

A NIGHT AND A DAY

Written in 1876

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Chapter 1

THERE is no part of England more unsightly or more marred and spoiled of its original beauty than the Black Country, the great coal-field of South Staffordshire, which stretches into the neighboring counties. Low beds of smouldering slag lie upon the ground, where grass and primroses once grew, and make the air heavy with the fumes and stench of gas.

The tall chimneys of the forges belch out clouds of thick smoke, mingled with tongues of flame, which hang overhead, slowly drifting with the wind, but never passing away to leave the blue sky clear. The soft round outlines of the land have been broken up by huge stiff mounds of slack and shale, for which no man can find a use, that are thrown up round the shaft of every pit.

No leafy trees can flourish in such a soil or such an atmosphere. But a few pale and stunted willows grow down by the edge of the dark and noisome pools lying in the barren valleys of these desolate hillocks.

High poles, not unlike the gibbets of olden days, stretch across the dreary scene, and the chains they support, groan and creak dolefully as they wind slowly up and down the dark pits. No chirping and twittering of birds are to be heard, nor the merry cries of rosy children at play. But instead of these you have the deep throbbing of many forge hammers, which beat like the feverish yet sluggish pulse of Mammon.

But upon the outskirts of this despoiled country, the riches that lie underground run into scattered veins of minerals, that pierce under the green meadows and golden cornfields still smiling undisturbed in the sunshine. Here, there is less roughness and ugliness and more of nature.

The pitmen, when they come up from their dingy work, can lift their eyes to the clear sky above, and to the hills not far away clothed in leafy trees. They can cultivate their own little gardens, and grow southernwood and sweetwilliam to wear in their button holes on Sundays.

In some places, there is only one shaft, or two perhaps, sunk a mile away from any others, running down into some small, separated fragment of the great coalfield. Here the trees grow up to the very edge of the worthless rubble flung about the pit's mouth. And the lark sings its song within sound of the clanking engine. There is no more than a scar or two on the face of the country, and like a blemish in a face we love, it grows familiar and dear, as years go by, to those whose home is beside it.

The miners in these little isolated places are very different from the rough and brutal colliers of the Black Country. These have few pleasures but pigeon-flying, and stealthy dog-fighting, and low revels in dirty taverns. The men are little better than rough bull-dogs and the women are still not much in advance of savages.

But among the country colliers are families of quite a different stamp. Their grandfathers or great-grandfathers heard John Wesley preach words they neither forgot themselves nor allowed their children to forget. Their grandmothers labored to learn to read amid all the cares of a family and the hard struggle for life, though they had no other books to read than their Bibles and the hymn-book. The families which sprang from them are altogether a different race from those of the rough and ignorant savages, dwelling in dense masses, where the mines are thickest.

In one of these separate coalfields, with a single old shaft, which had been at work longer than any one living could remember, there had dwelt for several generations one family of the name of Hazeldine.

The same roof sheltered them that had sheltered their forefathers. All the men had worked in the pit and some of them had died there. The old garden round the cottage budded and blossomed year after year with the same flowers and fruit trees planted by the first Hazeldine. Or so nearly the same that if he had come back to it he would have felt no shock of surprise or strangeness. The square hillock of shale alone had risen to such a height as to hide the pit's mouth, and it was thinly overgrown with yellow coltsfoot, since he had left the little house of his own building.

At present, the widow of one of his grandsons was inhabiting it, the mother of two sons who, like their forefathers, were busy all day long in the hidden galleries and foot-roads underground, which had formed a network, crossing and recrossing, and twisting in and out like a labyrinth wherever coal had been found.

Judith Hazeldine spent long and silent days in her quiet cottage while her sons were below. For it stood quite alone in the shadow of the great mound of rubbish which had gradually separated it from the neighboring dwellings. But when Reuben and Simeon came home, the evening hours were too short for all that had to be said and done.

The two sons had been named according to a custom of the Hazeldines, which no one had yet been bold enough to break through. It was half believed that some long-dead forefather had spoken a curse against the first to break it. This was to begin with the names of the sons of Israel and follow them faithfully in order of their birth—though it had never been known for any mother to reach the favorite name of Benjamin. Judith herself had not had more than two sons, but there had once been a child named Issachar, whose grave was in the village churchyard.

There was another custom and an heirloom in the family which gave it a still higher distinction in the eyes of their neighbors. Old Judah Hazeldine, who had been dead more than two hundred years, had left a favorite black-letter Bible [Blackletter, also known as Gothic script, Gothic minuscule, or Textura, was a script used throughout Western Europe from approximately 1150 until the 17th century. See photo.] of an antique binding, and with silver clasps and silver corner-pieces, which was forever to become the possession of any one of his descendants who, at the age of fifteen, could open its pages at haphazard, and read off aloud the chapter that chanced to lie beneath his eyes, without making a single blunder.

To each generation the difficulty had become greater, for the black-letter fell more and more into disuse. The later descendants of Judah Hazeldine, who might be able to read easily enough a chapter in an ordinary Bible, found themselves puzzled and baffled by the odd and crabbed letters they were bound to turn into ready speech.

Reuben, Judith's eldest son, had tried it and failed, with tears of disappointment smarting under his cast-down eyelids. That was seven years ago, and it would soon be Simeon's turn to prove his scholarship, for he would be fifteen in a week or two.

Judith had set her heart upon her younger boy gaining the coveted heirloom. He was the head scholar in the Sunday-school and had repeated the whole of a long chapter at the Sunday-school anniversary, in the face of all the congregation, without missing a single word. Her heart had been swelling with pride and pleasure as he went triumphantly forward from verse to verse, though she would take no notice of Reuben nudging her elbow as if he were putting in the full stops which were being left out by Simeon.

Why should not the lad win the old black-letter Bible? He was a better scholar than Reuben, though Reuben was a good son, ay, the best of sons. She was a very

happy woman for a widow, she said to herself. Reuben was the best of sons, but Simeon was the better scholar. Simeon could not fail to win the Bible.

There was the more reason why Simeon must not fail to win it, as the present owner was on the point of emigrating, and no one knew exactly how to act in this unforeseen emergency. It had not entered the head of old Judah Hazeldine, who had certainly never even heard of Australia, to dream of any of his descendants wandering so far away from the ancient home. He might otherwise have made some provision against the difficulty.

If the Bible went to the other side of the world, would it ever come back to England? There had been a good deal of talk up and down the country, among the Hazeldines, as to what ought to be done. But no one could see the way clearly.

Levi Hazeldine was not willing to give it up unless the conditions were fulfilled. He had won it himself more than thirty years ago, and had held it ever since for lack of any successful competitor. The only concession he would make was to delay his voyage for a few weeks until Simeon should reach the stipulated age and declare himself ready for the trial.

"It's not as I set much store by the Bible," said Levi sarcastically. "Why, the Bible's just like a bone thrown among a pack o' curs. You Christians are always a-snarlin' over it, and pullin' it about, and snatchin' a morsel off it here and another morsel there. You can always get up a dogfight over the Bible. It's likely a man of sense like me 'ud value it!"

Levi had been a greater traveler than any other of the Hazeldines and was looked up to as a man of more than ordinary knowledge. He could read many books which were difficult to be understood by the greater number of his neighbors. He had been a great scholar thirty years ago, when he won the black-letter Bible. And he was believed to be a greater scholar now. So it made his simple-minded kith and kin very uneasy to hear his estimate of the Bible.

"If you set so little store by it," said Judith, who was a shrewd woman, "why not leave the old Bible behind you? We'd pay the value of the silver and welcome."

