated by wearing itself out. His strength

returned, and a month after the visit of Thomasin he might have been seen walking about the garden. Endurance and despair, equanimity and gloom, the tints of health and the pallor of death, mingled weirdly in his face. He was now unnaturally silent upon all of the past that related to his mother; and though Eustacia knew that he was thinking of it none the less, she was only too glad to escape the topic ever to bring it up anew. When his mind had been weaker his heart had led him to speak out; but reason having now somewhat recovered itself he sank into taciturnity.

One evening when he was thus standing in the garden, abstractedly spudding up a weed with his stick, a bony figure turned the corner of the house and came up to him.

"Christian, isn't it?" said Clym. "I am glad you have found me out. I shall soon want you to go to Blooms-End and assist me in putting the house in order. I suppose it is all locked up as I left it?"

"Yes, Mister Clym."

"Have you dug up the potatoes and other roots?"

"Yes, without a drop o' rain, thank God. But I was coming to tell 'ee of something else which is quite different from what we have lately had in the family. I am sent by the rich gentleman at the Woman, that we used to call the landlord, to tell 'ee that Mrs. Wildeve is doing

well of a girl, which was born punctually at one o'clock at noon, or a few minutes more or less; and 'tis said that expecting of this increase is what have kept 'em there since they came into their money."

"And she is getting on well, you say?"

"Yes, sir. Only Mr. Wildeve is twanky because 'tisn't a boy--that's what they say in the kitchen, but I was not supposed to notice that."

"Christian, now listen to me."

"Yes, sure, Mr. Yeobright."

"Did you see my mother the day before she died?"

"No, I did not."

Yeobright's face expressed disappointment.

"But I zeed her the morning of the same day she died."

Clym's look lighted up. "That's nearer still to my meaning," he said.

"Yes, I know 'twas the same day; for she said, 'I be going to see him, Christian; so I shall not want any vegetables brought in for dinner.'"

"See whom?"

"See you. She was going to your house, you understand."

Yeobright regarded Christian with intense surprise. "Why did you never mention this?" he said. "Are you sure it was my house she was coming to?"

"O yes. I didn't mention it because I've never zeed you lately. And as she didn't get there it was all nought, and nothing to tell."

"And I have been wondering why she should have walked in the heath on that hot day! Well, did she say what she was coming for? It is a thing, Christian, I am very anxious to know."

"Yes, Mister Clym. She didn't say it to me, though I think she did to one here and there."

"Do you know one person to whom she spoke of it?"

"There is one man, please, sir, but I hope you won't mention my name to him, as I have seen him in strange places, particular in dreams. One night last summer he glared at me like Famine and Sword, and it made me feel so low that I didn't comb out my few hairs for two days. He was standing, as it might be, Mister Yeobright, in the middle of

the path to Mistover, and your mother came up, looking as pale--"

"Yes, when was that?"

"Last summer, in my dream."

"Pooh! Who's the man?"

"Diggory, the reddleman. He called upon her and sat with her the evening before she set out to see you. I hadn't gone home from work when he came up to the gate."

"I must see Venn--I wish I had known it before," said Clym anxiously. "I wonder why he has not come to tell me?"

"He went out of Egdon Heath the next day, so would not be likely to know you wanted him."

"Christian," said Clym, "you must go and find Venn. I am otherwise engaged, or I would go myself. Find him at once, and tell him I want to speak to him."

"I am a good hand at hunting up folk by day," said Christian, looking dubiously round at the declining light; "but as to nighttime, never is such a bad hand as I, Mister Yeobright."

"Search the heath when you will, so that you bring him soon. Bring him tomorrow, if you can."

Christian then departed. The morrow came, but no Venn. In the evening Christian arrived, looking very weary. He had been searching all day, and had heard nothing of the reddleman.

"Inquire as much as you can tomorrow without neglecting your work," said Yeobright. "Don't come again till you have found him."

The next day Yeobright set out for the old house at Blooms-End, which, with the garden, was now his own. His severe illness had hindered all preparations for his removal thither; but it had become necessary that he should go and overlook its contents, as administrator to his mother's little property; for which purpose he decided to pass the next night on the premises.

He journeyed onward, not quickly or decisively, but in the slow walk of one who has been awakened from a stupefying sleep. It was early afternoon when he reached the valley. The expression of the place, the tone of the hour, were precisely those of many such occasions in days gone by; and these antecedent similarities fostered the illusion that she, who was there no longer, would come out to welcome him. The garden gate was locked and the shutters were closed, just as he himself had left them on the evening after the funeral. He unlocked the gate, and found that a spider had already constructed a large web,

tying the door to the lintel, on the supposition that it was never to be opened again. When he had entered the house and flung back the shutters he set about his task of overhauling the cupboards and closets, burning papers, and considering how best to arrange the place for Eustacia's reception, until such time as he might be in a position to carry out his long-delayed scheme, should that time ever arrive.

As he surveyed the rooms he felt strongly disinclined for the alterations which would have to be made in the time-honoured furnishing of his parents and grandparents, to suit Eustacia's modern ideas. The gaunt oak-cased clock, with the picture of the Ascension on the door-panel and the Miraculous Draught of Fishes on the base; his grandmother's corner cupboard with the glass door, through which the spotted china was visible; the dumb-waiter; the wooden tea-trays; the hanging fountain with the brass tap--whither would these venerable articles have to be banished?

He noticed that the flowers in the window had died for want of water, and he placed them out upon the ledge, that they might be taken away. While thus engaged he heard footsteps on the gravel without, and somebody knocked at the door.

Yeobright opened it, and Venn was standing before him.

"Good morning," said the reddleman. "Is Mrs. Yeobright at home?"

Yeobright looked upon the ground. "Then you have not seen Christian or any of the Egdon folks?" he said.

"No. I have only just returned after a long stay away. I called here the day before I left."

"And you have heard nothing?"

"Nothing."

"My mother is--dead."

"Dead!" said Venn mechanically.

"Her home now is where I shouldn't mind having mine."

Venn regarded him, and then said, "If I didn't see your face I could never believe your words. Have you been ill?"

"I had an illness."

"Well, the change! When I parted from her a month ago everything seemed to say that she was going to begin a new life."

"And what seemed came true."

"You say right, no doubt. Trouble has taught you a deeper vein of talk than mine. All I meant was regarding her life here. She has died too soon."

"Perhaps through my living too long. I have had a bitter experience on that score this last month, Diggory. But come in; I have been wanting to see you."

He conducted the reddleman into the large room where the dancing had taken place the previous Christmas; and they sat down in the settle together. "There's the cold fireplace, you see," said Clym. "When that half-burnt log and those cinders were alight she was alive! Little has been changed here yet. I can do nothing. My life creeps like a snail."

"How came she to die?" said Venn.

Yeobright gave him some particulars of her illness and death, and continued: "After this no kind of pain will ever seem more than an indisposition to me.--I began saying that I wanted to ask you something, but I stray from subjects like a drunken man. I am anxious to know what my mother said to you when she last saw you. You talked with her a long time, I think?"

"I talked with her more than half an hour."

"About me?"

"Yes. And it must have been on account of what we said that she was on the heath. Without question she was coming to see you."

"But why should she come to see me if she felt so bitterly against me? There's the mystery."

"Yet I know she quite forgave 'ee."

"But, Diggory--would a woman, who had quite forgiven her son, say, when she felt herself ill on the way to his house, that she was broken-hearted because of his ill-usage? Never!"

"What I know is that she didn't blame you at all. She blamed herself for what had happened, only herself. I had it from her own lips."

"You had it from her lips that I had NOT ill-treated her; and at the same time another had it from her lips that I HAD ill-treated her? My mother was no impulsive woman who changed her opinion every hour without reason. How can it be, Venn, that she should have told such different stories in close succession?"

"I cannot say. It is certainly odd, when she had forgiven you, and had forgiven your wife, and was going to see ye on purpose to make friends."

"If there was one thing wanting to bewilder me it was this incomprehensible thing!... Diggory, if we, who remain alive, were only allowed to hold conversation with the dead--just once, a bare minute, even through a screen of iron bars, as with persons in prison--what we might learn! How many who now ride smiling would hide their heads! And this mystery--I should then be at the bottom of it at once. But the grave has for ever shut her in; and how shall it be found out now?"

No reply was returned by his companion, since none could be given; and when Venn left, a few minutes later, Clym had passed from the dullness of sorrow to the fluctuation of carking incertitude.

He continued in the same state all the afternoon. A bed was made up for him in the same house by a neighbour, that he might not have to return again the next day; and when he retired to rest in the deserted place it was only to remain awake hour after hour thinking the same thoughts. How to discover a solution to this riddle of death seemed a query of more importance than highest problems of the living. There was housed in his memory a vivid picture of the face of a little boy as he entered the hovel where Clym's mother lay. The round eyes, eager gaze, the piping voice which enunciated the words, had operated like stilettos on his brain.

A visit to the boy suggested itself as a means of gleaning new particulars; though it might be quite unproductive. To probe a

child's mind after the lapse of six weeks, not for facts which the child had seen and understood, but to get at those which were in their nature beyond him, did not promise much; yet when every obvious channel is blocked we grope towards the small and obscure. There was nothing else left to do; after that he would allow the enigma to drop into the abyss of undiscoverable things.

It was about daybreak when he had reached this decision, and he at once arose. He locked up the house and went out into the green patch which merged in heather further on. In front of the white garden-palings the path branched into three like a broad-arrow. The road to the right led to the Quiet Woman and its neighbourhood; the middle track led to Mistover Knap; the left-hand track led over the hill to another part of Mistover, where the child lived. On inclining into the latter path Yeobright felt a creeping chilliness, familiar enough to most people, and probably caused by the unsunned morning air. In after days he thought of it as a thing of singular significance.

When Yeobright reached the cottage of Susan Nunsuch, the mother of the boy he sought, he found that the inmates were not yet astir. But in upland hamlets the transition from a-bed to abroad is surprisingly swift and easy. There no dense partition of yawns and toilets divides humanity by night from humanity by day. Yeobright tapped at the upper window-sill, which he could reach with his walking-stick; and in three or four minutes the woman came down.

It was not till this moment that Clym recollected her to be the person who had behaved so barbarously to Eustacia. It partly explained the insuavity with which the woman greeted him. Moreover, the boy had been ailing again; and Susan now, as ever since the night when he had been pressed into Eustacia's service at the bonfire, attributed his indispositions to Eustacia's influence as a witch. It was one of those sentiments which lurk like moles underneath the visible surface of manners, and may have been kept alive by Eustacia's entreaty to the captain, at the time that he had intended to prosecute Susan for the pricking in church, to let the matter drop; which he accordingly had done.

Yeobright overcame his repugnance, for Susan had at least borne his mother no ill-will. He asked kindly for the boy; but her manner did not improve.

"I wish to see him," continued Yeobright, with some hesitation; "to ask him if he remembers anything more of his walk with my mother than what he has previously told."

She regarded him in a peculiar and criticizing manner. To anybody but a half-blind man it would have said, "You want another of the knocks which have already laid you so low."

She called the boy downstairs, asked Clym to sit down on a stool, and

continued, "Now, Johnny, tell Mr. Yeobright anything you can call to mind."

"You have not forgotten how you walked with the poor lady on that hot day?" said Clym.

"No," said the boy.

"And what she said to you?"

The boy repeated the exact words he had used on entering the hut. Yeobright rested his elbow on the table and shaded his face with his hand; and the mother looked as if she wondered how a man could want more of what had stung him so deeply.

"She was going to Alderworth when you first met her?"

"No; she was coming away."

"That can't be."

"Yes; she walked along with me. I was coming away too."

"Then where did you first see her?"

"At your house."

"Attend, and speak the truth!" said Clym sternly.

"Yes, sir; at your house was where I seed her first."

Clym started up, and Susan smiled in an expectant way which did not embellish her face; it seemed to mean, "Something sinister is coming!"

"What did she do at my house?"

"She went and sat under the trees at the Devil's Bellows."

"Good God! this is all news to me!"

"You never told me this before?" said Susan.

"No, mother; because I didn't like to tell 'ee I had been so far. I was picking black-hearts, and went further than I meant."

"What did she do then?" said Yeobright.

"Looked at a man who came up and went into your house."

"That was myself--a furze-cutter, with brambles in his hand."

"No; 'twas not you. 'Twas a gentleman. You had gone in afore."

"Who was he?"

"I don't know."

"Now tell me what happened next."

"The poor lady went and knocked at your door, and the lady with black hair looked out of the side window at her."

The boy's mother turned to Clym and said, "This is something you didn't expect?"

Yeobright took no more notice of her than if he had been of stone. "Go on, go on," he said hoarsely to the boy.

