

John Granger

By Mary E. Braddon

I

“Then there is no hope for me, Susy?”

The speaker was a stalwart young fellow of the yeoman class, with a grave, earnest face, and a frank, fearless manner. He was standing by the open window of a pleasant farmhouse parlour, by the side of a bright-eyed girl, who was leaning with folded arms upon the broad window-sill, looking shyly downwards as he talked to her.

“Is there no chance, Susy! none? Is it all over between us?”

“If you mean that I shall ever cease to think of you as one of the best friends I have in this world, John, no,” she answered “or that I shall ever cease to look up to you as the noblest and truest of men, no, John—a hundred times no.”

“But I mean something more than that, Susy, and you know it as well as I do. I want you to be my wife by-and-by. I’m not in a hurry, you know, my dear. I can bide my time. You’re very young yet, and may be you scarcely know your own mind. I can wait, Susy. My love will stand wear and tear. Let me have the hope of winning you by-and-by. I’m not a poor man at this present time, you know, Susy. There are three thousand pounds of old uncle Tidman’s on deposit in my name in Hiliborough Bank I’ve been a lucky fellow in having an industrious father and a rich bachelor uncle, and with this chance of you for my wife, a few years would make me a rich man.”

“That can never be, John. I know how proud I ought to be that you should think of me like this. I’m not worthy of so much love. It isn’t that I don’t appreciate your merits, John; but—”

“There’s someone else, eh, Susy?”

“Yes, John,” she faltered, in a very low voice, and with a vivid blush on her drooping face.

“Someone who has asked you to be his wife?”

“No, John; but I think he likes me a little, and—”

Here she stopped suddenly, finding the sentence difficult to continue. John Granger gave a long, heavy sigh, and stood for some minutes looking at the ground in dead silence.

“I think I can guess who it is,” he said at last; “Robert Ashley—eh, Susy?” The blush grew deeper, and the girl’s silence was a sufficient answer. “Well, he’s a fine handsome young fellow, and more likely to take a pretty girl’s fancy than such a blunt, plain-spoken chap as I am; and he’s a good fellow enough, as far as I know; I’ve nothing to say against him, Susy. But there’s one man in the world I should have liked to warn you against, Susan, if I’d thought there was a shadow of a chance you’d ever listen to any love-making of his.”

“Who is that, John?”

“Your cousin, Stephen Price.”

“You needn’t fear that I should ever listen to him, John. There’s little love lost between Stephen and me.”

“Isn’t there? I’ve heard him swear that he’d have you for his wife some day, Susan. I don’t like him, my dear, and I don’t trust him either. It isn’t only that he bears a bad character up town, as a dissipated, pleasure-loving spendthrift; there’s something more than that, something below the surface that I can’t find words for. I know that he’s very clever. Folks say that Mr Vollair the

lawyer looks over all his faults on account of his cleverness, and that he never had a clerk to serve him so well as Stephen does. But cleverness and honesty don't always go together, Susy, and I fear that cousin of yours will come to a bad end."

Susan Lorton did not attempt to dispute the justice of this opinion. Stephen Price was no favourite of hers, in spite of those good looks and that showy cleverness which had won him a certain amount of popularity elsewhere.

John Granger lingered at the sunny window, where the scent of a thousand roses came floating in upon the warm summer air. He lingered as if loth to go and make an end of that interview-, though the end must come, and the last words must needs be spoken very soon.

"Well, well, Susy," he said presently, "a man must teach himself to bear these things, even when they seem to break his life up somehow, and make an end of every hope and dream he ever had. I can't tell you how I've loved you, my dear—how I shall love you to the end of my days. Bob Ashley is a good fellow, and God grant he may make you a good husband! But I don't believe it's in him to love you, as I do, Susan. He takes life pleasantly and has his mind full of getting on in the world, you see, and he has father and mother and sisters to care for. I've got no one but you to love, Susan. I've stood quite alone in the world ever since I was a boy, and you've been all the world to me. It's bitter to bear, my dear but it can't be helped. Don't cry, Sissy darling. I'm a selfish brute to talk like this, and bring the tears into those pretty eyes. It can't be helped, my dear. Providence orders these things, you see, and we must bear them quietly. Goodbye, dear."

He gave the girl his big honest hand. She took it in both her own, bent over it, and kissed it tearfully.

"You'll never know how truly I respect you John," she said. "But don't say goodbye like that. We are to be friends always, aren't we?"

