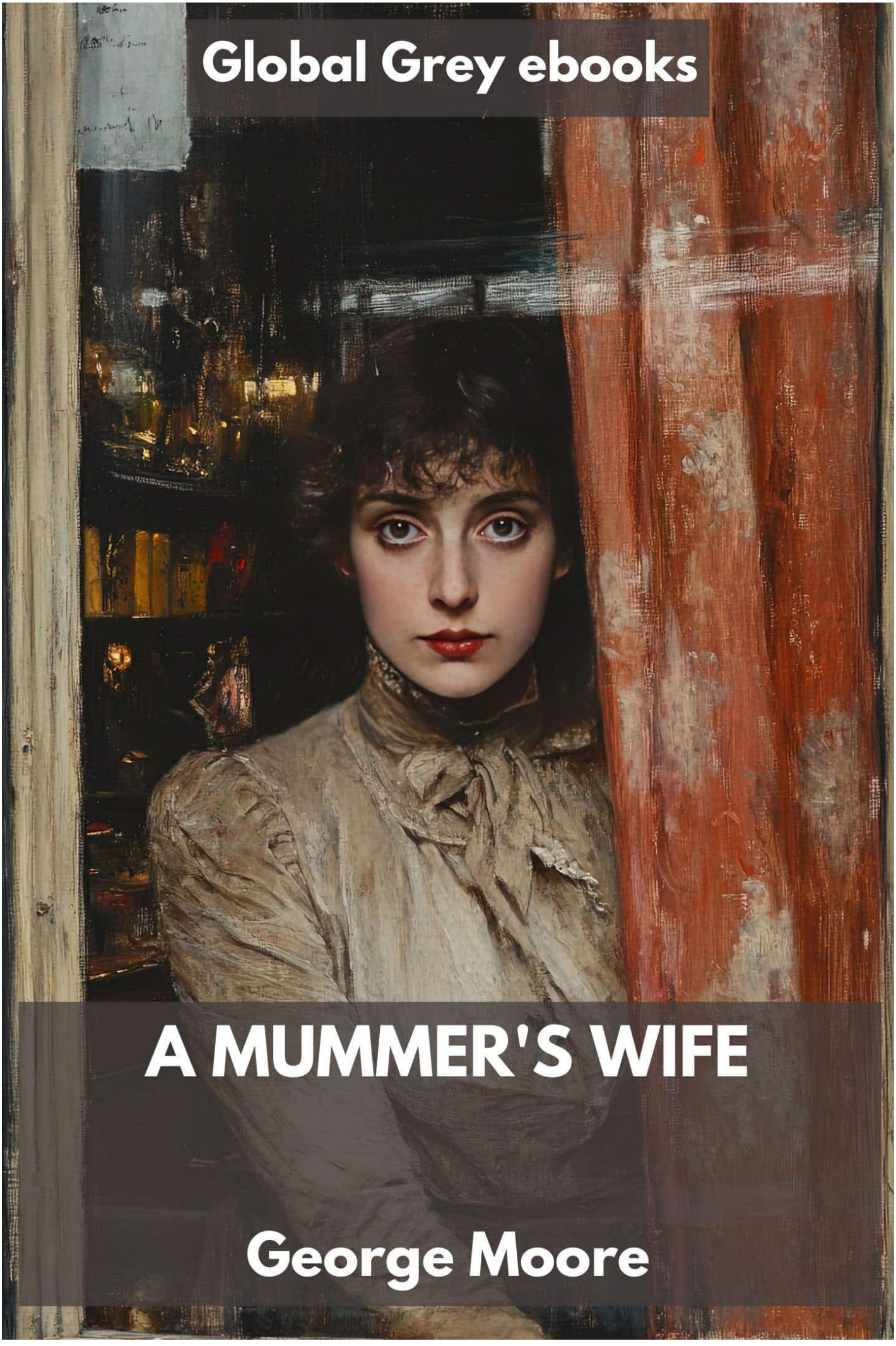
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A MUMMER'S WIFE
George Moore

A MUMMER'S WIFE

GEORGE MOORE

A Mummer’s Wife by George Moore.
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A Dedication To Robert Ross

I

In the sunset of his life a man often finds himself unable to put dates even upon events in which his sympathies were, and perhaps are still, engaged; all things seem to have befallen yesterday, and yet it cannot be less than three years since we were anxious to testify to our belief in the kindness and justice with which you had fulfilled your double duties in the *Morning Post* towards us and the proprietors of the paper.

A committee sprang up quickly, and a letter was addressed by it to all the notable workers in the arts and to all those who were known to be interested in the arts, and very soon a considerable sum of money was collected; but when the committee met to decide what form the commemorative gift should take, a perplexity arose, many being inclined towards a piece of plate. It was pointed out that a piece of plate worth eight hundred pounds would prove a cumbersome piece of furniture—a white elephant, in fact—in the small house or apartment or flat in which a critic usually lives. The truth of this could not be gainsaid. Other suggestions were forthcoming for your benefit, every one obtaining a certain amount of support, but none commanding a majority of votes; and the perplexity continued till it was mooted that the disposal of the money should be left to your option, and in view of the fact that you had filled the post of art critic for many years, you decided to found a Slade scholarship. It seemed to you well that a young man on leaving the Slade School should be provided with a sum of money sufficient to furnish a studio, and some seven or eight hundred pounds were invested, the remainder being spent on a trinket for your personal wear—a watch. I have not forgotten that I was one of the dissidents, scholarships not appealing to me, but lately I have begun to see that you were wise in the disposal of the money. A watch was enough for remembrance, and since I caught sight of it just now, the pleasant thoughts it has evoked console me for your departure: after bidding you good-bye on the doorstep, I return to my fireside to chew the cud once again of the temperate and tolerant articles that I used to read years ago in the *Morning Post*.

You see, Ross, I was critic myself for some years on the *Speaker*, but my articles were often bitter and explosive; I was prone to polemics and lacked the finer sense that enabled you to pass over works with which you were not in sympathy, and without wounding the painter. My intention was often to wound him in the absurd hope that I might compel him to do better. My motto seems to have been ‘Compel them to come in’—words used by Jesus in one of his parables, and relied on by ecclesiastics as a justification of persecution, and by many amongst us whose names I will not pillory here, for I have chosen that these pages shall be about you and nothing but you. If I speak of myself in a forgotten crusade, it is to place you in your true light. We recognized your critical insight and your literary skill, but it was not for these qualities that we, the criticized, decided to present you, the critic, with a token of our gratitude; nor was it because you had praised our works (a great number of the subscribers had not received praise from you): we were moved altogether, I think, by the consciousness that you had in a difficult task proved yourself to be a kindly critic, and yet a just one, and it was for these qualities that you received an honour, that is unique, I think, in the chronicles of criticism.

II

Memory pulls me up, and out of some moments of doubt, the suspicion emerges that all I am writing here was read by me somewhere: but it was not in our original declaration of faith, for I never saw it, not having attended the presentation of the testimonial. Where, then? In the newspapers that quoted from the original document? Written out by whom? By Witt or by MacColl, excellent writers both? But being a writer myself, I am called upon to do my own writing…. Newspapers are transitory things—a good reason for writing out the story afresh; and there is still another reason for writing it out—my reasons for dedicating this book to you. We must have reasons always, else we pass for unreasonable beings, and a better reason for dedicating a book to you than mine, I am fain to believe, will never be found by anybody in search of a reason for his actions. My name is among the signatories to the document that I have called 'our declaration of faith'; and having committed myself thus fully to your critical judgment, it seems to me that for the completion of the harmony a dedication is necessary. A fair share of reasons I am setting forth for this act of mine, every one of them valid, and the most valid of all my reason for choosing this book, *A Mummer's Wife*, to dedicate to you, is your own commendation of it the other night when you said to me that no book of mine in your opinion was more likely to 'live'! To live for five-and-twenty years is as long an immortality as anyone should set his heart on; for who would wish to be chattered about by the people that will live in these islands three hundred years hence? We should not understand them nor they us. Avaunt, therefore, all legendary immortalities, and let us be content, Ross, to be remembered by our friends, and, perhaps, to have our names passed on by disciples to another generation! A fair and natural immortality this is; let us share it together. Our bark lies in the harbour: you tell me the spars are sound, and the seams have been caulked; the bark, you say, is seaworthy and will outlive any of the little storms that she may meet on the voyage—a better craft is not to be found in my little fleet. You said yesterevening across the hearthrug, '*Esther Waters* speaks out of a deeper appreciation of life;' but you added: 'In *A Mummer's Wife* there is a youthful imagination and a young man's exuberance on coming into his own for the first time, and this is a quality - 'No doubt it is a quality, Ross; but what kind of quality? You did not finish your sentence, or I have forgotten it. Let me finish it for you - 'that outweighs all other qualities' But does it? I am interpreting you badly. You would not commit yourself to so crude an opinion, and I am prepared to believe that I did not catch the words as they fell from your lips. All I can recall for certain of the pleasant moment when, you were considering which of my works you liked the best are stray words that may be arranged here into a sentence which, though it does not represent your critical judgments accurately, may be accepted by you. You said your thoughts went more frequently to *A Mummer's Wife* than to *Esther Waters*; and I am almost sure something was said about the earlier book being a more spontaneous issue of the imagination, and that the wandering life of the mummers gives an old-world, adventurous air to the book, reminding you of *The Golden Ass*—a book I read last year, and found in it so many remembrances of myself that I fell to thinking it was a book I might have written had I lived two thousand years ago. Who can say he has not lived before, and is it not as important to believe we lived here before as it is to believe we are going to live hereafter? If I had lived here before, Jupiter knows what I should have written, but it would not have been *Esther Waters*: more likely a book like *A Mummer's Wife*—a band of jugglers and acrobats travelling from town to town. As I write these lines an antique story rises up in my mind, a recollection of one of my lost works or an instantaneous reading of Apuleius into *A Mummers Wife*—which?

G.M.

Chapter I

In default of a screen, a gown and a red petticoat had been thrown over a clothes-horse, and these shaded the glare of the lamp from the eyes of the sick man. In the pale obscurity of the room, his bearded cheeks could be seen buried in a heap of tossed pillows. By his bedside sat a young woman. As she dozed, her face drooped until her features were hidden, and the lamp-light made the curious curves of a beautiful ear look like a piece of illuminated porcelain. Her hands lay upon her lap, her needlework slipped from them; and as it fell to the ground she awoke.

She pressed her hands against her forehead and made an effort to rouse herself. As she did so, her face contracted with an expression of disgust, and she remembered the ether. The soft, vaporous odour drifted towards her from a small table strewn with medicine bottles, and taking care to hold the cork tightly in her fingers she squeezed it into the bottle.

At that moment the clock struck eleven and the clear tones of its bell broke the silence sharply; the patient moaned as if in reply, and his thin hairy arms stirred feverishly on the wide patchwork counterpane. She took them in her hands and covered them over; she tried to arrange the pillows more comfortably, but as she did so he turned and tossed impatiently, and, fearing to disturb him, she put back the handkerchief she had taken from the pillow to wipe the sweat from his brow, and regaining her chair, with a weary movement she picked up the cloth that had fallen from her knees and slowly continued her work.

It was a piece of patchwork like the counterpane on the bed; the squares of a chessboard had been taken as a design, and, selecting a fragment of stuff, she trimmed it into the required shape and sewed it into its allotted corner.

Nothing was now heard but the methodical click of her needle as it struck the head of her thimble, and then the long swish of the thread as she drew it through the cloth. The lamp at her elbow burned steadily, and the glare glanced along her arm as she raised it with the large movement of sewing.

Her hair was blue wherever the light touched it, and it encircled the white prominent temple like a piece of rich black velvet; a dark shadow defined the delicate nose, and hinted at thin indecision of lips, whilst a broad touch of white marked the weak but not unbeautiful chin.

On the corner of the table lay a book, a well-worn volume in a faded red paper cover. It was a novel she used to read with delight when she was a girl, but it had somehow failed to interest her, and after a few pages she had laid it aside, preferring for distraction her accustomed sewing. She was now well awake, and, as she worked, her thoughts turned on things concerning the daily routine of her life. She thought of the time when her husband would be well: of the pillow she was making; of how nice it would look in the green armchair; of the much greater likelihood of letting their rooms if they were better furnished; of their new lodger; and of the probability of a quarrel between him and her mother-in-law, Mrs. Ede.

For more than a week past the new lodger had formed the staple subject of conversation in this household. Mrs. Ede, Kate’s mother-in-law, was loud in her protestations that the harbouring of an actor could not but be attended by bad luck. Kate felt a little uneasy; her puritanism was of a less marked kind; perhaps at first she had felt inclined to agree with her mother-in-law, but her husband had shown himself so stubborn, and had so persistently declared that he was not going to keep his rooms empty any longer, that for peace’ sake she was fain to side with him. The question arose in a very unexpected way. During the whole

winter they were unfortunate with their rooms, though they made many attempts to get lodgers; they even advertised. Some few people asked to see the rooms; but they merely made an offer. One day a man who came into the shop to buy some paper collars asked Kate if she had any apartments to let. She answered yes, and they went upstairs. After a cursory inspection he told her that he was the agent in advance to a travelling opera company, and that if she liked he would recommend her rooms to the stage manager, a particular friend of his. The proposition was somewhat startling, but, not liking to say no, she proposed to refer the matter to her husband.

At that particular moment Ede happened to be engaged in a violent dispute with his mother, and so angry was he that when Mrs. Ede raised her hands to protest against the introduction of an actor into the household, he straightway told her that 'if she didn't like it she might do the other thing.' Nothing more was said at the time; the old lady retired in indignation, and Mr. Lennox was written to. Kate sympathized alternately with both sides. Mrs. Ede was sturdy in defence of her principles; Ede was petulant and abusive; and between the two Kate was blown about like a feather in a storm. Daily the argument waxed warmer, until one night, in the middle of a scene characterized by much Biblical quotation, Ede declared he could stand it no longer, and rushed out of the house. In vain the women tried to stop him, knowing well what the consequences would be. A draught, a slight exposure, sufficed to give him a cold, and with him a cold always ended in an asthmatic attack. And these were often so violent as to lay him up for weeks at a time. When he returned, his temper grown cooler under the influence of the night air, he was coughing, and the next night found him breathless. His anger had at first vented itself against his mother, whom he refused to see, and thus the whole labour of nursing him was thrown on Kate. She didn't grumble at this, but it was terrible to have to listen to him.

It was Mr. Lennox, and nothing but Mr. Lennox. All the pauses in the suffocation were utilized to speak on this important question, and even now Kate, who had not yet perceived that the short respite which getting rid of the phlegm had given him was coming to an end, expected him to say something concerning the still unknown person. But Ede did not speak, and, to put herself as it were out of suspense, she referred to some previous conversation:

'I'm sure you're right; the only people in the town who let their rooms are those who have a theatrical connection.'

'Oh, I don't care; I'm going to have a bad night,' said Mr. Ede, who now thought only of how he should get his next breath.

'But you seemed to be getting better,' she replied hurriedly.

'No! I feel it coming on—I'm suffocating. Have you got the ether?'

Kate did not answer, but made a rapid movement towards the table, and snatching the bottle she uncorked it. The sickly odour quietly spread like oil over the close atmosphere of the room, but, mastering her repugnance, she held it to him, and in the hope of obtaining relief he inhaled it greedily. But the remedy proved of no avail, and he pushed the bottle away.

'Oh, these headaches! My head is splitting,' he said, after a deep inspiration which seemed as if it would cost him his life. 'Nothing seems to do me any good. Have you got any cigarettes?'

'I'm sorry, they haven't arrived yet. I wrote for them,' she replied, hesitating; 'but don't you think—?'

He shook his head; and, resenting Kate's assiduities, with trembling fingers he unfastened the shawl she had placed on his shoulders, and then, planting his elbows on his knees, with a

fixed head and elevated shoulders, he gave himself up to the struggle of taking breath…. At that moment she would have laid down her life to save him from the least of his pains, but she could only sit by him watching the struggle, knowing that nothing could be done to relieve him. She had seen the same scene repeated a hundred times before, but it never seemed to lose any of its terror. In the first month of their marriage she had been frightened by one of these asthmatic attacks. It had come on in the middle of the night, and she remembered well how she had prayed to God that it should not be her fate to see her husband die before her eyes. She knew now that death was not to be apprehended—the paroxysm would wear itself out—but she knew also of the horrors that would have to be endured before the time of relief came. She could count them upon her fingers—she could see it all as in a vision—a nightmare that would drag out its long changes until the dawn began to break; she anticipated the hours of the night.

'Air! Air! I'm suff-o-cating!' he sobbed out with a desperate effort.

Kate ran to the window and threw it open. The paroxysm had reached its height, and, resting his elbows well on his knees, he gasped many times, but before the inspiration was complete his strength failed him. No want but that of breath could have forced him to try again; and the second effort was even more terrible than the first. A great upheaval, a great wrenching and rocking seemed to be going on within him; the veins on his forehead were distended, the muscles of his chest laboured, and it seemed as if every minute were going to be his last. But with a supreme effort he managed to catch breath, and then there was a moment of respite, and Kate could see that he was thinking of the next struggle, for he breathed avariciously, letting the air that had cost him so much agony pass slowly through his lips. To breathe again he would have to get on to his feet, which he did, and so engrossed was he in the labour of breathing that he pushed the paraffin lamp roughly; it would have fallen had Kate not been there to catch it. She besought of him to say what he wanted, but he made no reply, and continued to drag himself from one piece of furniture to another, till at last, grasping the back of a chair, he breathed by jerks, each inspiration being accompanied by a violent spasmodic wrench, violent enough to break open his chest. She watched, expecting every moment to see him roll over, a corpse, but knowing from past experiences that he would recover somehow. His recoveries always seemed to her like miracles, and she watched the long pallid face crushed under a shock of dark matted hair, a dirty nightshirt, a pair of thin legs; but for the moment the grandeur of human suffering covered him, lifting him beyond the pale of loving or loathing, investing and clothing him in the pity of tragic things. The room, too, seemed transfigured. The bare wide floor, the gaunt bed, the poor walls plastered with religious prints cut from journals, even the ordinary furniture of everyday use—the little wash handstand with the common delf ewer, the chest of drawers that might have been bought for thirty shillings—lost their coarseness; their triviality disappeared, until nothing was seen or felt but this one suffering man.

