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Silas Marner

George Eliot · *1861 · original English text*

A wronged weaver buries himself in a lonely cottage and in a hoard of gold, until a child crawls to his hearth and slowly teaches him to trust again. Eliot's short novel is about providence that does not always explain itself, about a stolen faith, and about the costly good of raising what you did not plan to love.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

When trust in God and neighbor has been stolen, what can make a closed life open again?

"the child was come instead of the gold—that the gold had turned into the child."

narrator · Part I, Chapter XIV

Silas is betrayed by a false friend and a drawn lot in Lantern Yard, and he concludes that God is not just. Raveloe does not argue him back to faith with a theory. Eppie's coming, Dolly's plain help, and years of fatherhood become the light he can "trusten by" until he dies.

KEY CHARACTERS

Silas Marner
wronged weaver; hoard, then fatherhood

Eppie
the child who opens the house

Godfrey Cass
weakness, secrecy, late confession

Nancy Lammeter
upright, tested by a hidden past

Dunstan Cass
the thief; recklessness

Dolly Winthrop
plain neighborly faith

William Dane
the false friend of Lantern Yard

Squire Cass
a house weak in fatherhood

Grades 9–12

Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01
Lantern Yard
PART I, CHAPTER I

A false charge, a drawn lot, and a door closed on God.

- Silas is a devout weaver in a tight religious community in the north
- His friend William Dane arranges an accusation of theft while Silas is in a cataleptic trance
- The church draws lots; the lot falls against him
- He cries out that there is no just God, and leaves the place forever

> *"there is no just God that governs the earth righteously, but a God of lies, that bears witness against the innocent."*
> **Silas** · Part I, Chapter I

02
The Hoard
PART I, CHAPTERS II–V

Work without love, and gold that can be counted.

- In Raveloe, Silas weaves apart from his neighbors and finds comfort only in his growing pile of coins
- He is thought strange, even uncanny, though he once heals a woman with a remedy he knows
- Godfrey Cass, the squire's son, is secretly married to unhappy Molly, and is bullied by his brother Dunstan
- Dunstan, riding in the dark after a bad bargain, steals Silas's gold

03
New Year's Eve
PART I, CHAPTERS VI–XIII

A death in the snow, and a child on the hearth.

- The village talks, dances, and waits; Godfrey, still hiding his marriage, eyes Nancy Lammeter
- Molly sets out for the Red House with their child, meaning to expose Godfrey, and dies in the snow
- The little girl wanders through Silas's open door to the light of the fire
- Silas, coming out of a trance, finds her and, soon after, the dead mother; he will not give the child up

04
Eppie
PART I, CHAPTERS XIV–XV

Gold is gone; a living claim begins.

- Silas names the child Hephzibah—Eppie—and learns, awkwardly, how to care for her
- Dolly Winthrop helps him with practical mercy and simple talk of belief
- Godfrey, relieved of Molly, keeps his silence and later marries Nancy
- The gold is not found; Dunstan remains missing

> *"the child was come instead of the gold—that the gold had turned into the child."*
> **narrator** · Part I, Chapter XIV

05
Sixteen Years
PART II, CHAPTERS XVI–XIX

The hidden father wants the girl back, and she will not go.

- Eppie has grown in Silas's cottage, loved and free; she and Aaron Winthrop wish to marry
- Dunstan's skeleton and the stolen gold are found in the Stone-pits
- Godfrey confesses to Nancy, and they come to claim Eppie as their daughter
- Eppie chooses Silas; Nancy, honestly, accepts that a delayed right is not a present claim

06
Trusten till I Die
PART II, CHAPTERS XX–XXI AND CONCLUSION

A journey backward, and a faith that can live without the old proof.

- Silas and Eppie visit Lantern Yard; the chapel is gone, the old certainty cannot be recovered
- He no longer needs that verdict in order to trust
- Eppie marries Aaron; the cottage, enlarged, remains their home
- The book closes on a small, thankful household rather than a public vindication

> *"I think I shall trusten till I die."*
> **Silas** · Part II, Chapter XXI

Trust & Providence | Fatherhood | Gold vs Love | Truth Told Late | Community | Mercy

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–12

1. Silas's blasphemy in Chapter I is the wound the rest of the book must meet. He is not argued out of it in a single speech.
2. Watch the gold: how he loves it, how it is stolen, and how Eliot says it "turns into" the child.
3. Godfrey wants a cleaned past and a claimed daughter at once. Why does the book refuse him Eppie even after he tells the truth?
4. Dolly Winthrop's faith is not clever. What does her way of helping teach Silas that Lantern Yard did not?
5. The return to Lantern Yard gives no restored proof. Why is that absence important to Silas's last trust?
6. Notice how catalepsy, open doors, and the New Year's fire are arranged so that chance looks, gradually, like providence.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #550, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/silas-marner/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.