"Friends always? Yes, my dear; but friends at a distance. There's some things I couldn't bear to see. I can wish for your happiness, and pray for it—honestly but I couldn't stop at Friarsgate to see you Robert Ashley's wife. My lease of the old farm is out. I'm to call on Mr Vollair this afternoon to talk about renewing it. I fancied you'd be mistress of the dear old place, Susy. That's been my dream for the last three years. I couldn't bear the look of the empty rooms now that dream's broken. I shall surrender the farm at once, and go to America, I've got capital that'll start me anywhere, and I'm not afraid of work. I've old friends out there too; my first cousin, Jim Lomax, and his wife. They went out five years ago, and have been doing wonders with a farm in New England. I shan't feel quite strange there."

"Go to America, John, and never come back?" said Susan, despondently.

She had a sincere regard for this honest yeoman, and was grieved to the heart at the thought of the sorrow that had come to him through his unfortunate desire to be something more to her than a friend.

"Never's a long word, Sissy," he answered, in his serious straightforward way. "Perhaps when a good many years have gone over all our heads, and when your children are beginning to grow up, I may come back and take my seat beside your hearth, and smoke my pipe with your husband. Not that I should ever cease to love you, my dear; but time would take the sting out of the old pain, and it would be only a kind of placid sorrow, like the thought of one that's long been dead. Yes, I shall come back to England after ten or fifteen years, if I live, if it's only for the sake of seeing your children—and I'll wager there'll be one amongst them that'll take to me almost as if it was my own, and will come to be like a child to me in my old age. I've seen such

things. And now I must say goodbye, Susy; for I've got to be up town at three o'clock to see Mr Vollair, and I've a deal of work to do before I leave."

"Shall you go soon, John!"

"As soon as ever I can get things settled—the farm off my hands, and so on. But I shall come to say goodbye to you and your father before I go."

"Of course, you will, John. It would be unfriendly to go without seeing father. Goodbye!"

They shook hands once more and parted. The yeoman walked slowly along the little garden path, and across a patch of furze-grown common land, on the other side of which there was a straggling wood of some extent, broken up here and there by disused gravel-pits and pools of stagnant water—a wild kind of place to pass at night, yet considered safe enough by the country people about Hillborough as there was scarcely any part of it that was not within earshot of the high road. The narrow footpath across this wood was a short-cut between Matthew Lorton's farm and Hillborough, and John Granger took it

He walked with a firm step and an upright bearing, though his heart was heavy, as he went townwards that afternoon. He was a man to bear his trouble in a manly spirit, whatever it might be, and there were no traces of his disappointment in his looks or manner when he presented himself at the lawyer's house.

Mr Vollair had a client with him; so John Granger was ushered into the clerk's office, where he found Stephen Price hard at work at a desk, in company with a smaller and younger clerk.

"Good afternoon, Granger," he said, in a cool patronizing manner that John Granger hated; "come about your lease, of course?"

"There is nothing else for me to come about."

"Ah, you see, you're one of those lucky fellows who never want the help of the law to get you out of a scrape. And you're a devilish lucky fellow, too, in the matter of this lease, if you can get Friarsgate for a new term at the rent you've been paying hitherto, as I dare say you will, if you play your cards cleverly with our governor presently."

"I am not going to ask for a new lease," answered John Granger; "I am going to leave Friarsgate."

"Going to leave Friarsgate! You astound me. Have you got a better farm in your eye?"

"I am going to America."

Stephen Price gave expression to his astonishment by a prolonged whistle, and then twisted himself round upon his stool, the better to regard Mr Granger.

"Why, Granger, how is this?" he asked. "A fellow like you, with plenty of money, going off to America! I thought that was the refuge for the destitute."

"I'm tired of England, and I've a fancy for a change. I hear that a man may do very well in America, with a good knowledge of farming and a tidy bit of capital."

"Ah, and you've got that," said Stephen Price, with an envious sigh. "And so you're thinking of going to America? That's very strange. I used to fancy you were sweet upon a certain pretty cousin of mine. I've seen you hanging about old Lorton's place a good deal of late years." John Granger did not reply to this remark. Mr Vollair's client departed a few minutes later, and Mr Granger was asked to step into the lawyer's office. He found his business very easy to arrange in the manner he wished. Mr Vollair had received more than one offer for Friarsgate farm, and there was an applicant who would be glad to get the place as soon as John Granger could relinquish it, without waiting for the expiration of his lease. This incoming tenant would no doubt be willing to take his furniture and live and dead stock at a valuation, Mr Vollair told John.

So the young farmer left the office in tolerable spirits, pleased to find there were no obstacles to his speedy departure from a home that had once been dear to him.

II

John Granger's preparations and arrangements, the disposal of his property, and the getting together of his simple outfit, occupied little more than three weeks; and it was still bright midsummer weather when he took his last walk round the pastures of Friarsgate and, for the first time since he had resolved to leave those familiar scenes, realized how great a hold they had upon his heart.