"It's not a Bible, it's an heirloom," answered the wise Levi. "There's a charm with it. Those that have got it have good luck. If your lad can win it, it's his, and the luck'll go to him, but if he can't, it'll stay with me, and go with me out o' the country. It's a great deal that I'll stay to give him a chance."

You may be sure that Simeon was as eager as Judith herself that he should win the Bible. The lad had been sharp enough to get for himself an alphabet of old English letters, and had copied verse after verse diligently in their characters. But he had no idea of what chapter he might have to read.

The usage was, to blindfold the candidate and lay his hand on the closed volume, which he then opened for himself. Some familiar psalm or well-known passage from the Gospels might lie before him, or some long hard chapter in Chronicles, or the still more unaccustomed words of a minor prophet. He felt as if it would almost break his heart to let the old Bible quit the country.

Chapter 2

Judith Hazeldine had too deep a sense of the importance of the coming trial, not to signalize it by making a solemn feast to all of the house of the Hazeldines, who were within reach of an invitation.

There was a second event to be celebrated, but one of secondary consequence, as being common to all families and to all conditions of men. Reuben was to take advantage of the feast and the family gathering to marry Abby Upton, the sister of his

favorite comrade. Abby had helped old Judith on baking and washing days ever since she was fourteen, and it seemed hardly a change for her to be coming to live under the same roof as Reuben's wife.

Under the roof literally they were to live, in a large spare attic, with strong beams of old oak, black with age, forming sharp angles under the thatch, and with a lattice window deep set in the southern gable, looking out upon the garden and the wood beyond, which climbed up a gentle slope and traced its green branches clear against the sky.

Reuben and Abby had both been as busy as the swallows under the eaves about this homely little nest of theirs. It was Reuben who had papered every small clear space in the irregular walls, with a paper that had a pattern of sweet peas and roses running all over it. And it was he who had bought some pots of rare hothouse flowers for the broad low window sill. But it was Abby who had scrubbed the floor white, and removed every speck and stain from the old-fashioned furniture. There had been a good share of deep though unspoken happiness in getting ready their future home.

Reuben and Abby were quite conscious of the secondary place they were to take in the coming festival, and were quite content with it. Young men and girls can get married any day, but to win the Hazeldine Bible was a rare event, and the present circumstances were absolutely without a parallel. The danger seemed great that the precious heirloom would be carried out of the kingdom and carried out of it by an infidel.

"Reuben," said Abby, with a look of awe on her rosy face, "folks do say as Levi Hazeldine doesn't even believe as our Lord was born on Christmas-day. I wonder how he can think! There'd never be any merry Christmases if that weren't true."

"Never mind, Levi," answered Reuben fondly, "he hasn't got either chick or child, or wife neither, to make him believe in such things. It's mainly folks as haven't any love in them, that don't believe there's a good God who loves us every one, and who'd be lonesome in His almighty power if He'd no creature to be fond of and caring after. Why! isn't Jesus Christ gone to prepare a place for us, somewhere in His Father's house, just like me making the attic fit for you, Abby, here in mother's house? I've been thinking of it all along, and it seems somehow as if I could see Him looking all about the grand room He's getting ready, to see if there's anything we'd like, that has been forgotten. Levi can't understand, for he's never loved anybody enough."

"Reuben," whispered Abby, with her hands clasped about his arm, "I shall always believe like you. You are so good."

The day before the double festival had come, and the sun shone on one of the pleasantest mornings of the pleasant springtime. Reuben stayed away from his underground toil to put some finishing touches to the attic, which was to become Abby's home tomorrow. Abby herself was busy over her simple wedding gown, but that was away, in her old home, and she could not hinder him by peeping through the half-open door to see what he was about.

Judith was deep in her preparations for the great dinner, to which she had invited her guests. And Reuben could hear the clatter of earthenware, and the beating up of eggs, and the opening and shutting of the oven-door, in the large, old-fashioned kitchen below. They were pleasant sounds came to his listening ear through the open window.

There was the cuckoo calling from the woods, with a note softened and mellowed by the distance, and the throstles were piping, and the blackbirds whistling nearer to him, in the hawthorn hedgerow round the garden. The low southerly breeze that fluttered the leaves of the Bible and hymn-book on the window sill brought with it the

scent of lilac and gillyflowers growing in the borders. Reuben Hazeldine felt as if he had never really known what earthly happiness was before.

It was past noonday, and he was still busy about his finishing touches, and humming little snatches of hymns in his low, deep voice, for he was a famous singer in his parish, when he suddenly heard Abby's voice calling him afar off. He stopped, with his hand upholding a hammer, that was about to knock a nail into the wall, and listened eagerly.

Yes, that was Abby's voice, clearer and sweeter than the throstle's piping note. He smiled to himself, as he wondered how far off she might be, and he neither answered nor went towards the open window, that he might hear her calling him again. Then there came a nearer and a shriller call, and his quick ear caught the ring of fear in it. He stretched himself half through the little casement in the gable, and saw her flying down the bank, which hid the pit mouth from him, as if she was in an agony of terror. But the moment she caught sight of him she stopped herself in her headlong flight and stretched out her arms to him. And he heard her crying mournfully through the still and sunny air.

"Come, come quickly," she called, "the water's broke out, and the pit's flooded."

For a moment or two Reuben could not stir, but stood leaning through the casement, staring in bewilderment at Abby. Was it possible that she was making fun to frighten him? But she had quickly turned away and was climbing up the bank, while his mother ran down the garden path and was following her as swiftly as she could. Then he roused himself from his stupor and hurried after them.

If it was true the pit was flooded, how good God had been to him! That was the thought his mind fastened on at first. God had saved him from peril, perhaps from death. If he had gone to work in the pit this morning, he might have been among those that were lost, if any were lost. When he reached the top of the bank, he saw, in the sunny noonday light, the pit's mouth, with its black framework of chains and thick old timber, as he seemed never to have seen it before. So sharp, so distinct it stood out against the sky, and imprinted itself on his brain.

A group of women and old men and children was already gathered about it, and the elder one among the boys were peering into the shaft, down which the truck was being lowered as quickly as the little engine would work. A knot of swarthy men, who had just come up from the underground stood in the center of the group, telling their story.

Reuben thrust his way in among them and stood listening in awed silence.

"It broke out on us in the Long Spinny footpath," one of them was saying, "and we ran for our lives. Us six were first, and there's eight or nine more to come. But there's ole Lijah, and Simeon, and Abner, they'll be cut off by the flood. They kept together, and the water's out betwixt them and the shaft. There's no chance for ever a one of them."

Reuben heard as if the tidings had nothing to do with him. "Old Lijah, and Simeon, and Abner!" he repeated over and over again, half aloud. But he was quite unconscious that he was uttering their names. He seemed to see them quite plainly—his young brother, who had been of late so absorbed in preparing for the great contest for the Hazeldine Bible. His chosen friend Abner, who was to him what Jonathan had been to David—and the old man, who had been like a father to the fatherless boys.

He counted them upon his fingers, mechanically—"old Lijah, Abner, Simeon." His mother shrieked aloud, with a very wild and bitter cry, and Abby threw herself down on the ground by the mouth of the shaft, calling, "Abner, brother Abner!" A second cluster of pitmen, some clinging to the chain, without foothold, was ascending slowly

to the light of day. Reuben's bewildered eye ran through the number, but none of these three was there.

Then he shook himself and as if he awoke suddenly from a dream, he seized the full meaning of the accident that had happened. The flood had separated them from their comrades, and had cut off all hope of escape from a terrible and lingering death.