"And when she saw the young lady look out of the window the old lady knocked again; and when nobody came she took up the furze-hook and looked at it, and put it down again, and then she looked at the faggot-bonds; and then she went away, and walked across to me, and blowed her breath very hard, like this. We walked on together, she and I, and I talked to her and she talked to me a bit, but not much, because she couldn't blow her breath."

"O!" murmured Clym, in a low tone, and bowed his head. "Let's have more," he said.

"She couldn't talk much, and she couldn't walk; and her face was, O so queer!"

"How was her face?"

"Like yours is now."

The woman looked at Yeobright, and beheld him colourless, in a cold sweat. "Isn't there meaning in it?" she said stealthily. "What do you think of her now?"

"Silence!" said Clym fiercely. And, turning to the boy, "And then you left her to die?"

"No," said the woman, quickly and angrily. "He did not leave her to die! She sent him away. Whoever says he forsook her says what's not true."

"Trouble no more about that," answered Clym, with a quivering mouth. "What he did is a trifle in comparison with what he saw. Door kept shut, did you say? Kept shut, she looking out of window? Good heart of God!--what does it mean?"

The child shrank away from the gaze of his questioner.

"He said so," answered the mother, "and Johnny's a God-fearing boy and tells no lies."

"'Cast off by my son!' No, by my best life, dear mother, it is not so! But by your son's, your son's--May all murderesses get the torment they deserve!"

With these words Yeobright went forth from the little dwelling. The pupils of his eyes, fixed steadfastly on blankness, were vaguely lit with an icy shine; his mouth had passed into the phase more or less imaginatively rendered in studies of Oedipus. The strangest deeds were possible to his mood. But they were not possible to his situation. Instead of there being before him the pale face of Eustacia, and a masculine shape unknown, there was only the imperturbable countenance of the heath, which, having defied the cataclysmal onsets of centuries, reduced to insignificance by its seamed and antique features the wildest turmoil of a single man.

III

Eustacia Dresses Herself on a Black Morning

A consciousness of a vast impassivity in all which lay around him took possession even of Yeobright in his wild walk towards Alderworth. He had once before felt in his own person this overpowering of the fervid by the inanimate; but then it had tended to enervate a passion far sweeter than that which at present pervaded him. It was once when he stood parting from Eustacia in the moist still levels beyond the hills.

But dismissing all this he went onward home, and came to the front of his house. The blinds of Eustacia's bedroom were still closely drawn, for she was no early riser. All the life visible was in the shape of a solitary thrush cracking a small snail upon the door-stone for his breakfast, and his tapping seemed a loud noise in the general silence which prevailed; but on going to the door Clym found it unfastened, the young girl who attended upon Eustacia being astir in the back part of the premises. Yeobright entered and went straight to his wife's room.

The noise of his arrival must have aroused her, for when he opened the door she was standing before the looking-glass in her night-dress, the ends of her hair gathered into one hand, with which she was coiling the whole mass round her head, previous to beginning toilette operations. She was not a woman given to speaking first at a meeting, and she allowed Clym to walk across in silence, without turning her head. He came behind her, and she saw his face in the glass. It was ashy, haggard, and terrible. Instead of starting towards him in

sorrowful surprise, as even Eustacia, undemonstrative wife as she was, would have done in days before she burdened herself with a secret, she remained motionless, looking at him in the glass. And while she looked the carmine flush with which warmth and sound sleep had suffused her cheeks and neck dissolved from view, and the deathlike pallor in his face flew across into hers. He was close enough to see this, and the sight instigated his tongue.

"You know what is the matter," he said huskily. "I see it in your face."

Her hand relinquished the rope of hair and dropped to her side, and the pile of tresses, no longer supported, fell from the crown of her head about her shoulders and over the white night-gown. She made no reply.

"Speak to me," said Yeobright peremptorily.

The blanching process did not cease in her, and her lips now became as white as her face. She turned to him and said, "Yes, Clym, I'll speak to you. Why do you return so early? Can I do anything for you?"

"Yes, you can listen to me. It seems that my wife is not very well?"

"Why?"

"Your face, my dear; your face. Or perhaps it is the pale morning light which takes your colour away? Now I am going to reveal a secret to you. Ha-ha!"

"O, that is ghastly!"

"What?"

"Your laugh."

"There's reason for ghastliness. Eustacia, you have held my happiness in the hollow of your hand, and like a devil you have dashed it down!"

She started back from the dressing-table, retreated a few steps from him, and looked him in the face. "Ah! you think to frighten me," she said, with a slight laugh. "Is it worth while? I am undefended, and alone."

"How extraordinary!"

"What do you mean?"

"As there is ample time I will tell you, though you know well enough. I mean that it is extraordinary that you should be alone in my absence. Tell me, now, where is he who was with you on the afternoon of the thirty-first of August? Under the bed? Up the chimney?"

A shudder overcame her and shook the light fabric of her night-dress throughout. "I do not remember dates so exactly," she said. "I cannot recollect that anybody was with me besides yourself."

"The day I mean," said Yeobright, his voice growing louder and harsher, "was the day you shut the door against my mother and killed her. O, it is too much--too bad!" He leant over the footpiece of the bedstead for a few moments, with his back towards her; then rising again: "Tell me, tell me! tell me--do you hear?" he cried, rushing up to her and seizing her by the loose folds of her sleeve.

The superstratum of timidity which often overlies those who are daring and defiant at heart had been passed through, and the mettlesome substance of the woman was reached. The red blood inundated her face, previously so pale.

"What are you going to do?" she said in a low voice, regarding him with a proud smile. "You will not alarm me by holding on so; but it would be a pity to tear my sleeve."

Instead of letting go he drew her closer to him. "Tell me the particulars of--my mother's death," he said in a hard, panting whisper; "or--I'll--I'll--"

"Clym," she answered slowly, "do you think you dare do anything to

me that I dare not bear? But before you strike me listen. You will get nothing from me by a blow, even though it should kill me, as it probably will. But perhaps you do not wish me to speak--killing may be all you mean?"

"Kill you! Do you expect it?"

"I do."

"Why?"

"No less degree of rage against me will match your previous grief for her."

"Phew--I shall not kill you," he said contemptuously, as if under a sudden change of purpose. "I did think of it; but--I shall not. That would be making a martyr of you, and sending you to where she is; and I would keep you away from her till the universe come to an end, if I could."

"I almost wish you would kill me," said she with gloomy bitterness. "It is with no strong desire, I assure you, that I play the part I have lately played on earth. You are no blessing, my husband."

"You shut the door--you looked out of the window upon her--you had a man in the house with you--you sent her away to die. The

inhumanity--the treachery--I will not touch you--stand away from me--and confess every word!"

"Never! I'll hold my tongue like the very death that I don't mind meeting, even though I can clear myself of half you believe by speaking. Yes. I will! Who of any dignity would take the trouble to clear cobwebs from a wild man's mind after such language as this? No; let him go on, and think his narrow thoughts, and run his head into the mire. I have other cares."

"'Tis too much--but I must spare you."

"Poor charity."

"By my wretched soul you sting me, Eustacia! I can keep it up, and hotly too. Now, then, madam, tell me his name!"

"Never, I am resolved."

"How often does he write to you? Where does he put his letters--when does he meet you? Ah, his letters! Do you tell me his name?"

"I do not."

"Then I'll find it myself." His eyes had fallen upon a small desk that stood near, on which she was accustomed to write her letters.

He went to it. It was locked.

"Unlock this!"

"You have no right to say it. That's mine."

Without another word he seized the desk and dashed it to the floor. The hinge burst open, and a number of letters tumbled out.

"Stay!" said Eustacia, stepping before him with more excitement than she had hitherto shown.

"Come, come! stand away! I must see them."

She looked at the letters as they lay, checked her feeling, and moved indifferently aside; when he gathered them up, and examined them.

By no stretch of meaning could any but a harmless construction be placed upon a single one of the letters themselves. The solitary exception was an empty envelope directed to her, and the handwriting was Wildeve's. Yeobright held it up. Eustacia was doggedly silent.

"Can you read, madam? Look at this envelope. Doubtless we shall find more soon, and what was inside them. I shall no doubt be gratified by learning in good time what a well-finished and full-blown adept in a certain trade my lady is."

"Do you say it to me--do you?" she gasped.

He searched further, but found nothing more. "What was in this letter?" he said.

"Ask the writer. Am I your hound that you should talk to me in this way?"

"Do you brave me? do you stand me out, mistress? Answer. Don't look at me with those eyes as if you would bewitch me again! Sooner than that I die. You refuse to answer?"

"I wouldn't tell you after this, if I were as innocent as the sweetest babe in heaven!"

"Which you are not."

"Certainly I am not absolutely," she replied. "I have not done what you suppose; but if to have done no harm at all is the only innocence recognized, I am beyond forgiveness. But I require no help from your conscience."

"You can resist, and resist again! Instead of hating you I could, I think, mourn for and pity you, if you were contrite, and would confess all. Forgive you I never can. I don't speak of your lover--I will

give you the benefit of the doubt in that matter, for it only affects me personally. But the other: had you half-killed ME, had it been that you wilfully took the sight away from these feeble eyes of mine, I could have forgiven you. But THAT'S too much for nature!"

"Say no more. I will do without your pity. But I would have saved you from uttering what you will regret."

"I am going away now. I shall leave you."

"You need not go, as I am going myself. You will keep just as far away from me by staying here."

"Call her to mind--think of her--what goodness there was in her: it showed in every line of her face! Most women, even when but slightly annoyed, show a flicker of evil in some curl of the mouth or some corner of the cheek; but as for her, never in her angriest moments was there anything malicious in her look. She was angered quickly, but she forgave just as readily, and underneath her pride there was the meekness of a child. What came of it?--what cared you? You hated her just as she was learning to love you. O! couldn't you see what was best for you, but must bring a curse upon me, and agony and death upon her, by doing that cruel deed! What was the fellow's name who was keeping you company and causing you to add cruelty to her to your wrong to me? Was it Wildeve? Was it poor Thomasin's husband? Heaven, what wickedness! Lost your voice, have you? It is natural after

detection of that most noble trick... Eustacia, didn't any tender thought of your own mother lead you to think of being gentle to mine at such a time of weariness? Did not one grain of pity enter your heart as she turned away? Think what a vast opportunity was then lost of beginning a forgiving and honest course. Why did not you kick him out, and let her in, and say I'll be an honest wife and a noble woman from this hour? Had I told you to go and quench eternally our last flickering chance of happiness here you could have done no worse. Well, she's asleep now; and have you a hundred gallants, neither they nor you can insult her any more."

"You exaggerate fearfully," she said in a faint, weary voice; "but I cannot enter into my defence--it is not worth doing. You are nothing to me in future, and the past side of the story may as well remain untold. I have lost all through you, but I have not complained. Your blunders and misfortunes may have been a sorrow to you, but they have been a wrong to me. All persons of refinement have been scared away from me since I sank into the mire of marriage. Is this your cherishing--to put me into a hut like this, and keep me like the wife of a hind? You deceived me--not by words, but by appearances, which are less seen through than words. But the place will serve as well as any other--as somewhere to pass from--into my grave." Her words were smothered in her throat, and her head drooped down.

"I don't know what you mean by that. Am I the cause of your sin?" (Eustacia made a trembling motion towards him.) "What, you can begin

to shed tears and offer me your hand? Good God! can you? No, not I. I'll not commit the fault of taking that." (The hand she had offered dropped nervelessly, but the tears continued flowing.) "Well, yes, I'll take it, if only for the sake of my own foolish kisses that were wasted there before I knew what I cherished. How bewitched I was! How could there be any good in a woman that everybody spoke ill of?"

"O, O, O!" she cried, breaking down at last; and, shaking with sobs which choked her, she sank upon her knees. "O, will you have done! O, you are too relentless--there's a limit to the cruelty of savages! I have held out long--but you crush me down. I beg for mercy--I cannot bear this any longer--it is inhuman to go further with this! If I had--killed your--mother with my own hand--I should not deserve such a scourging to the bone as this. O, O! God have mercy upon a miserable woman!... You have beaten me in this game--I beg you to stay your hand in pity!... I confess that I--wilfully did not undo the door the first time she knocked--but--I--should have unfastened it the second--if I had not thought you had gone to do it yourself. When I found you had not I opened it, but she was gone. That's the extent of my crime--towards HER. Best natures commit bad faults sometimes, don't they?--I think they do. Now I will leave you--for ever and ever!"

"Tell all, and I WILL pity you. Was the man in the house with you Wildeve?"