'It'll be dreary work in a strange country,' he thought, as he leaned upon a gate, looking at the lazy cattle which were no longer his, and wondering whether they would miss him when he was gone; "and what pleasure can lever take in trying to get rich!—I who have no one to work for, no one to take pride in my success! Perhaps it would have been better to stay here, even though I had to hear her wedding bells some fine summer morning, and see her leaning on Robert Ashley's arm, and looking up in his face as I used to fancy she would look up to me in all the years to come. O God, how I wish I was dead! What an easy end that would make of everything!"

He thought of the men and women who had died of a fever last autumn round about Hilborough—people who had wished to live, for whom life was full of duties and household joys; whose loss left wide gaps among their kindred, not to be filled again upon this earth. If death would come to him, what a glad release! It was not that he suffered from any keen or violent agony it was the dull blankness of his existence which he felt—an utter emptiness and hopelessness; nothing to live for in the present, nothing to look forward to in the future.

This was the last day. His three great sea chests, containing his clothes, books, and other property which he could not bring himself to part with, had gone on to London by that morning's luggage train. He had arranged to follow himself by the night mail which left Hillborough Station at halfpast nine, and would be in London at two o'clock next morning. At the last he had been seized with a fancy for prolonging his time to the uttermost, and it was for this reason, he had chosen the latest train by which he could leave Hillborough. He had a good many people to take leave of, and it was rather trying work He had always been liked and respected, and on this last day it surprised him to find how fond the people were of him, and how general was the regret caused by his departure. Little children clung about his knees, matronly eyes were dried in lavender cotton aprons, pretty girls offered blushing to kiss him at parting, stalwart young fellows, his companions of old, declared they would never have a friend they could trust and honour as they had trusted and honoured him. It touched the poor fellow to the heart to find himself so much beloved. And he was going to sacrifice all this, because he could not endure to live in the old home now his dream was broken.

He had put off his visit to Matthew Lorton's house to the very last. His latest moments at Hillborough should be given to Susan, he told himself. He would drain to the last drop the cup of that sweet, sad parting. His last memory of English soil should be her bright tender face looking at him compassionately, as she had looked the day she broke his heart.

It was half-past seven when he went in at the little garden gate. A warm summer evening, the rustic garden steeped in the low western sunshine; the birds singing loud in hawthorn and sycamore; a peaceful vesper calm upon all things. John Granger had been expected. He could see that at a glance. The best tea-things were set out in the best parlour, and Mr Lorton and his

daughter were waiting tea for him. There was a great bunch of roses on the table, and Susan was dressed in light blue muslin, with a rose in her bosom. He thought how often in the dreary time to come she would arise before him like a picture, with the sunshine flickering about her bright hair, and the red rose at her breast

She was very sweet to him that evening, tender and gentle and clinging, as she might have been with a fondly loved brother who was leaving her for ever. The farmer asked him about his plans, and gave his approval of them heartily. It was well for a sturdy fellow with a bit of money to push his way in a new country, where he might make fifty per cent upon his capital, instead of dawdling on in England, where it was quite as much as a man could do to make both ends meet at the dose of a year's hard work.

"My little Susy is going to be married to young Bob Ashley," Mr Lorton said by-and-by. "He asked her last Tuesday was a week, but they've been courting in a kind of way this last twelvemonth. I couldn't well say no, for Bob's father and I have been friends for many a year, and the young man's a decent chap enough. He's going to rent that little dairy farm of Sir Marmaduke Halliday's on the other side of Hillborough Road. Old Ashley has promised to stock it for him, and he hopes to do well. It isn't much of a match for my girl, you know, John; but the young people have made up their minds, so it's no use setting my face against it"

They had been sitting at the tea-table nearly half an hour, when the sunny window was suddenly darkened by the apparition of Mr Stephen Price looking in upon them in an easy familiar manner, with his folded arms upon the sill.

"Good evening, uncle Lorton," he said. "Good evening, Susy. How do, Granger? I didn't know there was going to be a tea-party, or I shouldn't have come."

"It isn't a tea-party," answered Susan; "it is only John Granger, who has come to bid us goodbye, and we are very, very sorry he is going away."

"Oh, we are, are we?" said the lawyer's clerk with a sneer; "what would Bob Ashley say to that, I wonder?"

"Come in, Steph, and don't be a fool," growled the old man.

Mr Price came in, and took his seat at the tea-table. He was flashily dressed, wore his hair long and had a good deal of whisker, which he was perpetually caressing with a hand of doubtful cleanliness, whereon the inky evidence of his day's work was unpleasantly obvious.

He did not care much for such womanish refreshment as tea, which he denounced in a sweeping manner as "cat-lap," but he took a cup from his cousin nevertheless, and joined freely in the conversation while he drank it.