"How deep is it?" he asked, in a hoarse harsh voice.

"Not above the soles of our shoon," answered one of the men, "it came trickling by like a brook in the woods, but we felt scared like. There's a heavy dip, thee knows, before you come to the Long Spinny siding."

"Not above the soles of our shoon!" repeated another of the men, "it was up to our knees! See thee, Reuben, look how deep I've been, and it came roaring in after us like a mill-dam. It'll be a fathom high in the shaft tonight."

A dead silence followed this last speech. A silence which seemed to Reuben to continue for hours, so terribly significant it was. Yet there were many sounds smiting against his ear and filling his brain. The cry of the cuckoo seemed to shout loudly and mockingly at him, and the fitful creaking of the chain by which the truck hung over the dark mouth of the pit grated and jarred upon him.

He had never felt like this before. Life had been so dear and sweet to him only ten minutes ago. Ten minutes since he had been singing at his happy work, and it had appeared only right and natural that the sun should shine so brightly and the birds sing so merrily as they were still doing. But now, why could not the birds be still and the sun withdraw its shining? A sudden darkness and calamity had fallen upon them all, and he shivered and trembled like a startled child.

"I shall be bound to go," he said, looking round him with a gloomy and stupefied air. He was the first to break the silence, and at the sound of his voice the women burst out into sobs and cries, and the men into eager speech. Abby and his mother clung to him, beseeching him not to risk his life. If Reuben had shrunk from the danger, they would have despised him in their hearts. But now, as they read his resolution in his mournful face, and the few words he spoke so hoarsely, they could not let him go.

Fresh numbers of eager, anxious men and women were flocking to the spot, from fields and woods and distant cottages, for a rumor of the calamity seemed to be carried by the soft southerly breeze. Levi Hazeldine was among them, and Reuben saw his face more clearly than any other—a shrewd, sharp, sinister face, that had no true compassion in it.

Some of the women about them were calling loudly to God to save those who were left behind in the flooded pit. Reuben freed himself almost roughly and impatiently from Abby's clinging hands.

"How can God save them if He has nobody to send?" cried Reuben. "There isn't a man living that knows the pit as I know it, and there's another road out of the Long Spinny siding, if they'd anybody to guide them. Don't you see that I must go, if there's a bare chance of winning through to save them? How could I live in peace at home, and think of them starved to death down below, and lying there unburied? Abby, mother, can't you see how wicked I should be if I could leave them to perish, without doing all I could to save them?"

"But suppose I lose you both?" cried Judith, in a shrill, quavering voice, "suppose thee comes back no more, never! But O Simeon, my little lad, that was only a baby a little while ago! And I'm so proud of thee! Come back, Simeon. Come home to thy mother!"

"I'm bound to go," said Reuben, stepping on to the truck, which hung over the shaft, while one of the men ran to the engine-house to lower it. For a few seconds he

stood there, looking round him on the pleasant, sunny day, and on his old friends and neighbors gathered about him. Abby had fallen on the ground and was hiding her face from the light. And his mother was on her knees, torn between the dread of letting him go and the hope that he might save Simeon. Old Lijah's wife was crying and blessing him amid her sobs. While his comrades were crowding eagerly round to shake hands with him and bid him God speed. But it was all over in a few moments, and as the chain grated and creaked over the windlass, he glanced about him for the last time.

"Take care of them," he shouted, as he felt himself passing out of their sight, and a faint, broken cheer answered him. For a little while he could still see a cluster of friendly, anxious faces looking after him. "God bless you!" he called to them. He could hear them yet when he reached the bottom of the shaft, though the round opening above him was but as a very little ring of light in the midst of deep darkness.

"All right! I'll be back in an hour, please God!" he shouted again, as he looked up to the small, bright spot overhead. Then he plunged into one of the yawning caverns that opened before him.

Chapter 3

The pit was more familiar to Reuben Hazeldine than the woods and lanes of the country over ground. It was a very ancient one. How long it had been worked nobody could tell, but for generations back there had been a small though regular output of coal, which had been just worth digging for, along the winding and narrow veins of the mineral.

There had been no more money spent upon it than the absolutely necessary outlay. And most of the old disused footways had been allowed to sink in, making little dells and dimples in the woods overhead, where the earliest primroses and violets were blooming, as Reuben threaded his darksome way underground.

He found himself really more at home in these black and winding galleries than in the green tangle of the brushwood above ground, for while he was still a mere child his father had often taken him down the pit, to accustom him to its darkness and its perils. He could recollect strolling about it, holding his father's hand and lighted by his lamp, while he learned every footway and siding, as if they had been the streets and thoroughfares of some town.

He could remember, too, how his father had told him stories of men whose sense of comradeship had been so strong in them that they held their lives cheap in comparison with the shame of leaving their fellow-workmen or their kinsfolk in peril. One miserable man had been pointed out to him as having saved his own life at the sacrifice of another's, and Reuben still felt the shuddering horror and aversion with which he had regarded him when he was himself a boy.

As he hurried along his rough dark road as swiftly as possible, the tones of his father's voice seemed to be sounding plainly in his ears, saying over and over again the familiar words, "He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Once Reuben paused for a single instant, and said half aloud, "Yes, father! I'll do it."

Before many minutes had passed, he reached that dip in the narrow roadway, which must be passed through before he could gain the Long Spinny siding. For the last hundred yards or so, the water had been up to his knees, and at every step now he felt himself sinking into it more deeply, but whether because the flood was rising or the path sloping, he could hardly tell. Yet his safety, his return to light and life, depended almost utterly on this.

In no part of his course had the current been so strong as to show that the breach through which it had broken was very large. He recollected only a few days ago listening to the sullen murmur and gurgle of imprisoned waters, which had never sparkled in the sunlight, beating against the thin wall of rock left between them and the spot where he was at work. A single blow of his pickaxe would have released them.

The question was whether it had been some small darksome tank, that would be soon exhausted, or some immense and hidden reservoir of a hundred subterranean springs, which must break down the frail barrier, and pour itself in resistless force along the winding level of the pit. He could not solve this question, but there was not an instant to lose. The dipping footpath must be trodden, even if he could lead his friends back to the shaft by that other and longer way of which he had spoken.

His safety-lamp, which he had fastened securely in the front of his cap, cast a pale glimmer of light upon the slowly whirling water into which he plunged, and the tremulous gleam which quivered before him and upon the low roof above him, appeared almost more terrible than utter darkness would have been.

As he moved on through the deepening stream, he could hear louder and louder the gloomy sound of a torrent surging through a narrow outlet, as if the sluices of some great water-course had been opened. It was an inexpressibly mournful and threatening sound. His heart failed him—and he stood still for a few seconds thinking.

The flood was swirling around him, and the pale sinister light of his lamp fell upon the eddying waters before him. The roof was low, and not far from where he stood, the reflection of his light seemed to show that the flood already touched it, cutting off his access to his friends.

The chance of saving them was so small, would it not be wiser, was it not his duty to retrace his steps while there was yet time? There were Abby and his mother to think of. Behind him lay the daylight and his pleasant home, and Abby so unutterably precious to him. While before him was deadly risk and a mere chance of making his way to his comrades. Even if he should succeed in joining them, it might be only to share their fate and die slowly of hunger, should the flood cut them off from the shaft, and yet not reach their higher place of miserable and fatal refuge. Surely it was his duty to go back while going back was possible.

