

Silas Marner



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George Eliot



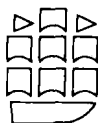
SILAS MARNER

GEORGE ELIOT

Simplified by
Manfred E. Graham and Michael West

Illustrated by Imre Hofbauer

2,300 word vocabulary



LONGMAN

LONGMAN GROUP LIMITED
London

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First published 1936

New edition (reset & re-illustrated) 1963

*New impressions *1964; *1965 (twice); *1966 (twice);
*1968 (thrice); *1969 (twice); *1970;
*1971; *1972 (twice); *1974;
*1975; *1976; *1977 (twice);
*1978; *1979*

ISBN 0 582 53527 1

Note: Words with a star* are outside stage 6 of the New Method Supplementary Readers and are not explained in the text. These extra words are in a list on page 102.

*Printed in Hong Kong by
Sheck Wah Tong Printing Press Ltd*

INTRODUCTION

This is a beautiful story, telling how a great wrong was set right.

Silas Marner was a weaver—a maker of cloth. He had sudden attacks which left him in a kind of sleep in which he did not know what was happening around him, and he often did not know that he had had one of these attacks.

At the beginning of the story Silas was greatly wronged by a friend as a result of one of these attacks, so he left the town where he was living and came to a village called Raveloe and started to work there. He lived all by himself and did not meet the people around, and the people around disliked him. The only thing he was interested in was counting his money. One day Silas Marner's gold, which he loved so much, was stolen from him and he thought that he had lost everything in the world, everything that he loved or worked for. Yet soon after this something came to Silas which he loved more than gold.

During one of his attacks a little girl came in his house. The mother was later found to be dead. Silas kept the child and was like a father to her. He named her Eppie. As the years went by he loved Eppie more than anything else in the world, and he blessed the day when she had come to him in

place of his stolen money. She changed him from a lonely old man into a happy, much-loved man. There are two brothers, Godfrey and Dunstan Cass, whose lives are strangely mixed up with those of Silas and Eppie . . . as you will find when you read the story.

Silas Marner was written by George Eliot. "George Eliot" was the book name of Mary Evans (1819-1880). She was thought to be one of the greatest writers of her time, and *Silas Marner* was one of her best books. She also wrote *The Mill on the Floss* (Stage 7).

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Silas Marner at his loom

One

WHY SILAS LEFT THE TOWN

Silas Marner was a weaver. He lived first in the town, but later came to the village of Raveloe, and settled there.

It is first necessary to tell why Silas left the town.

In this town the life of Silas was closely connected with a small group of persons named The Brotherhood. These people followed a little known form of religion of their own. They met frequently in a hall at Lantern Yard, a little street in the poorer part of the town. Silas was a respected member of this group and was a regular visitor to the prayer-meetings.

At one of these prayer-meetings Silas fell into a *trance*¹ which lasted for an hour, and he was thought to be dead. As a result of this it was believed that Silas was a person chosen for Divine favour, and a less truthful man than he might have been tempted to pretend that he had had a vision or heard mysterious voices. He could easily have pretended, too, that his knowledge of the medical properties of plants was of Divine origin. But Silas was as truthful and honest as his long-dead mother. It was she who had carefully taught him his letters

¹ Trance = a sudden deep sleep into which a person falls as a result of an illness.

and the little he knew of these plants and their preparation.

Among the members of this little group there was a young man with whom Silas had long lived in close friendship. It was the custom of their Lantern Yard companions to call them David and Jonathan. His real name was William Dane, and he, too, was looked upon as a young man of noble character, although rather inclined to be too hard upon the weaker members.

For some months Silas had been *engaged*¹ to a young servant-maid, named Sarah. They were waiting only for a little increase in their wages in order to get married; and it was a great delight to him that Sarah was willing to allow William to be present sometimes at their weekly meeting.

It was at this point that Silas's trance happened during the prayer-meeting.

All the members said some kind words to Silas, or asked him interested questions; but William's words were not kind. William said that to him the trance seemed more likely to be caused by the Devil than to be a proof of Divine favour. He urged his friend to see that he hid no wicked thought within his soul.

Silas was pained also to notice that Sarah's manner to him was less loving. He asked her if she wished to break off their engagement; but she denied this. Their engagement was known to the council and had been accepted at the prayer-meet-

¹ Engaged = promised in marriage.



Sarah, William Dane and Silas

ings: it could not be broken off without good reason, and Sarah had no reason which would be accepted by the members.

Not long after Silas's trance an important member of the group became ill. As he lived alone, he was nursed by the other members in turn. Silas usually took his turn in the night-watching with William Dane. The one relieved the other at two in the morning.

One night Silas, sitting by the bedside, noticed that the sick man's breathing had ceased. The candle was burning low, and he had to lift it up to see the old man's face. A close examination showed that the man was dead, that he had been dead for some time. Silas asked himself if he had been asleep. He looked at the clock. It was already four in the morning. Why had not William come?

In much anxiety he went to get help, and soon there were several members assembled in the house.



At last, as Silas went away to his work, he wished he could have met William and learned the reason why he had not come.

At six o'clock the next evening, he was just thinking of going to look for his friend, when William came. With him came the priest of the group. They came to tell Silas to appear before the members at Lantern Yard.

"What is the reason for this?" asked Silas anxiously.

"You will see," was the only reply.

Nothing further was said until Silas was seated at the council with the eyes of the members fixed solemnly on him. Then the priest, seated in judgment, took out a knife, and showed it to Silas.

"You have lost a knife," he said. "This is it. Where did you leave it?"

"I did not know that I had lost it," answered Silas. But he was trembling at this strange questioning.