He asked John Granger a good many questions about his plans—whether he meant to buy land, and when, and where, and a great deal more in the same way—to all of which John replied as shortly as was consistent with the coldest civility.

"You take all your capital with you, of course!" asked Stephen Price.

"No; I take none of my capital with me."

"Why, hang it all, man, you must take some money!"

"I take the money I received for my furniture and stock."

"Ah, to be sure; you came to the office yesterday afternoon to receive it? Over six hundred pounds, wasn't it? I drew up the agreement between you and the new man; so I ought to know."

"It was over six hundred pounds."

"And you take that with you? Quite enough to start with, of course. And the rest of your money is as safe as houses in old Lawler's bank. No fear of any smash there. I wish I was going with you, Granger. I'm heartily sick of Hillborough. I shall cut old Vollair's office before very long,

come what may. I can't stand it much longer. I've got a friend on the look-out for a berth for me up in London, and directly I hear of anything I shall turn my back upon this dismal old hole."

"You'll have to pay your debts before you do that, I should think, Steph," his uncle remarked, bluntly.

Stephen Price shrugged his shoulders, and pushed his teacup away with a listless air. He got up presently and lounged out of the house, after a brief good evening to all. He made no attempt to take leave of John Granger, and seemed in his careless way to have forgotten that he was parting with him for the last time. No one tried to detain him. They seemed to breathe more freely when he was gone.

John and Susan wandered out into the garden after tea, while the farmer smoked his pipe by the open window. The sun was low by this time, and the western sky flooded with rosy light. The garden was all abloom with roses and honeysuckle. John Granger fancied he should never look upon such flowers or such a garden again.

They walked up and down the narrow path once or twice almost in silence, and then Susan began to tell him how much she regretted his departure.

"I don't know how it is, John," she said, "but I feel tonight as if I would give all the world to keep you here. I cannot tell you how sorry I am you are going. Oh, John, I wish with all my heart I could have been what you asked me to be. I wish I could have put aside all thoughts of Robert."

"Could you have done that, Susan?" he cried, with sudden energy.

His fate trembled upon a breath in that moment. A word from Susan, and he would have stayed; a word from her, and he would never have taken the path across the common and through the wood to Hillborough on that fair summer evening. He was her valued friend of many years; dearer to her than she had known until that moment. It seemed to her all at once that she had thrown away the gold, and had chosen—not dross, but something less precious than that unalloyed gold.

It was too late now for any change.

"I have promised Robert to be his wife," she said; "but oh, John, I wish you were not going away."

"My dear love, I could not trust myself to stay here; I love you too much for that. But I will come back when I am a sober elderly man, and ask for a corner beside your hearth."

"Promise me that. And you will write to me from America, won't you, John? I shall be so anxious, and father too, to know that you are safe and well."

"Yes, my dear, I will write."

"What is the name of the steamer you are to go in?"

"The *Washington*, bound for New York"

"I shall not forget that—the *Washington*."

John Granger looked at his watch. The sun had gone down, and there was a long line of crimson yonder in the west above the edge of the brown furze-grown common. Beyond it, the wood dipped down, and the tops of the trees made a black line against that red light. Above, the sky was of one pale tender green, with stars faintly shining here and there.

"What a lovely night!" said Susan.

John Granger sighed as he looked at that peaceful landscape.

"I did not know how much I loved this place and all belonging to it," he said. "Good night, Susy Good night, and goodbye."

"Won't you kiss me the last time, John?" she said, shyly.

She scarcely knew what she had asked. He took her in his arms, strained her to his breast, and pressed one passionate, despairing kiss upon her brow. It was the first and last in his life.

“Time’s up, Susy,” he said, gently releasing her.

He went to the window, shook hands with the farmer, and took leave of him in that quiet, undemonstrative way which means a good deal with a man of John Granger’s mould. A minute more, and he was gone.

Susan stood at the garden gate, watching the tall dark figure crossing the common. Twice he turned and waved his hand to her—the last time upon the edge of the common, before he took the path down to the wood. After this night the still twilight hour seldom came without bringing the thought of him to Susan Lorton.

It seemed to grow dark all at once when he was gone, and the house had a dreary look to Susan when she went indoors. What was it that made her shiver as she crossed the threshold? Something—some nameless, shapeless fancy shook her with a sudden fear. Her father had strolled out to the garden through the wide open back door. The house seemed quite empty, and the faint sound of the summer wind sighing in the parlour chimney was like the lamentation of a human creature in pain.

III

The summer passed, and in the late autumn came Susan’s wedding day. She was very fond of her good-looking generous-hearted young suitor, and yet even on the eve of her marriage her heart had turned a little regretfully towards absent John Granger. She was not a coquette, to glory in the mischief her beauty had done. It seemed to her a terrible thing that a good man should have been driven from his home for love of her.