"I cannot tell," she said desperately through her sobbing. "Don't

insist further--I cannot tell. I am going from this house. We cannot both stay here."

"You need not go: I will go. You can stay here."

"No, I will dress, and then I will go."

"Where?"

"Where I came from, or ELSEwhere."

She hastily dressed herself, Yeobright moodily walking up and down the room the whole of the time. At last all her things were on. Her little hands quivered so violently as she held them to her chin to fasten her bonnet that she could not tie the strings, and after a few moments she relinquished the attempt. Seeing this he moved forward and said, "Let me tie them."

She assented in silence, and lifted her chin. For once at least in her life she was totally oblivious of the charm of her attitude. But he was not, and he turned his eyes aside, that he might not be tempted to softness.

The strings were tied; she turned from him. "Do you still prefer going away yourself to my leaving you?" he inquired again.

"I do."

"Very well--let it be. And when you will confess to the man I may pity you."

She flung her shawl about her and went downstairs, leaving him standing in the room.

Eustacia had not long been gone when there came a knock at the door of the bedroom; and Yeobright said, "Well?"

It was the servant; and she replied, "Somebody from Mrs. Wildeve's have called to tell 'ee that the mis'ess and the baby are getting on wonderful well, and the baby's name is to be Eustacia Clementine." And the girl retired.

"What a mockery!" said Clym. "This unhappy marriage of mine to be perpetuated in that child's name!"

IV

Eustacia's journey was at first as vague in direction as that of thistledown on the wind. She did not know what to do. She wished it had been night instead of morning, that she might at least have borne her misery without the possibility of being seen. Tracing mile after mile along between the dying ferns and the wet white spiders' webs, she at length turned her steps towards her grandfather's house. She found the front door closed and locked. Mechanically she went round to the end where the stable was, and on looking in at the stable-door she saw Charley standing within.

"Captain Vye is not at home?" she said.

"No, ma'am," said the lad in a flutter of feeling; "he's gone to Weatherbury, and won't be home till night. And the servant is gone home for a holiday. So the house is locked up."

Eustacia's face was not visible to Charley as she stood at the doorway, her back being to the sky, and the stable but indifferently lighted; but the wildness of her manner arrested his attention. She turned and walked away across the enclosure to the gate, and was hidden by the bank.

When she had disappeared Charley, with misgiving in his eyes, slowly

came from the stable door, and going to another point in the bank he looked over. Eustacia was leaning against it on the outside, her face covered with her hands, and her head pressing the dewy heather which bearded the bank's outer side. She appeared to be utterly indifferent to the circumstance that her bonnet, hair, and garments were becoming wet and disarranged by the moisture of her cold, harsh pillow. Clearly something was wrong.

Charley had always regarded Eustacia as Eustacia had regarded Clym when she first beheld him--as a romantic and sweet vision, scarcely incarnate. He had been so shut off from her by the dignity of her look and the pride of her speech, except at that one blissful interval when he was allowed to hold her hand, that he had hardly deemed her a woman, wingless and earthly, subject to household conditions and domestic jars. The inner details of her life he had only conjectured. She had been a lovely wonder, predestined to an orbit in which the whole of his own was but a point; and this sight of her leaning like a helpless, despairing creature against a wild wet bank filled him with an amazed horror. He could no longer remain where he was. Leaping over, he came up, touched her with his finger, and said tenderly, "You are poorly, ma'am. What can I do?"

Eustacia started up, and said, "Ah, Charley--you have followed me. You did not think when I left home in the summer that I should come back like this!"

"I did not, dear ma'am. Can I help you now?"

"I am afraid not. I wish I could get into the house. I feel giddy--that's all."

"Lean on my arm, ma'am, till we get to the porch, and I will try to open the door."

He supported her to the porch, and there depositing her on a seat hastened to the back, climbed to a window by the help of a ladder, and descending inside opened the door. Next he assisted her into the room, where there was an old-fashioned horsehair settee as large as a donkey-waggon. She lay down here, and Charley covered her with a cloak he found in the hall.

"Shall I get you something to eat and drink?" he said.

"If you please, Charley. But I suppose there is no fire?"

"I can light it, ma'am."

He vanished, and she heard a splitting of wood and a blowing of bellows; and presently he returned, saying, "I have lighted a fire in the kitchen, and now I'll light one here."

He lit the fire, Eustacia dreamily observing him from her couch. When

it was blazing up he said, "Shall I wheel you round in front of it, ma'am, as the morning is chilly?"

"Yes, if you like."

"Shall I go and bring the victuals now?"

"Yes, do," she murmured languidly.

When he had gone, and the dull sounds occasionally reached her ears of his movements in the kitchen, she forgot where she was, and had for a moment to consider by an effort what the sounds meant. After an interval which seemed short to her whose thoughts were elsewhere, he came in with a tray on which steamed tea and toast, though it was nearly lunch-time.

"Place it on the table," she said. "I shall be ready soon."

He did so, and retired to the door; when, however, he perceived that she did not move he came back a few steps.

"Let me hold it to you, if you don't wish to get up," said Charley.
He brought the tray to the front of the couch, where he knelt down, adding, "I will hold it for you."

Eustacia sat up and poured out a cup of tea. "You are very kind to

me, Charley," she murmured as she sipped.

"Well, I ought to be," said he diffidently, taking great trouble not to rest his eyes upon her, though this was their only natural position, Eustacia being immediately before him. "You have been kind to me."

"How have I?" said Eustacia.

"You let me hold your hand when you were a maiden at home."

"Ah, so I did. Why did I do that? My mind is lost--it had to do with the mumming, had it not?"

"Yes, you wanted to go in my place."

"I remember. I do indeed remember--too well!"

She again became utterly downcast; and Charley, seeing that she was not going to eat or drink any more, took away the tray.

Afterwards he occasionally came in to see if the fire was burning, to ask her if she wanted anything, to tell her that the wind had shifted from south to west, to ask her if she would like him to gather her some blackberries; to all which inquiries she replied in the negative or with indifference.

She remained on the settee some time longer, when she aroused herself and went upstairs. The room in which she had formerly slept still remained much as she had left it, and the recollection that this forced upon her of her own greatly changed and infinitely worsened situation again set on her face the undetermined and formless misery which it had worn on her first arrival. She peeped into her grandfather's room, through which the fresh autumn air was blowing from the open window. Her eye was arrested by what was a familiar sight enough, though it broke upon her now with a new significance.

It was a brace of pistols, hanging near the head of her grandfather's bed, which he always kept there loaded, as a precaution against possible burglars, the house being very lonely. Eustacia regarded them long, as if they were the page of a book in which she read a new and a strange matter. Quickly, like one afraid of herself, she returned downstairs and stood in deep thought.

"If I could only do it!" she said. "It would be doing much good to myself and all connected with me, and no harm to a single one."

The idea seemed to gather force within her, and she remained in a fixed attitude nearly ten minutes, when a certain finality was expressed in her gaze, and no longer the blankness of indecision.

She turned and went up the second time--softly and stealthily now--and

entered her grandfather's room, her eyes at once seeking the head of the bed. The pistols were gone.

The instant quashing of her purpose by their absence affected her brain as a sudden vacuum affects the body: she nearly fainted. Who had done this? There was only one person on the premises besides herself. Eustacia involuntarily turned to the open window which overlooked the garden as far as the bank that bounded it. On the summit of the latter stood Charley, sufficiently elevated by its height to see into the room. His gaze was directed eagerly and solicitously upon her.

She went downstairs to the door and beckoned to him.

"You have taken them away?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Why did you do it?"

"I saw you looking at them too long."

"What has that to do with it?"

"You have been heart-broken all the morning, as if you did not want to live."

"Well?"

"And I could not bear to leave them in your way. There was meaning in your look at them."

"Where are they now?"

"Locked up."

"Where?"

"In the stable."

"Give them to me."

"No, ma'am."

"You refuse?"

"I do. I care too much for you to give 'em up."

She turned aside, her face for the first time softening from the stony immobility of the earlier day, and the corners of her mouth resuming something of that delicacy of cut which was always lost in her moments of despair. At last she confronted him again.

"Why should I not die if I wish?" she said tremulously. "I have made a bad bargain with life, and I am weary of it--weary. And now you have hindered my escape. O, why did you, Charley! What makes death painful except the thought of others' grief?--and that is absent in my case, for not a sigh would follow me!"

"Ah, it is trouble that has done this! I wish in my very soul that he who brought it about might die and rot, even if 'tis transportation to say it!"

"Charley, no more of that. What do you mean to do about this you have seen?"

"Keep it close as night, if you promise not to think of it again."

"You need not fear. The moment has passed. I promise." She then went away, entered the house, and lay down.

Later in the afternoon her grandfather returned. He was about to question her categorically; but on looking at her he withheld his words.

"Yes, it is too bad to talk of," she slowly returned in answer to his glance. "Can my old room be got ready for me tonight, grandfather? I shall want to occupy it again."

He did not ask what it all meant, or why she had left her husband, but ordered the room to be prepared.

V

An Old Move Inadvertently Repeated

Charley's attentions to his former mistress were unbounded. The only solace to his own trouble lay in his attempts to relieve hers. Hour after hour he considered her wants: he thought of her presence there with a sort of gratitude, and, while uttering imprecations on the cause of her unhappiness, in some measure blessed the result. Perhaps she would always remain there, he thought, and then he would be as happy as he had been before. His dread was lest she should think fit to return to Alderworth, and in that dread his eyes, with all the inquisitiveness of affection, frequently sought her face when she was not observing him, as he would have watched the head of a stockdove to learn if it contemplated flight. Having once really succoured her, and possibly preserved her from the rashest of acts, he mentally assumed in addition a guardian's responsibility for her welfare.

For this reason he busily endeavoured to provide her with pleasant distractions, bringing home curious objects which he found in the heath, such as white trumpet-shaped mosses, red-headed lichens, stone arrow-heads used by the old tribes on Egdon, and faceted crystals from the hollows of flints. These he deposited on the premises in such positions that she should see them as if by accident.

A week passed, Eustacia never going out of the house. Then she walked into the enclosed plot and looked through her grandfather's spy-glass, as she had been in the habit of doing before her marriage. One day she saw, at a place where the high-road crossed the distant valley, a heavily laden waggon passing along. It was piled with household furniture. She looked again and again, and recognized it to be her own. In the evening her grandfather came indoors with a rumour that Yeobright had removed that day from Alderworth to the old house at Blooms-End.

On another occasion when reconnoitring thus she beheld two female figures walking in the vale. The day was fine and clear; and the persons not being more than half a mile off she could see their every detail with the telescope. The woman walking in front carried a white bundle in her arms, from one end of which hung a long appendage of drapery; and when the walkers turned, so that the sun fell more directly upon them, Eustacia could see that the object was a baby. She called Charley, and asked him if he knew who they were, though she well guessed.

"Mrs. Wildeve and the nurse-girl," said Charley.

"The nurse is carrying the baby?" said Eustacia.

"No, 'tis Mrs. Wildeve carrying that," he answered, "and the nurse walks behind carrying nothing."

The lad was in good spirits that day, for the Fifth of November had again come round, and he was planning yet another scheme to divert her from her too absorbing thoughts. For two successive years his mistress had seemed to take pleasure in lighting a bonfire on the bank overlooking the valley; but this year she had apparently quite forgotten the day and the customary deed. He was careful not to remind her, and went on with his secret preparations for a cheerful surprise, the more zealously that he had been absent last time and unable to assist. At every vacant minute he hastened to gather furze-stumps, thorn-tree roots, and other solid materials from the adjacent slopes, hiding them from cursory view.

The evening came, and Eustacia was still seemingly unconscious of the anniversary. She had gone indoors after her survey through the glass, and had not been visible since. As soon as it was quite dark Charley began to build the bonfire, choosing precisely that spot on the bank which Eustacia had chosen at previous times.

When all the surrounding bonfires had burst into existence Charley kindled his, and arranged its fuel so that it should not require tending for some time. He then went back to the house, and lingered round the door and windows till she should by some means or other learn of his achievement and come out to witness it. But the shutters were closed, the door remained shut, and no heed whatever seemed to be taken of his performance. Not liking to call her he went back and replenished the fire, continuing to do this for more than half an hour. It was not till his stock of fuel had greatly diminished that he went to the back door and sent in to beg that Mrs. Yeobright would open the window-shutters and see the sight outside.

Eustacia, who had been sitting listlessly in the parlour, started up at the intelligence and flung open the shutters. Facing her on the bank blazed the fire, which at once sent a ruddy glare into the room where she was, and overpowered the candles.