He did not linger more than a few seconds. "He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren," came to him again, as if spoken by One who had a right to demand the sacrifice. With a deep drawn breath, he marched forward into the gloomy black stream. A swift current of air, sweeping along the surface of the water, blew his hair into his eyes, and made the flame of his lamp quiver. If that went out, he would be left in utter darkness.

He felt a little bewildered too. The long galleries and sidings, perfectly familiar to him, seemed strange now that they were flooded and there was only a low archway of a foot or so visible above the water. He could scarcely tell whereabouts he was. The path was still ending downward and the flood rising higher about him. Now it was breast high.

A few steps farther on, and he could only keep his mouth above it by stretching himself as upright as possible. If his feet did not touch rising ground in half a dozen paces, his lamp must be put out, even if he struggled through himself in safety. To go back now was difficult as to go forward. But there was no longer any question in his mind as to going back. He knew that the end was near at hand and a few seconds only would decide it.

They were a few seconds of intense anxiety. But his feet soon felt the ground rising beneath them, and he knew that the victory was his own. A rapture of joy, such

as he had never felt before, rushed through him. In another five minutes, he would reach the siding, where his lost comrades were waiting in despair for their inevitable fate.

He fancied he could see their faces, lit up by the light of their safety-lamps, turning towards him as he drew near to save them from death. They were all very dear to him. But they had never seemed so dear to him as at this moment. The peril he had come through was so great, and he had so fully conquered the temptation to leave them in their woe, that his own love for them had deepened a hundred fold. In another minute or two, he would hear their voices, and feel their hands clasping his. And he would lead them by a safe way to the daylight and the safety and the life above.

He was hurrying on breathlessly, for there was even now no time to lose. But presently he hesitated, and looked around him with a gesture of bewilderment, and an air of anxious inspection. The water was still knee deep, and the rough walls of rock and the low roof which hemmed him in would have appeared to any other eyes exactly the same as all the other galleries and passages of the old mine. But the difference was plain to him.

He had, in his hurry and perplexity, missed his way. This was not the Long Spiny siding, where his young brother and his comrades had been at work, and from which a safe, though circuitous route, led to the foot of the shaft, where his mother and Abby were waiting and praying for them. It was a blind cutting, long ago deserted, far away from the shaft, and with the flood already filling up and surging through the roadway, by which alone he could have returned. He was lost, and he had saved no one!

Chapter 4

No one stirred from the mouth of the pit. Reuben had promised to be back in an hour's time. And though many more spectators gathered to the spot, not a soul could leave it. The men and boys still clustered about the very edge, looking down anxiously into the darkness below, and ready to catch the faintest sound. Judith Hazeldine and old Lijah's wife sat together, sobbing and praying. While Abby crouched on the ground near them, hiding her face from the sight of all, and from the mocking, garish light of the sun.

"God take care of my Reuben," were the only words she could think of. She had never been down into the pit and the darkness there seemed terrible to her. There was very little talking going on around her. And those who spoke at all whispered. But she would not have heard them if they had talked loudly.

She did not hear the merry sounds of a spring evening which filled the air, the caroling of the birds calling to one another from the topmost branches of the trees, and the bleating of the young lambs in the meadows, and the lowing of the cows as they trod slowly along the lanes towards their stalls. The heavy minutes dragged by, and Abby saw only a great darkness, and heard nothing save the cry of her own heart.

But she was among the first that caught the sound of a shout, faint and smothered as it was, that came up from the gloomy depths below. It was a little over an hour since Reuben had disappeared from their sight. Yes! Surely that was the shout of men saved from a terrible doom! In an instant, the spell that had kept the crowd silent was broken.

The women cried and laughed in the same breath. The men shouted hurrah and shook hands joyfully with those nearest to them. Abby sprang to her feet, a smile

dawning through the look of terror and despair that still lingered on her face. Every eye watched the chain that slowly dragged up its load of rescued men. How slowly the old engine did its work! And how noisily the chain creaked and grated! But here they were in sight! Here they were in the blessed sunlight once more!

The truck stopped on a level with the shaft's mouth. But now it was evident that there were only three persons in it. The three that had been at work when the flood broke out. Where then was Reuben Hazeldine, the one who had taken his life in his hand and gone down to save these? Silence fell again upon the crowd, which lasted only for an instant, yet which seemed long and terrible, until old Judith cried out,

"But where's my lad, Reuben?" she asked.

"Reuben!" they all cried, in one breath.

"Ay!" answered old Lijah's wife, grasping her husband's arm with both hands, "Reuben went down to seek you. Hast seen naught of him?"

"Nay!" he said, "we fled for our lives, and did not tarry. We 'scaped with the skin of our teeth only. There was a road none knew of save me, and I guided the other twain along it. Wherefore did Reuben come?"

"He thought as nobody knew of that road save him," sobbed his wife, "and he's down in the pit seeking to save you."

Once more the silence of awe and terror fell upon them all. Three were saved, but one was lost. And he who had been chief and foremost in all their hearts for the last hour, excepting in the heart of the old woman who was clasping her husband's arm as if she could never let it go.

"Who will go down after my lad Reuben?" cried Judith, mournfully.

"There's not a soul can live in the pit," answered old Lijah, "it's too late now. The flood's rising, rising. Look here. It was halfway up to my knee at the foot of the shaft. If he's not here in half an hour there's no chance for him."

"He must get out," exclaimed Simeon, so young yet that he could not believe in any harm coming to his brother Reuben. "God is bound to save him."

"Hush, lad, hush!" said old Lijah. "God's not bound to bring him back, but let's pray to Him for Reuben."

"Wouldn't it ha' been wiser-like of God Almighty if He'd kept Reuben from going on a fool's errand?" asked Levi Hazeldine with a sneer. He had been very silent while the crowd was waiting for the return of Reuben from his brave adventure, but this was too good an occasion to be missed for impressing upon the simple folk their folly in believing in God and trusting Him.

"Levi," answered old Lijah, "there's nobody here, but thee that 'ud call it a fool's errand. There isn't a soul about that wont love Reuben Hazeldine, ay, a hundred times more than if he'd saved himself and stayed skulking round the pit's mouth while there was a chance of saving his friends. I believe he's followed his Lord, and won a crown of honor by what he's done, whether he comes out of the pit alive or no. It isn't every man has such a chance of showing how he's learned to be like the Lord Jesus Christ. God Almighty was too wise to look to thee to do such a deed as this."

There was faint, quickly dying laugh as Levi Hazeldine walked away with his head carried high, and with a contemptuous smile upon his face. He felt that the sympathy of the people was not with him, and that it would be useless to argue his point with them just then. He turned round for a last disdainful glance at the crowd before losing sight of the spot. And clearly outlined against the evening sky he could see them clustered about old Lijah, some kneeling and others standing, but all bareheaded, while the old man, with face upturned and uplifted hands, was evidently speaking in earnest prayer.

“Poor fools!” sneered Levi, “as if there was anybody as could hear them or anybody as cared!”

He fancied he was sorry for Reuben, but it was of no use to be sorry, he said to himself. What could he do? What difference would it make to him? The sun would shine as brightly, and his food would be as savory, and his clothing would be as good, whether Reuben was alive or dead. It would not alter in the smallest degree his own actual life.

Why should he fret himself about fanciful things? about such a thing, for instance, as a man by his own folly and rashness throwing away his existence, and sacrificing all the sober reality of life for a mere fanatical idea of duty. If Reuben had only been persuaded of what he himself knew, that there was no God, no immortality, no life better than or beyond the present, then he would have valued his own precious existence too highly to treat it as a thing to be held cheap. Poor Reuben!

