EN TREMAYNE rarely visited his son. They had quarrelled when Luke married what his father had termed "a wisp." The estate was more to Ben Tremayne than the "fancical leanings toward pink and white" of Luke. There was no appearance, so Ben thought, of a good family stock being carried on by a will o' the wisp. Now she was dead, however, a visit was a matter of decency, like a hearse and bearers. As Ben sat uncomfortably in his son's kitchen he shuffled his feet on the sanded floor and spat now and then in the little iron spittoon with its porcelain bowl. He gazed stolidly for some time on his son's bowed head as Luke sat opposite to him with his hands clasped between his knees.

"You be beaten low, Luke. You was never one to cope with women's whims. You was bound to take 'em serious. I allus told you so but you'd never listen. You was modeled for a bachelor and missed your calling, but it would have come to the same if you'd chosen a plain-featured woman with property to steady you."

Luke jerked his head.

"There was never whims," he muttered.

"You could never see wood for trees, my son. She was a passil of them," said Ben, "but they was gilded over with smiles and cos-setings. She've brought you low at last. Her saucy life wasn't enough, but she've left you to tend yourself and with no heart to seek a suitable female."

Luke's head went up and his pale-blue eyes had a flash in them.

"I'm uplifted beyond all seeming," he said.

"Not by her death, I reckon?" queried Ben with a slight sneer.

"Iss!" answered Luke. "Even in the face of her death. Death can't snatch what ain't snatchable. It's not as big as—as—"

"Thy calf love, I suppose," said Ben roughly.

"No, nor yet as big as our happiness," said Luke. "It cain't rob me of what's been."

The older man took a pipe from his pocket and put it back again.

"Smoking do help my tongue a bit, but it ain't seemly in the house of mourning."

"Smoke away if it'll make thee think different o' she," said Luke. "Not but that she's beyond thy smearing."

"Death be oft times a g'eat release," said Ben in a kindlier voice. "Perhaps better things be ahead for thee yet, my son. The neighbors do well to call thee Hop o' my Thumb. You'm wonder-
ful small in body but you overcame Tom Curnow’s bull at a pinch. I believe you dazed him with your funny eyes though neighbors say it was the strong heart in you. You was all right till you fell in with that girl. Her tripetty walk was a snare in itself, sure enough. You was mazed and I wonder you’ve not got a meaner nickname than Hop o’ my Thumb in the village by now. It’s not wholesome for any man to fall down and worship idols, especially if they be saucy chits instead of graven images.”


A growl proceeded from the throat of Ben Tremayne.

“And you be childless,” he cried, “and—and—bah! The prop-
erty will have to go to strangers unless you get mazed a second time. Oh! you may smile. A chiel as ’ave been burnt once don’t shun the fire. Don’t you believe it. It’s more than likely it’ll get worse burnt next time. It makes me sick to think that you won’t believe what all the village do mag over. If only you would it might cure you and leave your fancy free.”

“The village!” cried Luke. “You ought to know by the tales you and me manufactured ourselves, for pastime, years agone, what village talk be worth.”

“Them as had eyes could see,” said Ben Tremayne severely, “and some of us have ears. Hedges and sand dunes ain’t granite to fence off love whispers.”

Luke stood up and drew himself to the full height of his five feet. He clasped his hands behind his thin neck and looked down at his father as he sat shuffling his feet.

“By Gosh!” he cried bitterly. “Is this the way to cheer a man as the Lord ’ave seemly felled? If what you say be true isn’t it enough without jawin’ over it and if it be false ain’t you afraid of being struck dead?”

The old man peered anxiously into his son’s face.

“Luke,” he said, “own up. You know she was—”

Luke smiled at his father as he interrupted him.

“A winsome, witching maiden-woman, too good for any man among us to have come nigh, and neither you nor the Virgin Mary nor all the apostles put together could make me believe any other.”

“You be a blasted fool,” said Ben Tremayne irritably.

“I expect you be a bit ’ sponsible for that, father,” said Luke sadly. “Anyway I’m not such a fool as to believe evil of my law-
ful wife nor yet to listen to it sitting. If that’s all as you can say of she let’s talk of crops.”

“Crops!” hissed Ben. “You’ll have crops in plenty presently. Crops of scandal and worse to deal with. All this talk have under-
mined your prospects all over the place and her sudden death don’t help appearances.”


“Her heart were allus wrong, the doctor said. Her sperrit wore it down. We was spared last words.”

Ben shook himself as he stood up.

“They call you a ninney and well they may. They’ll shun you for an unchristian feeling man as countenanced sin in his own wife.”