The minutes slipped like the iron teeth of a saw over Kate's sensibilities. A hundred times she had run over in her mind the list of remedies she had seen him use. They were few in number, and none of any real service except the cigarettes which she had not. She asked him to allow her to try iodine, but he could not or would not make her any answer. It was cruel to see him struggling, but he resisted assistance, and watching like one in a dream, frightened at her own powerlessness to save or avert, Kate remained crouching by the fireplace without strength to think or act, until she was suddenly awakened by seeing him relax his hold and slip heavily on the floor; and it was only by putting forth her whole strength she could get him into a sitting position; when she attempted to place him in a chair he slipped through her arms. There was, therefore, nothing to do but to shriek for help, and hope to awaken her mother-in-

law. The echoes rang through the house, and as they died away, appalled, she listened to the silence.

At length it grew clear that Mrs. Ede could not be awakened, and Kate saw that she would have to trust to herself alone, and after two or three failures she applied herself to winning him back to consciousness. It was necessary to do so before attempting to move him again, and, sprinkling his face with water, she persuaded him to open his eyes, and after one little stare he slipped back into the nothingness he had come out of; and this was repeated several times, Kate redoubling her efforts until at last she succeeded in placing him in a chair. He sat there, still striving and struggling with his breath, unable to move, and soaked with sweat, but getting better every minute. The worst of the attack was now over; she buttoned his nightshirt across his panting chest and covered his shoulders with his red shawl once more, and with a sentiment of real tenderness she took his hand in hers. She looked at him, feeling her heart grow larger.

He was her husband; he had suffered terribly, and was now getting better; and she was his wife, whose duty it was to attend him. She only wished he would allow her to love him a little better; but against her will facts pierced through this luminous mist of sentiment, and she could not help remembering how petulant he was with her, how utterly all her wishes were disregarded. ‘What a pity he’s not a little different!’ she thought; but when she looked at him and saw how he suffered, all other thoughts were once more drowned and swept away. She forgot how he often rendered her life miserable, wellnigh unbearable, by small vices, faults that defy definition, unending selfishness and unceasing irritability. But now all dissatisfaction and bitternesses were again merged into a sentiment that was akin to love; and in this time of physical degradation he possessed her perhaps more truly, more perfectly, than even in his best moments of health.

But her life was one of work, not of musing, and there was plenty for her to attend to. Ralph would certainly not be able to leave his chair for some time yet; she had wrapped him up comfortably in a blanket, she could do no more, and whilst he was recovering it would be as well to tidy up the room a bit. He would never be able to sleep in a bed that he had been lying in all day; she had better make the bed at once, for he generally got a little ease towards morning, particularly after a bad attack. So, hoping that the present occasion would not prove an exception, Kate set to work to make the bed. She resolved to do this thoroughly, and turning the mattress over, she shook it with all her force. She did the same with the pillows, and fearing that there might be a few crumbs sticking to the sheets, she shook them out several times; and when the last crease had been carefully smoothed away she went back to her husband and insisted on being allowed to paint his back with iodine, although he did not believe in the remedy. On his saying he was thirsty, she went creeping down the narrow stairs to the kitchen, hunted for matches in the dark, lighted a spirit lamp and made him a hot drink, which he drank without thanking her. She fell to thinking of his ingratitude, and then of the discomfort of the asthma. How could she expect him to think of her when he was thinking of his breath? All the same, on these words her waking thoughts must have passed into dream thoughts. She was still watching by his bedside, waiting to succour him whenever he should ask for help, yet she must have been asleep. She did not know how long she slept, but it could not have been for long; and there was no reason for his peevishness, for she had not left him.

‘I’m sorry, Ralph, but I could not help it, I was so very tired. What can I do for you, dear?’

‘Do for me?’ he said - ‘why, shut the window. I might have died for all you would have known or cared.’

She walked across the room and shut the window, but as she came back to her place she said, ‘I don’t know why you speak to me like that, Ralph.’

‘Prop me up: if I lie so low I shall get bad again. If you had a touch of this asthma you’d know what it is to lie alone for hours.’

‘For hours, Ralph?’ Kate repeated, and she looked at the clock and saw that she had not been asleep for more than half an hour. Without contradicting him—for of what use would that be, only to make matters worse?—she arranged the pillows and settled the blankets about him, and thinking it would be advisable to say something, she congratulated him on seeming so much better.

‘Better! If I’m better, it’s no thanks to you,’ he said. ‘You must have been mad to leave the window open so long.’

‘You wanted it open; you know very well that when you’re very bad like that you must have change of air. The room was so close.’

‘Yes, but that is no reason for leaving it open half an hour.’

‘I offered to shut it, and you wouldn’t let me.’

‘I dare say you’re sick of nursing me, and would like to get rid of me. The window wasn’t a bad dodge.’

Kate remained silent, being too indignant for the moment to think of replying; but it was evident from her manner that she would not be able to contain herself much longer. He had hurt her to the quick, and her brown eyes swam with tears. His head lay back upon the built-up pillows, he fumed slowly, trying to find new matter for reproach, and breath wherewith to explain it. At last he thought of the cigarettes.

‘Even supposing that you did not remember how long you left the window open, I cannot understand how you forgot to send for the cigarettes. You know well enough that smoking is the only thing that relieves me when I’m in this state. I think it was most unfeeling—yes, most unfeeling!’ Having said so much, he leaned forward to get breath, and coughed.

‘You’d better lie still, Ralph; you’ll only make yourself bad again. Now that you feel a little easier you should try to go to sleep.’

So far she got without betraying any emotion, but as she continued to advise him her voice began to tremble, her presence of mind to forsake her, and she burst into a flood of tears.

‘I don’t know how you can treat me as you do,’ she said, sobbing hysterically. ‘I do everything—I give up my night’s rest to you, I work hard all day for you, and in return I only receive hard words. Oh, it’s no use,’ she said; ‘I can bear it no longer; you’ll have to get someone else to mind you.’

This outburst of passion came suddenly upon Mr. Ede, and for some time he was at a loss how to proceed. At last, feeling a little sorry, he resolved to make it up, and putting out his hand to her, he said:

‘Now, don’t cry, Kate; perhaps I was wrong in speaking so crossly. I didn’t mean all I said—it’s this horrid asthma.’

‘Oh, I can bear anything but to be told I neglect you—and when I stop up watching you three nights running— - ‘

These little quarrels were of constant occurrence. Irritable by nature, and rendered doubly so by the character of his complaint, the invalid at times found it impossible to restrain his ill-

humour; but he was not entirely bad; he inherited a touch of kind-heartedness from his mother, and being now moved by Kate's tears, he said:

'That's quite true, and I'm sorry for what I said; you are a good little nurse. I won't scold you again. Make it up.'

Kate found it hard to forget merely because Ralph desired it, and for some time she refused to listen to his expostulations, and walked about the room crying, but her anger could not long resist the dead weight of sleep that was oppressing her, and eventually she came and sat down in her own place by him. The next step to reconciliation was more easy. Kate was not vindictive, although quick-tempered, and at last, amid some hysterical sobbing, peace was restored. Ralph began to speak of his asthma again, telling how he had fancied he was going to die, and when she expressed her fear and regret he hastened to assure her that no one ever died of asthma, that a man might live fifty, sixty, or seventy years, suffering all the while from the complaint; and he rambled on until words and ideas together failed him, and he fell asleep. With a sigh of relief Kate rose to her feet, and seeing that he was settled for the night, she turned to leave him, and passed into her room with a slow and dragging movement; but the place had a look so cold and unrestful that it pierced through even her sense of weariness, and she stood urging her tired brains to think of what she should do. At last, remembering that she could get a pillow from the room they reserved for letting, she turned to go.

Facing their room, and only divided by the very narrowest of passages, was the stranger's apartment.

Both doors were approached by a couple of steps, which so reduced the space that were two people to meet on the landing, one would have to give way to the other. Mr. and Mrs. Ede found this proximity to their lodger, when they had one, somewhat inconvenient, but, as he said, 'One doesn't get ten shillings a week for nothing.'

Kate lingered a moment on the threshold, and then, with the hand in which she held the novel she had been reading, she picked up her skirt and stepped across the way.

Chapter II

At first she could not determine who was passing through the twilight of the room, but as the blinds were suddenly drawn up and a flood of sunlight poured across the bed, she fell back amid the pillows, having recognized her mother-in-law in a painful moment of semi-blindness. The old woman carried a slop-pail, which she nearly dropped, so surprised was she to find Kate in the stranger's room.

'But how did you get here?' she said hastily.

'I had to give Ralph my pillow, and when he went to sleep I came to fetch one out of the bedroom here; and then I thought I would be more comfortable here—I was too tired to go back again—I don't know how it was—what does it matter?'

Kate, who was stupefied with sleep, had answered so crossly that Mrs. Ede did not speak for some time; at last, at the end of a long silence, she said:

'Then he had a very bad night?'

'Dreadful!' returned Kate. 'I never was so frightened in my life.'

'And how did the fit come on?' asked Mrs. Ede.

'Oh, I can't tell you now,' said Kate. 'I'm so tired. I'm aching all over.'

'Well, then, I'll bring you up your breakfast. You do look tired. It will do you good to remain in bed.'

'Bring me up my breakfast! Then, what time is it?' said Kate, sitting up in bed with a start.

'What does it matter what the time is? If you're tired, lie still; I'll see that everything is right.'

'But I've promised Mrs. Barnes her dress by tomorrow night. Oh, my goodness! I shall never get it done! Do tell me what time it is.'

'Well, it's just nine,' the old woman answered apologetically; 'but Mrs. Barnes will have to wait; you can't kill yourself. It's a great shame of Ralph to have you sitting up when I could look after him just as well, and all because of the mummer.'

'Oh, don't, mother,' said Kate, who knew that Mrs. Ede could rate play-actors for a good half-hour without feeling the time passing, and taking her mother-in-law's hands in hers, she looked earnestly in her face, saying:

'You know, mother, I have a hard time of it, and I try to bear up as well as I can. You're the only one I've to help me; don't turn against me. Ralph has set his mind on having the rooms let, and the mummer, as you call him, is coming here to-day; it's all settled. Promise me you'll do nothing to unsettle it, and that while Mr. Lennox is here you'll try to make him comfortable. I've my dressmaking to attend to, and can't be always after him. Will you do this thing for me?' and after a moment or so of indecision Mrs. Ede said:

'I don't believe money made out of such people can bring luck, but since you both wish it, I suppose I must give way. But you won't be able to say I didn't warn you.'

'Yes, yes, but since we can't prevent his coming, will you promise that whilst he's here you'll attend to him just as you did to the other gentleman?'

'I shall say nothing to him, and if he doesn't make the house a disgrace, I shall be well satisfied.'

‘How do you mean a disgrace?’

‘Don’t you know, dear, that actors have always a lot of women after them, and I for one am not going to attend on wenches like them. If I had my way I’d whip such people until I slashed all the wickedness out of them.’

‘But he won’t bring any women here; we won’t allow it,’ said Kate, a little shocked, and she strove to think how they should put a stop to such behaviour. ‘If Mr. Lennox doesn’t conduct himself properly - ‘

‘Of course I shall try to do my duty, and if Mr. Lennox respects himself I shall try to respect him.’

She spoke these words hesitatingly, but the admission that she possibly might respect Mr. Lennox satisfied Kate, and not wishing to press the matter further, she said, suddenly referring to their previous conversation:

‘But didn’t you say that it was nine o’clock?’

‘It’s more than nine now.’

‘Oh, Lord! oh, Lord! how late I am! I suppose the two little girls are here?’

‘They just came in as I was going upstairs; I’ve set them to work.’

‘I wish you’d get the tea ready, and you might make some buttered toast; Ralph would like some, and so should I, for the matter of that.’

Then Ralph’s voice was heard calling, and seeing what was wanted, she hastened to his assistance.

‘Where were you last night?’ he asked her.

‘I slept in the stranger’s room; I thought you’d not require me, and I was more comfortable there. The bed in the back room is all ups and downs.’

He was breathing heavily in a way that made her fear he was going to have another attack.

‘Is mother in a great rage because I won’t let her in?’ he said presently.

‘She’s very much cut up about it, dear; you know she loves you better than anyone in the world. You’d do well to make it up with her.’

‘Well, perhaps I was wrong,’ he said after a time, and with good humour, ‘but she annoys me. She will interfere in everything; as if I hadn’t a right to let my rooms to whom I please. She pays for all she has here, but I’d much sooner she left us than be lorded over in that way.’

‘She doesn’t want to lord it over you, dear. It’s all arranged. She promised me just now she’d say nothing more about it, and that she’d look after Mr. Lennox like any other lodger.’

On hearing that his mother was willing to submit to his will, the invalid smiled and expressed regret that the presence of an extra person in the house, especially an actor, would give his wife and mother more work to do.

‘But I shall soon be well,’ he said, ‘and I dare say downstairs looking after the shop in a week.’

Kate protested against such imprudence, and then suggested she should go and see after his breakfast. Ralph proffered no objection, and bidding him goodbye for the present, she went downstairs. Annie was helping Mrs. Ede to make the toast in the front kitchen; Lizzie stood at

the table buttering it, but as soon as Kate entered they returned to their sewing, for it was against Kate's theories that the apprentices should assist in the household work.

'Dear mother,' she began, but desisted, and when all was ready Mrs. Ede, remembering she had to make peace with her son, seized the tray and went upstairs. And the moment she was gone Kate seated herself wearily on the red, calico-covered sofa. Like an elongated armchair, it looked quaint, neat, and dumpy, pushed up against the wall between the black fireplace on the right and the little window shaded with the muslin blinds, under which a pot of greenstuff bloomed freshly. She lay back thinking vaguely, her cup of hot tea uppermost in her mind, hoping that Mrs. Ede would not keep her waiting long; and then, as her thoughts detached themselves, she remembered the actor whom they expected that afternoon. The annoyances which he had unconsciously caused her had linked him to her in a curious way, and all her prejudices vanished in the sensation of nearness that each succeeding hour magnified, and she wondered who this being was who had brought so much trouble into her life even before she had seen him. As the word 'trouble' went through her mind she paused, arrested by a passing feeling of sentimentality; but it explained nothing, defined nothing, only touched her as a breeze does a flower, and floated away. The dreamy warmth of the fire absorbed her more direct feelings, and for some moments she dozed in a haze of dim sensuousness and emotive numbness. As in a dusky glass, she saw herself a tender, loving, but unhappy woman; by her side were her querulous husband and her kindly-minded mother-in-law, and then there was a phantom she could not determine, and behind it something into which she could not see. Was it a distant country? Was it a scene of revelry? Impossible to say, for whenever she attempted to find definite shapes in the glowing colours they vanished in a blurred confusion.

But amid these fleeting visions there was one shape that particularly interested her, and she pursued it tenaciously, until in a desperate effort to define its features she awoke with a start and spoke more crossly than she intended to the little girls, who had pulled aside the curtain and were intently examining the huge theatrical poster that adorned the corner of the lane. But as she scolded she could not help smiling; for she saw how her dream had been made out of the red and blue dresses of the picture.

The arrival of each new company in the town was announced pictorially on this corner wall, and, in the course of the year, many of the vicissitudes to which human life is liable received illustration upon it. Wrecks at sea, robberies on the highways, prisoners perishing in dungeons, green lanes and lovers, babies, glowing hearths, and heroic young husbands. The opera companies exhibited the less serious sides of life—strangely dressed people and gallants kissing their hands to ladies standing on balconies.

The little girls examined these pictures and commented on them; and on Saturdays it was a matter of the keenest speculation what the following week would bring them. Lizzie preferred exciting scenes of murder and arson, while Annie was moved more by leave-takings and declarations of unalterable affection. These differences of taste often gave rise to little bickerings, and last week there had been much prophesying as to whether the tragic or the sentimental element would prove next week's attraction. Lizzie had voted for robbers and mountains, Annie for lovers and a nice cottage. And, remembering their little dispute, Kate said:

'Well, dears, is it a robber or a sweetheart?'

'We're not sure,' exclaimed both children in a disappointed tone of voice; 'we can't make the picture out.' Then Lizzie, who cared little for uncertainties, said:

'It isn't a nice picture at all; it is all mixed up.'

‘Not a nice picture at all, and all mixed up?’ said Kate, smiling, yet interested in the conversation. ‘And all mixed up; how is that? I must see if I can make it out myself.’

The huge poster contained some figures nearly life-size. It showed a young girl in a bridal dress and wreath struggling between two police agents, who were arresting her in a marketplace of old time, in a strangely costumed crowd, which was clamouring violently. The poor bridegroom was being held back by his friends; a handsome young man in knee-breeches and a cocked hat watched the proceedings cynically in the right-hand corner, whilst on the left a big fat man frantically endeavoured to recover his wig, that had been lost in the mêlée. The advertisement was headed, ‘Morton and Cox’s Operatic Company,’ and concluded with the announcement that *Madame Angot* would be played at the Queen’s Theatre. After a few moments spent in examining the picture Kate said it must have something to do with France.

‘I know what it means,’ cried Lizzie; ‘you see that old chap on the right? He’s the rich man who has sent the two policemen to carry the bride to his castle, and it’s the young fellow in the corner who has betrayed them.’

The ingenuity of this explanation took Kate and Annie so much by surprise that for the moment they could not attempt to controvert it, and remained silent, whilst Lizzie looked at them triumphantly. The more they examined the picture the more clear did it appear that Lizzie was right. At the end of a long pause Kate said:

‘Anyhow, we shall soon know, for one of the actors of the company is coming here to lodge, and we’ll ask him.’

‘A real actor coming here to lodge?’ exclaimed Annie. ‘Oh, how nice that will be! And will he take us to see the play?’

‘How silly of you, Annie!’ said Lizzie, who, proud of her successful explanation of the poster, was a little inclined to think she knew all about actors. ‘How can he take us to the play? Isn’t he going to act it himself? But do tell me, Mrs. Ede—is he the one in the cocked hat?’

‘I hope he isn’t the fat man who has lost his wig,’ Annie murmured under her breath.

‘I don’t know which of those gentlemen is coming here. For all I know it may be the policeman,’ Kate added maliciously.

‘Don’t say that, Mrs. Ede!’ Annie exclaimed.

Kate smiled at the children’s earnestness, and, wishing to keep up the joke, said:

‘You know, my dear, they are only sham policemen, and I dare say are very nice gentlemen in reality.’

Annie and Lizzie hung down their heads; it was evident they had no sympathies with policemen, not even with sham ones.