It was a dreary night in the little hamlet. The crowd about the pit’s mouth did not separate until the long twilight had faded into night, and the birds had long ago ceased to sing from the topmost branches of the trees. They had lingered and listened but no voice, however faint, had called up from the black depths of the pit. The long, sad minutes brought no new hope.

Again and again the shaft had been sounded, and the water was steadily rising, slowly, but surely. Before the moon was to be seen in the clear cold gray of the eastern sky, they all knew for certain that Reuben Hazeldine had met with death in the dark galleries below the green meadows and the wooded coppices upon which the pale and mournful light was lying.

There was nothing more to be done but to go home and to mourn over the brave, unselfish, Christlike friend who had so lately lived among them, but whom they had not loved as they loved him now.

Even Abby felt that she had not loved him as he deserved to be loved. She had been carried in a deathlike swoon to Judith Hazeldine’s house, and laid upon the bed in the pleasant attic under the thatched roof, which Reuben had been so fondly preparing for her.

When she came to herself, her eyes opened upon the almost finished work, which was still waiting, and must wait forever now, for the last touches of his hand. There were the beautiful flowers he had bought for her on the window-sill, and the picture he was just about to hang upon the wall. Under the window was the garden where he worked in the long summer evenings after his sunless toil in the pit.

His Bible and hymn-book, which they had read in and sung from together, were almost within her reach, and she stretched out her hand for them. All the night through she clasped them to her breast, or kept them under her cheek, while she was lying, tearless and speechless, on the bed, thinking of him down below, not dead yet perhaps, but hopelessly imprisoned and buried in a living grave.

Why had she not known him better and loved him more while he was with her? She had been sharp with him and trifled with him, and made his heart ache with her foolish contrary ways. Perhaps God had thought him too good for her, and so had taken him away to a place where he would be happier than with her. Yet all the while she seemed to see him pacing the dark passages underground in search of his lost comrades, for whom he had laid down his life.

Simeon had cried himself to sleep and was still sobbing in his troubled dreams, but old Judith had not even lain down on her bed to rest her weary limbs. Her heart was too heavy for sleep. She had been so much bound up in Simeon, her youngest born, that she had somewhat neglected Reuben.

At this very time her mind had been so fully engaged with the contest for the Hazeldine Bible, that she had been too ready to chide and thwart her elder son, and to fume at the changes he was making in the house for his young wife. She had even opposed peevish objections to his marriage, though Abby was a girl quite to her own liking.

Life had not been as smooth and happy to Reuben as it might have been of late. Ever since he had lost his chance of winning the Hazeldine Bible, he had been looked down upon as a poor scholar, chiefly fit for the harder and rougher work of the world. While Simeon had been put forward and brought to the front on every occasion.

But what a good son her firstborn had been to her! She could not remember a harsh word or an unkind look from him, though he could not read the Bible aloud like a parson, as Simeon did. All his quiet, thoughtful, patient ways came back to her mind. His hard work and his constant self-forgetfulness. His tender care of her and his silence when she was blaming him. He was too good for them all and God had taken him. Her thoughts brought her to the same point that Abby had reached.

Chapter 5

The sun rose early, as brightly and cheerily as though there never had been death or sorrow on the face of the earth, which grew light and joyous under its beams. The first rays smote on Abby's face through the uncurtained window, and the call of the cuckoo seemed to shout loudly in her ear. But she neither saw nor heard. She was at rest for a little while, gaining strength to bear fresh burdens of sorrow.

It was a perfect day for a holiday—such a holiday as it was to have been, when old Judith threw open the cottage-door and looked out on the green bank which hid the shaft of the pit from her sight, then stretched across the narrow track, trodden through the broad leaves of the coltsfoot, which had been made by her sons' footsteps as they hastened to and from their darksome labor.

She could almost hear Reuben's voice singing and see him striding along the little path. Through the long somber hours of the night, her trouble had been too deep for tears, but now that she saw the sun shining in a cloudless sky, and the dew glistening on every leaf, and felt the soft sweet rush of the fresh air wafting past her with the scent of flowers borne upon it, a flood of tears welled up to her sunken eyes.

"Oh, my lad! my lad!" she cried out aloud, as if some ear was listening to her in the morning stillness. Her heart was aching very bitterly. Yet after a few minutes she went indoors again calmly and crept cautiously and silently up the steep stairs to the attic where Abby was lying. She had often stolen up so to wake Reuben and call him to his work.

The girl had fallen asleep at last and lay locked in a profound slumber, with her cheek resting on Reuben's hymn-book. "Young folks can sleep while old folks break their hearts," thought Judith. Simeon too had forgotten his sorrow during the night, and like Abby, had been wrapped up and softly lifted away from his misery. But the old mother had not been released for one instant from the stern grip of grief.

Early in the morning the neighbors came dropping in to offer what help and comfort they could give, for the business of living goes on, though the joy of life may have passed away. Some of them had been eager to stay all night with Judith, but she had chosen rather to be left to pass through the first hours of her anguish quite alone.

The large, old-fashioned house-place, with its wide hearth and high mantel shelf over it, looked very dreary in the sunlight. The preparations for the expected festivity,

so suddenly interrupted, were still strewn about, though the large fire had gone out and the oven was cold, but all Judith's plentiful provisions were there, and it needed only to kindle the fire and burn fresh fagots of wood in the big oven for the feast still to be ready at the appointed time.

Judith aroused herself. Some of the invited guests, who were coming from a distance and would have several miles to walk, must be already on their way no doubt, ignorant of the calamity that had befallen the household. Her old, lifelong habits of thrift, and her strong sense of the duty of hospitality to her kith and ken, conquered her new grief. The Hazeldines flocking from different quarters would come in weary and hungry, and their wants must be provided for. There were friendly neighbors only too glad to help, and by and by the same pleasant sounds of cooking were to be heard in the house as those which had reached Reuben's ears at his happy work the day before.

To Simeon and Abby, two young creatures still strange to sorrow, it seemed monstrous to think of feasting or preparing a feast now Reuben was lost, terribly lost, in the sunless windings of the pit. Simeon crawled languidly away, with the slow and weary step of a heavy heart, to the mouth of the shaft, where the pitmen were gathered to hear how the water was going on, whether rising or falling. The pump had been at work all night and the flood was not gaining ground. At the same time, there was no perceptible lowering of the water in the shaft.

The most experienced among the miners did not expect the pit to be fit for working under a week, and they shook their heads when Simeon stammered out his question, "Is there any hope of finding him alive?" The water had risen too high in the shaft to leave any cutting unflooded. The lad threw himself on the ground and stretched his head over the edge of the deep, dark pit, where, many fathoms below his wistful eyes, there might be seen a faint glimmer in the blackness of the fitful quivering of light upon the waters, beneath which his brother lay somewhere in his vast grave. He had perished in seeking to save him.

It was almost noonday before he could make up his mind to go back home. When he reached its threshold at last, he found the large old house-place more closely filled with guests than he had ever seen it before. All the Hazeldines dwelling within ten miles had gathered together, dressed in their best and gayest Sunday clothing, many of them with Bibles carefully wrapped up in clean handkerchiefs, as though they had come to a religious solemnity, for were they not there to hear him read his trial chapter?

His mother also had carefully attired herself in her best black gown and whitest widow's cap, and sat in the chimney corner, sad though tearless, ready to bid each new-comer welcome, and to listen to their rough, but well-meant words of consolation. Except to her, not a word was spoken above a whisper.