"Well done, Charley!" said Captain Vye from the chimney-corner. "But I hope it is not my wood that he's burning... Ah, it was this time last year that I met with that man Venn, bringing home Thomasin Yeobright--to be sure it was! Well, who would have thought that girl's troubles would have ended so well? What a snipe you were in that matter, Eustacia! Has your husband written to you yet?"

"No," said Eustacia, looking vaguely through the window at the fire, which just then so much engaged her mind that she did not resent her

grandfather's blunt opinion. She could see Charley's form on the bank, shovelling and stirring the fire; and there flashed upon her imagination some other form which that fire might call up.

She left the room, put on her garden-bonnet and cloak, and went out. Reaching the bank, she looked over with a wild curiosity and misgiving, when Charley said to her, with a pleased sense of himself, "I made it o' purpose for you, ma'am."

"Thank you," she said hastily. "But I wish you to put it out now."

"It will soon burn down," said Charley, rather disappointed. "Is it not a pity to knock it out?"

"I don't know," she musingly answered.

They stood in silence, broken only by the crackling of the flames, till Charley, perceiving that she did not want to talk to him, moved reluctantly away.

Eustacia remained within the bank looking at the fire, intending to go indoors, yet lingering still. Had she not by her situation been inclined to hold in indifference all things honoured of the gods and of men she would probably have come away. But her state was so hopeless that she could play with it. To have lost is less disturbing than to wonder if we may possibly have won: and Eustacia could now,

like other people at such a stage, take a standing-point outside herself, observe herself as a disinterested spectator, and think what a sport for Heaven this woman Eustacia was.

While she stood she heard a sound. It was the splash of a stone in the pond.

Had Eustacia received the stone full in the bosom her heart could not have given a more decided thump. She had thought of the possibility of such a signal in answer to that which had been unwittingly given by Charley; but she had not expected it yet. How prompt Wildeve was! Yet how could he think her capable of deliberately wishing to renew their assignations now? An impulse to leave the spot, a desire to stay, struggled within her; and the desire held its own. More than that it did not do, for she refrained even from ascending the bank and looking over. She remained motionless, not disturbing a muscle of her face or raising her eyes; for were she to turn up her face the fire on the bank would shine upon it, and Wildeve might be looking down.

There was a second splash into the pond.

Why did he stay so long without advancing and looking over? Curiosity had its way: she ascended one or two of the earth-steps in the bank and glanced out.

Wildeve was before her. He had come forward after throwing the last

pebble, and the fire now shone into each of their faces from the bank stretching breast-high between them.

"I did not light it!" cried Eustacia quickly. "It was lit without my knowledge. Don't, don't come over to me!"

"Why have you been living here all these days without telling me? You have left your home. I fear I am something to blame for this?"

"I did not let in his mother; that's how it is!"

"You do not deserve what you have got, Eustacia; you are in great misery; I see it in your eyes, your mouth, and all over you. My poor, poor girl!" He stepped over the bank. "You are beyond everything unhappy!"

"No, no; not exactly--"

"It has been pushed too far--it is killing you: I do think it!"

Her usually quiet breathing had grown quicker with his words. "I--I--" she began, and then burst into quivering sobs, shaken to the very heart by the unexpected voice of pity--a sentiment whose existence in relation to herself she had almost forgotten.

This outbreak of weeping took Eustacia herself so much by surprise

that she could not leave off, and she turned aside from him in some shame, though turning hid nothing from him. She sobbed on desperately; then the outpour lessened, and she became quieter. Wildeve had resisted the impulse to clasp her, and stood without speaking.

"Are you not ashamed of me, who used never to be a crying animal?" she asked in a weak whisper as she wiped her eyes. "Why didn't you go away? I wish you had not seen quite all that; it reveals too much by half."

"You might have wished it, because it makes me as sad as you," he said with emotion and deference. "As for revealing--the word is impossible between us two."

"I did not send for you--don't forget it, Damon; I am in pain, but I did not send for you! As a wife, at least, I've been straight."

"Never mind--I came. O, Eustacia, forgive me for the harm I have done you in these two past years! I see more and more that I have been your ruin."

"Not you. This place I live in."

"Ah, your generosity may naturally make you say that. But I am the culprit. I should either have done more or nothing at all."

"In what way?"

"I ought never to have hunted you out, or, having done it, I ought to have persisted in retaining you. But of course I have no right to talk of that now. I will only ask this: can I do anything for you? Is there anything on the face of the earth that a man can do to make you happier than you are at present? If there is, I will do it. You may command me, Eustacia, to the limit of my influence; and don't forget that I am richer now. Surely something can be done to save you from this! Such a rare plant in such a wild place it grieves me to see. Do you want anything bought? Do you want to go anywhere? Do you want to escape the place altogether? Only say it, and I'll do anything to put an end to those tears, which but for me would never have been at all."

"We are each married to another person," she said faintly; "and assistance from you would have an evil sound--after--after--"

"Well, there's no preventing slanderers from having their fill at any time; but you need not be afraid. Whatever I may feel I promise you on my word of honour never to speak to you about--or act upon--until you say I may. I know my duty to Thomasin quite as well as I know my duty to you as a woman unfairly treated. What shall I assist you in?"

"In getting away from here."

"Where do you wish to go to?"

"I have a place in my mind. If you could help me as far as Budmouth I can do all the rest. Steamers sail from there across the Channel, and so I can get to Paris, where I want to be. Yes," she pleaded earnestly, "help me to get to Budmouth harbour without my grandfather's or my husband's knowledge, and I can do all the rest."

"Will it be safe to leave you there alone?"

"Yes, yes. I know Budmouth well."

"Shall I go with you? I am rich now."

She was silent.

"Say yes, sweet!"

She was silent still.

"Well, let me know when you wish to go. We shall be at our present house till December; after that we remove to Casterbridge. Command me in anything till that time."

"I will think of this," she said hurriedly. "Whether I can honestly make use of you as a friend, or must close with you as a lover--that

is what I must ask myself. If I wish to go and decide to accept your company I will signal to you some evening at eight o'clock punctually, and this will mean that you are to be ready with a horse and trap at twelve o'clock the same night to drive me to Budmouth harbour in time for the morning boat."

"I will look out every night at eight, and no signal shall escape me."

"Now please go away. If I decide on this escape I can only meet you once more unless--I cannot go without you. Go--I cannot bear it longer. Go--go!"

Wildeve slowly went up the steps and descended into the darkness on the other side; and as he walked he glanced back, till the bank blotted out her form from his further view.

VI

Thomasin Argues with Her Cousin, and He Writes a Letter

Yeobright was at this time at Blooms-End, hoping that Eustacia would return to him. The removal of furniture had been accomplished only

that day, though Clym had lived in the old house for more than a week. He had spent the time in working about the premises, sweeping leaves from the garden-paths, cutting dead stalks from the flower-beds, and nailing up creepers which had been displaced by the autumn winds. He took no particular pleasure in these deeds, but they formed a screen between himself and despair. Moreover, it had become a religion with him to preserve in good condition all that had lapsed from his mother's hands to his own.

During these operations he was constantly on the watch for Eustacia. That there should be no mistake about her knowing where to find him he had ordered a notice board to be affixed to the garden gate at Alderworth, signifying in white letters whither he had removed. When a leaf floated to the earth he turned his head, thinking it might be her footfall. A bird searching for worms in the mould of the flower-beds sounded like her hand on the latch of the gate; and at dusk, when soft, strange ventriloquisms came from holes in the ground, hollow stalks, curled dead leaves, and other crannies wherein breezes, worms, and insects can work their will, he fancied that they were Eustacia, standing without and breathing wishes of reconciliation.

Up to this hour he had persevered in his resolve not to invite her back. At the same time the severity with which he had treated her lulled the sharpness of his regret for his mother, and awoke some of his old solicitude for his mother's supplanter. Harsh feelings produce harsh usage, and this by reaction quenches the sentiments that

gave it birth. The more he reflected the more he softened. But to look upon his wife as innocence in distress was impossible, though he could ask himself whether he had given her quite time enough--if he had not come a little too suddenly upon her on that sombre morning.

Now that the first flush of his anger had paled he was disinclined to ascribe to her more than an indiscreet friendship with Wildeve, for there had not appeared in her manner the signs of dishonour. And this once admitted, an absolutely dark interpretation of her act towards his mother was no longer forced upon him.

On the evening of the fifth November his thoughts of Eustacia were intense. Echoes from those past times when they had exchanged tender words all the day long came like the diffused murmur of a seashore left miles behind. "Surely," he said, "she might have brought herself to communicate with me before now, and confess honestly what Wildeve was to her."

Instead of remaining at home that night he determined to go and see Thomasin and her husband. If he found opportunity he would allude to the cause of the separation between Eustacia and himself, keeping silence, however, on the fact that there was a third person in his house when his mother was turned away. If it proved that Wildeve was innocently there he would doubtless openly mention it. If he were there with unjust intentions Wildeve, being a man of quick feeling, might possibly say something to reveal the extent to which Eustacia

was compromised.

But on reaching his cousin's house he found that only Thomasin was at home, Wildeve being at that time on his way towards the bonfire innocently lit by Charley at Mistover. Thomasin then, as always, was glad to see Clym, and took him to inspect the sleeping baby, carefully screening the candlelight from the infant's eyes with her hand.

"Tamsin, have you heard that Eustacia is not with me now?" he said when they had sat down again.

"No," said Thomasin, alarmed.

"And not that I have left Alderworth?"

"No. I never hear tidings from Alderworth unless you bring them. What is the matter?"

Clym in a disturbed voice related to her his visit to Susan Nunsuch's boy, the revelation he had made, and what had resulted from his charging Eustacia with having wilfully and heartlessly done the deed. He suppressed all mention of Wildeve's presence with her.

"All this, and I not knowing it!" murmured Thomasin in an awestruck tone. "Terrible! What could have made her--O, Eustacia! And when you found it out you went in hot haste to her? Were you too cruel?--or is

she really so wicked as she seems?"

"Can a man be too cruel to his mother's enemy?"

"I can fancy so."

"Very well, then--I'll admit that he can. But now what is to be done?"

"Make it up again--if a quarrel so deadly can ever be made up. I almost wish you had not told me. But do try to be reconciled. There are ways, after all, if you both wish to."

"I don't know that we do both wish to make it up," said Clym. "If she had wished it, would she not have sent to me by this time?"

"You seem to wish to, and yet you have not sent to her."

"True; but I have been tossed to and fro in doubt if I ought, after such strong provocation. To see me now, Thomasin, gives you no idea of what I have been; of what depths I have descended to in these few last days. O, it was a bitter shame to shut out my mother like that! Can I ever forget it, or even agree to see her again?"

"She might not have known that anything serious would come of it, and perhaps she did not mean to keep aunt out altogether."

"She says herself that she did not. But the fact remains that keep her out she did."

"Believe her sorry, and send for her."

"How if she will not come?"

"It will prove her guilty, by showing that it is her habit to nourish enmity. But I do not think that for a moment."

"I will do this. I will wait for a day or two longer--not longer than two days certainly; and if she does not send to me in that time I will indeed send to her. I thought to have seen Wildeve here tonight. Is he from home?"

Thomasin blushed a little. "No," she said. "He is merely gone out for a walk."

"Why didn't he take you with him? The evening is fine. You want fresh air as well as he."

"Oh, I don't care for going anywhere; besides, there is baby."

"Yes, yes. Well, I have been thinking whether I should not consult your husband about this as well as you," said Clym steadily.

"I fancy I would not," she quickly answered. "It can do no good."

Her cousin looked her in the face. No doubt Thomasin was ignorant that her husband had any share in the events of that tragic afternoon; but her countenance seemed to signify that she concealed some suspicion or thought of the reputed tender relations between Wildeve and Eustacia in days gone by.

Clym, however, could make nothing of it, and he rose to depart, more in doubt than when he came.

"You will write to her in a day or two?" said the young woman earnestly. "I do so hope the wretched separation may come to an end."

"I will," said Clym; "I don't rejoice in my present state at all."

And he left her and climbed over the hill to Blooms-End. Before going to bed he sat down and wrote the following letter:--

MY DEAR EUSTACIA,--I must obey my heart without consulting my reason too closely. Will you come back to me? Do so, and the past shall never be mentioned. I was too severe; but O, Eustacia, the provocation! You don't know, you never will know, what those words of anger cost me which you drew down

upon yourself. All that an honest man can promise you I promise now, which is that from me you shall never suffer anything on this score again. After all the vows we have made, Eustacia, I think we had better pass the remainder of our lives in trying to keep them. Come to me, then, even if you reproach me. I have thought of your sufferings that morning on which I parted from you; I know they were genuine, and they are as much as you ought to bear. Our love must still continue. Such hearts as ours would never have been given us but to be concerned with each other. I could not ask you back at first, Eustacia, for I was unable to persuade myself that he who was with you was not there as a lover. But if you will come and explain distracting appearances I do not question that you can show your honesty to me. Why have you not come before? Do you think I will not listen to you? Surely not, when you remember the kisses and vows we exchanged under the summer moon. Return then, and you shall be warmly welcomed. I can no longer think of you to your prejudice--I am but too much absorbed in justifying you.--Your husband as ever,

CLYM.