‘But if it isn’t a policeman, who would you like it to be, Lizzie?’ said Kate.

‘Oh, the man in the cocked hat,’ replied Lizzie without hesitation.

‘And you, Annie?’

Annie looked puzzled, and after a moment said with a slight whimper:

‘Lizzie always takes what I want—I was just going - ‘

‘Oh yes, miss, we know all about that,’ returned Lizzie derisively. ‘Annie never can choose for herself; she always tries to imitate me. She’ll have the man who’s lost his wig! Oh yes, yes! Isn’t it so, Mrs. Ede? Isn’t Annie going to marry the man who’s lost his wig?’

Tears trembled in Annie’s eyes, but as she happened at that moment to catch sight of the young man in white, she declared triumphantly that she would choose him.

‘Well done, Annie!’ said Kate, laughing as she patted the child’s curls, but her eyes fell on the neglected apron, and seeing how crookedly it was being hemmed, she said:

‘Oh, my dear, this is very bad; you must go back, undo all you have done this morning, and get it quite straight.’

She undid some three or four inches of the sewing, and then showed the child how the hem was to be turned in, and while she did so a smile hovered round the corners of her thin lips, for she was thinking of the new lodger, asking herself which man in the picture was coming to lodge in her house.

Mrs. Ede returned, talking angrily, but Kate could only catch the words ‘waiting’ and ‘breakfast cold’ and ‘sorry.’ At last, out of a confusion of words a reproof broke from her mother-in-law for not having roused her.

‘I called and called,’ said Kate, ‘but nothing would have awakened you.’

‘You should have knocked at my door,’ Mrs. Ede answered, and after speaking about open house and late hours she asked Kate suddenly what was going to be done about the latchkey.

‘I suppose he will have to have his latchkey,’ Kate answered.

‘I shall not close my eyes,’ Mrs. Ede returned, ‘until I hear him come into the house. He won’t be bringing with him any of the women from the theatre.’

Kate assured her that she would make this part of the bargain, and somewhat softened, Mrs. Ede spoke of the danger of bad company, and trusted that having an actor in the house would not be a reason for going to the theatre and falling into idle habits.

‘One would have thought that we heard enough of that theatre from Miss Hender,’ she interjected, and then lapsed into silence.

Miss Hender, Kate’s assistant, was one of Mrs. Ede’s particular dislikes. Of her moral character Mrs. Ede had the gravest doubts; for what could be expected, she often muttered, of a person who turned up her nose when she was asked to stay and attend evening prayers, and who kept company with a stage carpenter?

Mrs. Ede did not cease talking of Hender till the girl herself came in, with many apologies for being an hour behind her time, and saying that she really could not help it; her sister had been very ill, and she had been obliged to sit up with her all night. Mrs. Ede smiled at this explanation, and withdrew, leaving Kate in doubt as to the truth of the excuse put forward by her assistant; but remembering that Mrs. Barnes’s dress had been promised for Tuesday morning, she said:

‘Come, we’re wasting all the morning; we must get on with Mrs. Barnes’s dress,’ and a stout, buxom, carroty-haired girl of twenty followed Kate upstairs, thinking of the money she might earn and of how she and the stage carpenter might spend it together. She was always full of information concerning the big red house in Queen Street. She was sure that the hours in the workroom would not seem half so long if Kate would wake up a bit, go to the play, and chat about what was going on in the town. How anyone could live with that horrid old woman

always hanging about, with her religion and salvation, was beyond her. She hadn't time for such things, and as for Bill, he said it was all 'tommy-rot.'

Hender was an excellent workwoman, although a lazy girl, and, seeing from Kate's manner that the time had not come for conversation, applied herself diligently to her business. Placing the two side-seams and the back under the needle, she gave the wheel a turn, and rapidly the little steel needle darted up and down into the glistening silk, as Miss Hender's thick hands pushed it forward. The work was too delicate to admit of any distraction, so for some time nothing was heard but the clinking rattle of the machine and the 'swishing' of the silk as Kate drew it across the table and snipped it with the scissors which hung from her waist.

But at the end of about half an hour the work came to a pause. Hender had finished sewing up the bodice, had tacked on the facings, and Kate had cut out the skirt and basted it together. The time had come for exchanging a few words, and lifting her head from her work, she asked her assistant if she could remain that evening and do a little overtime. Hender said she was very sorry, but it was the first night of the new opera company; she had passes for the pit, and had promised to take a friend with her. She would, therefore, have to hurry away a little before six, so as to have her tea and be dressed in time.

'Well, I don't know what I shall do,' said Kate sorrowfully. 'As for myself, I simply couldn't pass another night out of bed. You know I was up looking after my husband all night. Attending a sick man, and one as cross as Mr. Ede, is not very nice, I can assure you.'

Hender congratulated herself inwardly that Bill was never likely to want much attendance.

'I think you'd better tell Mrs. Barnes that she can't expect the dress; it will be impossible to get it done in the time. I'd be delighted to help you, but I couldn't disappoint my little friend. Besides, you've Mr. Lennox coming here to-day … you can't get the dress done by to-morrow night!'

Hender had been waiting for a long time for an opportunity to lead up to Mr. Lennox.

'Oh, dear me!' said Kate, 'I'd forgotten him, and he'll be coming this afternoon, and may want some dinner, and I'll have to help mother.'

'They always have dinner in the afternoon,' said Miss Hender, with a feeling of pride at being able to speak authoritatively on the ways and habits of actors.

'Do they?' replied Kate reflectively; and then, suddenly remembering her promise to the little girls, she said:

'But do you know what part he takes in the play?'

Hender always looked pleased when questioned about the theatre, but all the stage carpenter had been able to tell her about the company was that it was one of the best travelling; that Frank Bret, the tenor, was supposed to have a wonderful voice; that the amount of presents he received in each town from ladies in the upper ranks of society would furnish a small shop - 'It's said that they'd sell the chemises off their backs for him.' The stage carpenter had also informed her that Joe Mortimer's performance in the Cloches was extraordinary; he never failed to bring down the house in his big scene; and Lucy Leslie was the best Clairette going.

And now that they were going to have an actor lodging in their house, Kate felt a certain interest in hearing what such people were like; and while Miss Hender gossiped about all she had heard, Kate remembered that her question relating to Mr. Lennox remained unanswered.

‘But you’ve not told me what part Mr. Lennox plays. Perhaps he’s the man in white who is being dragged away from his bride? I’ve been examining the big picture; the little girls were so curious to know what it meant.’

‘Yes, he may play that part; it is called Pom-Pom Pouet—I can’t pronounce it right; it’s French. But in any case you’ll find him fine. All theatre people are. The other day I went behind to talk to Bill, and Mr. Rickett stopped to speak to me as he was running to make a change.’

‘What’s that?’ asked Kate.

‘Making a change? Dressing in a hurry.’

‘I hope you won’t get into trouble; stopping out so late is very dangerous for a young girl. And I suppose you walk up Piccadilly with him after the play?’

‘Sometimes he takes me out for a drink,’ Hender replied, anxious to avoid a discussion on the subject, but at the same time tempted to make a little boast of her independence. ‘But you must come to see *Madame Angot*; I hear it is going to be beautifully put on, and Mr. Lennox is sure to give you a ticket.’

‘I dare say I should like it very much; I don’t have much amusement.’

‘Indeed you don’t, and what do you get for it? I don’t see that Mr. Ede is so kind to you for all the minding and nursing you do; and old Mrs. Ede may repeat all day long that she’s a Christian woman, and what else she likes, but it doesn’t make her anything less disagreeable. I wouldn’t live in a house with a mother-in-law—and such a mother-in-law!’

‘You and Mrs. Ede never hit it off, but I don’t know what I should do without her; she’s the only friend I’ve got.’

‘Half your time you’re shut up in a sick-room, and even when he is well he’s always blowing and wheezing; not the man that would suit me.’

‘Ralph can’t help being cross sometimes,’ said Kate, and she fell to thinking of the fatigue of last night’s watching. She felt it still in her bones, and her eyes ached. As she considered the hardships of her life, her manner grew more abandoned.

‘If you’ll let me have the skirt, ma’am, I’ll stitch it up.’

Kate handed her the silk wearily, and was about to speak when Mrs. Ede entered.

‘Mr. Lennox is downstairs,’ she said stiffly. ‘I don’t know what you’ll think of him. I’m a Christian woman and I don’t want to misjudge anyone, but he looks to me like a person of very loose ways.’

Kate flushed a little with surprise, and after a moment she said:

‘I suppose I’d better go down and see him. But perhaps he won’t like the rooms after all. What shall I say to him?’

‘Indeed, I can’t tell you; I’ve the dinner to attend to.’

‘But,’ said Kate, getting frightened, ‘you promised me not to say any more on this matter.’

‘Oh, I say nothing. I’m not mistress here. I told you that I would not interfere with Mr. Lennox; no more will I. Why should I? What right have I? But I may warn you, and I have warned you. I’ve said my say, and I’ll abide by it.’

These hard words only tended to confuse Kate; all her old doubts returned to her, and she remained irresolute. Hender, with an expression of contempt on her coarse face, watched a

moment and then returned to her sewing. As she did so Kate moved towards the door. She waited on the threshold, but seeing that her mother-in-law had turned her back, her courage returned to her and she went downstairs. When she caught sight of Mr. Lennox she shrank back frightened, for he was a man of about thirty years of age, with bronzed face, and a shock of frizzly hair, and had it not been for his clear blue eyes he might have passed for an Italian.

Leaning his large back against the counter, he examined a tray of ornaments in black jet. Kate thought he was handsome. He wore a large soft hat, which was politely lifted from his head when she entered. The attention embarrassed her, and somewhat awkwardly she interrupted him to ask if he would like to see the rooms. The suddenness of the question seemed to surprise him, and he began talking of their common acquaintance, the agent in advance, and of the difficulty in getting lodgings in the town. As he spoke he stared at her, and he appeared interested in the shop.

It was a very tiny corner, and, like a Samson, Mr. Lennox looked as if he would only have to extend his arms to pull the whole place down upon his shoulders. From the front window round to the kitchen door ran a mahogany counter; behind it, there were lines of cardboard boxes built up to the ceiling; the lower rows were broken and dusty, and spread upon wires were coarse shirts and a couple of pairs of stays in pink and blue. The windows were filled with babies' frocks, hoods, and many pairs of little woollen shoes.

After a few remarks from Mr. Lennox the conversation came to a pause, and Kate asked him again if he would like to see the rooms. He said he would be delighted, and she lifted the flap and let him pass into the house. On the right of the kitchen door there was a small passage, and at the end of it the staircase began; the first few steps turned spirally, but after that it ascended like a huge canister or burrow to the first landing.

They passed Mrs. Ede gazing scornfully from behind the door of the workroom, but Mr. Lennox did not seem to notice her, and continued to talk affably of the difficulty of finding lodgings in the town.

Even the shabby gentility of the room, which his presence made her realize more vividly than ever, did not appear to strike him. He examined with interest the patchwork cloth that covered the round table, looked complacently at the little green sofa with the two chairs to match, and said that he thought he would be comfortable. But when Kate noticed how dusty was the pale yellow wall-paper, with its watery roses, she could not help feeling ashamed, and she wondered how so fine a gentleman as he could be so easily satisfied. Then, plucking up courage, she showed him the little mahogany chiffonier which stood next the door, and told him that it was there she would keep whatever he might order in the way of drinks. Mr. Lennox walked nearer to the small looking-glass engarlanded with green paper cut into fringes, twirled a slight moustache many shades lighter than his hair, and admired his white teeth.

The inspection of the drawing-room being over, they went up the second portion of the canister-like staircase, and after a turn and a stoop arrived at the bedroom.

'I'm sorry you should see the room like this,' Kate said. 'I thought that my mother-in-law had got the room ready for you. I was obliged to sleep here last night; my husband - '

'I assure you I take no objection to the fact of your having slept here,' he replied gallantly.

Kate blushed, and an awkward silence followed.

As Mr. Lennox looked round an expression of dissatisfaction passed over his face. It was a much poorer place than the drawing-room. Religion and poverty went there hand-in-hand. A rickety iron bedstead covered with another patchwork quilt occupied the centre of the room,

and there was a small chest of drawers in white wood placed near the fireplace—the smallest and narrowest in the world. Upon the black painted chimney-piece a large red apple made a spot of colour. The carpet was in rags, and the lace blinds were torn, and hung like fishnets. Mr. Lennox apparently was not satisfied, but when his eyes fell upon Kate it was clear that he thought that so pretty a woman might prove a compensation. But the pious exhortations hanging on the walls seemed to cause him a certain uneasiness. Above the washstand there were two cards bearing the inscriptions, 'Thou art my hope,' 'Thou art my will'; and these declarations of faith were written within a painted garland of lilies and roses.

'I see that you're religious.'

'I'm afraid not so much as I should be, sir.'

'Well, I don't know so much about that; the place is covered with Bible texts.'

'Those were put there by my mother-in-law. She is very good.'

'Oh ah,' said Mr. Lennox, apparently much relieved by the explanation. 'Old people are very pious, generally, aren't they? But this patchwork quilt is yours, I suppose?'

'Yes, sir; I made it myself,' said Kate, blushing.

He made several attempts at conversation, but she did not respond, her whole mind being held up by the thought: 'Is he going to take the rooms, I wonder?' At last he said:

'I like these apartments very well; and you say that I can have breakfast here?'

'Oh, you can have anything you order, sir. I, or my mother, will - '

'Very well, then; we may consider the matter settled. I'll tell them to send down my things from the theatre.'

This seemed to conclude the affair, and they went downstairs. But Mr. Lennox stopped on the next landing, and without any apparent object re-examined the drawing-room. Speaking like a man who wanted to start a conversation, he manifested interest in everything, and asked questions concerning the rattle of the sewing-machine, which could be heard distinctly; and before she could stop him he opened the door of the workroom. He wondered at all the brown-paper patterns that were hung on the walls, and Miss Hender, too eager to inform him, took advantage of the occasion to glide in a word to the effect that she was going to see him that evening at the theatre. Kate was amused, but felt it was her duty to take the first opportunity of interrupting the conversation. For some unexplained reason Mr. Lennox seemed loath to go, and it was with difficulty he was got downstairs. Even then he could not pass the kitchen door without stopping to speak to the apprentices. He asked them where they had found their brown hair and eyes, and attempted to exchange a remark with Mrs. Ede. Kate thought the encounter unfortunate, but it passed off better than she expected. Mrs. Ede replied that the little girls were getting on very well, and, apparently satisfied with this answer, Mr. Lennox turned to go. His manner indicated his Bohemian habits, for after all this waste of time he suddenly remembered that he had an appointment, and would probably miss it by about a quarter of an hour.

'Will you require any dinner?' asked Kate, following him to the door.

At the mention of the word 'dinner' he again appeared to forget all about his appointment. His face changed its expression, and his manner again grew confidential. He asked all kinds of questions as to what she could get him to eat, but without ever quite deciding whether he would be able to find time to eat it. Kate thought she had never seen such a man. At last in a fit of desperation, he said:

‘I’ll have a bit of cold steak. I haven’t the time to dine, but if you’ll put that out for me … I like a bit of supper after the theatre - ‘

Kate wished to ask him what he would like to drink with it, but it was impossible to get an answer. He couldn’t stop another minute, and, dodging the passers-by, he rushed rapidly down the street. She watched until the big shoulders were lost in the crowd, and asked herself if she liked the man who had just left her; but the answer slipped from her when she tried to define it, and with a sigh she turned into the shop and mechanically set straight those shirts that hung aslant on the traversing wires. At that moment Mrs. Ede came from the kitchen carrying a basin of soup for her sick son. She wanted to know why Kate had stayed so long talking to that man.

‘Talking to him!’ Kate repeated, surprised at the words and suspicious of an implication of vanity. ‘If we’re going to take his money it’s only right that we should try to make him comfortable.’

‘I doubt if his ten shillings a week will bring us much good,’ Mrs. Ede answered sourly; and she went upstairs, backbone and principles equally rigid, leaving Kate to fume at what she termed her mother-in-law’s unreasonableness.

But Kate had no time to indulge in many angry thoughts, for the tall gaunt woman returned with tears in her eyes to beg pardon.

‘I’m so sorry, dear. Did I speak crossly? I’ll say no more about the actor, I’ll promise.’

‘I don’t see why I should be bullied in my own house,’ Kate answered, feeling that she must assert herself. ‘Why shouldn’t I let my rooms to Mr. Lennox if I like?’

‘You’re right,’ Mrs. Ede replied - ‘I’ve said too much; but don’t turn against me, Kate.’

‘No, no, mother; I don’t turn against you. You’re the only person I have to love.’

At these words a look of pleasure passed over the hard, blunt features of the peasant woman, and she said with tears in her voice:

‘You know I’m a bit hard with my tongue, but that’s all; I don’t mean it.’

‘Well, say no more, mother,’ and Kate went upstairs to her workroom. Miss Hender, already returned from dinner, was trembling with excitement, and she waited impatiently for the door to be shut that she might talk. She had been round to see her friend the stage carpenter, and he had told her all about the actor. Mr. Lennox was the boss; Mr. Hayes, the acting manager, was a nobody, generally pretty well boozed; and Mr. Cox, the London gent, didn’t travel.

Kate listened, only half understanding what was said.

‘And what part does he play in *Madame Angot*?’ she asked as she bent her head to examine the bead trimmings she was stitching on to the sleeves.

‘The low comedy part,’ said Miss Hender; but seeing that Kate did not understand, she hastened to explain that the low comedy parts meant the funny parts.

‘He’s the man who’s lost his wig—La—La Ravodée, I think they call it—and a very nice man he is. When I was talking to Bill I could see Mr. Lennox between the wings; he had his arm round Miss Leslie’s shoulder. I’m sure he’s sweet on her.’

Kate looked up from her work and stared at Miss Hender slowly. The announcement that Mr. Lennox was the funny man was disappointing, but to hear that he was a woman’s lover turned her against him.

‘All those actors are alike. I see now that my mother-in-law was right. I shouldn’t have let him my rooms.’

‘One’s always afraid of saying anything to you, ma’am; you twist one’s words so. I’m sure I didn’t mean to say there was any harm between him and Miss Leslie. There, perhaps you’ll go and tell him that I spoke about him.’

‘I’m sure I shall do nothing of the sort. Mr. Lennox has taken my rooms for a week, and there’s an end of it. I’m not going to interfere in his private affairs.’