The men were all lingering outside the house, in the trim garden, while the women talked together in low undertones. There was no mirth, no good-humored jesting, no hearty, loud-spoken greeting as old friends met one another, such as there would have been if it had been Reuben's wedding-day. Most of the women were weeping as they whispered together about Reuben and Abby, and not a few of the men furtively rubbed their eyes with the back of their horny hands.

All was hushed and solemn, as if the guests had been summoned to a funeral. Abby was not there. Only one woman after another mounted silently the steep staircase, and came down again with redder eyes and a still more sorrowful face than when she went up to see the broken-hearted girl.

Almost the last guest to appear was Levi Hazeldine. He was seen coming over the pit-bank, carrying under his arm the treasured black-letter Bible, which Simeon

must win today, or the Hazeldines must see it borne away forever from the land of its first famous owner. It was a point of honor to win that Bible. Every Hazeldine in the house looked to Simeon, who had shrunk away into the darkest corner to hide his tear-stained face and swollen eyes.

In the midst of their grief for Reuben, there was a thrill of excitement and dread at the mere thought of the boy failing. Judith herself forgot for the moment her firstborn, as the large, heavy old volume, with its thick binding and silver clasps, was laid aside on a small table, to be opened by Simeon blindfolded after the meal was over. Everyone felt that it would be well to have their feast, a funeral feast though it seemed, well over before the die was cast.

Sorrowful men are hungry, however real their sorrow, especially when they have taken a walk of ten miles since breakfast. And Judith's hospitable notions about a feast were well-known among all her kinsfolk. There was a general feeling of relief when the signal was given to sit down to dinner.

Judith did not sit down to the table, but Simeon was placed at the head of it, between old 'Lijah and Levi. It seemed to him as if that meal would never come to an end. He could not swallow a morsel, though all about him were urging him to try to taste one dainty after another.

Levi Hazeldine distinguished himself above the others by the way in which he plied his knife and fork, and consumed the delicacies set before him. He was too enlightened and philosophical to feel very keenly any trouble that did not touch himself, and he felt persuaded of the folly of losing his appetite because all around were more or less sorrowful.

His mind was quite at ease also about the Bible. The weeping lad beside him would never pass through the trial and he would carry the old heirloom away with him. He would rather have had one of more value than a worn-out, superstitious old book of fables, but such as it was, he still felt a pride in possessing it. A black-letter Bible, with silver clasps, would be quite a curiosity wherever he might go. Moreover, he might sell it some day for a tidy little sum, when he was clear away from the Hazeldines and their troublesome claims upon it.

Old 'Lijah ate and drank but little during the meal, and when it was over he rose up in his place, and laid a trembling hand upon the table before him, as if was about to make a speech. There was a dead silence in the house, for he had been like a father to the two fatherless boys, and Judith sat down in her rocking-chair and covered her face with her hands as she listened.

"Friends," he said, "it's a sore heart I have, standin' here and thinkin' of him as died for us yesterday. He was like my own son to me. He was for sure. But I was comforted by a vision I had of him in the night, in the dreams of my head upon my bed. And lo! I beheld him wanderin' and wanderin' about down there in the pit, seekin' for us in the darkness, and there was One beside him as he couldn't see, with a face so shinin' it dazzled me to look upon him, only I knew that it was none other than the Lord Christ Himself. And when I looked back to Reuben's face, I beheld it growin' brighter and brighter, though he couldn't see who was walking step-by-step beside him, until my eyes were dazzled to look upon him also. And I awoke just in the spring of the morning' and a voice was sayin' softly in the chamber, as if angels were talkin' about it one with another, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.' That's what Reuben did. He laid down his life for us."

"I call it throwing away his life like a fool," muttered Levi.

"Ay, if life's naught but eatin' and drinkin' and toilin' and moilin'," said old 'Lijah, "but it seems to me as if life was love and friendship, and trustin' in God, and strivin' to be like the dear Lord Himself. I'm a world happier than thee, Levi, all here bein'

judges, when I sit and read quiet in my house a chapter about my God and heaven, than thee in the public house drinkin' thy money away and makin' thy head ache. Ay, and my wife's happier, and the house at home's happier for it. If they take God and the Bible away from poor folks, what's left for them save toilin' and moilin'? Tell me, if thou can!"

"But the Bible isn't true," answered Levi. "Look thee! What a blunder it all was yesterday. The poor lad leaving everything to risk his life in the pit and all for nothing, nothing at all. Why did God let it be? You'd have been the same and the world 'ud have been the same, if he'd done naught but smoke his pipe at the pit's mouth till you came up safe and sound."

"No, no," said old 'Lijah, "we should never have known how he loved us. Nay, and the world 'ud never have known what love was, if God's dear Son had never left His home in heaven, if He'd never have 'emptied Himself of all but love,' as the hymn says, and laid down His life for us. I see it all plainer now. I tell thee, Levi, life's not worth havin', for us poor folks anyhow, if there's no love in it. If God don't love us, and we don't love one another, there's naught but toilin' and moilin' for us till we die like dogs."

"Well, well," replied Levi, "we wont argy. If dinner's over, let the lad try his chance for the Hazeldine Bible. A fair chance and no favor."

There was a solemn silence, which lasted for a minute or two. Many of the women and some of the older men bent down their heads and closed their eyes as if they were praying. You might have seen poor Judith's wrinkled hands trembling and her gray head shaking. But there was a gloom before Simeon's eyes, as if a sudden night had fallen. He could hear, after the silence, that some one rose up from the table to reach the Bible, and there was a hum and murmur, as of indistinct though friendly words of encouragement, but he could neither hear nor see plainly.

His head was light and giddy and his heart was beating fast. He could only think of Reuben's failure some years ago, and the disappointment of his mother and of all the Hazeldines at the Bible remaining in the hands of a professed infidel. There was no need to blindfold his eyes, for he was hardly conscious of what he was doing.

As his trembling fingers groped for the book, he heard old 'Lijah cry, "God bless the lad," but when he had opened the Bible, and the bandage was removed, his eyes fell upon a page of heavy black characters, of which he could not make out a single letter. His young face flushed and then grew deadly pale. Where was his brother, who should have been beside him, upholding him by his sympathy and love? Lost! Reuben was lost! What did it matter who had the Hazeldine Bible now?

With a sudden loud and very bitter cry, which rang in every ear, he turned away and fled through the open door, to hide his grief in the green solitude of the quiet woods, where he had played so often with his brother.

Chapter 6

For some minutes after he had found out the terrible mistake he had made, Reuben Hazeldine felt utterly paralyzed, both in mind and body, by despair. He stood perfectly still, staring blankly before him. He had lost his own life and saved no one. The feeble gleam of his miner's lamp showed him but too plainly that the cutting he had entered was not the Long Spinnny siding, where his young brother and his comrades had been at work.

The swirl and rush of the water had bewildered him. They could not be more than a few yards away from him. But there was a barrier of solid rock between them, burying them apart in living graves. No cry of his could reach them. No answering

voice from them could ever pierce through the awful silence of this great tomb which they shared unconsciously with him.

They were so far happier than himself in not knowing that he too was perishing, that he had vainly sacrificed his life for them. On the other hand, he would at least be spared the anguish of watching his comrades' slow and lingering death. Probably Simeon would die first, and then old 'Lijah, while Abner, a strong, full-grown man, must see them faint and fail before his time came. But as for Reuben, he must perish by himself, quite alone.