“There’s ninnies and ninnies,” said Luke. “The biggest ninney be one as thinks himself one, and as for sin they as knows so much about its nature ’ad best baptize theirselves in its waters if they be as clean as she were.”

“You’ve never shown man over this affair, Luke,” said Ben, “for you never taught your woman her kneeling paces or felled her lover into the mud where he do belong.”

Luke’s face was very stern as he walked over to his father. He hit the table fiercely with his clenched fist as he looked down into Ben’s face.

“Drop it,” he said. “Father or no father, my fist will be in your face if you dare speak like that again. I’ve no cause to think of kneeling except to she, and I’ve done it to her, I’ll allow, both living and dead. My business is with myself and not with no other. I know what she be to me. I’ve heerd her words to me and not the everlasting trumpets could din them out of my ears. Do you reckon me a white-livered fool what has never had her kisses or her love looks? I’m not mazed, father, but I’m buttressed, in a manner of speaking. I’ve had all as belonged to me and no gossip and no gibing nor yet no death nor hell itself can rob me of it.”

“Iss!” cried Ben, stung to cruelty by the radiance he could not understand in his son’s face. “That’s just where you’re a forthright fool. You ’ave been robbed, right afore your eyes. You’ve had what belonged to you, sure enough, and that is shame. She’ve fooled you. She kept you quiet with them vows and kisses so that she—”

Luke sprang forward and clutched his father’s two arms with his muscular little hands.

“My God! father!” he cried. “Have you never loved mother as you can talk like this ’ere?”

The older man stood up and shook himself free of his son’s grip.

“Love!” he said, showing his teeth. “Don’t talk so silly. We didn’t used to jaw so much ’bout love when I were young. We got a fancy, when the primroses came out, and the cowslips and hare-
bells followed, for a comely lass as could make a light pasty and a
good saffron cake and one as could see to the linen bein’ darned
and keep things a bit fittey in the house. All this gimcrack talk of
love be nothin’ but idle frenzy or a touch of liver complaint. It’s
unwholesome. No woman should be put first. It’s bound to turn
her constitution trickey. It’s Scripture sense as she should be second
to man. She was only a rib to start with, and by all seeming she
be less than that in most men’s reckoning.”

The men started as a noise was heard overhead. Ben’s face
grew serious. He pointed to the ceiling.
“Who be up there?” he cried. “What’s that tramping? Bean’t
she alone?”
“No!” said Luke.
Ben whistled a long, low whistle of alarm.
“Luke, my son,” he whispered, “who be there? That be a
heavy tread and masterful?”
“Sampson be there,” said Luke quietly.
“Sampson Daniel?” cried Ben.
“Iss! him!” said Luke stolidly. “He’ve been there a good
hour and more.”

Ben came forward and towered over his son.
“This be worse nor devil’s work,” he said. “This be real seri-
ous. You paltry little worm, you. If the neighbors get to know
this they won’t never come nigh one of us.”

“Let ’em keep away then,” said Luke. “It’s all the same to
me. Neighbor’s spite can’t call back the dead nor yet kill the liv-
ing as I can see. She and me never reckoned with it. We’d got
enough to warm us outside such truck as that.”
“You’m a measly son of Beelzebub,” roared Ben. “I’d sooner
have coffined you than cradled you if I’d know your disposition
when you was born. You was allus for fairy tales more nor foot-
ball and never cuddled up a pretty girl till you fell on that half Irish
will o’ the wisp as was partly eel and partly pixy.”

Luke put his hands in his pockets and leaned up against the
mantelpiece.
“You talk like a crazy, jealous son of Adam,” said Luke, “and
like a lonesome sour old bachelor.”

Ben strode forward and stood with his legs apart and his hands
in his trouser pockets as he faced his son.
“I thank heaven, Luke,” he cried, “as I threw back the only
fancy I’ve ever had in that line ’ afore I married your mother. She
wern’t never molested with the fancical frenzy. It was a craze as
come with the harvest moon and died with it but it soved me for
THE PIXY: A STORY

life. I’ve reckoned it a madness ever since and tried to warn you but you wouldn’t listen. I got over it same as I did the typhoid, and when I took your mother I took her, not only for better and worse but for steady ways and no woman’s whimsies. She had to behave, and plenty of washing and cleaning sobered she if tantrums and moods came on."

“Poor mother,” said Luke. “No wonder she were such a patient dear.”

“I never gave she no chance to stamp on my feelin’s,” said Ben. “There was no time with ten of you, and you a delicate little devil we thought wasn’t going to live. No woman ’ave put the heel of her dancin’ shoe into my heart, my son, and made mincemeat of my constitootion.” Ben shook first one leg and then another and stooped to knock a bit of dry mud from his brown leggings. As he looked up he sneered as he went on. “Every one knows as you couldn’t call your bootlaces your own and was deceived and mimicked and mocked like the dolt in Bob Webster’s fairy tales.”