The conversation then came to a pause, and all that was heard for a long time was the clicking of the needle and the rustling of silk. Kate wondered how it was that Mr. Lennox was so different off the stage from what he was when on; and it seemed to her strange that such a nice gentleman—for she was obliged to admit that he was that—should choose to play the funny parts. As for his connection with Miss Leslie, that of course was none of her business. What did it matter to her? He was in love with whom he pleased. She’d have thought he was a man who would not easily fall in love; but perhaps Miss Leslie was very pretty, and, for the matter of that, they might be going to be married. Meanwhile Miss Hender regretted having told Kate anything about Mr. Lennox. The best and surest way was to let people find out things for themselves, and having an instinctive repugnance to virtue—at least, to questions of conscience—she could not abide whining about spilt milk. Beyond an occasional reference to their work, the women did not speak again, until at three o’clock Mrs. Ede announced that dinner was ready. There was not much to eat, however, and Kate had little appetite, and she was glad when the meal was finished. She had then to help Mrs. Ede in getting the rooms ready, and when this was done it was time for tea. But not even this meal did they get in comfort, for Mr. Lennox had ordered a beefsteak for supper; somebody would have to go to fetch it. Mrs. Ede said she would, and Kate went into the shop to attend to the few customers who might call in the course of the evening. The last remarkable event in this day of events was the departure of Miss Hender, who came downstairs saying she had only just allowed herself time to hurry to the theatre; she feared she wouldn’t be there before the curtain went up, and she was sorry Kate wasn’t coming, but she would tell her to-morrow all about Mr. Lennox, and how the piece went. As Kate bade her assistant good-night a few customers dropped in, all of whom gave a great deal of trouble. She had to pull down a number of packages to find what was wanted. Then her next-door neighbour, the stationer’s wife, called to ask after Mr. Ede and to buy a reel of cotton; and so, in evening chat, the time passed, until the fruiterer’s boy came to ask if he should put up the shutters.

Kate nodded, and remarked to her friend, who had risen to go, what a nice, kind man Mr. Jones was.

‘Yes, indeed, they are very kind people, but their prices are very high. Do you deal with them?’

Kate replied that she did; and, as the fruiterer’s boy put up the shutters with a series of bangs, she tried to persuade her neighbour to buy a certain gown she had been long talking of.

‘Trimming and everything, it won’t cost you more than thirty shillings; you’ll want something fresh now that summer’s coming on.’

‘So I shall. I’ll speak to my man about it to-night. I think he’ll let me have it.’

‘He won’t refuse you if you press him.’

‘Well, we shall see,’ and bidding Kate good-night she passed into the street.

The evening was fine, and Kate stood for a long while watching the people surging out of the potteries towards Piccadilly. ‘Coming out,’ she said, ‘for their evening walk,’ and she was glad that the evening was fine. ‘After a long day in the potteries they want some fresh air,’ and then, raising her eyes from the streets, she watched the sunset die out of the west; purple and yellow streaks still outlined the grey expanse of the hills, making the brick town look like a little toy. An ugly little brick town—brick of all colours: the pale reddish-brown of decaying brick-yards, the fierce red brick of the newly built warehouses that turns to purple, and above the walls scarlet tiled roofs pointing sharp angles to a few stars.

Kate stood watching the fading of the hills into night clouds, interested in her thoughts vaguely—her thoughts adrift and faded somewhat as the spectacle before her. She wondered if her lodger would be satisfied with her mother’s cooking; she hoped so. He was a well-spoken man, but she could not hope to change mother. As the image of the lodger floated out of her mind Hender’s came into it, and she hoped the girl would not get into trouble. So many poor girls are in trouble; how many in the crowd passing before her door? The difficulty she was in with Mrs. Barnes’s dress suggested itself, and with a shiver and a sigh she shut the street-door and went upstairs. The day had passed; it was gone like a hundred days before it—wearily, perhaps, yet leaving in the mind an impression of something done, of duties honestly accomplished.

Chapter III

‘Oh, ma’am!’ Hender broke in, ‘you can’t think how amusing it was last night! I never enjoyed myself so much in my life. The place was crammed! Such a house! And Miss Leslie got three encores and a call after each act.’

‘And what was Mr. Lennox like?’

‘Oh, he only played a small part—one of the policemen. He don’t play Pom-poucet; I was wrong. It’s too heavy a part, and he’s too busy looking after the piece. But Joe Mortimer was splendid; I nearly died of laughing when he fell down and lost his wig in the middle of the stage. And Frank Bret looked such a swell, and he got an encore for the song, “Oh, Certainly I Love Clairette.” And he and Miss Leslie got another for the duet. To-morrow they play the *Cloches*.’

‘But now you’ve seen so much of the theatre I hope you’ll be able to do a little overtime with me. I’ve promised to let Mrs. Barnes have her dress by to-morrow morning.’

‘I’m afraid I shan’t be able to stay after six o’clock.’

‘But surely if they’re doing the same play you don’t want to see it again?’

‘Well ‘tisn’t exactly that, but—well, I prefer to tell you the truth; ‘tisn’t the piece I go to the theatre for; I’m one of the dressers, and I get twelve shillings a week, and I can’t afford to lose it. But there’s no use in telling Mrs. Ede, she’d only make a bother.’

‘How do you mean, dressing?’

‘The ladies of the theatre must have someone to dress them, and I look after the principals, Miss Leslie and Miss Beaumont, that’s all.’

‘And how long have you been doing that?’

‘Why, about a month now. Bill got me the place.’

This conversation had broken in upon a silence of nearly half an hour; with bent heads and clicking needles, Kate and Hender had been working assiduously at Mrs. Barnes’s skirt.

Having a great deal of *passementerie* ornamentation to sew on to the heading of the flounces, and much fringe to arrange round the edge of the drapery, Kate looked forward to a heavy day. She had expected Miss Hender an hour earlier, and she had not turned up until after nine. An assistant whose time was so occupied that she couldn’t give an extra hour when you were in a difficulty was of very little use; and it might be as well to look out for somebody more suitable. Besides, all this talk about theatres and actors was very wrong; there could be little doubt that the girl was losing her character, and to have her coming about the house would give it a bad name. Such were Kate’s reflections as she handled the rustling silk and folded it into large plaitings. Now and again she tried to come to a decision, but she was not sincere with herself. She knew she liked the girl, and Hender’s conversation amused her: to send her away meant to surrender herself completely to her mother-in-law’s stern kindness and her husband’s irritability.

Hender was the window through which Kate viewed the bustle and animation of life, and even now, annoyed as she was that she would not be able to get the dress done in time, she could not refrain from listening to the girl’s chatter. There was about Miss Hender that strange charm which material natures possess even when they offend. Being of the flesh, we

must sympathize with it, and the amiability of Hender's spirits made a great deal pass that would have otherwise appeared wicked. She could tell without appearing too rude, how Mr. Wentworth, the lessee, was gone on a certain lady in the new company, and would give her anything if she would chuck up her engagement and come and live with him. When Hender told these stories, Kate, fearing that Mrs. Ede might have overheard, looked anxiously at the door, and under the influence of the emotion, it interested her to warn her assistant of the perils of frequenting bad company. But as Kate lectured she could not help wondering how it was that her life passed by so wearily. Was she never going to do anything else but work? she often asked herself, and then reproached herself for the regret that had risen unwittingly up in her mind that life was not all pleasure. It certainly was not, 'but perhaps it is better,' she said to herself, 'that we have to get our living, for me at least'—her thoughts broke off sharply, and she passed out of the present into a long past time.

Kate had never known her father; her mother, an earnest believer in Wesley, was a hard-working woman who made a pound a week by painting on china. This was sufficient for their wants, and Mrs. Howell's only fears were that she might lose her health and die before her time, leaving her daughter in want. To avoid this fate she worked early and late at the factory, and Kate was left in the charge of the landlady, a childless old woman who, sitting by the fire, used to tell stories of her deceptions and misfortunes in life, thereby intoxicating the little girl's brain with sentiment. The mother's influence was a sort of make-weight; Mrs. Howell was a deeply religious woman, and Kate was often moved to trace back a large part of herself to Bible-readings and extemporary prayers offered up by the bedside in the evening.

Her school-days were unimportant. She learnt to read and write and to do sums; that was all. Kate grew, softly and mystically as a dark damask rose, into a pretty woman without conversions or passions: for notwithstanding her early training, religion had never taken a very firm hold upon her, and despite the fact that she married into a family very similar to her own, although her mother-in-law was almost a counterpart of her real mother—a little harder and more resolute, but as God-fearing and as kind—Kate had caught no blast of religious fervour; religion taught her nothing, inspired her with nothing, could influence her in little. She was not strong nor great, nor was she conscious of any deep feeling that if she acted otherwise than she did she would be living an unworthy life. She was merely good because she was a kind-hearted woman, without bad impulses, and admirably suited to the life she was leading.

But in this commonplace inactivity of mind there was one strong characteristic, one bit of colour in all these grey tints: Kate was dreamy, not to say imaginative. When she was a mere child she loved fairies, and took a vivid interest in goblins; and when afterwards she discarded these stories for others, it was not because it shocked her logical sense to read of a beanstalk a hundred feet high, but for a tenderer reason: Jack did not find a beautiful lady to love him. She could not help feeling disappointed, and when the *London Journal* came for the first time across her way, with the story of a broken heart, her own heart melted with sympathy; the more sentimental and unnatural the romance, the more it fevered and enraptured her. She loved to read of singular subterranean combats, of high castles, prisoners, hair-breadth escapes; and her sympathies were always with the fugitives. It was also very delightful to hear of lovers who were true to each other in spite of a dozen wicked uncles, of women who were tempted until their hearts died within them, and who years after threw up their hands and said, 'Thank God that I had the courage to resist!'

The second period of her sentimental education was when she passed from the authors who deal exclusively with knights, princesses, and kings to those who interest themselves in the love fortunes of doctors and curates.

Amid these there was one story that interested her in particular, and caused her deeper emotions than the others. It concerned a beautiful young woman with a lovely oval face, who was married to a very tiresome country doctor. This lady was in the habit of reading Byron and Shelley in a rich, sweet-scented meadow, down by the river, which flowed dreamily through smiling pasture-lands adorned by spreading trees. But this meadow belonged to a squire, a young man with grand, broad shoulders, who day after day used to watch these readings by the river without venturing to address a word to the fair trespasser. One day, however, he was startled by a shriek: in her poetical dreamings the lady had slipped into the water. A moment sufficed to tear off his coat, and as he swam like a water-dog he had no difficulty in rescuing her. Of course after this adventure he had to call and inquire, and from henceforth his visits grew more and more frequent, and by a strange coincidence, he used to come riding up to the hall-door when the husband was away curing the ills of the country-folk. Hours were passed under the trees by the river, he pleading his cause, and she refusing to leave poor Arthur, till at last the squire gave up the pursuit and went to foreign parts, where he waited thirty years, until he heard Arthur was dead. And then he came back with a light heart to his first and only love, who had never ceased to think of him, and lived with her happily for ever afterwards. The grotesque mixture of prose and poetry, both equally false, used to enchant Kate, and she always fancied that had she been the heroine of the book she would have acted in the same way.

Kate's taste for novel-reading distressed Mrs. Howell; she thought it 'a sinful waste of time, not to speak of the way it turned people's heads from God'; and when one day she found Kate's scrap-book, made up of poems cut from the *Family Herald*, she began to despair of her daughter's salvation. The answer Kate made to her mother's reproaches was: 'Mother, I've been sewing all day; I can't see what harm it can be to read a little before I go to bed. Nobody is required to be always saying their prayers.'

The next two years passed away unperceived by either mother or daughter, and then an event occurred of some importance. Their neighbours at the corner of the street got into difficulties, and were eventually sold out and their places taken by strangers, who changed the oil-shop into a drapery business. The new arrivals aroused the keenest interest, and Mrs. Howell and her daughter called to see what they were like, as did everybody else. The acquaintance thus formed was renewed at church, and much to their surprise and pleasure, they discovered that they were of the same religious persuasion.

Henceforth the Howells and Edes saw a great deal of each other, and every Sunday after church the mothers walked home together and the young people followed behind. Ralph spoke of his ill-health, and Kate pitied him, and when he complimented her on her beautiful hair she blushed with pleasure. For much as she had revelled in fictitious sentiment, she had somehow never thought of seeking it in nature, and how that she had found a lover, the critical sense was not strong enough in her to lead her to compare reality with imagination. She accepted Ralph as unsuspectingly as she hitherto accepted the tawdry poetry of her favourite fiction. And her nature not being a passionate one, she was able to do this without any apparent transition of sentiment. She pitied him, hoped she could be of use in nursing him, and felt flattered at the idea of being mistress of a shop.

The mothers were delighted, and spoke of the coincidence of their religions and the admirable addition dressmaking would be to the drapery business. Of love, small mention was made. The bridegroom spoke of his prospects of improving the business, the bride

listened, interested for the while in his enthusiasm; orders came in, and Kate was soon transformed into a hard-working woman.

This change of character passed unperceived by all but Mrs. Howell, who died wondering how it came about. Kate herself did not know; she fancied that it was fully accounted for by the fact that she had no time - 'no time for reading now'—which was no more than the truth; but she did not complain; she accepted her husband's kisses as she did the toil he imposed on her—meekly, unaffectedly, as a matter of course, as if she always knew that the romances which used to fascinate her were merely idle dreams, having no bearing upon the daily life of human beings—things fit to amuse a young girl's fancies, and to be thrown aside when the realities of life were entered upon. The only analogy between the past and present was an ample submission to authority and an indifference to the world and its interest. Even the fact of being without children did not seem to concern her, and when her mother-in-law regretted it she merely smiled languidly, or said, 'We are very well as we are.' Of the world and the flesh she lived almost in ignorance, suspecting their existence only through Miss Hender. Hender was attracted by her employer's kindness and softness of manner, and Kate by her assistant's strength of will. For some months past a friendship had been growing up between the two women, but if Kate had known for certain that Hender was living a life of sin with the stage carpenter she might not have allowed her into the house. But the possibility of sin attached her to the girl in the sense that it forced her to think of her continually. And then there was a certain air of bravado in Miss Hender's freckled face that Kate admired. She instituted comparisons between herself and the assistant, and she came to the conclusion that she preferred that fair, blonde complexion to her own clear olive skin; and the sparkle of the red frizzy hair put her out of humour with the thick, wavy blue tresses which encircled her small temples like a piece of black velvet.

As she continued her sewing she reconsidered the question of Hender's dismissal, but only to perceive more and more clearly the blank it would occasion in her life. And besides her personal feeling there was the fact to consider that to satisfy her customers she must have an assistant who could be depended upon. And she did not know where she would find another who would turn out work equal to Hender's. At last Kate said:

'I don't know what I shall do; I promised the dress by to-morrow morning.'

'I think we'll be able to finish it to-day,' Hender answered. 'I'll work hard at it all the afternoon; a lot can be done between this and seven o'clock.'

'Oh, I don't know,' replied Kate dolefully; 'these leaves take such a time to sew on; and then there's all the festooning.'

'I think it can be managed, but we must stick at it.'

On this expression of good-will the conversation ceased for the time being, and the clicking of needles and the buzzing of flies about the brown-paper patterns were all that was heard until twelve o'clock, when Mrs. Ede burst into the room.

'I knew what it would be,' she said, shutting the door after her.

'What is it?' said Kate, looking up frightened.

'Well, I offered to do him a chop or some fried eggs, but he says he must have an omelette. Did you ever hear of such a thing? I told him I didn't know how to make one, but he said that I was to ask you if you could spare the time.'

'I'll make him an omelette,' said Kate, rising. 'Have you got the eggs?'

‘Yes. The trouble that man gives us! What with his bath in the morning, and two pairs of boots to be cleaned, and the clothes that have to be brushed, I’ve done nothing but attend to him since ten o’clock; and what hours to keep!—it is now past eleven.’

‘What’s the use of grumbling? You know the work must be done, and I can’t be in two places at once. You promised me you wouldn’t say anything more about it, but would attend to him just the same as any other lodger.’

‘I can’t do more than I’m doing; I haven’t done anything all the morning but run upstairs,’ said Mrs. Ede very crossly; ‘and I wish you’d take the little girls out of the kitchen; I can’t look after them, and they do nothing but look out of the window.’

‘Very well, I’ll have them up here; they can sit on the sofa. We can manage with them now that we’ve finished the cutting out.’

Hender made no reply to this speech, which was addressed to her. She hated having the little girls up in the workroom, and Kate knew it.

Kate did not take long to make Mr. Lennox’s omelette. There was a bright fire in the kitchen, the muffins were toasted, and the tea was made.

‘This is a very small breakfast,’ she said as she put the plates and dishes on the tray. ‘Didn’t he order anything else?’

‘He spoke about some fried bacon, but I’ll attend to that; you take the other things up to him.’

As Kate passed with the tray in her hand she reproved the little girls for their idleness and told them to come upstairs, but it was not until she motioned them into the workroom that she realized that she was going into Mr. Lennox’s room.

After a slight pause she turned the handle of the door and entered. Mr. Lennox was lying very negligently in the armchair, wrapped in his dressing-gown. ‘Oh, I beg your pardon, sir; I didn’t know - ‘ she said, starting back. Then, blushing for shame at her own silliness in taking notice of such things, she laid the breakfast things on the table.

Mr. Lennox thanked her, and without seeming to notice her discomfiture he wrapped himself up more closely, drew his chair forward, and, smacking his lips, took the cover off the dish. ‘Oh, very nice indeed,’ he said, ‘but I’m afraid I’ve given you a great deal of trouble; the old lady said you were very, very busy.’

‘I’ve to finish a dress to-day, sir, and my assistant –’

Here Kate stopped, remembering that if Mr. Lennox had renewed his acquaintance with Hender at the theatre, any allusion to her would give rise to further conversation. ‘Oh yes, I know Miss Hender; she’s one of our dressers; she looks after our two leading ladies, Miss Leslie and Miss Beaumont. But I don’t see the bacon here.’

‘Mrs. Ede is cooking it; she’ll bring it up in a minute or two,’ Kate answered, edging towards the door.

‘We’ve nothing to do with the dressers,’ said Mr. Lennox, speaking rapidly, so as to detain his landlady; ‘but if you’re as pressed with your work as you tell me, I dare say, by speaking to the lessee, I might manage to get Miss Hender off for this one evening.’