She had thought of him a great deal since that summer night upon which he had looked back at her on the verge of Hawley Wood—all the more because no letter had come from him yet, and she was beginning to be a little anxious about his safety. She thought of him still more, by and by, as the winter months passed without bringing the promised letter. Her husband made light of her fears, telling her that John Granger would find plenty to do in a new country, without wasting his time in scribbling letters to old friends. But this did not convince Susan.

“He promised to write, Robert,” she said; “and John Granger is not the man to break his promise.”

Susan was very happy in her new home, and Robert Ashley declared he had the handiest, brightest, and most industrious wife in all Woodlandshire, to say nothing of her being the prettiest. She had been used to keeping her father’s house since her early girlhood, and her matronly duties came very easy to her. The snug little farmhouse, with its neat furniture and fresh dimity draperies, was the prettiest thing possible in the way of rustic interiors; the Dutch-tiled dairy was like a temple dedicated to some pastoral divinity, and Susan took a natural womanly pride in this bright home. She had come from as good a house; but then this was quite her own, and young Robert Ashley was a more romantic figure in the foreground of the picture than her good humdrum old father.

Stephen Price did not stay at Hillborough long enough to see his cousin’s wedding. He left Mr Vollair’s employment about three weeks after John Granger’s departure, and left without giving his employer any notice of his intention.

He went away from Hillborough as deeply in debt as it was practicable for a young man in his position to be, and the tradesmen to whom he owed money were loud in their complaints about him.

He was known to have gone to London, and there were some attempts made to discover his whereabouts. But in that mighty metropolis it was no easy thing to find an obscure lawyer's clerk, and nothing resulted from the endeavours of his angry creditors, except the mortification of defeat, which made them still more angry. No one, except those to whom he owed money, cared what had become of him. He had been considered pleasant company in a tavern parlour, and his manners and dress had been copied by some aspiring derks and apprentices in Hillborough; but he had never been known to do anyone a kindness, and his disappearance left no empty place in any heart.

The new year came, and still there was no letter from John Granger. But early in January Robert Ashley came home from Hillborough market one afternoon, and told his wife she needn't worry herself about her old friend any longer.

"John Granger's safe enough, my lass," he said. "I was talking to Simmons, the cashier at Lawler's bank, this morning, and he told me that Granger wrote to them for a thousand pounds last November from New York, and he has written five hundred more since. He is buying land somewhere—I forget the name of the place—and he's well and hearty, Simmons tells me."

Susan clapped her hands joyfully.

"Oh, Robert, how glad I am!" she cried. "It isn't kind of John to have forgotten his promise; but I don't care about that as long as he's safe."

"I don't know why you should ever take it into your head that there was anything amiss with him," said Robert Ashley, who did not regard John Granger's exile from a sentimental point of view.

"Well, I'm afraid I'm rather fanciful, Bob; but I could never explain to you what a strange feeling came over me the night John Granger went away from Hillborough. It was after I had said goodbye to him, and had gone back into the house, where all was dark and quiet. I sat in the parlour thinking of him, and it seemed as if a voice was saying in my ear that neither I, nor anyone that cared for him, would ever see John Granger again. There wasn't any such voice, of course, you know, Robert, but it seemed like that in my mind; and whenever I've thought of poor John Granger since that time, it has seemed to me like thinking of the dead. Often and often I've said to myself 'Why, Susan, you foolish thing, you ought to know that he's safe enough in America. Ill news travels fast and if there'd be anything wrong, we should have heard of it somehow.' But, reason with myself as I would, I have never been able to feel comfortable about him; and thank God for your good news, Robert, and thank you for bringing it to me."

She raised herself on tiptoe to kiss her husband, who looked down at her in a fond, protecting way from the height of his own wisdom.

"Why, Susy, what a timid, nervous little puss you are!" he said. "I should have been getting jealous of John Granger by this time if I'd known you thought so much of him."

The winter days lengthened, and melted into early spring. It was bright March weather, and Susan had an hour of daylight after tea for her needlework, while Robert attended to his evening duties out of doors. They had fires still, though the days were very mild; and Susan used to sit at the open window, with a jug of primroses on the wide wooden ledge before her, executing some dainty little repairs upon her husband's shirts.

One evening Robert Ashley was out later than usual, and when it had grown too dark for her to work any longer, Susan sat with her hands lying idle in her lap thinking—thinking of her wedded

life, and the years that had gone before it—years that she could never recall without the image of John Granger, who had been in a manner mixed up with all her girlish days. It had been very unkind of him not to write. It seemed as if his love for her could not have been very much after all, or he would have been pleased to comply with her request. She could not quite forgive him for his neglect, glad as she was to know that he was safe.