"There," he said, as he laid it in his desk, "that's a good thing done. If she does not come before tomorrow night I will send it to

her."

Meanwhile, at the house he had just left Thomasin sat sighing uneasily. Fidelity to her husband had that evening induced her to conceal all suspicion that Wildeve's interest in Eustacia had not ended with his marriage. But she knew nothing positive; and though Clym was her well-beloved cousin there was one nearer to her still.

When, a little later, Wildeve returned from his walk to Mistover, Thomasin said, "Damon, where have you been? I was getting quite frightened, and thought you had fallen into the river. I dislike being in the house by myself."

"Frightened?" he said, touching her cheek as if she were some domestic animal. "Why, I thought nothing could frighten you. It is that you are getting proud, I am sure, and don't like living here since we have risen above our business. Well, it is a tedious matter, this getting a new house; but I couldn't have set about it sooner, unless our ten thousand pounds had been a hundred thousand, when we could have afforded to despise caution."

"No--I don't mind waiting--I would rather stay here twelve months longer than run any risk with baby. But I don't like your vanishing so in the evenings. There's something on your mind--I know there is, Damon. You go about so gloomily, and look at the heath as if it were somebody's gaol instead of a nice wild place to walk in."

He looked towards her with pitying surprise. "What, do you like Egdon Heath?" he said.

"I like what I was born near to; I admire its grim old face."

"Pooh, my dear. You don't know what you like."

"I am sure I do. There's only one thing unpleasant about Egdon."

"What's that?"

"You never take me with you when you walk there. Why do you wander so much in it yourself if you so dislike it?"

The inquiry, though a simple one, was plainly disconcerting, and he sat down before replying. "I don't think you often see me there. Give an instance."

"I will," she answered triumphantly. "When you went out this evening I thought that as baby was asleep I would see where you were going to so mysteriously without telling me. So I ran out and followed behind you. You stopped at the place where the road forks, looked round at the bonfires, and then said, 'Damn it, I'll go!' And you went quickly up the left-hand road. Then I stood and watched you."

Wildeve frowned, afterwards saying, with a forced smile, "Well, what wonderful discovery did you make?"

"There--now you are angry, and we won't talk of this any more." She went across to him, sat on a footstool, and looked up in his face.

"Nonsense!" he said, "that's how you always back out. We will go on with it now we have begun. What did you next see? I particularly want to know."

"Don't be like that, Damon!" she murmured. "I didn't see anything. You vanished out of sight, and then I looked round at the bonfires and came in."

"Perhaps this is not the only time you have dogged my steps. Are you trying to find out something bad about me?"

"Not at all! I have never done such a thing before, and I shouldn't have done it now if words had not sometimes been dropped about you."

"What DO you mean?" he impatiently asked.

"They say--they say you used to go to Alderworth in the evenings, and it puts into my mind what I have heard about--"

Wildeve turned angrily and stood up in front of her. "Now," he said,

flourishing his hand in the air, "just out with it, madam! I demand to know what remarks you have heard."

"Well, I heard that you used to be very fond of Eustacia--nothing more than that, though dropped in a bit-by-bit way. You ought not to be angry!"

He observed that her eyes were brimming with tears. "Well," he said, "there is nothing new in that, and of course I don't mean to be rough towards you, so you need not cry. Now, don't let us speak of the subject any more."

And no more was said, Thomasin being glad enough of a reason for not mentioning Clym's visit to her that evening, and his story.

VII

The Night of the Sixth of November

Having resolved on flight Eustacia at times seemed anxious that something should happen to thwart her own intention. The only event that could really change her position was the appearance of Clym. The

glory which had encircled him as her lover was departed now; yet some good simple quality of his would occasionally return to her memory and stir a momentary throb of hope that he would again present himself before her. But calmly considered it was not likely that such a severance as now existed would ever close up: she would have to live on as a painful object, isolated, and out of place. She had used to think of the heath alone as an uncongenial spot to be in; she felt it now of the whole world.

Towards evening on the sixth her determination to go away again revived. About four o'clock she packed up anew the few small articles she had brought in her flight from Alderworth, and also some belonging to her which had been left here: the whole formed a bundle not too large to be carried in her hand for a distance of a mile or two. The scene without grew darker; mud-coloured clouds bellied downwards from the sky like vast hammocks slung across it, and with the increase of night a stormy wind arose; but as yet there was no rain.

Eustacia could not rest indoors, having nothing more to do, and she wandered to and fro on the hill, not far from the house she was soon to leave. In these desultory ramblings she passed the cottage of Susan Nunsuch, a little lower down than her grandfather's. The door was ajar, and a riband of bright firelight fell over the ground without. As Eustacia crossed the firebeams she appeared for an instant as distinct as a figure in a phantasmagoria--a creature of light surrounded by an area of darkness: the moment passed, and she

was absorbed in night again.

A woman who was sitting inside the cottage had seen and recognized her in that momentary irradiation. This was Susan herself, occupied in preparing a posset for her little boy, who, often ailing, was now seriously unwell. Susan dropped the spoon, shook her fist at the vanished figure, and then proceeded with her work in a musing, absent way.

At eight o'clock, the hour at which Eustacia had promised to signal Wildeve if ever she signalled at all, she looked around the premises to learn if the coast was clear, went to the furze-rick, and pulled thence a long-stemmed bough of that fuel. This she carried to the corner of the bank, and, glancing behind to see if the shutters were all closed, she struck a light, and kindled the furze. When it was thoroughly ablaze Eustacia took it by the stem and waved it in the air above her head till it had burned itself out.

She was gratified, if gratification were possible to such a mood, by seeing a similar light in the vicinity of Wildeve's residence a minute or two later. Having agreed to keep watch at this hour every night, in case she should require assistance, this promptness proved how strictly he had held to his word. Four hours after the present time, that is, at midnight, he was to be ready to drive her to Budmouth, as prearranged.

Eustacia returned to the house. Supper having been got over she retired early, and sat in her bedroom waiting for the time to go by. The night being dark and threatening, Captain Vye had not strolled out to gossip in any cottage or to call at the inn, as was sometimes his custom on these long autumn nights; and he sat sipping grog alone downstairs. About ten o'clock there was a knock at the door. When the servant opened it the rays of the candle fell upon the form of Fairway.

"I was a-forced to go to Lower Mistover tonight," he said, "and Mr. Yeobright asked me to leave this here on my way; but, faith, I put it in the lining of my hat, and thought no more about it till I got back and was hasping my gate before going to bed. So I have run back with it at once."

He handed in a letter and went his way. The girl brought it to the captain, who found that it was directed to Eustacia. He turned it over and over, and fancied that the writing was her husband's, though he could not be sure. However, he decided to let her have it at once if possible, and took it upstairs for that purpose; but on reaching the door of her room and looking in at the keyhole he found there was no light within, the fact being that Eustacia, without undressing, had flung herself upon the bed, to rest and gather a little strength for her coming journey. Her grandfather concluded from what he saw that he ought not to disturb her; and descending again to the parlour he placed the letter on the mantelpiece to give it to her in the morning.

At eleven o'clock he went to bed himself, smoked for some time in his bedroom, put out his light at half-past eleven, and then, as was his invariable custom, pulled up the blind before getting into bed, that he might see which way the wind blew on opening his eyes in the morning, his bedroom window commanding a view of the flagstaff and vane. Just as he had lain down he was surprised to observe the white pole of the staff flash into existence like a streak of phosphorus drawn downwards across the shade of night without. Only one explanation met this--a light had been suddenly thrown upon the pole from the direction of the house. As everybody had retired to rest the old man felt it necessary to get out of bed, open the window softly, and look to the right and left. Eustacia's bedroom was lighted up, and it was the shine from her window which had lighted the pole. Wondering what had aroused her, he remained undecided at the window, and was thinking of fetching the letter to slip it under her door, when he heard a slight brushing of garments on the partition dividing his room from the passage.

The captain concluded that Eustacia, feeling wakeful, had gone for a book, and would have dismissed the matter as unimportant if he had not also heard her distinctly weeping as she passed.

"She is thinking of that husband of hers," he said to himself. "Ah, the silly goose! she had no business to marry him. I wonder if that letter is really his?"

He arose, threw his boat-cloak round him, opened the door, and said, "Eustacia!" There was no answer. "Eustacia!" he repeated louder, "there is a letter on the mantelpiece for you."

But no response was made to this statement save an imaginary one from the wind, which seemed to gnaw at the corners of the house, and the stroke of a few drops of rain upon the windows.

He went on to the landing, and stood waiting nearly five minutes. Still she did not return. He went back for a light, and prepared to follow her; but first he looked into her bedroom. There, on the outside of the quilt, was the impression of her form, showing that the bed had not been opened; and, what was more significant, she had not taken her candlestick downstairs. He was now thoroughly alarmed; and hastily putting on his clothes he descended to the front door, which he himself had bolted and locked. It was now unfastened. There was no longer any doubt that Eustacia had left the house at this midnight hour; and whither could she have gone? To follow her was almost impossible. Had the dwelling stood in an ordinary road, two persons setting out, one in each direction, might have made sure of overtaking her; but it was a hopeless task to seek for anybody on a heath in the dark, the practicable directions for flight across it from any point being as numerous as the meridians radiating from the pole. Perplexed what to do, he looked into the parlour, and was vexed to find that the letter still lay there untouched.

At half-past eleven, finding that the house was silent, Eustacia had lighted her candle, put on some warm outer wrappings, taken her bag in her hand, and, extinguishing the light again, descended the staircase. When she got into the outer air she found that it had begun to rain, and as she stood pausing at the door it increased, threatening to come on heavily. But having committed herself to this line of action there was no retreating for bad weather. Even the receipt of Clym's letter would not have stopped her now. The gloom of the night was funereal; all nature seemed clothed in crape. The spiky points of the fir trees behind the house rose into the sky like the turrets and pinnacles of an abbey. Nothing below the horizon was visible save a light which was still burning in the cottage of Susan Nunsuch.

Eustacia opened her umbrella and went out from the enclosure by the steps over the bank, after which she was beyond all danger of being perceived. Skirting the pool, she followed the path towards Rainbarrow, occasionally stumbling over twisted furze-roots, tufts of rushes, or oozing lumps of fleshy fungi, which at this season lay scattered about the heath like the rotten liver and lungs of some colossal animal. The moon and stars were closed up by cloud and rain to the degree of extinction. It was a night which led the traveller's thoughts instinctively to dwell on nocturnal scenes of disaster in the chronicles of the world, on all that is terrible and dark in history

and legend--the last plague of Egypt, the destruction of Sennacherib's host, the agony in Gethsemane.

Eustacia at length reached Rainbarrow, and stood still there to think. Never was harmony more perfect than that between the chaos of her mind and the chaos of the world without. A sudden recollection had flashed on her this moment: she had not money enough for undertaking a long journey. Amid the fluctuating sentiments of the day her unpractical mind had not dwelt on the necessity of being well-provided, and now that she thoroughly realized the condition she sighed bitterly and ceased to stand erect, gradually crouching down under the umbrella as if she were drawn into the Barrow by a hand from beneath. Could it be that she was to remain a captive still? Money: she had never felt its value before. Even to efface herself from the country means were required. To ask Wildeve for pecuniary aid without allowing him to accompany her was impossible to a woman with a shadow of pride left in her; to fly as his mistress--and she knew that he loved her--was of the nature of humiliation.

Anyone who had stood by now would have pitied her, not so much on account of her exposure to weather, and isolation from all of humanity except the mouldered remains inside the tumulus; but for that other form of misery which was denoted by the slightly rocking movement that her feelings imparted to her person. Extreme unhappiness weighed visibly upon her. Between the drippings of the rain from her umbrella to her mantle, from her mantle to the heather, from the heather to

the earth, very similar sounds could be heard coming from her lips; and the tearfulness of the outer scene was repeated upon her face. The wings of her soul were broken by the cruel obstructiveness of all about her; and even had she seen herself in a promising way of getting to Budmouth, entering a steamer, and sailing to some opposite port, she would have been but little more buoyant, so fearfully malignant were other things. She uttered words aloud. When a woman in such a situation, neither old, deaf, crazed, nor whimsical, takes upon herself to sob and soliloquize aloud there is something grievous the matter.