‘Thank you, sir; I’m sure it’s very kind of you, but I shall be able to manage without that.’

The lodger spoke with such an obvious desire to oblige that Kate could not choose but like him, and it made her wish all the more that he would cover up his big, bare neck.

‘Pon my word, this is a capital omelette,’ he said, licking his lips, ‘There is nothing I like so much as a good omelette, I was very lucky to come here,’ he added, glancing at Kate’s waist, which was slim even in her old blue striped dress.

‘It’s very kind of you to say so, sir,’ she said, and a glow of rose-colour flushed the dark complexion. There was something very human in this big man, and Kate did not know whether his animalism irritated or pleased her.

‘You weren’t at the theatre last night?’ he said, forcing a huge piece of deeply buttered, spongy French roll into his mouth.

‘No, sir, I wasn’t there; I rarely go to the theatre.’

‘Ah! I’m sorry. How’s that? We had a tremendous house. I never saw the piece go better. If this business keeps up to the end of the week I think we shall try to get another date.’

Kate did not know what ‘another date’ meant, but Hender would be able to tell her.

‘You’ve only to tell me when you want to see the piece, and I’ll give you places. Would you like to come to-night?’

‘Not to-night, thank you, sir. I shall be busy all the evening, and my husband is not very well.’

The conversation then came to an irritating pause. Mr. Lennox had scraped up the last fragments of the omelette, and poured himself out another cup of tea, when Mrs. Ede appeared with the broiled bacon. On seeing Kate talking to Mr. Lennox, she at once assumed an air of mingled surprise and regret.

Kate noticed this, but Mr. Lennox had no eyes for anything but the bacon, which he heaped on his plate and devoured voraciously. It pleased Kate to see him enjoy his breakfast, but while she was admiring him Mrs. Ede said as she moved towards the door, ‘Can I do anything for you, sir?’

‘Well, no,’ replied Mr. Lennox indifferently; but seeing that Kate was going too he swallowed a mouthful of tea hastily and said, ‘I was just telling the lady here that we had a tremendous success last night, and that she ought to come and see the piece. I think she said she had no one to go with. You should take her. I’m sure you will like the *Cloches*.’

Mrs. Ede looked indignant, but after a moment she recovered herself, and said severely and emphatically: ‘Thank you, sir, but I’m a Christian woman. No offence, sir, but I don’t think such things are right.’

‘Ah! don’t you, indeed?’ replied the mummer, looking at her in blank astonishment. But the expression of his face soon changed, and as if struck suddenly by some painful remembrance, he said, ‘You’re a Dissenter or something of that kind, I suppose. We lost a lot of money at Bradford through people of your persuasion; they jolly well preached against us.’

Mrs. Ede did not answer, and after a few brief apologetic phrases to the effect that it would not do for us all to think alike, Kate withdrew to her work-room, asking herself if Mr. Lennox would take offence and leave them. Hender suspected that something had occurred, and was curious to hear what it was; but there sat those idiotic little girls, and of course it wouldn’t do to speak before them. Once she hinted that she had heard that Mr. Lennox, though a very nice man, was a bit quick-tempered, a query that Kate answered evasively, saying that it was difficult to know what Mr. Lennox was like. Words were an effort to her, and she could not detach a single precise thought from the leaden-coloured dreams which hung about her.

Click, click, went the needles all day long, and Kate wondered what a woman who lived in a thirty-pound house could want with a ten-pound dress. But that was no affair of hers, and as it was most important she should not disappoint her, Kate kept Hender to dinner; and as compensation for the press of work, she sent round to the public for three extra half-pints. They needed a drink, for the warmth of the day was intense. Along the red tiles of the houses, amid the brick courtyards, the sun's rays created an oven-like atmosphere. From the high wall opposite the dead glare poured into the little front kitchen through the muslin blinds, burning the pot of green-stuff, and falling in large spots upon the tiled floor; and overcome by the heat, the two women lay back on the little red calico-covered sofa, languidly sipping their beer, and thinking vaguely of when they would have to begin work again. Hender lolled with her legs stretched out; Kate rested her head upon her hand wearily; Mrs. Ede sat straight, apparently unheeding the sunlight which fell across the plaid shawl that she wore winter and summer. She drank her beer in quick gulps, as if even the time for swallowing was rigidly portioned out. The others watched her, knowing that when her pewter was empty she would turn them out of the kitchen. In a few moments she said, 'I think, Kate, that if you're in a hurry you'd better get on with your dress. I have to see to Mr. Lennox's dinner, and I can't have you a-hanging about. As it is, I don't know how I'm to get the work done. There's a leg of mutton to be roasted, and a pudding to be made, and all by four o'clock.'

Kate calmed the old woman with a few words, and taking Ralph's dinner from her, carried it upstairs. She found her husband better, and, setting the tray on the edge of the bed, she answered the questions he put to her concerning the actor briefly; then begged of him to excuse her, as she heard voices in the shop. Mr. Lennox had come in bringing two men with him, Joe Mortimer, the low comedian, and young Montgomery, the conductor; and it became difficult to prevent Hender from listening at the doors, and almost useless to remind her of the fact that there were children present, so excited did she become when she spoke of Bret's love affairs.

But at six o'clock she put on her hat, and there was no dissuading her; Mrs. Barnes must wait for her dress. There was still much to be done, and when Mrs. Ede called from the kitchen that tea was ready, Kate did not at first answer, and when at last she descended she remained only long enough to eat a piece of bread and butter. Her head was filled with grave forebodings, that gradually drifted and concentrated into one fixed idea—not to disappoint Mrs. Barnes. Once quite suddenly, she was startled by an idea which flashed across her mind, and stopping in the middle of a 'leaf,' she considered the question that had propounded itself. Lodgers often make love to their landladies; what would she do if Mr. Lennox made love to her? Such a thing might occur. An expression of annoyance contracted her face, and she resumed her sewing. The hours passed slowly and oppressively. It was now ten o'clock, and the tail had still to be bound with braid, and the side strings to be sewn in. She had no tape by her, and thought of putting off these finishing touches till the morning, but plucking up her courage, she determined to go down and fetch from the shop what was required. The walk did her good, but it was hard to sit down to work again; and the next few minutes seemed to her interminable: but at last the final stitch was given, the thread bitten off, and the dress held up in triumph. She looked at it for a moment with a feeling of pride, which soon faded into a sensation of indifference.

All the same her day's labour was over; she was now free. But the thought carried a bitterness: she remembered that there was no place for her to go to but her sick husband's room. Yet she had been looking forward to having at least one night's rest, and it exasperated her to think that there was nothing for her but a hard pallet in the back room, and the certainty of being awakened several times to attend to Ralph. She asked herself passionately if she was always going to remain a slave and a drudge? Hender's words came back to her with a

strange distinctness, and she saw that she knew nothing of pleasure, or even of happiness; and in a very simple way she wondered what were really the ends of life. If she were good and religious like her mother or her mother-in-law—But somehow she could never feel as they did. Heaven seemed so far away. Of course it was a consolation to think there was a happier and better world; still—still—Not being able to pursue the thread any further, she stopped, puzzled, and a few moments after she was thinking of the lady who used to read Byron and Shelley, and who resisted her lover's entreaties so bravely. Every part of the forgotten story came back to her. She realized the place they used to dream in. She could see them watching with ardent eyes the paling of the distant sky as they listened to the humming of insects, breathing the honied odour of the flowers; she saw her leaning on his arm caressingly, whilst pensively she tore with the other hand the leaves as they passed up the long terrace.

Then as the vision became more personal and she identified herself with the heroine of the book, she thought of the wealth of love she had to give, and it seemed to her unutterably sad that it should bloom like a rose in a desert unknown and unappreciated.

This was the last flight of her dream. The frail wings of her imagination could sustain her no longer, and too weary to care for or even to think of anything, she went upstairs, to find Mrs. Ede painting her son's chest and back with iodine. He had a bad attack, which was beginning to subside. His face was haggard, his eyes turgid, and the two women talked together. Mrs. Ede was indignant, and told of all her trouble with the dinner. She had to fetch cigars and drinks. Kate listened, watching her husband all the while. He began to get a little better, and Mrs. Ede took advantage of the occasion to suggest that it was time for evening prayers.

In days when speech was possible, it was Ralph who read the customary chapter of the Bible and led the way with the Lord's Prayer; but when words were forbidden to him his mother supplied his place. The tall figure knelt upright. It was not a movement of cringing humility, but of stalwart belief, and as she handed her the Bible, Kate could not help thinking that there was pride in her mother-in-law's very knees.

The old woman turned over the leaves for a few seconds in silence; then, having determined on a chapter, she began to read. But she had not got beyond a few sentences before she was interrupted by the sound of laughing voices and stamping feet.

She stopped reading, and looked from Kate to her husband. He was at the moment searching for his pocket-handkerchief. Kate rose to assist him, and Mrs. Ede said:

'It's shameful! it's disgraceful!'

'It's only Mr. Lennox coming in.'

'Only Mr. Lennox!' At that moment she was interrupted by the lighter laughter of female voices; she paused to listen, and then, shutting the book fiercely, she said, 'From the first I was against letting our rooms to a mummer; but I didn't think I should live to see my son's house turned into a night house. I shall not stop here.'

'Not stop here—eh, eh? We must tell—tell him that it can't be allowed,' Ralph wheezed.

'And I should like to know who these women are he has dared to bring into—People he has met in Piccadilly, I suppose!'

'Oh no!' interrupted Kate, 'I'm sure that they are the ladies of the theatre.'

'And where's the difference?' Mrs. Ede asked fiercely. Sectarian hatred of worldly amusement flamed in her eyes, and made common cause with the ordinary prejudice of the British landlady. Mr. Ede shared his mother's opinions, but as he was then suffering from a splitting headache, his chief desire was that she should lower the tone of her voice.

‘For goodness’ sake don’t speak so loud!’ he said plaintively. ‘Of course he mustn’t bring women into the house; but he had better be told so. Kate, go down and tell him that these ladies must leave.’

Kate stood aghast at hearing her fate thus determined, and she asked herself how she was to tell Mr. Lennox that he must put his friends out of doors. She hesitated, and during a long silence all three listened. A great guffaw, a woman’s shriek, a peal of laughter, and then a clinking of glasses was heard. Even Kate’s face told that she thought it very improper, and Mrs. Ede said with a theatrical air of suppressed passion:

‘Very well; I suppose that is all that can be done at present.’

Feeling very helpless, Kate murmured, ‘I don’t see how I’m to tell them to go. Hadn’t we better put it off until morning?’

‘Till morning!’ said Mr. Ede, trying to button his dirty nightshirt across his hairy chest. ‘I’m not going to listen to that noise all night. Kate, you g-go and tur-r-rn them out.’

‘I’m sorry, dearie,’ said Mrs. Ede, seeing her daughter-in-law’s distress. ‘I’ll soon send them away.’

‘Oh no! I’d rather go myself,’ said Kate.

‘Very well, dear. I only thought you might not like to go down among a lot of rough people.’

The noise downstairs was in the meanwhile increasing, and Ralph grew as angry as his asthma would allow him. ‘They’re just killing me with their noise. Go down at once and tell them they must leave the house instantly. If you don’t I’ll go myself.’

Mrs. Ede made a movement towards the door, but Kate stopped her, saying:

‘I’ll go; it’s my place.’ As she descended the stairs she heard a man’s voice screaming above the general hubbub:

‘I’ll tell you what; if Miss Beaumont doesn’t wait for my beat another night, I’ll insist on a rehearsal being called. She took the concerted music in the finale of the first act two whole bars before her time. It was damned awful. I nearly broke my stick trying to stop her.’

‘Quite true; I never saw the piece go so badly. Bret was “fluffing” all over the shop.’

Kate listened to these fragments of conversation, asked herself how she was to walk in upon those people and tell them that they must keep quiet.

‘And the way Beaumont tries to spoon with Dick. She nearly missed her cue once with sneaking after him in the wings.’

A peal of laughter followed. This sally determined Kate to act; and without having made up her mind what to say, she turned the handle of the door and walked into the room.

The three gas-burners were blazing, wine-glasses were on the table, and Mr. Lennox stood twisting a corkscrew into a bottle which he held between his fat thighs. On the little green sofa Miss Lucy Leslie lay back playing with her bonnet-strings. Her legs were crossed, and a lifted skirt showed a bit of striped stocking. Next her, with his spare legs sprawled over the arm of the easy-chair, was Mr. Montgomery, the thinnest being possible to imagine, in grey clothes. His nose was enormous, and he pushed up his glasses when Kate came into the room with a movement of the left hand that was clearly habitual. On the other side of the round table sat Mr. Joe Mortimer, the heavy lead, the celebrated miser in the *Cloches*. A tall girl standing behind him playfully twisted his back hair. He addressed paternal admonitions to her from time to time in an artificially cracked voice.

‘Please, sir,’ said Kate pleadingly, ‘I’m very sorry, but we cannot keep open house after eleven o’clock.’

A deep silence followed this announcement. Miss Leslie looked up at Kate curiously. Mr. Lennox stopped twisting the corkscrew into the bottle, and the low comedian, seizing the opportunity, murmured in his mechanical voice to the girl behind him, ‘Open house! Of course, she’s quite right. I knew there was a draught somewhere; I felt my hair blowing about.’

Everybody laughed, and the merriment still contributed to discountenance the workwoman.

‘Will he never speak and let me go?’ she asked herself. At last he did speak, and his words fell upon her like blows.

‘I don’t know what you mean, Mrs. Ede,’ he said in a loud, commanding voice. ‘I made no agreement with you that I wasn’t to bring friends home with me in the evening. Had I known that I was taking lodgings in a church I wouldn’t have come.’

She felt dreadfully humiliated, and nothing was really present in her mind but a desire to conciliate Mr. Lennox.

‘It isn’t my fault, sir. I really don’t mind; but my mother-in-law and my husband won’t have people coming into the house after ten o’clock.’

Mr. Lennox’s face showed that his heart had softened towards her, and when she mentioned that her husband was lying ill in bed, turning round to his company, he said:

‘I think we are making too much noise; we shouldn’t like it ourselves if - ‘

But just at that moment, when all was about to end pleasantly, Mrs. Ede was heard at the top of the stairs.

‘I’m a Christian woman, and will not remain in a house where drinking and women - ‘

This speech changed everything. Mr. Lennox’s eyes flashed passion, and he made a movement as if he were going to shout an answer back to Mrs. Ede, but checking himself, he said, addressing Kate, ‘I beg that you leave my rooms, ma’am. You can give me warning in the morning if you like, or rather, I’ll give it to you; but for this evening, at least, the place is mine, and I shall do what I like.’ On that he advanced towards the door and threw it open.

Tears stood in her eyes. She looked sorrowfully at Mr. Lennox. He noticed the pitiful, appealing glance, but was too angry to understand. The look was her whole soul. She did not see Miss Leslie sneering, nor Mr. Montgomery’s grinning face. She saw nothing but Mr. Lennox, and, stunned by the thought of his leaving them, she followed her mother-in-law upstairs. The old woman scolded and rowed. To have that lot of men and women smoking and drinking after eleven o’clock in the house was not to be thought of, and she tried to force her son to say that the police must be sent for. But it was impossible to get an answer from him: the excitement and effort of speaking had rendered him speechless, and holding his moppy black hair with both hands, he wheezed in deep organ tones. Kate looked at him blankly, and longed for some place out of hearing of his breath and out of the smell of the medicine-bottles. His mother was now insisting on his taking a couple of pills, and called upon Kate to find the box. The sharp, sickly odour of the aloes was abominable, and with her stomach turning, she watched her husband trying vainly to swallow the dose with the aid of a glass of water. Stop in this room! No, that she couldn’t do! It would poison her. She wanted sleep and fresh air. Where could she get them? The mummer was in the spare room; but he would be gone to-morrow, and she would be left alone. The thought startled her, though she

soon forgot it in her longing to get out of her husband's sight. Every moment this desire grew stronger, and at last she said:

'I cannot stay here; another night would kill me. Will you let me have your room?'

'Certainly I will, my dear,' replied the old woman, astonished not so much at the request, but at the vehemence of the emphasis laid upon the words. 'You're looking dreadfully worn out, my dear; I'll see to my boy.'

As soon as her request had been granted, Kate hesitated as if she feared she was doing wrong, and she looked at her husband, wondering if he would call her back.

But he took no heed; his attention was too entirely occupied by his breath to think either of her or of the necessity of sending for the police, and he waved his mother away when she attempted to speak to him.

'Are those men going to stop there all night?' Mrs. Ede asked.

'Oh, I really don't know; I'm too tired to bother about it any more,' replied Kate petulantly. 'It's all your fault—you're to blame for everything; you've no right to interfere with the lodgers in my house.'

Mrs. Ede raised her arms as she sought for words, but Kate walked out of the room without giving her time to answer. Suddenly a voice cried in a high key:

'Who do you take me for, Dick? I wasn't born yesterday. A devilish pretty woman, if you ask me. What hair!—like velvet!'

Kate stopped. 'Black hair,' she said to herself - 'they must be talking of me,' and she listened intently.

The remark, however, did not appear to have been particularly well-timed, for after a long silence, a woman's voice said:

'Well, I don't know whether he liked her, and I don't care, but what I'm not going to do is to wait here listening to you all cracking up a landlady's good looks. I'm off.'

A scuffle then seemed to be taking place; half a dozen voices spoke together, and in terror of her life Kate flew across the workroom to Mrs. Ede's bed.

The door of the sitting-room was flung open and cajoling and protesting words echoed along the passage up and down the staircase. It was disgraceful, and Kate expected every minute to hear her mother-in-law's voice mingling in the fray; but peace was restored, and for at least an hour she listened to sounds of laughing voices mingling with the clinking of glasses. At last Dick wished his friends good-night, and Kate lay under the sheets and listened. Something was going to happen. 'He thinks me a pretty woman; she is jealous,' were phrases that rang without ceasing in her ears. Then, hearing his door open, she fancied he was coming to seek her, and in consternation buried herself under the bedclothes, leaving only her black hair over the pillows to show where she had disappeared. But the duplicate drop of a pair of boots was conclusive, and assuring herself that he would not venture on such a liberty, she strove to compose herself to sleep.