Luke’s finger pointed to the door.

“I’m dead sick of this, father,” he said sternly. “It’s beyond bearin’. She only died last night and I be most dead yet.” His voice had sunk to a hoarse whisper. “Jawin’ ain’t here nor yet there. Just leave me be. What is, is, and what isn’t, isn’t, and neither you nor me nor the neighbors can alter things. If my heart wasn’t sore and my body tired I’d perhaps surprise you all with a truth or two. Not that you’d believe me ’cause, seemly, lies be easier to swallow and more refreshin’, by all the signs.”

Ben looked at the pale stern face before him.

“I’m going,” said Luke’s father, “but I’m casting you off, mind, and all the village shall know it before sunset. You make me sick with your feeble talk. It’s like the chatter of white-faced curates and tea-drinking girls. No sap in it. You deserve all you’ve got. You’m just chicken-livered and sopp’y. Good-bye.”

He banged the door after him.

Luke put the kettle on the fire and turned round as the door opened and Sampson Daniel came into the room. The two men’s eyes met and then suddenly lowered.

Sampson took down his hunting crop from a peg near the door and was just taking his hat from a nail close by when Luke strode over to him.

“Sampson Daniel,” he said, “you and me must place her in her box to-night. She shan’t be touched by hired strangers.”

Sampson clasped each end of his crop behind his head, which
appeared enormous because of the masses of dark, tight curls surrounding it. As he faced Luke his thin mouth was closed and his broad, tall, frame seemed strung to some muscular act. Luke smiled up at him drearily.

"She'd have had it so," said Luke softly.

Sampson never moved. He only looked down at the man who was speaking to him.

"I've no call," went on Luke, "to see different to she."

Sampson's arms dropped and he tried to speak. He jerked his riding-whip between his hands and it snapped in two.

"Good God!" he said at last.


"Sampson Daniel," he muttered softly. "I'd comfort thee if I knew how, but I'm sorely beset myself. I'm most gone in."

Sampson picked up one of the pieces of the riding-whip and twirled it in the air mechanically. It hit Luke.

"Pardon," he said.


Sampson pointed at the fallen whip.


"Oh! that!"


"Well, I can't say as I have any particular taste for 'em myself," answered Luke, "unless they happen to come unawares into the family. Mother were a bit that way inclined and I suppose you was thinking perhaps there'd bound to be a second," pointing to the ceiling.

"Good sakes, man, no!" cried Sampson almost smiling. "A pixy be most kin to a wild flower not to a saint."

Luke touched Sampson's arm.

"That's the first comforting phrase I've heard sin' she passed," he said. "It do belong, in a manner of speaking."

"She thought a pile of you, Luke," said Sampson moodily. "It be terrible hard on you."


"There isn't much pickin' and choosin' between you and me," said Luke slowly, "but of course there's lawful and unlawful. She were allus gamesome but sweet as lavender, as you do know."

"Iss! I do know," said Sampson.

"I was never a dancing chap," said Luke. "They only just saved me having troll feet, they say, so I missed what you fell on. She was that light on her feet she minded me of a dragon fly."

Sampson's teeth crunched and he squared his shoulders.
"I was never good at book learnin'," went on Luke, "and she got a lot of her fancies readin' all sorts. I was confined to fairy tales when I was a youngster and it spoilt me for solid readin'. I'd dearly have loved to dance. She was enough to set cripples doing the lancers in that pink muslin of hers and slippers fit for a fairy. I can see you two now spinning round like tops at Hollow's Feast." He hesitated a moment. Sampson's eyes were very bright and his mouth had relaxed a little. "When we went home that night," Luke went on, "I warmed up milk for her and she were like a child wi' joy and sprightliness. "Luke," says she to me, 'I wouldn't be no man if mugs of gold went with my christening.' Fancy she a man browbeating the world." Both men threw back their heads a moment. Sampson Daniel took hold of Luke's shoulder and turned him towards the light.

"Hop o' my Thumb," he said, "I believe thee's got a halo."

"What be that?" queried Luke. "I seem to know, but I can't rightly place it."

"By heaven! it's placed," said Sampson solemnly.

"I was never no great shakes at riddles," said Luke, "but she were splendid. She'd guess em' before you'd time to get 'em out of your mouth."

Sampson threw down the half of the broken hunting-crop.

"Luke," he said, "maybe I've made you a bit of a byword without exactly meaning to."