Why had God allowed him to be caught in this snare, like some wild creature taken in a trap? He could not blame himself. He had not acted meanly or selfishly. He had obeyed the call of duty, as he believed, following the footsteps of his Lord and Master. There had come to him a cry for help and he had sprung forward to be the helper. Those whom he had loved dearly had been brought into great peril and there had been no arm to deliver except his own. Surely God had looked to him to do this deed. Why, then, had He left him to fail and perish?

There was no answer. Reuben fancied he could see Levi's mocking face and hear his taunting voice ask, "Dost thou believe in a God now?" He had always been troubled and confused when Levi had called upon him to prove that there was a God, for he was not a clever man ready with arguments. Being only a collier, toiling hard day by day, he was not a learned man.

He had only felt sure in his own heart that there was a God who loved him as a Father, a Savior who had died for him and rose again for him, and a blessed heaven of rest and sinlessness lying beyond this world of toil and strife. But he did not know how to explain his belief to a man who had no more perception of such things than the deaf have of music or the blind of sunlight. At this moment, Levi's sneers and unbelief troubled him more than they had ever done.

He could have understood God's purpose if he had saved the others by the loss of his own life. But his sacrifice had been thrown away, altogether wasted. He could not bear to think of them imprisoned as he was, so near to him, yet so utterly separated from him.

As soon as his limbs recovered some strength, he strode back to the lower level of the cutting, until he stood neck high in the water and dare venture no farther, with a vain hope to gain the entrance to the Long Spinny siding. He turned again and sat down on the ground, burying his face in his hands.

Oh for the sunlight overhead, and the shout of the cuckoo, and the scent of the flowers in the garden! What would Abby do? His poor girl, who would never be his dear wife now. And his mother, who would have two sons to mourn over? How could they get through life, with no strong arm to work for them and no thoughtful heart to care for them? For if there was no God, there was no one to help them and comfort them. They were watching and waiting and praying round the pit's mouth at this moment. How long would they stay there with their breaking hearts?

Presently he heard his own lips whispering, almost mechanically, as though it was a mere habit, as one speaks familiar words sometimes unconsciously. What had he been saying to himself in this grim silence and solitude? "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Why! he had said it a thousand times, from his boyhood upwards. What! Could he indeed trust in God even now, when He was slaying him? Could he still believe there was a heavenly Father who loved him, yet saw him in his great despair, and did not stretch out His mighty arm and save him by some miracle? Had God no angel He could send to burst through the rocky barriers that hemmed him in?

A feeling of deep awe came over his spirit, and he sank on his knees, covering his face with his hands, as though some marvellous thing was about to come to pass. He

could hear the sullen splash of water running through the narrow channels of the pit. But there was no other sound, all was profound stillness.

Then, in his utmost heart, there seemed a still, small voice, whispering, "Did God work any miracle to save His own Son? Did He send to Christ one out of His legions of angels to take Him down from the cross, though all the host of heaven would have gone gladly on that errand? Did Jesus ask the Father to do this thing? No, when He cried to God, He said, "Oh, my Father! If this cup may not pass away except I drink it, Thy will be done.'" And He had drunk the bitter cup to the dregs.

Chapter 7

Reuben's very soul hushed itself to catch these low whisperings, and a strange sense of peace, which no words can tell, took possession of him. Yes, he would put his trust in God, though He was calling him to die, perhaps by a slow and lingering death.

He lifted himself up from the ground and looked calmly about him. How long he might live he did not know, but it was certain his lamp would not keep alight long. He would spend the little time left to him in leaving some record of his trust in God, if his dead body should ever be found. He had a strong knife in his pocket, and his pitman's axe in his hand, which he had snatched up almost unawares as he entered the main gangway of the pit. Now he must be quick, and find some spot on the rocky walls of his prison, where he could scratch a few words of farewell to Abby and his other dear ones before he was left in darkness.

About ten yards from the place where he had been standing, the deserted cutting came to a sudden end, and his heart leaped with a new hope. It had been roughly filled up with rubble and loose stones, and he could remember how his father had told him, long ago, that it had been so blocked up to prevent the lads at work in the pit from straying away and losing themselves in the old, abandoned tracks.

Where they might lead he could not tell, but here was, at least, something to be done, and he set about it in eager haste. In a short time, he had made an outlet large enough to creep through and found the passage beyond still tending upward, and increasing in height, as if it had once been one of the main cuttings of the mine. It seemed a long time to him, as he followed its windings wistfully and anxiously, but at length he stood at the bottom of an old disused shaft, looking up to the small ring of daylight overhead, which shone down upon him through a screen of green leaves.

How well he knew that spot above him, so far out of his reach! All around it lay a tangle of brushwood, just now covered with yellow catkins and young leaf buds, half-opened to the sun. Little dingles and dells of mossy turf, strewn with scented bluebells, and wind-flowers, and brown ferns, uncurling from their winter's sleep, were hidden amid the knotted bushes.

How often he and Abby and Simeon had gone nutting in the coppice overhead! He could even catch down there the even-song which the birds were caroling their loudest, and he knew well how the young hares, and rabbits, and the squirrels, were leaping and playing about the trees and grass. He stood, with upturned face, looking and listening till the twilight fell. His lamp had gone out, and he was left in darkness, but his soul was delivered from the blackness and bitterness of despair. He drew back again under the roof of the old gangway and sat down against the side to wait till morning.

He could not be sure yet of deliverance. There was no path in the woods past the old shaft and it might be days before any one passed that way. But it was springtime, when the children of the little hamlet would be sure to be hunting for bluebells and

primroses, and some of them would perhaps be about the next morning, throwing pebbles down the shaft to hear them rattle on the stones at the bottom, as he and Simeon had done dozens of times, when he was a boy.

How joyfully would he catch the welcome sound, and how terrified the little cowards would be, when they heard a voice from the deep pit! Reuben's heart was no longer heavy and it did not seem difficult to trust in God. He was willing to perish, if that was God's will. But no miracle would be needed now for his deliverance, no mighty angel need descend to break through the rock and set him free. A child at play in the woods might be his deliverer, and would not God send a little child to his help, if it would be better for him to live than to die?

Reuben slept, hard as his bed was, and felt no fear on awaking. The night was long, but not dreary. Even the thought of Simeon and old 'Lijah and Abner was no longer so distressing to him. They, too, were all under the care of God, who could do whatsoever He would. When the morning came, and the light shone again far away overhead, he went back to the bottom of the shaft, and took up his post, listening. The long, long hours passed slowly by, and no merry sound of children at play fell upon his ear. Yet his heart did not fail. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," he cried, half-aloud.

Now and then, Reuben caught in the hollow of his hand a few drops of water falling from the oozy walls of the shaft, and drank them, but he scarcely felt hunger. There was a solemn gladness in his spirit, which he had never felt before. Whether he lived, he lived unto the Lord, or whether he died, he died unto the Lord. Whatever befell him, life or death, was the will of God.

What time it was, or how long the daylight had gleamed overhead, he did not know, but at last his quickened ears caught the faint sound of sobs and cries, so faint that he almost doubted whether he was not mistaken. Yet it brought him fresh hope, and he stood out into the middle of the shaft and called and shouted up it loudly, using a cry shrill and clear, which rang down the narrow tunnel behind him and awoke its echoes.

He could hear no answer to them, but he cried again as soon as the echoes were silent, and then the ring of light above him was broken by a small dark object, which he knew must be a head stretched over the shaft, and he called as clearly as he could, "Don't be afraid, but run and tell some of the men that Reuben Hazeldine is here!"

"Reuben!" cried Simeon's voice. "Reuben! is't thee, my lad? Eh! Wait thee, and I'll be back in a minute!"