Chapter IV

Next day, about eleven o'clock, Kate walked up Market Street with Mrs. Barnes's dress, meditating on the letter she had received. A very serious matter this angry letter was to Kate, and she thought of what she could say to satisfy her customer. Her anxiety of mind caused her to walk faster than she was aware of, up the hill towards the square of sky where the passers-by seemed like figures on the top of a monument. At the top of the hill she would turn to the left and descend towards the little quasi-villa residences which form the suburbs of Northwood. Ten minutes later Kate approached Mrs. Barnes's door hot and out of breath, her plans matured, determined, if the worst came to the worst, to let the dress go at a reduction. Her present difficulty was so great that she forgot other troubles, and it was not until she had received her money that she remembered Mr. Lennox. He was going. Her rooms would be empty again. She was sorry he was going, and at the top of Market Street she stood at gaze, surprised by the view, though she had never seen any other. A long black valley lay between her and the dim hills far away, miles and miles in length, with tanks of water glittering like blades of steel, and gigantic smoke clouds rolling over the stems of a thousand factory chimneys. She had not come up this hillside at the top of Market Street for a long while; for many years she had not stood there and gazed at the view, not since she was a little girl, and the memories that she cherished in her workroom between Hanley and the Wever Hills were quite different from the scene she was now looking upon. She saw the valley with different eyes: she saw it now with a woman's eyes; before she had seen it with a child's eyes. She remembered the ruined collieries and the black cinder-heaps protruding through the hillside on which she was now standing. In childhood, these ruins were convenient places to play hide-and-seek in. But now they seemed to convey a meaning to her mind, a meaning that was not very clear, that perplexed her, that she tried to put aside and yet could not. At her left, some fifty feet below, running in the shape of a fan, round a belt of green, were the roofs of Northwood—black brick unrelieved except by the yellow chimney-pots, specks of colour upon a line of soft cotton-like clouds melting into grey, the grey passing into blue, and the blue spaces widening. 'It will be a hot day,' she said to herself, and fell to thinking that a hot day was hotter on this hillside than elsewhere. At every moment the light grew more and more intense, till a distant church spire faded almost out of sight, and she was glad she had come up here to admire the view from the top of Market Street. Southwark, on the right, as black as Northwood, toppled into the valley in irregular lines, the jaded houses seeming in Kate's fancy like cart-loads of gigantic pill-boxes cast in a hurry from the counter along the floor. It amused her to stand gazing, contrasting the reality with her memories. It seemed to her that Southwark had never before been so plain to the eye. She could follow the lines of the pavement and almost distinguish the men from the women passing. A hansom appeared and disappeared, the white horse seen now against the green blinds of a semi-detached villa and shown a moment after against the yellow rotundities of a group of pottery ovens.

The sun was now rapidly approaching the meridian, and in the vibrating light the wheels of the most distant collieries could almost be counted, and the stems of the far-off factory chimneys appeared like tiny fingers.

Kate saw with the eyes and heard with the ears of her youth, and the past became as clear as the landscape before her. She remembered the days when she came to read on this hillside. The titles of the books rose up in her mind, and she could recall the sorrow she felt for the heroes and heroines. It seemed to her strange that that time was so long past and she wondered why she had forgotten it. Now it all seemed so near to her that she felt like one

only just awakened from a dream. And these memories made her happy. She took pleasure in recalling every little event—an excursion she made when she was quite a little girl to the ruined colliery, and later on, a conversation with a chance acquaintance, a young man who had stopped to speak to her.

At the bottom of the valley, right before her eyes, the white gables of Bucknell Rectory, hidden amid masses of trees, glittered now and then in an entangled beam that flickered between chimneys, across brick-banked squares of water darkened by brick walls.

Behind Bucknell were more desolate plains full of pits, brick, and smoke; and beyond Bucknell an endless tide of hills rolled upwards and onwards.

The American tariff had not yet come into operation, and every wheel was turning, every oven baking; and through a drifting veil of smoke the sloping sides of the hills with all their fields could be seen sleeping under great shadows, or basking in the light. A deluge of rays fell upon them, defining every angle of Watley Rocks and floating over the grasslands of Standon, all shape becoming lost in a huge embrasure filled with the almost imperceptible outlines of the Wever Hills.

And these vast slopes which formed the background of every street were the theatre of all Kate's travels before life's struggles began. It amused her to remember that when she played about the black cinders of the hillsides she used to stop to watch the sunlight flash along the far-away green spaces, and in her thoughts connected them with the marvels she read of in her books of fairy-tales. Beyond these wonderful hills were the palaces of the kings and queens who would wave their wands and vanish! A few years later it was among or beyond those slopes that the lovers with whom she sympathized in the pages of her novels lived. But it was a long time since she had read a story, and she asked herself how this was. Dreams had gone out of her life, everything was a hard reality; her life was like a colliery, every wheel was turning, no respite day or night; her life would be always the same, a burden and a misery. There never could be any change now. She remembered her marriage, and how Mrs. Ede had persuaded her into it, and for the first time she blamed the old woman for her interference. But this was not all. Kate was willing to admit that there was no one she loved like Mr. Ede, but still it was hard to live with a mother-in-law who had a finger in everything and used the house like her own. It would be all very well if she were not so obstinate, so certain that she was always right. Religion was very well, but that perpetual 'I'm a Christian woman,' was wearisome. No wonder Mr. Lennox was leaving. Poor man, why shouldn't he have a few friends up in the evening? The lodgings were his own while he paid for them. No wonder he cut up rough; no wonder he was leaving them. If so, she would never see him again. The thought caught her like a pain in the throat, and with a sudden instinct she turned to hurry home. As she did so her eyes fell on Mr. Lennox walking towards her. At such an unexpected realization of her thoughts she uttered a little cry of surprise; but, smiling affably, and in no way disconcerted, he raised his big hat from his head. On account of the softness of the felt this could only be accomplished by passing the arm over the head and seizing the crown as a conjurer would a pocket-handkerchief. The movement was large and unctuous, and it impressed Kate considerably.

'I took the liberty to stop, for you seemed so interested that I felt curious to know what could be worth looking at in those chimneys and cinder-mounds.'

'I wasn't looking at the factories, but at the hills. The view from here is considered very fine. Don't you think so, sir?' she asked, feeling afraid that she had made some mistake.

'Ah, well, now you mention it, perhaps it is. How far away, and yet how distinct! They look like the gallery of a theatre. We're on the stage, the footlights run round here, and the valley

is the pit; and there are plenty of pits in it,' he added, laughing. 'But I mustn't speak to you of the theatre.'

'Oh, I'm sure I don't mind! I'm very fond of the theatre,' said Kate hastily.

This indirect allusion to last night brought the conversation to a close, and for some moments they stood looking vacantly at the landscape. Overhead the sky was a blue dome, and so still was the air that the smoke-clouds trailed like the wings of gigantic birds slowly balancing themselves. And waves of white light rolled up the valley as if jealous of the red, flashing furnaces. An odour of iron and cinders poisoned the air, and after some moments of contemplation which seemed to draw them closer together, Mr. Lennox said:

'There is no doubt that the view is very grand, but it is tantalizing to have those hills before your eyes when you are shut up in a red brick oven. How fresh and cool they look! What wouldn't you give to be straying about in those fresh woods far away?'

Kate looked at Mr. Lennox with ravished eyes; his words had flooded her mind with a thousand forgotten dreams. She felt she liked him better for what he had said, and she murmured as if half ashamed:

'I've never been out of Hanley. I've never seen the sea, and when I was a child I used to fancy that the fairies lived beyond those hills; even now I can't help imagining that the world is quite different over there. Here it is all brick, but in novels they never speak of anything but gardens and fields.'

'Never seen the sea! Well, there isn't much to *see* in it,' Mr. Lennox said, laughing at the pun. 'When you were a little girl you used to come here to play, I suppose?'

'Yes, sir; I was born over in one of those cottages.'

Mr. Lennox, without knowing whether to look sorry or sentimental, listened patiently to Kate, who, proud of being able to show him anything, drew his attention to the different points of view. The white gables that could just be distinguished in the large dark masses of trees was Bucknell Rectory. The fragment of the cliff on the top of the highest ridge half-way up the sky was Watley Rocks; then came Western Coyney, the plains of Standon, and far away in a blue mist the outlines of the Wever Hills. But Mr. Lennox did not seem very much interested; the sun was too hot for him, and in the first pause of the conversation he asked Kate which way she was going. He had to get on to the theatre, and he asked her if she would show him the way there.

'You can't do better than to go down Market Street; but if you like I will direct you.'

'I shall be so glad if you will; but Market Street—I think you said Market Street? That is just the way I've come.'

Market Street was where people connected with the theatre generally lived, and Kate knew at once he had been looking for lodgings; but she was ashamed to ask him, and they walked on for some time without speaking. But every moment the silence became more irritating, and at last, determined to know the worst, she said, 'I suppose you were looking for lodgings; all the theatre people put up in that street.'

Mr. Lennox flinched before this direct question.

'Why, no, not exactly; I was calling on some friends; but as you say, some of the profession live in the street, and now you mention it, I suppose I shall have to find some new diggings.'

'I'm sorry, sir, very sorry,' said Kate, looking up into the big blue eyes. 'I ought not to have come down; you are, of course, master in your own rooms.'

‘Oh, it wasn’t your fault; I could live with you for ever. You mustn’t think I want to change. If you could only guarantee that your mother-in-law will keep out of my way.’

Kate felt at that moment that she would guarantee anything that would prevent Mr. Lennox from leaving her house.

‘Oh, I don’t think there will be any difficulty about that,’ she said eagerly. ‘I’ll bring your breakfast and dinner up, and you are out nearly all day.’

‘Very well, then, and I’ll promise not to bring home any friends,’ he added gallantly.

‘But I’m afraid you’ll be very lonely, sir.’

‘I’ll have you to talk to sometimes.’

Kate made no answer, but they both felt that the words implied more than they actually meant, and they remained silent, like people who had come to some important conclusion. Then after a long pause, and without any transition, Mr. Lennox spoke of the heat of the weather and of the harm it was likely to do their business at the theatre. She asked him what he thought of Hanley. Mr. Lennox smiled through his faint moustache and said the red brick hurt his eyes.

Kate did not feel quite satisfied with this last observation, and spoke of the pretty places there were about the town. Pointing down a red perspective backed by the usual hills, she told him that Trentham, the Duke of Sutherland’s place, was over there.

‘What, over those hills? That must be miles away.’

‘Oh, not so far as that. Hanley doesn’t reach to there. The country is beautiful, once you get past Stoke. I went once to see the Duke’s place, and we had tea in the inn. That was the only time I was ever really in the country, and even then we were never quite out of sight of the factories. Still, it was very nice.’

‘And who were you with?’

‘Oh, with my husband.’

‘He’s an invalid, isn’t he?’

‘Well, I’m afraid he suffers very much at times, but he’s often well enough.’

The conversation again came to a pause, and both thought of how happy they would be were they taking tea together at the inn at Trentham.

But they were now in the centre of the town, close to the Town Hall, a stupid, square building with two black cannon on either side of the door. Opposite was a great shop with ‘Commercial House’ written across the second story in gold letters. Bright carpets and coarse goods were piled about the doorway; and from these two houses Piccadilly and Broad Street, its continuation, ran down an incline, and Church Street branched off, giving the town the appearance of a two-pronged fork.

All was red brick blazing under a blue sky without a cloud in it; the red brick that turns to purple; and all the roofs were scarlet—red brick and scarlet tiles, and not a tree anywhere.

‘You don’t seem to have a tree in Hanley,’ Mr. Lennox said.

‘I don’t think there are many,’ she answered, and they gazed at the bald rotundities of the pottery ovens.

He had never seen a town before composed entirely of brick and iron. A town of work; a town in which the shrill scream of the steam train as it rolled solemnly up the incline seemed to be man's cry of triumph over vanquished nature.

After looking about him, Mr. Lennox said, 'What I object to in the town is that there's nothing to do. And it's so blazing hot; for goodness' sake let us get under the shadow of a wall.'

Kate smiled, and as they crossed over they both wiped their faces.

'There are the potteries,' she said, referring to Mr. Lennox's complaint that there was nothing to do in the town. 'Everybody that comes to Hanley goes to see them; but the best are in Stoke.'

'I'm sure I'm not going to Stoke to see potteries,' he answered decisively, 'but if there are any at Hanley I dare say I shall turn in some afternoon. I've heard some of our people say they are worth seeing. But,' he added, as if a sudden thought had struck him, 'I might go now; I've nothing to do for the next couple of hours. How far are the nearest?'

Kate told him that Powell and Jones's works were close by in the High Street. She pointed out the way, but, failing to make Mr. Lennox understand her, she consented to go with him. He had a kind, soft manner of speaking which drew Kate towards him almost as if he had taken her in his arms, and it was astonishing how intimate they had grown in the last few minutes.

'It doesn't look very interesting,' he said, as they stopped before an archway and looked into a yard filled with straw and packing-cases.

'Yes it is, but you must see the different rooms. You must go up to the office and ask for permission to see the works.'

'I don't think I'd care to go by myself. Won't you come with me?'

Kate hesitated; she had very little to do at home, and could say that Mrs. Barnes had kept her waiting.

'Do come,' he said after a pause, during which he looked at her eagerly.

'Well, I should like to see the room where my mother used to work, but we mustn't stop too long. I shall be missed at home.' The matter being so arranged, they entered the yard, and Kate pointed out a rough staircase placed against the wall. 'You must go up there; the office is at the top. Ask for permission to see the works and I'll wait here for you.'

Half a dozen men were packing crockery into crates with spades, and as she watched them she remembered that she used to come to this yard with her mother's dinner, and stand wondering how they could pack the delf without breaking it. She remembered one afternoon particularly well; she had promised to be very good, and had been allowed to sit by her mother and watch her painting flowers that wound in and out and all about a big blue vase. She remembered how she was reproved for peeping over her neighbour's shoulder, and how proud she felt sitting among all the workwomen. She could recall the smell of the paint and turpentine, and her grief when she was told that she was too delicate to learn painting, and was going to be put out to dressmaking. But that time was long ago; her mother was dead and she was married. Everything was changed or broken, as was that beautiful vase, probably. It astonished Kate to find herself thinking of these things. She had passed the High Street twenty times during the last six months without it even occurring to her to visit the old places, and when Mr. Lennox came back he noticed that there were tears in her eyes. He made no

remark, but hastily explained that he had been told that there was a party just that minute gone on in front of them, and they were to catch them up.

‘This way, then,’ she said, pointing to a big archway.

‘Oh, I can’t run; don’t be in such a hurry,’ said Mr. Lennox, panting.

Kate laughed, and admitted that the heat was great. Out of a sky burnt almost to white the glare descended into the narrow brick-yards. The packing straw seemed ready to catch fire; the heaps of wet clay, which two boys were shovelling, smoked, emitting as it did so an unpleasant wet odour. On passing the archway they caught sight of three black coats and three soft hats like the one Mr. Lennox wore.

‘Oh!’ said Kate, stopping, disappointed, ‘we’ll have to go round with those clergymen.’

‘What does that matter? It will be amusing to listen to them.’

‘But mother knows all of them.’

‘They must be strangers in the town or they wouldn’t be visiting the potteries, surely.’

‘I hadn’t thought of that; I suppose you’re right,’ and hastening a little, they overtook the party that was being shown round. The Dissenting clergymen looked askance at Mr. Lennox, and as he showed them into a small white cell the guide said, ‘You’re in plenty of time, sir; these are the snagger-makers.’

Two men were beating a heap of wet clay in order to insure a something in the bakery which nobody understood, but which the guide took some trouble to explain. The clergymen pressed forward to listen. Mr. Lennox wiped his face, and they were then hurried into a second cell, where unbaked dishes were piled all around upon shelves. It was said to be the dishmakers’ place, and was followed by another and another room, all of which Mr. Lennox thought equally hot and uninteresting. He strove to escape from the guide, who drew him through the line of clergymen and made plain to him the mysteries of earthenware.

At last these preliminary departments were disposed of, and they were led to another part of the works. On their way thither they passed the ovens. These were scattered over the ground like beehives in a garden. Lennox patted their round sides, approvingly saying that they reminded him of oyster boys in a pantomime, and might be introduced into the next Christmas show. Kate looked at him, her eyes full of wonder. She could not understand how he could think of such things.

In the printing-room they listened to the guide, who apparently considered it important that clergymen, actor, and dressmaker should understand the different processes the earthenware had to pass through before it was placed on toilet or breakfast table. Smoking flannels hung on lines all around, and like laundresses at their tubs, four or five women washed the printed paper from the plates. A man in a paper cap bent over a stove, and as if dissatisfied with the guide’s explanation of his work, broke out into a wearisome flow of technical details. At the other end of this vast workroom there was a line of young girls who cut the printed matter out of sheets of paper, the scissors running in and out of flowers, tendrils, and little birds without ever injuring one. The clergymen watched the process, delighted, while Lennox stepped behind Kate and whispered that he had just caught the tall Dissenter winking at the dark girl on the right, which was not true, and was invented for the sake of the opportunity it gave him of breathing on Kate’s neck—a lead up to the love-scene which he had now decided was to come off as soon as he should find himself alone with her.

They passed through a brick alley with a staircase leading to a platform built like a ship’s deck, and went on through a series of rooms till they came to a place almost as hot as a

Turkish bath, filled with unbaked plates and dishes. The smell of wet clay drying in steam diffused from underneath was very unpleasant, and caused one of the ministers to cough violently, whereupon the guide explained that the platemakers' departments were considered the most unhealthy of any in the works; the people who worked there, he said, usually suffered from what is known as the potter's asthma. This interested Kate, and she delayed the guide with questions as to how the potter's asthma differed from the ordinary form of the disease, and when their little procession was again put in motion she told Mr. Lennox how her husband was affected, and the nights she had spent watching at his side. But although Lennox listened attentively, she could not help thinking that he seemed rather glad than otherwise that her husband was an invalid. The unkind way in which he spoke of sick people shocked her, and she opposed the opinion that a person in bad health was a disgusting object, while Lennox took advantage of the occasion to whisper into her ears that she was far too pretty a woman for an asthmatic husband; and, encouraged by her blushes, he even hazarded a few coarse jokes anent the poor husband's deficiencies. How could a man kiss if he couldn't breathe, for if there was a time when breath was essential, according to him, it was when four lips meet.

No one had ever spoken to her in this way before, and had she known how to do so she would have resented his familiarities. Once their hands met. The contact caused her a thrill; she put aside the unbaked plate they were examining and said: 'We'd better make haste or we shall lose them.'