The room was rather a large one; an old-fashioned room, with a low ceiling crossed by heavy beams; half parlour, half kitchen, with a wide open fireplace at one end, on which the logs had burnt to a dullish red just now, only brightening up with a faint flash of light now and then.

The old chintz-covered armchair, in which Robert Ashley was wont to smoke his evening pipe, stood by the hearth ready for him.

Susan had been sitting with her face towards the open window, looking absently out at the garden, where daffodils and early primroses glimmered through the dusk. It was only the striking of the eight day clock in the corner that roused her from her reverie. She stooped to pick up her work, which had fallen to the ground. She was standing folding this in a leisurely way, when she looked towards the fireplace, and gave a little start at seeing that her husband's armchair was no longer empty.

"Why, Robert," she cried, "how quietly you must have come into the place! I never heard you."

There was no answer, and her voice sounded strange to her in the empty room.

"Robert!" she repeated, a little louder, but the figure in the chair neither answered nor stirred.

Then a sudden fright seized her, and she knew that it was not her husband. The room was almost dark, it was quite impossible that she could see the face of that dark figure seated in the armchair, with the shoulders bent a little over the fire. Yet she knew, as well as ever she had known anything in her life, that it was not Robert Ashley.

She went slowly towards the fireplace, and stood within a few paces of that strange figure. A little flash of light shot up from the smouldering logs, and shone for an instant on the face.

It was John Granger!

Susan Ashley tried to speak to him; but the words would not come. And yet it was hardly so appalling a thing to see him there that she need have felt what she did. England is not so far from America that a man may not cross the sea and drop in upon his friends unexpectedly.

The logs fell together with a crashing noise, and broke into a ruddy flame, lighting up the whole room. The chair was empty.

Susan uttered a loud cry, and almost at the same time Robert Ashley came in at the door.

"Why, Susy!" he exclaimed, "What's amiss lass?"

She ran to him, and took shelter in his arms, sobbing hysterically, and then, calming herself with an effort, told him how she had seen John Granger's ghost.

Robert laughed her to scorn.

"Why, my pet, what fancies will you be having next? Granger is safe enough over in Yankee land. It was some shadow that took the shape of your old friend, to your fancy. It's easy enough to fancy such a thing when your mind's full of anyone."

"There's no use in saying that, Robert," Susan answered, resolutely. "It was no fancy. John Granger is dead, and I have seen his ghost."

"He wasn't dead on the 10th of last December, anyhow. They had a letter from him at Lawler's bank, dated that day. Simmons told me so."

Susan shook her head mournfully.

“I’ve a feeling that he never got to America alive, Robert,” she said. “I can’t explain how it is, but I’ve a feeling that it was so.”

“Dead men don’t write letters, Susy, or send for their money out of the bank”

“Someone else might write the letters.”

“Nonsense, lass! They know John Granger’s handwriting and signature well enough at the bank, depend upon it. It would be no easy matter to deceive them. But I’ll look in upon Simmons tomorrow. He and I are uncommonly friendly, you know, and there’s nothing he wouldn’t do to oblige me, in a reasonable way. I’ll ask him if there have been any more letters from Granger, and get him to give me the address.”

Susan did not say much more about that awful figure in the armchair. It was no use trying to convince her husband that the thing which she had seen was anything more than a creation of her own brain. She was very quiet all the rest of the evening, though she tried her uttermost to appear as if nothing had happened.

Robert Ashley saw Mr Simmons the cashier next day, and came back to his wife elated by the result of his inquiries. John Granger had written for another five hundred pounds by the very last post from America, and reported himself well and thriving. He was still in New York, and Mr Simmons had given Robert Ashley his address in that city.

Susan wrote to her old friend that very afternoon, telling him what she had seen, and begging him to write and set her mind at ease. After all, it was very consoling to hear what she had heard from her husband, and she tried to convince herself that the thing she had seen was only a trick of her imagination.

Another month went by, and again in the twilight the same figure appeared to her. It was standing this time, with one arm leaning on the high mantelpiece; standing facing her as she came back to the room, after having quitted it for a few minutes for some slight household duty.

There was a better fire and more light in the room than there had been before. The logs were burning with a steady blaze that lit up the well-known figure and unforgotten face. John Granger was looking at her with an expression that seemed half reproachful, half beseeching. He was very pale, much paler than she had ever seen him in life; and as he looked, she standing just within the threshold of the door, she saw him lift his hand slowly and point to his forehead, The firelight showed her a dark red stain upon the left temple, like the mark of a contused wound.