Simeon fled through the sunny woods, like one in terror pursued by some enemy, and it was not many minutes before he rushed, breathless and speechless, into the midst of the departing guests, who were still lingering about Judith Hazeldine's sorrowful house. There had been a keen and universal disappointment among them when he had turned away from his chance of winning the Hazeldine Bible and left it to be borne away to foreign lands. But now they all gathered about him, startled and aroused by his sudden reappearance.

Levi paused in his task of wrapping up the precious heirloom, which had been passing from hand to hand of the regretful family. Simeon, with his hair falling over his face, and uttering half-sobbed-out syllables which no one could understand, stood in the midst of them gesticulating and beckoning wildly, like one gone out of his mind.

"Poor lad!" whispered two or three of the women, shrinking back into safe corners behind the men, "it's crazed his brain!"

"Reuben!" he gasped, "in the spinny! There!" and he threw back his arm in the direction of the coppice. "Come! Reuben! mother! Abby, come!"

If the lad was not mad, he must have met with Reuben's ghost. Yet it was still broad day, when no ghost roams abroad. What could the lad mean? But in a minute or two, Simeon regained his breath, and could speak plainly, though he spoke with sobs and tears.

"Reuben's at the bottom of the old pit in the spinny," he cried. "Come quickly, and bring ropes and things. Abby, come and run to the old pit, where thee and me and Reuben used to play!"

The boy did not wait another instant, but darted back again to hang over the low stone wall which guarded the mouth of the old shaft, and gaze down into the dark depths below, where he could not see his brother. He was half-afraid he might have been deceived by his own fancy, but when he called again, Reuben quickly answered him.

"Simeon, lad!" he said, "art thee saved? And Abner? And old 'Lijah? Are all of you saved?"

"Ay, all of us, Reuben!" shouted Simeon, "and mother's comin', and Abby, I hear them comin' through the spinny."

The tears rushed to Reuben's eyes, though he had not wept before. He knelt down at the bottom of the pit, to thank God. Every love and joy in life seemed to have gathered new strength, even its toils and perils looked brighter than they had ever done. How sweet the sunlight was! And how gladsome the singing of the birds! His little attic at home was like a palace to him. And Abby and his mother and all his friends, how dear to him they were!

God had given them back to him, a hundred-fold more precious for the short sharp trial of his faith that he had passed through. There was no question now of God slaying him. He was bringing him out of his living grave and setting him to walk again on the earth, a better and a stronger man—more like Christ, who had also laid down His life, and who had come back from the grave, for a little while to comfort and bless those whom He had loved.

But who could tell the joy of every heart there, when he was drawn up out of the dark depths of the pit and stood among them a living man? They pressed round him and whose hand was the first to grasp his it would be impossible to say. It was like a dream of great joy to most of them. All whom he loved were there.

They marched homeward with him in a glad procession, through the sunny woods. The old home had never looked so beautiful, nor had the flowers in the garden ever been so sweet.

"Friends," said Reuben, with a choking sensation in his throat, "before I take sup or morsel in my mouth, let's kneel down and let 'Lijah thank God for us!"

They knelt down about the men that had been saved, even Levi bending his knee for the first time for many years. And old 'Lijah laid his trembling hands on the back of a chair, and swayed to and fro, with heavy sobs of joy and thankfulness breaking from him. But for these sobs, there was a deep silence in the little crowd.

"Dear Lord! thank Thee! Thank Thee!" was all that old 'Lijah could say, though he was a prayer-leader at the meetings held in his own cottage. Levi Hazeldine caught himself saying, "Thank Thee!" though he knew there was no one to thank, and that all had happened by chance. Yet he almost wished that what these simple, ignorant folks believed was really true.

When the short thanksgiving was over, old 'Lijah stood up again at the end of the long oak table, and asked Judith to place the Hazeldine Bible once more upon it.

"Levi," he said persuasively, "though thee and me don't agree in most things, maybe thee'll agree that Simeon hasn't had a fair chance of winnin' the old Bible. The lad hadn't a heart for readin' while his brother was lost and given up for dead. But

now the Lord's brought back Reuben from the jaws of the grave, give him another try for it. The sun's not gone down yet. Let him have his eyes blindfolded and open the book again. And the Lord will bless thee, Levi. Ay! Though thou knows Him not. He will be with thee in yon far country, where thee art goin' to spend thy substance."

"I'm willing," answered Levi shortly.

"Come, then, Simeon," said old 'Lijah, laying his hand on the boy's head, "and the Lord give thee seein' eyes, and an understandin' heart, and good success in this matter. The Lord that has done great things for us, may He give thee this blessing also!"

Faint and hungry as Reuben was, it was he who bound the handkerchief over the boy's eyes, and placed his hand on the closed Bible, whispering, "God bless thee, lad!" Judith and Abby stood behind them, their faces still pale with the past sorrow, though there was gladness in their eyes.

There was no dread of failure in Simeon's heart now. He stood for a minute looking at the black-letter page before him, and then he read out the chapter and verse of the book upon which he had opened. The Hazeldines about the table found the place in their Bibles, and followed his voice carefully.

But Reuben's face flushed, and his heart beat, as the closing verses fell upon his ear. They were these:

***"I went down to the bottoms of the mountains;
the earth with her bars was about me for ever;
yet hast Thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God.
When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord;
and my prayer came in unto Thee, into Thy holy temple.
They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.
But I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of thanksgiving;
I will pay that that I have vowed.
Salvation is of the Lord."***

Simeon's voice ceased, for the page was ended. No word had been missed, nor even stammered over. He could hardly believe that it was true that he had won the Hazeldine Bible, until Levi gave it a little push towards him.

"There, lad!" he said, "it's thine fairly. I didn't do better when I was thy age."

"Levi!" said Reuben earnestly, "would God it spoke to you as it speaks to me! Thou'rt going far away from thy kith and kin, and thou'rt without God in the world, and there's no Saviour for thee, thou thinkest—and thee doesn't know how gladsome it is to praise the Lord, nor how good it is to pray to Him and call upon Him, like young children calling to their fathers and mothers. But Cousin Levi, will thee take a gift from all thy kinsfolk here, if we buy another Bible for thee to take away to thy far country? Maybe a day will come that thou'lt read it for our sakes, if not thine own."

"Ay! Ay! Take a Bible from us, Levi!" cried out all the Hazeldines present.

"As a sign and token that we wish thee well," added Reuben.

"Ay! Ay! God bless thee, Levi!" they cried out again.

"I'll take it and thank you kindly," said Levi, in a faltering voice.

"Come again tomorrow, all of you," exclaimed Judith, speaking in a shrill, high-pitched tone of excitement, "it shall be bought by tomorrow, and Reuben shall be married, and we'll have another feast-day, now my son's found again."

The sun was setting by this time, and the guests departed, leaving the little household to feel in quietness their great joy. Old 'Lijah and his wife were the last

who said good-bye, and the moon was rising over the green coppice behind the cottage, when they shook hands for the last time with Reuben at the garden gate.

“It’s been such a night and a day as I’ve never worn through before!” said old ‘Lijah’s wife. “Last night it was all weepin’ and mournin’, and everything goin’ wrong, and tonight it’s all joy and gladness and singin’ praises, and everything goin’ right!”

“Ay, lass!” answered old ‘Lijah, “there’s no true hurt or loss to them that trust in God. I believe it and Reuben believes it. Things are goin’ all right, not wrong. Isn’t it written, ‘All things work together for good to them that love God’? and again, ‘Neither death nor life, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.’”

THE END

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