

"It's strange to think that a child can make
such a difference to Silas's life."

Hannah, 9



SILAS MARNER

GEORGE ELIOT

'It's a woman. She's dead, I think – dead in the snow at the
Stone-pits – not far from my door.'

Since his arrival in the small village of Raveloe, Silas Marner has
been an outsider. Nobody knows where he came from, nobody
understands him, nobody dares to invite him in.

All of this changes when a little girl wanders through his door
one snowy night. What feelings will she stir in Silas's lonely
heart? How will she draw Silas closer to the heart of Raveloe?

If Raveloe has a
heart, it also has a
head in the form
of the wealthy Cass
family. When
Dunstan Cass
enters Silas's life,
he takes something
valuable. Years later,
will Godfrey Cass do
the same and take away
what Silas has grown to
love most dearly?



ISBN 978-1-906230-60-9



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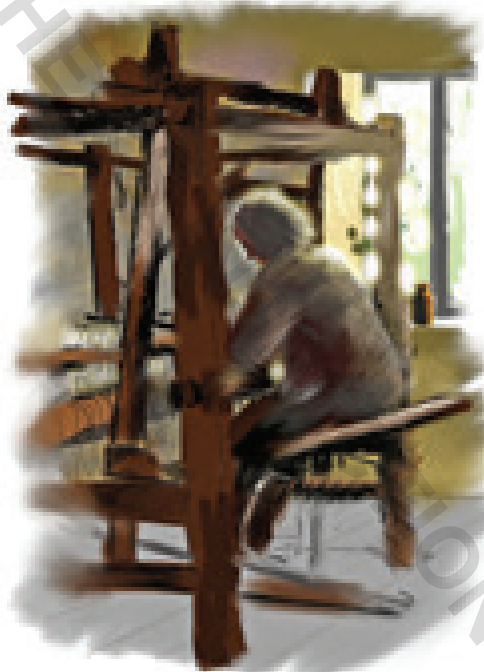
SILAS MARNER
George Eliot



Retold by Gill Tavner
Illustrated by Sarah Wimperis

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Published by Real Reads Ltd
Newbury, Berkshire, UK
www.realreads.co.uk

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First published in 2012
Reprinted 2014, 2015

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ISBN 978-1-906230-60-9

Printed in China by Wai Man Book Binding (China) Ltd
Designed by Lucy Guenot
Typeset by Bookcraft Ltd, Stroud, Gloucestershire



THE CHARACTERS



Silas Marner

Accused of a crime he didn't commit, Silas leaves the only life he knows. Will he ever love or trust again?

William Dane

William was Silas's best friend when they were young, but where was he when Silas needed him?



Godfrey Cass

Spoiled by his father, blackmailed by his brother, and secretly married to a drug addict, will he ever fulfil his dream of domestic happiness?



Dunstan (Dunsey) Cass

Godfrey's brother doesn't care who he hurts. One day he leaves and doesn't return. Where has he gone? Will he ever come back, or is Godfrey's secret safe?

Nancy Lammeter

Calm, beautiful and patient, Nancy cannot understand Godfrey's behaviour. Does he love her, or is he just playing with her heart?



Dolly and Aaron Winthrop

Dolly is a great help to Silas, and her young son is Eppie's best friend.



Eppie

Toddling into Silas's life when she is just two years old, Eppie unlocks his heart. Where has she come from? Will she stay?





SILAS MARNER

On the stone floor, in the middle of the room, a young man lay rigid and unconscious. He had been there for almost an hour. Some members of the prayer meeting interrupted by the man's fit thought he was dead, but nobody thought to send for a doctor, for this was evidently an event of spiritual, rather than physical, significance.

'Silas is a young man of exemplary life and strong faith,' breathed one of the awed brethren of Lantern Yard. 'This is a sign that he has been selected for special work.' The others murmured their assent.

A less honest man than Silas Marner, upon awaking from his fit, might have claimed to have witnessed a vision, but Silas made no such claim. He neither understood nor invented a reason for his seizure. His fits were considered by most to be a sign of his godliness. Only one person suggested otherwise, that it might be the work of Satan.

Among the community of this narrow religious sect in Lantern Yard was William Dane, Silas's closest friend. With William's friendship, the admiration of the brethren, enough work to keep him busy and a wedding to save for, Silas was a happy man. He and his fiancée Sarah were planning to marry once Silas had managed to save enough money from his weaving.

It was about this time that the senior deacon of Lantern Yard fell seriously ill, and the other brethren took turns to watch over him. One night, sitting at the deacon's bedside, Silas noticed that the man's breathing had ceased. Looking closely, he found that the deacon was dead, his body already cold and stiff. How long had he been dead? Silas looked at the clock. It was four in the morning. Had he slept? Why had his friend William not come at the appointed time to take over the watch? Had he come and found Silas in one of his fits? If so, why had he not helped?

It was William who led the accusations when the church's funds were found to be missing from the deceased deacon's room. When Silas's knife, which he had recently lent to William, was found where the money should have been, William expressed his concern. 'Brother,' he said solemnly to Silas, 'what have you done to give Satan this power over you?'

The brethren could not decide whether Silas was guilty or innocent, so chose to make the decision by drawing lots. And so it was that chance decided that Silas Marner was guilty. Dismayed, he was cast out from the church. 'There is no just god that governs the earth righteously,' he cried, 'only a god of lies!'

With his trust in both god and man severely shaken, and his spirit sorely wounded, Silas Marner shut himself away, working hard at his loom, weaving day and night. When news reached him that William Dane had married Sarah, it was the final straw.

brehtaking rate. Before Silas's time, most people worked as farmers. Any industry was small-scale, usually within houses. People produced only as much food or cloth as their community needed. However, by the early 1800s, most people realised that change was on the way.

Weaving was one of many crafts affected by the Industrial Revolution. In 1785, Edmund Cartwright patented a new invention: the power loom. By 1830, power looms and weaving mills began to put domestic weavers out of business. By 1850, most weaving was done in mills.

Silas's visit to Lantern Yard at the end of the book shows how Eliot felt about industrialisation. We see a community destroyed, replaced by people who don't know each other, a chapel replaced by a factory. Due to the lack of work in villages, people had to move to towns, where conditions for workers were terrible.

Although the ending of *Silas Marner* seems

happy, readers at the time would know that Eppie and Aaron are moving into this rapidly-changing world. What do you think would happen in a sequel to *Silas Marner*?

George Eliot's writing shows some of the influence of Romanticism. Romantic writers, such as Wordsworth, idealised nature, childhood and natural affections.

Finding out more

We recommend the following books and websites to gain a greater understanding of Silas Marner's England.

Books

- Peter Hepplewhite and Mairi Campbell, *All about the Industrial Revolution*, Hodder Wayland, 2002.
- Stewart Ross, *Witness to History: Industrial Revolution*, Heinemann Library, 2004.