She covered her face with her hands, shuddering and uttering a little cry of terror, and then dropped half fainting upon a chair. When she uncovered her face the room was empty, the firelight shining cheerily upon the walls, no trace of that ghostly visitant. Again when her husband came in she told him of what she had seen for the first time that night. He heard her very gravely. This repetition of the business made it serious. If it were, as Robert Ashley fully believed it was, a delusion of his wife’s, it was a dangerous delusion, and he knew not how to charm it away from her mind. She had conjured up a new fancy now, this notion of a blood-stained temple; the ghastly evidence of some foul play that had been done to John Granger.

And the *man* was alive and well in America all the time; but how convince a woman of that fact when she preferred to trust her own sick fancies?

This time Susan Ashley brooded over the thoughts of the thing she had seen, firmly believing that she had looked upon the shadow of the dead, and that there was some purpose to be fulfilled by that awful vision. In the day, however busy she might be with her daily work, the thought of this was almost always in her mind; in the dead silence of the night, when her husband was sleeping by her side, she would often lie awake for hours thinking of John Granger.

No answer had come to her letter, though there had been more than time for her to receive one.

“Robert,” she said to her husband one day, “I do not believe that John Granger ever went to America.”

“Oh, Susy, Susy, I wish you could get John Granger out of your head. Who is it that writes for his money, if it isn’t he?”

“Anybody might know of the money—people know everything about their neighbours’ affairs in Hillborough—and anybody that knew John Granger’s hand might be able to forge a letter. I don’t believe he ever went to America, Robert. I believe some accident—some fatal accident—happened to him on the night he was to leave Hillborough.”

“Why, Susy, what should happen to him, and we not hear of it?”

“He might have been waylaid and murdered. He had a good deal of money about him, I know, that night; he was to sail from London by the *Washington*, and his luggage was all sent to an inn near the Docks. I wish you’d write to the people, Robert, and ask if he arrived there at the time he was expected; and I wish you’d find out at the station whether anyone saw him go away by the train that night”

“It’s easy enough to do as much as that to please you, Susy. But I wish you wouldn’t dwell upon these fancies about Granger, it’s all nonsense, as you’ll find out sooner or later.”

He wrote the letter which his wife wanted written, asking the landlord of the Victoria Hotel, London Docks, whether a certain Mr John Granger, whose travelling chests had been forwarded from Hillborough, had arrived at his house on the 24th of July last, and when and how he had quitted it. He also took the trouble to go to the Hillborough Station, in order to question the station master and his subordinates about John Granger’s departure.

Neither the station master nor the porters were able to give Robert Ashley any satisfactory information on this point. One or two of the men were not quite dear that they knew John Granger by sight; another knew him very well indeed, but could not swear to having seen him that night. The station master was quite clear that he had not seen him.

“I’m generally pretty busy with the mail bags at that time,” he said, “and a passenger might very well escape my notice. But it would only have been civil in Granger to bid me goodbye; I’ve known him ever since he was a lad.”

This was not a satisfactory account to carry back to Susan; nor was the letter that came from London in a day or two much more satisfactory.

The landlord of the Victoria Hotel begged to inform Mr Ashley that the owner of the trunks from Hillborough had not arrived at his house until the middle of August. He was not quite sure about the date; but he knew the luggage had been lying in his place for something over three weeks, and he was thinking of advertising it, when the owner appeared.

Three weeks! And John Granger had left Susan Lorton that July night, intending to go straight to London. Where could he have been? What could he have been doing in the interval?

Robert Ashley tried to make light of the matter. Granger might have changed his mind at the last moment—at the railway station, perhaps—and might have gone off to visit friends in some other part of the country. But Susan told her husband that John Granger had no friends except at Hillborough, and that he was not given to changing his mind upon any occasion. She had now a settled conviction that some untimely fate had befallen her old friend, and that the letters from America were forgeries.

Ashley told his friend Simmons the story of the ghost rather reluctantly, but it was necessary to tell it in explaining how the letter to the London hotel keeper came to be written. Of course Mr Simmons was quite ready to agree with him that the ghostly part of the business was no more than a delusion of Susan’s; but he was a good deal puzzled, not to say disturbed, by the hotel

keeper's letter. He had talked over John Granger's plans with him on that last day, and he remembered that John had been perfectly decided in his intention of going straight to London. The three weeks interval between his departure from Hillborough and his arrival in that city was a mystery not easily to be explained.

Mr Simmons referred to the letters from New York, and compared the signatures of them with previous signatures of John Granger's. If they were forgeries, they were very clever forgeries; but Granger's was a plain commercial hand by no means difficult to imitate. There was one thing noticeable in the signatures to the American letters—they were all exactly alike, line for line and curve for curve. This rather discomposed Mr Simmons; for it is a notorious fact that a man rarely signs his name twice in exactly the same manner. There is almost always some difference.