"Can I go, can I go?" she moaned. "He's not GREAT enough for me to give myself to--he does not suffice for my desire!... If he had been a Saul or a Buonaparte--ah! But to break my marriage vow for him--it is too poor a luxury!... And I have no money to go alone! And if I could, what comfort to me? I must drag on next year, as I have dragged on this year, and the year after that as before. How I have tried and tried to be a splendid woman, and how destiny has been against me!... I do not deserve my lot!" she cried in a frenzy of bitter revolt. "O, the cruelty of putting me into this ill-conceived world! I was capable of much; but I have been injured and blighted and crushed by things beyond my control! O, how hard it is of Heaven to devise such tortures for me, who have done no harm to Heaven at all!"

The distant light which Eustacia had cursorily observed in leaving the house came, as she had divined, from the cottage window of Susan Nunsuch. What Eustacia did not divine was the occupation of the woman within at that moment. Susan's sight of her passing figure earlier in the evening, not five minutes after the sick boy's exclamation, "Mother, I do feel so bad!" persuaded the matron that an evil influence was certainly exercised by Eustacia's propinquity.

On this account Susan did not go to bed as soon as the evening's work was over, as she would have done at ordinary times. To counteract the malign spell which she imagined poor Eustacia to be working, the boy's mother busied herself with a ghastly invention of superstition, calculated to bring powerlessness, atrophy, and annihilation on any human being against whom it was directed. It was a practice well known on Egdon at that date, and one that is not quite extinct at the present day.

She passed with her candle into an inner room, where, among other utensils, were two large brown pans, containing together perhaps a hundredweight of liquid honey, the produce of the bees during the foregoing summer. On a shelf over the pans was a smooth and solid yellow mass of a hemispherical form, consisting of beeswax from the same take of honey. Susan took down the lump, and cutting off several thin slices, heaped them in an iron ladle, with which she returned to the living-room, and placed the vessel in the hot ashes of the

fireplace. As soon as the wax had softened to the plasticity of dough she kneaded the pieces together. And now her face became more intent. She began moulding the wax; and it was evident from her manner of manipulation that she was endeavouring to give it some preconceived form. The form was human.

By warming and kneading, cutting and twisting, dismembering and re-joining the incipient image she had in about a quarter of an hour produced a shape which tolerably well resembled a woman, and was about six inches high. She laid it on the table to get cold and hard. Meanwhile she took the candle and went upstairs to where the little boy was lying.

"Did you notice, my dear, what Mrs. Eustacia wore this afternoon besides the dark dress?"

"A red ribbon round her neck."

"Anything else?"

"No--except sandal-shoes."

"A red ribbon and sandal-shoes," she said to herself.

Mrs. Nunsuch went and searched till she found a fragment of the narrowest red ribbon, which she took downstairs and tied round the

neck of the image. Then fetching ink and a quill from the rickety bureau by the window, she blackened the feet of the image to the extent presumably covered by shoes; and on the instep of each foot marked cross-lines in the shape taken by the sandal-strings of those days. Finally she tied a bit of black thread round the upper part of the head, in faint resemblance to a snood worn for confining the hair.

Susan held the object at arm's length and contemplated it with a satisfaction in which there was no smile. To anybody acquainted with the inhabitants of Egdon Heath the image would have suggested Eustacia Yeobright.

From her work-basket in the window-seat the woman took a paper of pins, of the old long and yellow sort whose heads were disposed to come off at their first usage. These she began to thrust into the image in all directions, with apparently excruciating energy. Probably as many as fifty were thus inserted, some into the head of the wax model, some into the shoulders, some into the trunk, some upwards through the soles of the feet, till the figure was completely permeated with pins.

She turned to the fire. It had been of turf; and though the high heap of ashes which turf fires produce was somewhat dark and dead on the outside, upon raking it abroad with the shovel the inside of the mass showed a glow of red heat. She took a few pieces of fresh turf from the chimney-corner and built them together over the glow, upon which

the fire brightened. Seizing with the tongs the image that she had made of Eustacia, she held it in the heat, and watched it as it began to waste slowly away. And while she stood thus engaged there came from between her lips a murmur of words.

It was a strange jargon--the Lord's Prayer repeated backwards--the incantation usual in proceedings for obtaining unhallowed assistance against an enemy. Susan uttered the lugubrious discourse three times slowly, and when it was completed the image had considerably diminished. As the wax dropped into the fire a long flame arose from the spot, and curling its tongue round the figure ate still further into its substance. A pin occasionally dropped with the wax, and the embers heated it red as it lay.

VIII

Rain, Darkness, and Anxious Wanderers

While the effigy of Eustacia was melting to nothing, and the fair woman herself was standing on Rainbarrow, her soul in an abyss of desolation seldom plumbed by one so young, Yeobright sat lonely at Blooms-End. He had fulfilled his word to Thomasin by sending off

Fairway with the letter to his wife, and now waited with increased impatience for some sound or signal of her return. Were Eustacia still at Mistover the very least he expected was that she would send him back a reply tonight by the same hand; though, to leave all to her inclination, he had cautioned Fairway not to ask for an answer. If one were handed to him he was to bring it immediately; if not, he was to go straight home without troubling to come round to Blooms-End again that night.

But secretly Clym had a more pleasing hope. Eustacia might possibly decline to use her pen--it was rather her way to work silently--and surprise him by appearing at his door. How fully her mind was made up to do otherwise he did not know.

To Clym's regret it began to rain and blow hard as the evening advanced. The wind rasped and scraped at the corners of the house, and filliped the eavesdroppings like peas against the panes. He walked restlessly about the untenanted rooms, stopping strange noises in windows and doors by jamming splinters of wood into the casements and crevices, and pressing together the lead-work of the quarries where it had become loosened from the glass. It was one of those nights when cracks in the walls of old churches widen, when ancient stains on the ceilings of decayed manor houses are renewed and enlarged from the size of a man's hand to an area of many feet. The little gate in the palings before his dwelling continually opened and clicked together again, but when he looked out eagerly nobody was

there; it was as if invisible shapes of the dead were passing in on their way to visit him.

Between ten and eleven o'clock, finding that neither Fairway nor anybody else came to him, he retired to rest, and despite his anxieties soon fell asleep. His sleep, however, was not very sound, by reason of the expectancy he had given way to, and he was easily awakened by a knocking which began at the door about an hour after. Clym arose and looked out of the window. Rain was still falling heavily, the whole expanse of heath before him emitting a subdued hiss under the downpour. It was too dark to see anything at all.

"Who's there?" he cried.

Light footsteps shifted their position in the porch, and he could just distinguish in a plaintive female voice the words, "O Clym, come down and let me in!"

He flushed hot with agitation. "Surely it is Eustacia!" he murmured. If so, she had indeed come to him unawares.

He hastily got a light, dressed himself, and went down. On his flinging open the door the rays of the candle fell upon a woman closely wrapped up, who at once came forward.

"Thomasin!" he exclaimed in an indescribable tone of disappointment.

"It is Thomasin, and on such a night as this! O, where is Eustacia?"

Thomasin it was, wet, frightened, and panting.

"Eustacia? I don't know, Clym; but I can think," she said with much perturbation. "Let me come in and rest--I will explain this. There is a great trouble brewing--my husband and Eustacia!"

"What, what?"

"I think my husband is going to leave me or do something dreadful--I don't know what--Clym, will you go and see? I have nobody to help me but you! Eustacia has not yet come home?"

"No."

She went on breathlessly: "Then they are going to run off together! He came indoors tonight about eight o'clock and said in an off-hand way, 'Tamsie, I have just found that I must go a journey.' 'When?' I said. 'Tonight,' he said. 'Where?' I asked him. 'I cannot tell you at present,' he said; 'I shall be back again tomorrow.' He then went and busied himself in looking up his things, and took no notice of me at all. I expected to see him start, but he did not, and then it came to be ten o'clock, when he said, 'You had better go to bed.' I didn't know what to do, and I went to bed. I believe he thought I fell asleep, for half an hour after that he came up and unlocked the oak

chest we keep money in when we have much in the house and took out a roll of something which I believe was bank-notes, though I was not aware that he had 'em there. These he must have got from the bank when he went there the other day. What does he want bank-notes for, if he is only going off for a day? When he had gone down I thought of Eustacia, and how he had met her the night before--I know he did meet her, Clym, for I followed him part of the way; but I did not like to tell you when you called, and so make you think ill of him, as I did not think it was so serious. Then I could not stay in bed; I got up and dressed myself, and when I heard him out in the stable I thought I would come and tell you. So I came downstairs without any noise and slipped out."

"Then he was not absolutely gone when you left?"

"No. Will you, dear Cousin Clym, go and try to persuade him not to go? He takes no notice of what I say, and puts me off with the story of his going on a journey, and will be home tomorrow, and all that; but I don't believe it. I think you could influence him."

"I'll go," said Clym. "O, Eustacia!"

Thomasin carried in her arms a large bundle; and having by this time seated herself she began to unroll it, when a baby appeared as the kernel to the husks--dry, warm, and unconscious of travel or rough weather. Thomasin briefly kissed the baby, and then found time to

begin crying as she said, "I brought baby, for I was afraid what might happen to her. I suppose it will be her death, but I couldn't leave her with Rachel!"

Clym hastily put together the logs on the hearth, raked abroad the embers, which were scarcely yet extinct, and blew up a flame with the bellows.

"Dry yourself," he said. "I'll go and get some more wood."

"No, no--don't stay for that. I'll make up the fire. Will you go at once--please will you?"

Yeobright ran upstairs to finish dressing himself. While he was gone another rapping came to the door. This time there was no delusion that it might be Eustacia's: the footsteps just preceding it had been heavy and slow. Yeobright thinking it might possibly be Fairway with a note in answer, descended again and opened the door.

"Captain Vye?" he said to a dripping figure.

"Is my granddaughter here?" said the captain.

"No."

"Then where is she?".

"I don't know."

"But you ought to know--you are her husband."

"Only in name apparently," said Clym with rising excitement. "I believe she means to elope tonight with Wildeve. I am just going to look to it."

"Well, she has left my house; she left about half an hour ago. Who's sitting there?"

"My cousin Thomasin."

The captain bowed in a preoccupied way to her. "I only hope it is no worse than an elopement," he said.

"Worse? What's worse than the worst a wife can do?"

"Well, I have been told a strange tale. Before starting in search of her I called up Charley, my stable lad. I missed my pistols the other day."

"Pistols?"

"He said at the time that he took them down to clean. He has now

owned that he took them because he saw Eustacia looking curiously at them; and she afterwards owned to him that she was thinking of taking her life, but bound him to secrecy, and promised never to think of such a thing again. I hardly suppose she will ever have bravado enough to use one of them; but it shows what has been lurking in her mind; and people who think of that sort of thing once think of it again."

"Where are the pistols?"

"Safely locked up. O no, she won't touch them again. But there are more ways of letting out life than through a bullet-hole. What did you quarrel about so bitterly with her to drive her to all this? You must have treated her badly indeed. Well, I was always against the marriage, and I was right."

"Are you going with me?" said Yeobright, paying no attention to the captain's latter remark. "If so I can tell you what we quarrelled about as we walk along."

"Where to?"

"To Wildeve's--that was her destination, depend upon it."

Thomasin here broke in, still weeping: "He said he was only going on a sudden short journey; but if so why did he want so much money? O,

Clym, what do you think will happen? I am afraid that you, my poor baby, will soon have no father left to you!"

"I am off now," said Yeobright, stepping into the porch.

"I would fain go with 'ee," said the old man doubtfully. "But I begin to be afraid that my legs will hardly carry me there such a night as this. I am not so young as I was. If they are interrupted in their flight she will be sure to come back to me, and I ought to be at the house to receive her. But be it as 'twill I can't walk to the Quiet Woman, and that's an end on't. I'll go straight home."

"It will perhaps be best," said Clym. "Thomasin, dry yourself, and be as comfortable as you can."

With this he closed the door upon her, and left the house in company with Captain Vye, who parted from him outside the gate, taking the middle path, which led to Mistover. Clym crossed by the right-hand track towards the inn.

Thomasin, being left alone, took off some of her wet garments, carried the baby upstairs to Clym's bed, and then came down to the sitting-room again, where she made a larger fire, and began drying herself. The fire soon flared up the chimney, giving the room an appearance of comfort that was doubled by contrast with the drumming of the storm without, which snapped at the window-panes and breathed

into the chimney strange low utterances that seemed to be the prologue to some tragedy.