Luke folded his arms across his chest.

"No byword have ever come between me and she and nothing else counts."

Sampson's eyes were almost closed as he demanded curtly:

"Don't you want to ask me no questions?"

Luke smiled up into Sampson's face.

"Why, no," he answered quietly. "What about?"

"Good God!" said Sampson.

"Iss!" said Luke quickly. "There is just one. It come in my mind when father was talking here a bit since. I shall be rare and lonely in the evenings for things fall heaviest after dusk I reckon. Leastways they did after mother passed. You be a bachelor and I be a widower and both on us 'ave the same ideas about crops. Why shouldn't we live together and make a big thing in the farmin'?"

Sampson gazed at Luke. At last he murmured:

"What a Hop o' my Thumb notion to be sure."

"She'd fall in with it," said Luke.

"Would she?" queried Sampson. "I don't see how you can tell that."
“I do knaw,” said Luke. “Maybe she’ll find either one of us easier if we be together, that is if her spirit was let travel homeward at times. She’d lots of fancies over these things, as, of course, you do knaw?”

“No,” said Sampson, “that’s your trail, not mine.”

“Well,” said Luke. “It be a rare comfort now. ‘I’ll come to you,’ she said not long since, ‘if I’m allowed, and I’ll laugh in your ear if you be mopey.’ In a manner of speaking I ain’t tore abroad, except by neighbor’s cackle, as I might, just because of what she said about coming back.”

Sampson’s face darkened.

“She’d perhaps only come to you,” he said. “Others would be out of the reckoning. I’ve no truck with ghosts and such.”

“Tain’t a matter of ghosts,” said Luke. “A pixy thing be a sort of spirit to start with and it seems to me, we’re bound, one or both of us, to have a sign. If it’s a fearsome one we’d best be together and if it’s a gladsome one, as be very likely, she’d reckon on us to share it.”

“They’d talk worse nor ever then,” said Sampson.

Luke smoothed his straight hair from his forehead.

“They cain’t make me what they think me, thanks be, nor you neither, and as for she, they’ve neither had the making nor the un-making of she.”

“They’ll torment you if you’ve doubts at all,” said Sampson. “Scandal fells same as a poleax.”

“Doubts?” queried Luke. “Doubts of what? Heaven and sich? It ‘ave never fretted me same as some. Of course, now it’s a dwelling place for she, maybe I’ll turn my mind more that way, but I’ve never questioned but all were for the best.”

“I wasn’t particularly thinking of heaven,” said Sampson. “Some would doubt after the talk there’s been lately.”

Luke rubbed the sanded floor with the toe of his boot as he looked downwards.

“Some,” he said scornfully, “would hit the breasts as fed ’em. I’ve memories enough to make their silly talk no more nor sheep’s bleatin’.”

“But they might tell you they’d proof,” said Sampson watching Luke’s face with keen eyes.


“That I loved her!” The words were snapped out with a great effort.

Luke did not move or look at Sampson. He spoke very gently.

“Thee’s given me the proof of that thyself,” he said. “All
their chatter be but swine’s gurgling in comparison. Haven’t I seen her eyes fixed on thee and thy mouth closed like a trap against the kisses thee’s wanted same as food and drink? No man worth callin’ a man could do aught but feel a drawin’ to a woman of her make and no man callin’ himself a man could believe any ill o’ she or beguile her into wrong-doing.”

“Stop!” cried Sampson.
Luke looked up smiling.
“It’s just because you knew the sweet grain of she and never took the winsome smile out of her face with fool’s vanity that I’d dearly like to dwell alongside of you. I’m drawn to you like a brother, and Sampson and Luke, like Jonathan and David, must comfort one another because the love of a woman passes all understanding. No, mate, I’ve never had a doubt of either of you, never once. How could I? She allus told true.”

“Iss!” said Sampson. His face was gray and the beads of sweat stood on his clean-shaven upper lip. “She allus told true.”

“When shall it be?” queried Luke.
“I thought it was settled for Thursday,” said Sampson shortly.
“To onces’t,” he said. “Thee shan’t spend one night by thyself when she be gone—not one. She’d wish it so.”
“Iss! mate! she’d wish it so.”

THE CROSS-ROADS

AT THE cross-roads three travelers stood disputing. Said the first: “We must follow the road to the left.” But the second cried: “No, let us turn to the right. That is undoubtedly the only way.” And the third laughed at them, and exclaimed: “How foolish! You are both quite wrong! The road straight ahead of us is the proper one to take.” They continued to disagree, and at last they parted, each a different way.

But when evening came, to their surprise they found each other at the self-same inn.