

# **STORIES FOR OUR VILLAGE**

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Stories for our village by E. M. L.

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**E. M. L.**

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OUR VILLAGE**



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FOR OUR VILLAGE.

By E. M. L.

ESTHER TREGARTHEN'S FAITH.  
HOW JOHN MERRIVALE CHOSE HIS WIFE.  
DAME KREUTCHEN'S GEES!

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## ESTHER TREGARTHEN'S FAITH.

BY E. M. L.

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### CHAPTER I.

'By rains and dews and sunshine fed,  
Over the wall the ivy spread,  
And in the day-beam waving free,  
It grew into a stately tree.'

O drive a pair of spirited ponies among the beautiful, but precipitous hills of South Herefordshire, requires both nerve and skill. For this reason, Harold Conway paid more attention to Pearl's desire for a loosened rein, and to Presto's too cautious content with the restraint, than to the marvellous variety of the scenery, which unfolded itself anew at each turn of the road, or from each steep ascent which he gained. It was not, indeed, until he had reached the wild upland district of the Llydiatt, where the road becomes comparatively level, that he turned to his companion and said, with a pleasant smile,—

'I thought my wife would enjoy this part of our county. It has always appeared to me unequalled

for beauty ; and owing, I suppose, to the steepness of its roads and the lonely situation of its villages, it is much less known than it deserves to be. The Pengethly hills alone are worth some effort to see, with their pleasing variety of outline.'

'They are, indeed,' replied Ethel. 'Sometimes they appear to touch, and even to overwrap, each other, and presently they open out and reveal a still bluer group beyond. There was one point from which I saw the most wonderful effect of light and shade ; but before I could even ask you to look round, we were plunging down our last hill between those deeply-cut banks. Of course you saw nothing of the ferns, Harold. Oh, such ferns and foxgloves !'

'How so?' asked Harold. 'Do you think I did not see the road, and Presto's efforts to avoid its roughest stones, and the ferns, and all the rich gold-leaf work of autumn, at the same time? I saw it all, Ethel.'

As he spoke, a gorgeous pheasant got up and frightened Pearl, so that talking was out of the question ; and Ethel had to keep as quiet as a mouse, until the runaway had slackened speed ; by that time they were driving through a dark plantation of Scotch fir-trees, and when Ethel looked out for her view it was gone. 'I am so sorry,' she said, regretfully : 'it was the sweetest picture of all !'



It is hidden, I suppose, by that nearer wooded hill to our left.'

'You shall see it again presently,' said Harold: 'but meanwhile, look carefully at that same wooded hill, and try to find Llanarth Church. It is to be seen somewhere, Ethel; for although you will scarcely believe it, there is a village—rather a large one too—nestling down under the hill. I fancy I can see smoke curling up here and there, but scarcely a roof is visible. Now the church comes to view; the steeple is a new one, or even that might have kept itself in hiding.'

'What a sly little village, Harold! I wonder whether that narrow, and particularly muddy road, leads down to it; we have seen no other.'

'Very likely,' replied Harold. 'I remember my father telling me that the Llanarth roads were indescribably bad, and that in winter the only means of communication between that sequestered village and the outer world, was a kind of "Noah's Ark," calling itself the Llanarth Van. This used to travel once a-week into the neighbouring town, and was as eagerly waited for by the villagers, as the boat that steers towards a shipwrecked crew on a desolate island.'

'At all events,' said Ethel, 'we can certify that Llanarth is most carefully hidden, even in autumn; but, Harold, you certainly told me the Ilydiat

Farm was close to Llanarth, and I can see nothing but a low stone cottage here and there in the fields—nothing approaching to a farm-house.'

Harold smiled. 'Don't raise your expectations *too* high. Martin Heath's home is better seen than described. Look, before we turn, at those green swelling hills crowned with larches. What could be more beautiful? And *now*, Ethel, for another view of the Pengethly Hills; I promised you should see them again.'

'Ah, yes; but I cannot even glance at the hills, Harold, lovely as they are at this moment; for there is before us now the most *singular tree* I ever beheld!'

'Is it a tree?' inquired Harold.

'Oh, yes, certainly. Look at the branches, and at the curious straight trunk, completely covered with ivy; it is not a pollard oak or an elm.'

'Is it a tree?' again asked Harold. 'The road takes a turn here, so you will see it nearer. Look at your tree, *now*, Ethel.'

'Why, you are driving straight to it! and, oh, Harold, it is joined to that old stone cottage! It is a chimney, and there is smoke curling through the branches! That ivy must have been there for ages!'

Harold laughed.

'You were rather determined to make it into a

tree though, Ethel! And now you shall take a very near view of it, for this is the Llydiatt Farm, and Martin Heath's much-valued home. I expect he would break his heart if we gave him notice to quit, though I suppose he is doing very badly here, from what I am told, and, indeed, from the general appearance of things at the farm. You must talk to him, Ethel; he is a straightforward, kind-hearted fellow, and I only wish he had a good wife, and some home comforts around him.'

'Then he is not married,' said Ethel, rather dolefully. 'I had pictured to myself such a bright fire this cold morning, and such a pleasant Mrs. Heath to boil the kettle and make my tea; and now——'

'Now you find there is no Mrs. Heath, and only a very lonely and rather sad-looking tenant at the Llydiatt! What *shall* I do to make up for the disappointment?'

Ethel smiled.

'There he is, I suppose,' she said, 'standing in the doorway of that dilapidated building. Must I call it a stable?'

'I suppose that Pearl and Presto would have no objection to my giving it that name,' replied Harold, 'especially if we show them some beans and a manger.'

As he spoke, they drove through an open gate-