"Do not hide your sin," said the priest in a solemn voice. "Confess, and repent, and God may forgive you."

Silas remained silent. What did all this mean?

"This knife," said the priest, "was found on the writing-table near the dead man's bed."

Silas looked up. He put out his hand to take the knife.

"In that same place," continued the priest, "there was a bag of money belonging to the council. That money was gone! Someone has stolen

it. The hand that stole the money owned this knife! ”

Silas remained silent.

At last he spoke: “God will prove me innocent. I know nothing about it. I do not know how the knife came there. I know nothing about the money or who stole it. Search me and my house; you will find nothing but £3 5s. (three pounds five shillings) of my money, which William Dane knows I have had during these past six months.”

At this William moaned.

The priest looked at Silas. “The proof is heavy against you, brother Marner. The money was taken last night; and no man was with our dead brother but you. William Dane declares to us that he was prevented by sudden illness from going to take his place as usual, and you yourself said that he had not come; and, moreover, you neglected the dead body.”

“I must have slept,” said Silas. Then after a pause he added, “Or I must have had another trance like that which you have all seen. Perhaps the thief came while I was in a trance. But, I say again, search me; search my house, for I have gone nowhere else.”

The search was made. It ended in William Dane finding the bag of money in Silas’s room. On this he begged his friend to confess and not to hide his sin any longer.

Silas turned and said, “William, for the nine years during which we have been friends have you

ever known me tell a lie? But God will prove my innocence."

"Brother," said William, "how do I know what you have done in secret to give the Devil a power over you."

Silas remained looking at his friend for a few moments. Suddenly his eyes became bright. He was about to speak with some excitement: then he stopped; he trembled. At last he spoke feebly, "I remember now. The knife was not in my pocket."

His eyes met William's.

"I do not know what you mean," said William.

"What do you mean?" said the others. "Where was the knife?"

Silas made no reply.

The members of the council left the room and consulted together.

While they were absent, Silas knelt down and prayed.

At last they came back. The council decided that Silas was guilty. They solemnly shut him out from the brotherhood, and called upon him to give back the stolen money. Only on confession, as a sign of repentance, could he be received back into the brotherhood again.

All rose to depart.

Silas went towards William Dane and said:

"The last time I remember using the knife was when I took it out to cut something for you. I don't remember putting it into my pocket again. *You* have stolen the money, and you have planned to

lay the sin on me."

Poor Marner went out with that despair in his heart—that shaken faith in God and man which is very near madness to a loving and trusting nature.

He went home, and for a whole day he sat alone. He had no desire even to go to Sarah, to try to win her belief in his innocence. In the deep bitterness of his heart he said to himself, "Surely she too will not leave me!"

On the second day he occupied himself at his loom¹, but, before many hours had passed, a group of members came to inform him that Sarah considered her engagement to him at an end. Silas received the message in silence and then turned away from them to work at his loom again.

In little more than a month from that time, Sarah was married to William Dane; and not long afterwards it was known to the brotherhood in Lantern Yard that Silas Marner had departed from the town.

He left the town and went to the village of Raveloe.

TWO

RAVELOE

Silas left the town and came to the village of Raveloe. In this village he was regarded with suspicion.

¹ Loom=a machine used for weaving.

In the early years of the eighteenth century, when Silas lived, weaving was still an uncommon art and the people felt that it was in some way strange and mysterious; it was an art which could not be carried out without the help of the Devil.

Silas Marner's house was not far from the edge of a deserted stone-pit. The sound of his loom was so strange a thing, so unlike the usual sounds of the country, that boys would often stop their games and look in through the windows of the cottage. Silas would open the door and look at them; and this always made them run away in terror. Actually Silas could hardly see the children, for his eyesight was bad. But they told their fathers and mothers, and the fathers and mothers whispered that Silas was a suspected person.

So things went on for ~~fifteen years~~. Silas lived and worked in Raveloe; ~~but~~ the people did not treat him as a friend. They treated him rather as someone strange—mysterious, ~~and~~ ~~not~~ trusted.

When Silas came to ~~Raveloe~~ ~~he~~ was a young man with a pale face and ~~weak brown~~ eyes. These things seemed strange to the people of the village. But there was another thing which caused Silas to be suspected and feared, and this was his trances.

It was Jem Rodney, a farm labourer, who first noticed the trances. He said that, one evening, he saw Silas Marner leaning against a fence with a heavy bag on his shoulder. When Jem came near to him, he saw that Marner's eyes were fixed like a dead man's. Jem spoke to him and shook him;

his limbs were as stiff as iron. But, just as Jem had decided that the weaver was dead, Marner became all right again, said "Good night," and walked away.

Jem Rodney swore that he had seen this. Some said that Marner must have been in a trance. This word "trance" seemed to explain many mysterious things. People said that in a trance a man's soul might leave his body. Silas was regarded with even more suspicion than before.

At the end of fifteen years the people of Raveloe said just the same things about Marner as they had said at first. They did not say these things so often, but they believed them much more strongly when they did say them. There was only one important change which the passing years had brought; it was that Master Marner had saved a large sum of money which he had hidden somewhere.

About this time came an event which seemed to open a possibility of some friendship with his neighbours. One day, taking a pair of shoes to be mended, he saw Mrs. Oates, the shoe-repairer's wife, seated by the fire. She was suffering from a terrible disease of the heart. Silas had seen such signs of sickness in his mother just before her death; so he felt a sudden pity at the sight. He remembered the relief his mother used to find from a simple preparation of a certain plant (the *fox-glove*). He promised Sally Oates to bring her something that would help her, since the doctor did her no good.