But the least part of Thomasin was in the house, for her heart being at ease about the little girl upstairs she was mentally following Clym on his journey. Having indulged in this imaginary peregrination for some considerable interval, she became impressed with a sense of the intolerable slowness of time. But she sat on. The moment then came when she could scarcely sit longer; and it was like a satire on her patience to remember that Clym could hardly have reached the inn as yet. At last she went to the baby's bedside. The child was sleeping soundly; but her imagination of possibly disastrous events at her home, the predominance within her of the unseen over the seen, agitated her beyond endurance. She could not refrain from going down and opening the door. The rain still continued, the candlelight falling upon the nearest drops and making glistening darts of them as they descended across the throng of invisible ones behind. To plunge into that medium was to plunge into water slightly diluted with air. But the difficulty of returning to her house at this moment made her all the more desirous of doing so: anything was better than suspense. "I have come here well enough," she said, "and why shouldn't I go back again? It is a mistake for me to be away."

She hastily fetched the infant, wrapped it up, cloaked herself as before, and shoveling the ashes over the fire, to prevent accidents, went into the open air. Pausing first to put the door key in its

old place behind the shutter, she resolutely turned her face to the confronting pile of firmamental darkness beyond the palings, and stepped into its midst. But Thomasin's imagination being so actively engaged elsewhere, the night and the weather had for her no terror beyond that of their actual discomfort and difficulty.

She was soon ascending Blooms-End valley and traversing the undulations on the side of the hill. The noise of the wind over the heath was shrill, and as if it whistled for joy at finding a night so congenial as this. Sometimes the path led her to hollows between thickets of tall and dripping bracken, dead, though not yet prostrate, which enclosed her like a pool. When they were more than usually tall she lifted the baby to the top of her head, that it might be out of the reach of their drenching fronds. On higher ground, where the wind was brisk and sustained, the rain flew in a level flight without sensible descent, so that it was beyond all power to imagine the remoteness of the point at which it left the bosoms of the clouds. Here self-defence was impossible, and individual drops stuck into her like the arrows into Saint Sebastian. She was enabled to avoid puddles by the nebulous paleness which signified their presence, though beside anything less dark than the heath they themselves would have appeared as blackness.

Yet in spite of all this Thomasin was not sorry that she had started.

To her there were not, as to Eustacia, demons in the air, and malice in every bush and bough. The drops which lashed her face were not scorpions, but prosy rain; Egdon in the mass was no monster whatever, but impersonal open ground. Her fears of the place were rational, her dislikes of its worst moods reasonable. At this time it was in her view a windy, wet place, in which a person might experience much discomfort, lose the path without care, and possibly catch cold.

If the path is well known the difficulty at such times of keeping therein is not altogether great, from its familiar feel to the feet; but once lost it is irrecoverable. Owing to her baby, who somewhat impeded Thomasin's view forward and distracted her mind, she did at last lose the track. This mishap occurred when she was descending an open slope about two-thirds home. Instead of attempting, by wandering hither and thither, the hopeless task of finding such a mere thread, she went straight on, trusting for guidance to her general knowledge of the contours, which was scarcely surpassed by Clym's or by that of the heath-croppers themselves.

At length Thomasin reached a hollow and began to discern through the rain a faint blotted radiance, which presently assumed the oblong form of an open door. She knew that no house stood hereabouts, and was soon aware of the nature of the door by its height above the ground.

"Why, it is Diggory Venn's van, surely!" she said.

A certain secluded spot near Rainbarrow was, she knew, often Venn's chosen centre when staying in this neighbourhood; and she guessed at once that she had stumbled upon this mysterious retreat. The question arose in her mind whether or not she should ask him to guide her into the path. In her anxiety to reach home she decided that she would appeal to him, notwithstanding the strangeness of appearing before his eyes at this place and season. But when, in pursuance of this resolve, Thomasin reached the van and looked in she found it to be untenanted; though there was no doubt that it was the reddleman's. The fire was burning in the stove, the lantern hung from the nail. Round the doorway the floor was merely sprinkled with rain, and not saturated, which told her that the door had not long been opened.

While she stood uncertainly looking in Thomasin heard a footstep advancing from the darkness behind her, and turning, beheld the well-known form in corduroy, lurid from head to foot, the lantern beams falling upon him through an intervening gauze of raindrops.

"I thought you went down the slope," he said, without noticing her face. "How do you come back here again?"

"Diggory?" said Thomasin faintly.

"Who are you?" said Venn, still unperceiving. "And why were you crying so just now?"

"O, Diggory! don't you know me?" said she. "But of course you don't, wrapped up like this. What do you mean? I have not been crying here, and I have not been here before."

Venn then came nearer till he could see the illuminated side of her form.

"Mrs. Wildeve!" he exclaimed, starting. "What a time for us to meet! And the baby too! What dreadful thing can have brought you out on such a night as this?"

She could not immediately answer; and without asking her permission he hopped into his van, took her by the arm, and drew her up after him.

"What is it?" he continued when they stood within.

"I have lost my way coming from Blooms-End, and I am in a great hurry to get home. Please show me as quickly as you can! It is so silly of me not to know Egdon better, and I cannot think how I came to lose the path. Show me quickly, Diggory, please."

"Yes, of course. I will go with 'ee. But you came to me before this, Mrs. Wildeve?"

"I only came this minute."

"That's strange. I was lying down here asleep about five minutes ago, with the door shut to keep out the weather, when the brushing of a woman's clothes over the heath-bushes just outside woke me up (for I don't sleep heavy), and at the same time I heard a sobbing or crying from the same woman. I opened my door and held out my lantern, and just as far as the light would reach I saw a woman: she turned her head when the light sheened on her, and then hurried on downhill. I hung up the lantern, and was curious enough to pull on my things and dog her a few steps, but I could see nothing of her any more. That was where I had been when you came up; and when I saw you I thought you were the same one."

"Perhaps it was one of the heath-folk going home?"

"No, it couldn't be. 'Tis too late. The noise of her gown over the he'th was of a whistling sort that nothing but silk will make."

"It wasn't I, then. My dress is not silk, you see... Are we anywhere in a line between Mistover and the inn?"

"Well, yes; not far out."

"Ah, I wonder if it was she! Diggory, I must go at once!"

She jumped down from the van before he was aware, when Venn unhooked the lantern and leaped down after her. "I'll take the baby, ma'am,"

he said. "You must be tired out by the weight."

Thomasin hesitated a moment, and then delivered the baby into Venn's hands. "Don't squeeze her, Diggory," she said, "or hurt her little arm; and keep the cloak close over her like this, so that the rain may not drop in her face."

"I will," said Venn earnestly. "As if I could hurt anything belonging to you!"

"I only meant accidentally," said Thomasin.

"The baby is dry enough, but you are pretty wet," said the reddleman when, in closing the door of his cart to padlock it, he noticed on the floor a ring of water drops where her cloak had hung from her.

Thomasin followed him as he wound right and left to avoid the larger bushes, stopping occasionally and covering the lantern, while he looked over his shoulder to gain some idea of the position of Rainbarrow above them, which it was necessary to keep directly behind their backs to preserve a proper course.

"You are sure the rain does not fall upon baby?"

"Quite sure. May I ask how old he is, ma'am?"

"He!" said Thomasin reproachfully. "Anybody can see better than that in a moment. She is nearly two months old. How far is it now to the inn?"

"A little over a quarter of a mile."

"Will you walk a little faster?"

"I was afraid you could not keep up."

"I am very anxious to get there. Ah, there is a light from the window!"

"'Tis not from the window. That's a gig-lamp, to the best of my belief."

"O!" said Thomasin in despair. "I wish I had been there sooner--give me the baby, Diggory--you can go back now."

"I must go all the way," said Venn. "There is a quag between us and that light, and you will walk into it up to your neck unless I take you round."

"But the light is at the inn, and there is no quag in front of that."

"No, the light is below the inn some two or three hundred yards."

"Never mind," said Thomasin hurriedly. "Go towards the light, and not towards the inn."

"Yes," answered Venn, swerving round in obedience; and, after a pause, "I wish you would tell me what this great trouble is. I think you have proved that I can be trusted."

"There are some things that cannot be--cannot be told to--" And then her heart rose into her throat, and she could say no more.

IX

Sights and Sounds Draw the Wanderers Together

Having seen Eustacia's signal from the hill at eight o'clock, Wildeve immediately prepared to assist her in her flight, and, as he hoped, accompany her. He was somewhat perturbed, and his manner of informing Thomasin that he was going on a journey was in itself sufficient to rouse her suspicions. When she had gone to bed he collected the few articles he would require, and went upstairs to the money-chest, whence he took a tolerably bountiful sum in notes, which had been

advanced to him on the property he was so soon to have in possession, to defray expenses incidental to the removal.

He then went to the stable and coach-house to assure himself that the horse, gig, and harness were in a fit condition for a long drive. Nearly half an hour was spent thus, and on returning to the house Wildeve had no thought of Thomasin being anywhere but in bed. He had told the stable-lad not to stay up, leading the boy to understand that his departure would be at three or four in the morning; for this, though an exceptional hour, was less strange than midnight, the time actually agreed on, the packet from Budmouth sailing between one and two.

At last all was quiet, and he had nothing to do but to wait. By no effort could he shake off the oppression of spirits which he had experienced ever since his last meeting with Eustacia, but he hoped there was that in his situation which money could cure. He had persuaded himself that to act not ungenerously towards his gentle wife by settling on her the half of his property, and with chivalrous devotion towards another and greater woman by sharing her fate, was possible. And though he meant to adhere to Eustacia's instructions to the letter, to deposit her where she wished and to leave her, should that be her will, the spell that she had cast over him intensified, and his heart was beating fast in the anticipated futility of such commands in the face of a mutual wish that they should throw in their lot together.

He would not allow himself to dwell long upon these conjectures, maxims, and hopes, and at twenty minutes to twelve he again went softly to the stable, harnessed the horse, and lit the lamps; whence, taking the horse by the head, he led him with the covered car out of the yard to a spot by the roadside some quarter of a mile below the inn.

Here Wildeve waited, slightly sheltered from the driving rain by a high bank that had been cast up at this place. Along the surface of the road where lit by the lamps the loosened gravel and small stones scudded and clicked together before the wind, which, leaving them in heaps, plunged into the heath and boomed across the bushes into darkness. Only one sound rose above this din of weather, and that was the roaring of a ten-hatch weir to the southward, from a river in the meads which formed the boundary of the heath in this direction.

He lingered on in perfect stillness till he began to fancy that the midnight hour must have struck. A very strong doubt had arisen in his mind if Eustacia would venture down the hill in such weather; yet knowing her nature he felt that she might. "Poor thing! 'tis like her ill-luck," he murmured.

At length he turned to the lamp and looked at his watch. To his surprise it was nearly a quarter past midnight. He now wished that he had driven up the circuitous road to Mistover, a plan not adopted

because of the enormous length of the route in proportion to that of the pedestrian's path down the open hillside, and the consequent increase of labour for the horse.

At this moment a footstep approached; but the light of the lamps being in a different direction the comer was not visible. The step paused, then came on again.

"Eustacia?" said Wildeve.

The person came forward, and the light fell upon the form of Clym, glistening with wet, whom Wildeve immediately recognized; but Wildeve, who stood behind the lamp, was not at once recognized by Yeobright.

He stopped as if in doubt whether this waiting vehicle could have anything to do with the flight of his wife or not. The sight of Yeobright at once banished Wildeve's sober feelings, who saw him again as the deadly rival from whom Eustacia was to be kept at all hazards. Hence Wildeve did not speak, in the hope that Clym would pass by without particular inquiry.

While they both hung thus in hesitation a dull sound became audible above the storm and wind. Its origin was unmistakable--it was the fall of a body into the stream in the adjoining mead, apparently at a point near the weir.

Both started. "Good God! can it be she?" said Clym.

"Why should it be she?" said Wildeve, in his alarm forgetting that he had hitherto screened himself.

"Ah!--that's you, you traitor, is it?" cried Yeobright. "Why should it be she? Because last week she would have put an end to her life if she had been able. She ought to have been watched! Take one of the lamps and come with me."

Yeobright seized the one on his side and hastened on; Wildeve did not wait to unfasten the other, but followed at once along the meadow-track to the weir, a little in the rear of Clym.

Shadwater Weir had at its foot a large circular pool, fifty feet in diameter, into which the water flowed through ten huge hatches, raised and lowered by a winch and cogs in the ordinary manner. The sides of the pool were of masonry, to prevent the water from washing away the bank; but the force of the stream in winter was sometimes such as to undermine the retaining wall and precipitate it into the hole. Clym reached the hatches, the framework of which was shaken to its foundations by the velocity of the current. Nothing but the froth of the waves could be discerned in the pool below. He got upon the plank bridge over the race, and holding to the rail, that the wind might not blow him off, crossed to the other side of the river. There he leant over the wall and lowered the lamp, only to behold the vortex formed

at the curl of the returning current.