The next two rooms were considered the most interesting they had been through; even the three clergymen lost something of their stolid manner and asked Lennox his opinion regarding the religious character of Hanley, and if he were of their persuasion.

'What is that?' asked Lennox, affecting a comic innocence which he hoped would tickle Kate's fancy.

'We're Wesleyans,' said the minister.

'And I'm an actor; but, I beg your pardon, stage-managing's more my business,' news that seemed to cast a gloom over the faces of the ministers; and leaving them to make what they could of his reply, he drew Kate forward confidentially and pointed to an old man sitting straddle-legged on a high narrow table just on a line with the window. He was covered with clay; his forehead and beard were plastered with it, and before him was an iron plate, kept continually whirling by steam, which he could stop by a pressure of his foot. He squeezed a lump of clay into a long shape not unlike a tall ice, then, forcing it down into the shape of a batter-pudding, he hollowed it. Round and round went the clay, the hands forming it all the while, cleaning and smoothing until it came out a true and perfect jampot, even to the little furrow round the top, which was given by a movement of the thumbs. He had been at work since seven in the morning, and the shelves round him were encumbered with the result of his labours. Everyone marvelled at his dexterity, until he was forgotten in the superior attractions of the succeeding room. This was the turning-house, and Lennox could not help laughing outright, so amusing did the scene appear to him. Women went dancing up and down on one leg, and at such regular intervals that they seemed absolutely like machines. They were at once the motive power and the feeders of the different lathes. It was they who handed the men lumps of dry clay, which they turned into shapes. The strangeness of the spectacle gave rise to much comment. The clergymen were anxious to know if the constant jigging was injurious to health. Lennox inquired how much coin they made by their one-leg dancing. He spoke of their good looks, and this led him easily into the question of morals, a subject in which he was much interested. He wanted to know if this crowding together of the sexes could be effected without danger. Surely cases of seduction must occur occasionally. In

answering him the guide betrayed a certain reticence of manner which encouraged Lennox to ask him if he really meant to say that nothing ever befell these young women who were working all day side by side with people of the other sex. Did their thoughts never wander from their work? The guide assured Mr. Lennox that there was no time to think of such nonsense in the factory, and, anxious to vindicate the honour of the establishment, he declared that any who took the smallest liberty with any female would be instantly dismissed from the works. The ministers listened approvingly, although they seemed to think the subject might have been avoided. Kate felt a little embarrassed, and Mr. Lennox watched a big, blonde-haired woman who smiled prettily and seemed quite conscious of her sex, notwithstanding the ludicrous bobbing up and down position she was in. With a courage that surprised herself Kate proposed that they should go on. She was beginning to feel uneasy at the time she had been away from home and certain that Mrs. Ede would be on the doorstep looking up and down the street; and she could well imagine how cross Ralph would be if he heard she had been to the potteries with Mr. Lennox. She felt very sorry for the one and a little resentful towards the other, but the sentimental desire to see the painting-room where her mother used to work prevailed, and with her heart full of recollections she followed the party to the ovens.

Their way thither led them around the building, and they passed through many workrooms. These were generally clean, airy spaces, with big rafters and whitewashed walls. Sometimes a bunch of violets, a book, or a newspaper lying on the table, suggested an absent owner, and a refined countenance was sought for in the different groups of women. There was also a difference in the hats and shawls, and it was easy to tell which belonged to the young girls, which to the mothers of families. Everyone looked healthy and contented. All were nice-looking, as Lennox continued to assert, and all worked industriously at their numberless employments, one of the most curious of which consisted in knocking the roughness off the finished earthenware.

A dozen women sat in a circle; above them and around them were piles of dinner-services of all kinds. Each held with one hand a piece of crockery on her knees, whilst with a chisel she chopped away at it as if it could not by any possibility be broken. As may easily be imagined, the noise in this warehouse was bewildering.

Through this room and others, up and down many narrow staircases, the visiting party went, the guide leading, the three black clergymen following, Kate lingering behind with Mr. Lennox until they came to the ovens. The entrance was from an immense corridor, prolonged by shadow and divided down the middle by presses full of drying earthenware, the smell of which was not, however, as strong as in the platemakers' place, and the difference was noticed by the clergyman with the cough. He said he was not affected to nearly the same extent.

From time to time the visitors had to give way to men who marched in single file carrying what seemed to be huge cheeses, but the guide explained that within these were cups, saucers, bowls, and basins, and men mounted on ladders piled these yellow tubs up the walls of the ovens. When the visitors had peeped into the huge interior, they were conducted to the furnaces; and these were set in the oven's inner shell, which made a narrow circular passage slanting inwards as it ascended like the neck of a champagne bottle. The fires glared so furiously that they suggested many impious thoughts to Lennox, and he proposed to ask the ministers if there were any warmer corners in hell, and was with difficulty dissuaded by Kate, about whose waist he had passed his arm. His constant whispering in her ear, which had at first amused her, now irritated and annoyed her; other emotions filled her mind with a vague tumult, and she longed to be left to think in peace. She begged of him to keep quiet, and as

they crossed one of the yards she asked the guide if he could not go straight to the painting-room. He replied that there was a regular order to be observed, and insisted on marching them through two more rooms, and explaining fully three or four more processes. Then, after begging them to be careful and to hold the rail, he led them up a high staircase. The warning caused Kate a thrill, for she remembered that every step of this staircase had been a terror to her mother.

The room itself proved a little disappointing. The tables were not arranged in quite the same way, and these alterations deprived her of the emotions she had expected. Still it gave her a great deal of pleasure to point out to Mr. Lennox where her mother used to work.

But to find the exact spot was not by any means easy. There were upwards of a hundred young women sitting on benches, leaning over huge tables covered with unfinished pottery. Each held in her hand a plate, bowl, or vase, on which she executed some design. The clergy showed more interest than they had hitherto done, and as they leaned to and fro examining the work, one of them discovered the something *Guardian*, a Wesleyan organ, on one of the tables, and hailing his fellows, they began to interview the proprietor. But the guide said they had to visit the store-rooms, and forced them away from their 'lamb.'

Ridges of vases, mounds of basins and jugs, terraces of plates, formed masses of sickly white, through which rays of light were caught and sent dancing. Along the wall on the left-hand side presses were overcharged with dusty tea-services. On the right were square grey windows, under which the convex sides of salad-bowls sparkled in the sun; and from rafter to rafter, in garlands and clusters like grapes, hung gilded mugs bearing devices suitable for children, and down the middle of the floor a terrace was built of dinner-plates.

Two rooms away, a large mound of chamber-pots formed an astonishing background, and against all this white and grey effacement the men who stood on high ladders dusting the crockery came out like strange black climbing insects.

The clergyman said it was very interesting, and just as he did everything else the guide explained the system of storing employed by the firm; how the crockery was packed, and how the men would soon be working only three days a week on account of the American tariff. But he was not much listened to. Everyone was now tired, and the clergymen, who, since the discovery of the newspaper, had been showing signs that they regarded their visit to the potteries as ended, pulled out their watches and whispered that their time was up. The guide told them that there were only a few more rooms to visit, but they said that they must be off, and demanded to be conducted to the door. This request was an embarrassing one; it was against the rules ever to leave visitors when going the rounds. The guide had, therefore, either to conduct the whole party to the door or transgress his orders. After a slight hesitation, influenced no doubt by a conversation he had had with Lennox, in which mention was made of tickets for the theatre, he decided to take the responsibility on himself, and asked that gentleman if he would mind waiting a few minutes with his lady while the religious gentlemen were being shown the way out. Lennox assented with readiness, and the three black figures and the guide disappeared a moment after behind the bedroom utensils. After an anxious glance round Lennox looked at Kate, who, at that moment, was gathering to herself all the recollections that the place evoked. She knew the room she was in well, for she used to pass through it daily with her mother's dinner, and she remembered how in her childhood she wondered how big the world must be to hold enough people to use such thousands of cups and saucers. There used to be a blue tea-service in the far corner, and she had often lingered to imagine a suitable parlour for it and for her dream husband. One day she had torn her frock coming up the stairs, and was terribly scolded; another time Mr. Powell, attracted by her black curls, had stopped to speak to her, and he had given her as a present one of the

children's mugs—one exactly like those hanging over her head. She had treasured it a long time, but at last it was broken. It seemed that all things belonging to her had to be broken; her dreams were made in crockery.

But as Kate looked into the past she became gradually conscious of a voice whispering to her,

'How odd it is that you should never have thought of revisiting this place until you met me.'

She raised her eyes, and, her look seeming to tell him that this was his moment, he turned to see if they were watched. At their feet a pile of plates and teacups slept in a broad flood of sunlight, and three rooms away the boys on high ladders dusted the mugs.

'What a pretty child you must have been! I can fancy you with your black hair falling about your shoulders. Had I known you then, I should have taken you in my arms and kissed you. Do you think you would have liked me to have kissed you?'

She raised her eyes again, and a vague feeling of how nice, how kind he was, rushed through her, and perceiving still more clearly that this moment was his moment, Lennox affected to examine a ring on her finger. The warm pressure of his hand caused her to start, and she would have put him from her, but his voice calmed her.

'Ah!' he said, 'had I known you then, I should have been in love with you.'

Kate closed her eyes, and abandoned herself to an ineffable sentiment of weakness, of ravishment; and then, imagining that she was his, Lennox took her in his arms and kissed her rudely. But quick, angry thoughts rushed to her head at the first movement of his arms, and obeying an impulse in contradiction to her desire, she shook herself free, and looked at him vexed and humiliated.

'Oh, how very cross we are; and about a kiss, just a tiny, wee kiss!'

She stood staring at him, only half hearing what he said, irritated against him and herself.

'I'm sure I didn't mean to offend you,' he continued after a pause, for Kate's manner puzzled him; 'I love you too well.'

'Love me?' she cried, astonished, but with nevertheless a tone of interrogation in her voice. 'Why, you never saw me till the other day.'

'I loved you the first moment; I assure you I did.'

Kate looked at him imploringly, as if beseeching him not to deceive her. There was an honest frankness in his big blue eyes, and his face said as clearly as words, 'I think you a deuced pretty woman, and I'm sure I could love you very much,' and recognizing this, Kate remained silent.

And thus encouraged, Mr. Lennox attempted to renew his intentions. But actions have to be prefaced by words, and he commenced by declaring that when a man would give the whole world for a kiss, it was not to be expected that he would resist trying for one, and he strove to think of the famous love scene in *The Lady of Lyons*. But it was years since he had played the part, and he could only murmur something about reading no books but lovers' books, singing no songs but lovers' songs. The guide would be back in a few minutes, and, inspired by Kate's pale face, he came to the conclusion that it would be absurd to let her go without kissing her properly.

He was a strong man, but Kate had now really lost her temper, and struggled vigorously, determined he should not gain his end. Three times his lips had rested on her cheek, once he managed to kiss her on the chin, but he could not reach her mouth: she always succeeded in twisting her face away, and not liking to be beaten he put forth all his strength. She staggered

backwards and placed one hand on his throat, and with the other strove to catch at his moustache; she had given it a wrench that had brought tears into his eyes, but now he was pinioning her; she could see his big face approaching, and summoning up all her strength she strove to get away, but that moment, happening to tread on her skirt, her feet slipped. He made a desperate effort to sustain her, but her legs had gone between his.

The crash was tremendous. A pile of plates three feet high was sent spinning, a row of salad-bowls was over, and then with a heavy stagger Mr. Lennox went down into a dinner-service, sending the soup-tureen rolling gravely into the next room.

A feeling at first prevailed that some serious accident had happened, but when Kate rose, pale and trembling, from the litter of a bedroom set, and Lennox was lifted out of the dinner-service with nothing apparently worse than a cut hand, a murmur of voices asking the cause of the disaster was heard. But before a word could be said the guide came running towards them. He declared that he would lose his place, and spoke vaguely to those around him of the necessity of suppressing the fact that he had left visitors alone in the storerooms.

Lennox, on the other hand, was very silent. He had evidently received some bad cuts, of which he did not speak. He put his hand to his legs and felt them doubtfully. There was a large gash in his right hand, from which he picked a piece of delf, and as he tied the wound up with a pocket-handkerchief he partly quieted the expostulating guide by assuring him that everything would be paid for. And taking Kate's arm, he hobbled out of the place.

The suddenness and excitement of the accident had for the moment quenched her angry feelings, and, overwhelmed with pity for the poor wounded hand, she thought of nothing but getting him to a doctor. Indeed, it was not until she heard him telling Mr. Powell in the office that he was subject to fits, and that in striving to hold him up the lady had fallen too, that she remembered how he had behaved, how he had disgraced her. But her mouth was closed, and she listened in amazement to him as he invented detail after detail with surprising dexterity. He did not even hesitate to call in the evidence of the guide, who, in his own interests, was obliged to assent; and when Mr. Powell inquired after the three clergymen, Lennox said that they had left them in the yard after visiting the ovens.

Mr. Powell listened with a look of pity on his face, and began to tell of a poor brother of his who was likewise subject to fits, and, possibly influenced by the remembrance, refused to receive any remuneration for the broken crockery, saying that to a firm like theirs a few plates more or less was of no importance.

And this matter being settled, Lennox hobbled away, leaving a little pool of blood on the floor of the office. She had to lend him her handkerchief, his was now saturated—to tie round his hand: he confessed to a bad cut in the leg, saying he could feel the blood trickling down into his boot, but did not think he needed a doctor. 'A bit of sticking-plaster, dear; I'll get some at the apothecary's. Which is the way?'

'Take the first turn to the right, and you're in Church Street; but there may be bits of the delf in the wound?'

'I shall see to that. But how strong you are; you're like a lion. You mustn't struggle like that next time.'

At the suggestion that there was going to be a next time Kate's face clouded, but she was so alarmed for his safety that it was only for a moment. She had hardly noticed that he called her 'dear'; he used the word so naturally and simply that it touched her with swift pleasure, and was as soon lost in a crowd of conflicting emotions.

The man was coarse and largely sensual, but each movement of his fat hands was protective, every word he uttered was kind, the very intonation of his voice was comforting. He was, in a word, human, and this attracted all that was human in her.

Chapter V

On leaving Mr. Lennox Kate walked slowly along the streets, recalling every word he had said, feeling his breath upon her cheek and his blue eyes looking into hers more distinctly in recollection than when he had held her in his arms. She walked immersed in recollections, every one clear and precise, experiencing a sort of supersensual gratification, one she had never known before. Being a child of the people, his violence had not impressed her, and she murmured to herself every now and then:

‘Poor fellow, what a fall he had! I hope he didn’t hurt himself.’

By turns she thought of things totally different—of Hender, of the little girls, who would regret her absence from the workroom, and it was not without surprise that she caught herself wishing suddenly they were her own children. The wish was only momentary, but it was the first time a desire for motherhood had ever troubled her.

It amused her to think of their smiling faces, and to make sure of their smiles she entered a shop and bought a small packet of sweetstuff, and with the paper in her hand continued her walk home. The cheap prints in a newspaper shop delayed her, and the workmen who were tearing up the road forced her to consider how a suspension of traffic would interfere with her business. She was now in Broad Street, and when she raised her eyes she saw her own house. A new building high and narrow, it stood in the main street at the corner of a lane, the ground-floor windows filled with light goods, and underneath them black hats trimmed with wings and tails of birds. There were also children’s dresses, and a few neckties trimmed with white lace.

As she entered the shop Mrs. Ede, who was in the front kitchen, cried, ‘Well, is that you, Kate? Where have you been? I waited dinner an hour for you; and how tired you look!’

In her present state of mind Mrs. Ede was the last person Kate cared to meet.

‘What’s the matter, my dear? Aren’t you well? Shall I get you a glass of water?’

‘Oh no, mother; I’m all right. Can’t you see that I’m only very hot?’

‘But where have you been? I waited dinner an hour for you. It’s past two o’clock!’

Kate did not know how to account for her absence from home, but after a pause she answered, thinking of Mr. Lennox as she spoke, ‘Mrs. Barnes kept me waiting above an hour trying her dress on, and then I was so done up with night-watching and sewing that I thought I’d go for a walk,’ and after wiping her weary hot face she asked her mother-in-law if many people had been in the shop that morning.

‘Well, yes, half a dozen or more,’ Mrs. Ede answered, and began to recount the different events of the morning. Mrs. White had bought one of the aprons; she said she hadn’t seen the pattern before; a stranger had taken another; and Miss Sargent had called and wanted to know how much it would cost to remake her blue dress.

‘Oh, I know; she wants me to reline the skirt and put new trimming on the bodice for seven and sixpence; we can do without her custom. What then?’

‘And then—ah! I was forgetting—Mrs. West came in to tell us that her friend Mrs. Wood, the bookseller’s wife, you know, up the street, was going to be confined, and would want some baby-linen, and she recommended her here.’

‘Did you see nobody else?’

‘Well, yes, a young man who bought half a dozen pocket-handkerchiefs; I let him have the half-dozen for four shillings; and I sold a pink necktie to one of the factory hands over the way.’

‘Why, mother, you’ve done a deal of business, and I’m glad about the baby-linen. We’ve a lot in stock, and it hasn’t gone off well. I don’t know Mrs. Wood, but it’s very kind of Mrs. West to recommend us; and how has Hender been getting on with the skirt?’

‘Well, I must say she has been working very well; she was here at half-past eight, and she did not stop away above three-quarters of an hour for dinner.’

‘I’m glad of that, for I was never so backward in my life with my work, what with Ralph being ill and Mr. — - ‘

Kate tried here to stop herself. The conversation had so far been an agreeable one, and she did not wish to spoil it by alluding to a subject on which there was no likelihood of their agreeing. But her mother-in-law, guessing that Kate was thinking of the mummer, said, ‘Yes, I wanted to talk to you about that. He hasn’t sent anyone to take away his things, and he didn’t even speak when I took him up his breakfast this morning.’

‘I don’t think Mr. Lennox is leaving us,’ she answered, after a pause. ‘I thought it was settled last night that he was to be told that he mustn’t bring friends home after eleven o’clock at night. When I see him I’ll speak to him about it.’

‘The house is yours, deary. If you’re satisfied, I am.’ And Kate walked into the kitchen, and when she had finished her dinner she went upstairs to see Ralph, whom Mrs. Ede declared to be much better. On passing the workroom the door opened suddenly and the bright faces of the little girls darted out.

‘Oh, is that you, Mrs. Ede? How we’ve missed you all the morning!’ Annie cried.