"I'm going up to London in a month," said the cashier, "I'll call at the Victoria Hotel when I'm there, and make a few enquiries about John Granger. We can make some excuse for keeping back the money in the meantime, if there should be any more written for."

Before the month was out, John Granger's ghost appeared for the third time to Susan Ashley. She had been to Hillborough alone to make some little purchases in the way of linen drapery, and came home through Hawley Wood in the tender May twilight. She was thinking of her old friend as she walked along the shadowy winding footpath. It was just such a still, peaceful evening as that upon which he had stood on the edge of the common looking back at her, and waving his hand, upon that last well remembered night.

He was so much in her thoughts, and the conviction that he had come from among the dead to visit her was so rooted in her mind, that she was scarcely surprised when she looked up presently, and saw a tall familiar figure moving slowly among the trees a little way before her. There seemed to be an awful stillness in the wood all at once, but there was nothing awful in that well-known figure.

She tried to overtake it; but it kept always in advance of her, and at a sudden turn in the path she lost it altogether. The trees grew thicker, and there was a solemn darkness at the spot where the path took this sharp turn, and on one side of the narrow footpath there was a steep declivity and a great hollow, made by a disused gravel pit.

She went home quietly enough, with a subdued sadness upon her, and told her husband what had happened to her. Nor did she rest until there had been a search made in Hawley Wood for the body of John Granger.

They searched, and found him lying at the bottom of the gravel pit, half buried in loose sand and gravel, and quite hidden by a mass of furze and bramble that grew over the spot. There was an inquest, of course. The tailor who had made the clothes found upon the body identified them, and swore to them as those he had made for John Granger. The pockets were all empty. There could be little doubt that John Granger had been waylaid and murdered for the sake of the money he carried upon him that night. His skull had been shattered by a blow from a jagged stick on the left temple. The stick was found lying at the bottom of the pit a little way from the body, with human hair and stains of blood upon it.

John Granger had never left Hillborough; and the person who had contrived to procure so much of his money, by sending the deposit receipts and forged letters from America, was, in all probability, his murderer. There was a large reward offered for the discovery of the guilty party the police were hard at work, and the inquest was adjourned several times, in the hope that new facts might be elicited.

Susan Ashley and her father were examined closely as to the events of that fatal evening of July the 24th. Susan told everything her cousin Stephen Price dropping in while they were at tea, the questions and answers about the money John Granger carded upon him—to the most minute particular.

“Then Price knew of the money Granger had about him?” suggested the coroner.

“He did, sir.”

“And did he know that he had money on deposit in Hillborough Bank?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Did Price leave your father’s house after Granger, or before him?”

“Before him, sir: nearly an hour before him.”

The inquest was adjourned; and, within a week of this examination, Matthew Lorton received an application from the police, asking for a photograph of his nephew Stephen Price, if he happened to possess such a thing.

He did possess one, and sent it to London by return of post.

The landlord of the Victoria Hotel identified this portrait as that of the person who represented himself to be John Granger, and who carried away John Granger’s luggage.

After this the work was easy. Little links in the chain were picked up one by one. A labouring man turned up who had seen Stephen Price sitting on a stile hard by Hawley Wood, hacking at a thick jagged looking stake with his clasp knife, on the night of the 24th of July. The woman at whose house Price lodged gave evidence that he broke an appointment to play billiards with a friend of his on that night; the friend had called at his lodgings for him twice, and had been angry about the breaking of the appointment; and Stephen Price came in about half past ten o’clock, looking very white and strange. The lad who was his fellow clerk was ready to swear to his having been disturbed and strange in his manner during the two or three weeks before he left Hillborough; but the boy had thought very little of this, he said, knowing how deeply Stephen was in debt.

The final examination resulted in a verdict of wilful murder; and a police officer started for New York by the next steamer, carrying a warrant for the apprehension of Stephen Price.

He was not found very easily, but was ultimately apprehended, with some of John Granger’s property still in his possession. He was brought home, tried, found guilty, and hung, much to the satisfaction of Hillborough. Shortly afterwards, Mr Vollair produced a will, which John Granger had executed a few days before his intended departure, bequeathing all he possessed to Susan Lorton—the interest for her sole use and benefit, the principal to revert to her eldest son after her death, the son to take the name of Granger. The bank had to make good the money drawn from them by Stephen Price. The boy came in due course, and was christened after the dead man, above whose remains a fair white monument has been erected in the rustic churchyard near Hawley Wood, at the expense of Robert and Susan Ashley; a handsomer tomb than is usually given to a man of John Granger’s class, but it was the only thing Susan could do to show how much she had valued him who had loved her so dearly.

She often sits beside that quiet resting place in the spring twilight, with her children busy making daisy chains at her knee; but she has never seen John Granger’s ghost since that evening in the wood, and she knows she will never see it again.