Wildeve meanwhile had arrived on the former side, and the light from Yeobright's lamp shed a flecked and agitated radiance across the weir pool, revealing to the ex-engineer the tumbling courses of the currents from the hatches above. Across this gashed and puckered mirror a dark body was slowly borne by one of the backward currents.

"O, my darling!" exclaimed Wildeve in an agonized voice; and, without showing sufficient presence of mind even to throw off his greatcoat, he leaped into the boiling caldron.

Yeobright could now also discern the floating body, though but indistinctly; and imagining from Wildeve's plunge that there was life to be saved he was about to leap after. Bethinking himself of a wiser plan he placed the lamp against a post to make it stand upright, and running round to the lower part of the pool, where there was no wall, he sprang in and boldly waded upwards towards the deeper portion. Here he was taken off his legs, and in swimming was carried round into the centre of the basin, where he perceived Wildeve struggling.

While these hasty actions were in progress here, Venn and Thomasin had been toiling through the lower corner of the heath in the direction of the light. They had not been near enough to the river to hear the plunge, but they saw the removal of the carriage-lamp, and watched its motion into the mead. As soon as they reached the car and horse Venn

guessed that something new was amiss, and hastened to follow in the course of the moving light. Venn walked faster than Thomasin, and came to the weir alone.

The lamp placed against the post by Clym still shone across the water, and the reddleman observed something floating motionless. Being encumbered with the infant, he ran back to meet Thomasin.

"Take the baby, please, Mrs. Wildeve," he said hastily. "Run home with her, call the stable-lad, and make him send down to me any men who may be living near. Somebody has fallen into the weir."

Thomasin took the child and ran. When she came to the covered car the horse, though fresh from the stable, was standing perfectly still, as if conscious of misfortune. She saw for the first time whose it was. She nearly fainted, and would have been unable to proceed another step but that the necessity of preserving the little girl from harm nerved her to an amazing self-control. In this agony of suspense she entered the house, put the baby in a place of safety, woke the lad and the female domestic, and ran out to give the alarm at the nearest cottage.

Diggory, having returned to the brink of the pool, observed that the small upper hatches or floats were withdrawn. He found one of these lying upon the grass, and taking it under one arm, and with his lantern in his hand, entered at the bottom of the pool as Clym had done. As soon as he began to be in deep water he flung himself across

the hatch; thus supported he was able to keep afloat as long as he chose, holding the lantern aloft with his disengaged hand. Propelled by his feet he steered round and round the pool, ascending each time by one of the back streams and descending in the middle of the current.

At first he could see nothing. Then amidst the glistening of the whirlpools and the white clots of foam he distinguished a woman's bonnet floating alone. His search was now under the left wall, when something came to the surface almost close beside him. It was not, as he had expected, a woman, but a man. The reddleman put the ring of the lantern between his teeth, seized the floating man by the collar, and, holding on to the hatch with his remaining arm, struck out into the strongest race, by which the unconscious man, the hatch, and himself were carried down the stream. As soon as Venn found his feet dragging over the pebbles of the shallower part below he secured his footing and waded towards the brink. There, where the water stood at about the height of his waist, he flung away the hatch, and attempted to drag forth the man. This was a matter of great difficulty, and he found as the reason that the legs of the unfortunate stranger were tightly embraced by the arms of another man, who had hitherto been entirely beneath the surface.

At this moment his heart bounded to hear footsteps running towards him, and two men, roused by Thomasin, appeared at the brink above. They ran to where Venn was, and helped him in lifting out the

apparently drowned persons, separating them, and laying them out upon the grass. Venn turned the light upon their faces. The one who had been uppermost was Yeobright; he who had been completely submerged was Wildeve.

"Now we must search the hole again," said Venn. "A woman is in there somewhere. Get a pole."

One of the men went to the foot-bridge and tore off the handrail. The reddleman and the two others then entered the water together from below as before, and with their united force probed the pool forwards to where it sloped down to its central depth. Venn was not mistaken in supposing that any person who had sunk for the last time would be washed down to this point, for when they had examined to about half-way across something impeded their thrust.

"Pull it forward," said Venn, and they raked it in with the pole till it was close to their feet.

Venn vanished under the stream, and came up with an armful of wet drapery enclosing a woman's cold form, which was all that remained of the desperate Eustacia.

When they reached the bank there stood Thomasin, in a stress of grief, bending over the two unconscious ones who already lay there. The horse and cart were brought to the nearest point in the road, and it

was the work of a few minutes only to place the three in the vehicle. Venn led on the horse, supporting Thomasin upon his arm, and the two men followed, till they reached the inn.

The woman who had been shaken out of her sleep by Thomasin had hastily dressed herself and lighted a fire, the other servant being left to snore on in peace at the back of the house. The insensible forms of Eustacia, Clym, and Wildeve were then brought in and laid on the carpet, with their feet to the fire, when such restorative processes as could be thought of were adopted at once, the stableman being in the meantime sent for a doctor. But there seemed to be not a whiff of life left in either of the bodies. Then Thomasin, whose stupor of grief had been thrust off awhile by frantic action, applied a bottle of hartshorn to Clym's nostrils, having tried it in vain upon the othertwo. He sighed.

"Clym's alive!" she exclaimed.

He soon breathed distinctly, and again and again did she attempt to revive her husband by the same means; but Wildeve gave no sign. There was too much reason to think that he and Eustacia both were for ever beyond the reach of stimulating perfumes. Their exertions did not relax till the doctor arrived, when one by one, the senseless three were taken upstairs and put into warm beds.

Venn soon felt himself relieved from further attendance, and went

to the door, scarcely able yet to realize the strange catastrophe that had befallen the family in which he took so great an interest. Thomasin surely would be broken down by the sudden and overwhelming nature of this event. No firm and sensible Mrs. Yeobright lived now to support the gentle girl through the ordeal; and, whatever an unimpassioned spectator might think of her loss of such a husband as Wildeve, there could be no doubt that for the moment she was distracted and horrified by the blow. As for himself, not being privileged to go to her and comfort her, he saw no reason for waiting longer in a house where he remained only as a stranger.

He returned across the heath to his van. The fire was not yet out, and everything remained as he had left it. Venn now bethought himself of his clothes, which were saturated with water to the weight of lead. He changed them, spread them before the fire, and lay down to sleep. But it was more than he could do to rest here while excited by a vivid imagination of the turmoil they were in at the house he had quitted, and, blaming himself for coming away, he dressed in another suit, locked up the door, and again hastened across to the inn. Rain was still falling heavily when he entered the kitchen. A bright fire was shining from the hearth, and two women were bustling about, one of whom was Olly Dowden.

"Well, how is it going on now?" said Venn in a whisper.

"Mr. Yeobright is better; but Mrs. Yeobright and Mr. Wildeve are dead

and cold. The doctor says they were quite gone before they were out of the water."

"Ah! I thought as much when I hauled 'em up. And Mrs. Wildeve?"

"She is as well as can be expected. The doctor had her put between blankets, for she was almost as wet as they that had been in the river, poor young thing. You don't seem very dry, reddleman."

"Oh, 'tis not much. I have changed my things. This is only a little dampness I've got coming through the rain again."

"Stand by the fire. Mis'ess says you be to have whatever you want, and she was sorry when she was told that you'd gone away."

Venn drew near to the fireplace, and looked into the flames in an absent mood. The steam came from his leggings and ascended the chimney with the smoke, while he thought of those who were upstairs. Two were corpses, one had barely escaped the jaws of death, another was sick and a widow. The last occasion on which he had lingered by that fireplace was when the raffle was in progress; when Wildeve was alive and well; Thomasin active and smiling in the next room; Yeobright and Eustacia just made husband and wife, and Mrs. Yeobright living at Blooms-End. It had seemed at that time that the then position of affairs was good for at least twenty years to come. Yet, of all the circle, he himself was the only one whose situation had not

materially changed.

While he ruminated a footstep descended the stairs. It was the nurse, who brought in her hand a rolled mass of wet paper. The woman was so engrossed with her occupation that she hardly saw Venn. She took from a cupboard some pieces of twine, which she strained across the fireplace, tying the end of each piece to the firedog, previously pulled forward for the purpose, and, unrolling the wet papers, she began pinning them one by one to the strings in a manner of clothes on a line.

"What be they?" said Venn.

"Poor master's bank-notes," she answered. "They were found in his pocket when they undressed him."

"Then he was not coming back again for some time?" said Venn.

"That we shall never know," said she.

Venn was loth to depart, for all on earth that interested him lay under this roof. As nobody in the house had any more sleep that night, except the two who slept for ever, there was no reason why he should not remain. So he retired into the niche of the fireplace where he had used to sit, and there he continued, watching the steam from the double row of bank-notes as they waved backwards and forwards

in the draught of the chimney till their flaccidity was changed to dry crispness throughout. Then the woman came and unpinned them, and, folding them together, carried the handful upstairs. Presently the doctor appeared from above with the look of a man who could do no more, and, pulling on his gloves, went out of the house, the trotting of his horse soon dying away upon the road.

At four o'clock there was a gentle knock at the door. It was from Charley, who had been sent by Captain Vye to inquire if anything had been heard of Eustacia. The girl who admitted him looked in his face as if she did not know what answer to return, and showed him in to where Venn was seated, saying to the reddleman, "Will you tell him, please?"

Venn told. Charley's only utterance was a feeble, indistinct sound. He stood quite still; then he burst out spasmodically, "I shall see her once more?"

"I dare say you may see her," said Diggory gravely. "But hadn't you better run and tell Captain Vye?"

"Yes, yes. Only I do hope I shall see her just once again."

"You shall," said a low voice behind; and starting round they beheld by the dim light a thin, pallid, almost spectral form, wrapped in a blanket, and looking like Lazarus coming from the tomb.

It was Yeobright. Neither Venn nor Charley spoke, and Clym continued, "You shall see her. There will be time enough to tell the captain when it gets daylight. You would like to see her too--would you not, Diggory? She looks very beautiful now."

Venn assented by rising to his feet, and with Charley he followed Clym to the foot of the staircase, where he took off his boots; Charley did the same. They followed Yeobright upstairs to the landing, where there was a candle burning, which Yeobright took in his hand, and with it led the way into an adjoining room. Here he went to the bedside and folded back the sheet.

They stood silently looking upon Eustacia, who, as she lay there still in death, eclipsed all her living phases. Pallor did not include all the quality of her complexion, which seemed more than whiteness; it was almost light. The expression of her finely carved mouth was pleasant, as if a sense of dignity had just compelled her to leave off speaking. Eternal rigidity had seized upon it in a momentary transition between fervour and resignation. Her black hair was looser now than either of them had ever seen it before, and surrounded her brow like a forest. The stateliness of look which had been almost too marked for a dweller in a country domicile had at last found an artistically happy background.

Nobody spoke, till at length Clym covered her and turned aside. "Now

come here," he said.

They went to a recess in the same room, and there, on a smaller bed, lay another figure--Wildeve. Less repose was visible in his face than in Eustacia's, but the same luminous youthfulness overspread it, and the least sympathetic observer would have felt at sight of him now that he was born for a higher destiny than this. The only sign upon him of his recent struggle for life was in his finger-tips, which were worn and sacrificed in his dying endeavours to obtain a hold on the face of the weir-wall.

Yeobright's manner had been so quiet, he had uttered so few syllables since his reappearance, that Venn imagined him resigned. It was only when they had left the room and stood upon the landing that the true state of his mind was apparent. Here he said, with a wild smile, inclining his head towards the chamber in which Eustacia lay, "She is the second woman I have killed this year. I was a great cause of my mother's death, and I am the chief cause of hers."

"How?" said Venn.

"I spoke cruel words to her, and she left my house. I did not invite her back till it was too late. It is I who ought to have drowned myself. It would have been a charity to the living had the river overwhelmed me and borne her up. But I cannot die. Those who ought to have lived lie dead; and here am I alive!"

"But you can't charge yourself with crimes in that way," said Venn. "You may as well say that the parents be the cause of a murder by the child, for without the parents the child would never have been begot."

"Yes, Venn, that is very true; but you don't know all the circumstances. If it had pleased God to put an end to me it would have been a good thing for all. But I am getting used to the horror of my existence. They say that a time comes when men laugh at misery through long acquaintance with it. Surely that time will soon come to me!"

"Your aim has always been good," said Venn. "Why should you say such desperate things?"

"No, they are not desperate. They are only hopeless; and my great regret is that for what I have done no man or law can punish me!"