‘And Miss Hender has been so busy that she had to get me to help her with the skirt, and I did a great long piece myself without a mistake. Didn’t I, Miss Hender?’

‘I’m going to see my husband,’ said Kate, smiling; ‘but I shall be down presently, and I’ve bought something for you.’

‘Oh, what is it?’ cried Annie excitedly.

‘You shall see presently.’

Ralph was lying still in bed, propped up in his usual attitude, with his legs tucked under him.

‘Don’t you think we might open something?’ she said, as she sat down by the bedside; ‘and your sheets want changing.’

‘Oh, if you’ve only come in to turn everything upside-down, you might as well have stayed away.’ He spoke with difficulty, in a thin wheeze.

‘I think the pills did me good last night,’ he said, after a pause; and then added, laughing as much as his breath would allow him, ‘and what a rage mother was in! But tell me, what were they doing downstairs? Were there any ladies there? I was too bad to think of anything.’

‘Yes, some of the ladies from the theatre,’ Kate answered. ‘But I don’t think mother had a right to kick up all the row she did.’

‘And it just came in upon her prayers,’ Ralph replied, smiling.

Although cross-grained, Mr. Ede was not always an unpleasant man, and often in sudden flashes of affection the kind heart of his mother was recognizable in him.

‘You mustn’t laugh, Ralph,’ said Kate, looking aside, for the comic side of the question had suddenly dawned upon her.

But their hilarity was not of long endurance. Ralph was seized with a fit of coughing, and when this was over he lay back exhausted. At last he said:

‘But where have you been all the day? We’ve been wondering what had become of you.’

The question, although not put unkindly, annoyed Kate. ‘One would think I’d come back from a long journey’, she said to herself. ‘It’s just as Hender says; if I’m out half an hour more than my time everyone is, as they say, “wondering what has become of me.”‘ Assuming an air of indifference, she told him that Mrs. Barnes kept her a long time, and that she went for a walk afterwards.

‘I’m glad of that,’ he said. ‘You wanted a walk after being shut up with me three nights running. And what a time you must have had of it! But tell me what you’ve been doing in the shop.’

She told him that ‘mother’ had sold all the aprons, and he said: ‘I knew they’d sell. I told you so, didn’t I?’

‘You did, dear,’ said Kate, seeking to satisfy him; ‘but you mustn’t talk so much; you’ll make yourself bad again.’

‘But are you going?’

‘I’ve been out so long that I’ve a lot to do; but I’ll come back and see you in the evening.’

‘Well, then, kiss me before you go.’

As she kissed him, she remembered the struggle in the potteries, and it appeared strange to her that she should now be giving as a matter of course what she had refused an hour ago. She had always complied with the ordinances of the marriage state without passion or revolt, but now it disgusted her to kiss her husband, and as she stepped into the passage she almost walked into Mr. Lennox’s room unconsciously, without knowing what she was doing, beguiled by the natural sentiment that a woman feels in the room of a man she is interested in. Hoping that Mrs. Ede had not yet set everything straight, she went on to make sure. Slippers and boots lay about; the portmanteau yawned wide open, with some soiled shirts on the top; a pair of trousers trailed from a chair on the floor. Annoyed at the mother’s negligence, Kate hung the trousers on the door, placed the slippers tidily by his bedside, and put away the soiled linen. But in doing so she could not refrain from glancing at the contents of the portmanteau. She saw many of the traces which follow those who frequent women’s society. The duchess works a pair of slippers for her lover, and the chorus-girl does the same. The merchant’s wife, as she holds the loved hand under the ledge of her box at the theatre, clasps the ring she had given; the rich widow opposite has a jewel-case in her pocket which will presently be sent round to the stage-door for the tenor, who is now thinking of his high B flat.

Under the shirts Kate found a pair of slippers, a pin-cushion, and the inevitable ring. But there were other presents more characteristic of the man: there was a bracelet, a scent-bottle, and two pots of *pâté de foie gras* wrapped up in a lace-trimmed chemise. Kate examined everything, but without being able to adduce any conclusion beyond a vague surmise that Lennox lived in a different world from hers. The *foie gras* suggested delicacy of living, the chemise immorality, the bottle of scent refinement of taste; the bracelet she could make

nothing of. Prosaic and vulgar as were all these articles, in the dressmaker's imagination they became both poetized and purified. An infinite sadness, that she could not explain, rose up through her mind, and, staring vaguely at the pious exhortations hung on the wall - 'Thou art my will,' 'Thou art my hope'—she thought of Mr. Lennox's wounded legs, and asked herself if his bed were soft, and if she could do anything to make him more comfortable. It vexed her to see that he had chosen to use the basin-stand made out of a triangular board set in a corner instead of the proper one, where she had hung two clean towels; and it was not until she remembered the little girls that she was able to tear herself away.

'What have you got for us?' said four red lips as Kate entered.

'Oh, you must guess,' she replied, taking a chair, and bidding Miss Hender good-morning.

'An apple?' cried Annie.

'No.'

'An orange?' cried Lizzie.

Kate shook her head, and at the sight of their bright looks she felt her spirits return to her.

'No, it is sweetstuff.'

'Brandy balls?'

'No.'

'Toffee.'

'Yes; Annie has guessed right,' said Kate, as she divided the toffee equally between the two.

'And do I get nothing for guessing right?' said Annie doubtfully.

'Oh, for shame, Annie! I didn't think you were greedy!'

'I think I ought to have the most,' replied Lizzie in self-defence. 'Had it not been for me Miss Hender would never have got through her skirt. I helped you famously, didn't I, Miss Hender?'

The assistant nodded an impatient assent and gazed at her mistress curiously. But while the children were present, she could only watch her employer's face, and strive to read it.

And unconscious of the scrutiny, Kate sat idly talking of the skirt that was finished. The clicking of the needles sounded as music in her ears, and she abandoned herself to all sorts of soft and floating reveries. Not for years had she known what it was to take her fill of rest; and her thoughts swayed, now on one side and then on the other, as voluptuously as flowers, and hid themselves in the luxurious current of idleness which lapped loosely around her.

The afternoon passed delightfully, full of ease and pleasant quiet, Hender telling them how *Les Cloches* had gone the night before: of Miss Leslie's spirited singing, of the cider song, of Joe Mortimer's splendid miser scene, of Bret's success in the barcarole. So eagerly did she speak of them that one would have thought she herself had received the applause she described. Kate listened dreamily, and the little girls sucked toffee, staring the while with interested eyes.

Chapter VI

But Kate could not manage to see Mr. Lennox that evening or the next. He came in very late, and was away before she was down. She tormented herself trying to find reasons for his absence, and it pained her to think that it might be because the breakfasts were not to his taste. It seemed strange to her, too, that when a man cared to walk about the potteries with a woman, and talked as nicely as he had done to her, that he should not take the trouble to come and see her, if only to say good-morning; and in a thousand different ways did these thoughts turn and twist in Kate's brain, as she sat sewing opposite Hender in the workroom. This young woman had made up her mind that there was something between the stage-manager and her employer, and it irritated her when Kate said she had not seen him for the last two days. Kate was not very successful either in extracting theatrical news from Hender. 'If she's going to be close with me, I'll show her that two can play at that game,' and she answered that she had not noticed any limp. But Mrs. Ede told Kate he limped so badly that she felt sure he must have met with an accident. Which was she to believe? Mother, of course; but feeling that only direct news of him would satisfy her, she waited next morning in the kitchen. But the trick was not successful; she was serving in the shop, and heard him leave by the side door. Whether he had done this on purpose to avoid her, or whether it was the result of chance, Kate passed the morning in considering. She had hitherto succeeded in completely ignoring their ridiculous fall amid the teacups, but the memory of it now surged up in her mind; and certain coarse details that she had forgotten continued to recur to her with a singular persistency; deaf to Hender's conversation, she sat sullenly sewing, hating even to go down to the shop to attend when Mrs. Ede called from below that there was a customer waiting.

About three o'clock Mrs. Ede's voice was heard.

'Kate, come down; there is someone in the shop.'

Passing round the counter, she found herself face to face with a well-dressed woman.

'I was recommended here by Mrs. West,' the lady said, after a slight hesitation, 'to buy a set of baby clothes.'

'Is it for a new-born infant?' Kate asked, putting on her shop airs.

'Well, the baby is not born yet, but I hope soon will be.'

'Oh, I beg pardon,' said Kate, casting a rapid glance in the direction of the lady's waist.

The baby clothes were kept in a box under the counter, and in a few moments Kate reappeared with a bundle of flannels.

'You will find these of the very best quality; will you feel the warmth of this, ma'am?' she said, spreading out something that looked like two large towels.

The lady seemed satisfied with the quality, but from her manner of examining the strings Kate judged she was at her first confinement, and with short phrases and quick movements proceeded to explain how the infant was to be laid in the middle, and how the tapes were to be tied across.

'And you will want a hood and cloak? We have some very nice ones at two pounds ten; but perhaps you would not like to give so much?'

Without replying to this question, the lady asked to see the articles referred to, and then, beneath the men's shirts that hung just above their heads, the two women talked with many genuine airs of mystery and covert subtlety. The lady spoke of her fears, of how much she wished the next fortnight was over, of her husband, of how long she had been married. She was Mrs. Wood, the stationer's wife in Piccadilly. Kate said she knew her customer's shop perfectly, and assumed a sad expression when in her turn she was asked if she had any children. On her replying in the negative, Mrs. Wood said, with a sigh of foreboding, that people were possibly just as well without them.

It was at this moment that Mr. Lennox entered, and Kate tried to sweep away and to hide up the things that were on the counter. Mrs. Wood was mildly embarrassed, and with a movement of retiring she attempted to resume the conversation.

'Very well, Mrs. Ede,' she said; 'I quite agree with you—and I'll call again about those pocket-handkerchiefs.'

But Kate, in her anxiety not to lose a chance of doing a bit of business, foolishly replied:

'Yes, but about those baby clothes—shall I send them, Mrs. Wood?'

Mrs. Wood murmured something inaudible in reply, and as she sidled and backed out of the shop she bumped against Mr. Lennox.

He lifted his big hat and strove to make way for her, but he had to get into a corner to allow her to pass out, and then, still apologizing, he took a step forwards, and leaning on the counter, said in a hurried voice:

'I've been waiting to see you for the last two days. Where have you been hiding yourself?'

The unexpected question disconcerted Kate, and instead of answering him coldly and briefly, as she had intended, said:

'Why, here; where did you expect me to be? But you've been out ever since,' she added simply.

'It wasn't my fault—the business I've had to do! I was in London yesterday, and only got back last night in time for the show. There was talk of our boss drying up, but I think it's all right. I'll tell you about that another time. I want you to come to the theatre to-morrow night. Here are some tickets for the centre circle. I'll come and sit with you when I get the curtain up, and we'll be able to talk.'

The worm does not easily realize the life of the fly, and Kate did not understand. The rapidly stated facts bewildered her, and she could only say, in answer to his again repeated question:

'Oh, I should like it so much, but it is impossible; if my mother-in-law heard of it I don't know what she would say.'

'Well, then, come to-night; but no, confound it! I shall be busy all to-night. Hayes, our acting manager, has been drunk for the last three days; he can't even make up the returns. No, no; you must come to-morrow night. Come with Hender; she's one of the dressers. I'll make that all right; you can tell her so from me. Will you promise to come?'

'I should like it so much; but what excuse can I give for being out till half-past ten at night?'

'You needn't stay till then; you can leave before the piece is half over. Say you went out for a walk.'

The most ingenious and complete fiction that Mr. Lennox's inventive brain might have worked out would not have appeased Kate's fears so completely as the simple suggestion of a

walk, and her face lit up with a glow of intelligence as she remembered how successfully she had herself made use of the same excuse.

‘Then you’ll come?’ he said, taking her look for an answer.

‘I’ll try,’ she replied, still hesitating.

‘Then that’s all right,’ he murmured, pressing two or three pieces of paper into her hands. ‘I’ve been thinking of you a great deal.’

Kate smiled slowly, and a slight flush for a moment illuminated the pale olive complexion.

‘I dreamt that we were going up to London together, and that your head was lying on my shoulder, and it was so nice and pleasant, and when I woke up I was disappointed.’

Kate shivered a little, and drew back as if afraid; and in the pause which ensued Mr. Lennox remembered an appointment.

‘I must be off now,’ he said, ‘there’s no help for it; but you won’t disappoint me, will you? The doors open at half-past six. If you’re there early I may be able to see you before the piece begins.’

And with a grand lift of the hat the actor hurried away, leaving Kate to examine the three pieces of paper he had given her.

It was clearly impossible for her to go to the theatre without her assistant finding it out; she must confide in Hender, who would be astonished, no doubt. And she was not wrong in her surmise; the news produced first an astonished stare, and then a look of satisfaction to be read: ‘Well, you are coming to your senses at last.’ Kate would have liked no more to be said on the subject, but the fact that her employer was going to meet Mr. Lennox at the theatre was not sufficient for Hender; she must needs question Kate how this change had come about in her. ‘Was she really spoons on the actor?’ At these words Kate, who wished to leave everything vague, the facts as well as her conception of them, declared that she would rather not go to the theatre at all, if such remarks were to be made. Whereupon Miss Hender took a view less carnal, and the two women discussed how old Mrs. Ede might be given the slip. The idea of the walk was not approved of; it was too simple; but on this point Kate would take no advice, although she accepted the suggestion that she was to go upstairs, and under the pretext of changing her petticoat, should fold her hat into her mantle and tie the two behind her just as she would a bustle; an ingenious device, but difficult to put into practice.

Ralph was out of bed, and, having been deprived of speech for more than a week, he followed Kate into the back room, worrying her with questions about the shop, his health, his mother, and Mr. Lennox.

At five o’clock Mrs. Ede came up to say she was going up the town to do a little marketing for Sunday, and to ask Kate to come down to the front kitchen, where she could be in sight of the shop. Miss Hender said nothing could have happened more fortunately, and, with many instructions as to where they should meet, she hurried away. But she was no sooner gone than Kate remembered she had no one to leave in charge of the shop. She should have asked one of the apprentices, but she hadn’t, and would have to turn the key in the door and leave her mother-in-law to come in by the side way. Ralph would open to her; it couldn’t be helped. Mr. Lennox was going away to-morrow; she must see him.

At that moment her mantle caused her some uneasiness; it didn’t seem to hang well, and it was impossible to go to the theatre in the gloves that had been lying in her pocket for the last month. She took a pair of grey thread from the window, but while pulling them on her face changed expression. Was it Ralph coming down the staircase? There was nobody else in the

house. Trembling, she waited for him to appear. Wheezing loudly, her husband dragged himself through the doorway.

‘What—do you look so fri-frightened at? You did-didn’t expect to see me, did you?’

‘No, I didn’t,’ Kate answered as if in a dream.

‘Feeling a good deal better, I thou-ght I would come down, but—but the stairs—have tried me.’

It was some time before he could speak again. At last he said:

‘Where are you going?’

‘I was just going for a walk.’

‘I don’t know how it is, but it seems to me that you’re always out now; always coming in or going out; never in the shop. If it wasn’t for my asthma I don’t think I’d ever be out of the shop, but women think of nothing but pleasure and—,’ a very rude word which she had never heard Ralph use before. But it might be that she was mistaken. Poor man! it was distressing to watch him gasping for breath. He leaned against the counter, and Kate begged him to let her help him upstairs, but he shook her off testily, saying that he understood himself better than anybody else did, and that he would look after the shop.

‘You’re going out? Well, go,’ and she hurried away, hoping that a customer would come in, for his great delight was the shop. ‘Attending on half a dozen customers will amuse him more than the play will amuse me,’ she said to herself, and a smile rose to her lips, for she imagined him taking advantage of her absence to rearrange the window. ‘But what can have brought him down?’ Kate asked herself. ‘Ah! that’s it,’ she said, for it had suddenly come into her mind that ever since she had told him of a certain sale of aprons and some unexpected orders for baby clothes he had often mentioned that the worst part of these asthmatic attacks was that they prevented his attendance in the shop. ‘The shop is his pleasure just as the theatre is Hender’s,’ Kate said as she hurried up Piccadilly to the theatre, her heart in her mouth, for her time was up. Fearing to miss Hender, she raced along, dodging the passengers with quick turns and twists. ‘It’s my only chance of seeing him; he’s going away tomorrow,’ and she was living so intensely in her own imagination that she neither saw nor heeded anybody until she suddenly heard somebody calling after her, ‘Kate! Kate! Kate!’ She turned round and faced her mother-in-law.

‘Where on earth are you going at that rate?’ said Mrs. Ede, who carried a small basket on her arm.

‘Only for a walk,’ Kate replied in a voice dry with enforced calmness.

‘Oh, for a walk; I’m glad of that, it will do you good. But which way are you going?’

‘Any where round about the town. Up on the hill, St. John’s Road.’

‘How curious! I was just thinking of going back that way. There’s a fruiterer’s shop where you can get potatoes a penny a stone cheaper than you can here.’

If a thunderbolt had ruined Hanley before her eyes at that moment, it would not have appeared to her of such importance as this theft of her evening’s pleasure. It was with difficulty that she saved herself from saying straight out that she was going to the theatre to see Mr. Lennox, and had a right to do so if she pleased.

‘But I like walking fast,’ she said; ‘perhaps I walk too fast for you?’

‘Oh no, not at all. My old legs are as good as your young ones. Kate, dear, what is the matter? Are you all right?’ she said, seeing how cross her daughter-in-law was looking.

‘Oh yes, I’m all right, but you do bother one so.’

This very injudicious phrase led to a demonstration of affection on the part of Mrs. Ede, and whatever were the chances of getting rid of her before, they were now reduced to nothing. The strain on her nerves was at height during the first half of the walk, for during that time she knew that Mr. Lennox was expecting her; afterwards, while bargaining with the fruiterer in St. John’s Road, she fell into despondency. Nothing seemed to matter now; she did not care what might befall her, and in silence she accompanied her mother-in-law home.

‘Now, mother, you must leave me; I’ve some work to finish.’

‘I’m sorry, Kate, if— - ‘

‘Mother, I’ve some work to finish; good-night.’

And she sat in the workroom waiting for Mr. Lennox. At last his heavy step was heard on the stairs; then, laying aside the shirt she was making, she stole out to meet him. He saw her as he scraped a match on the wall; dropping it, he put out his hands towards her.

‘Is that you, dear?’ he said. ‘Why didn’t you come to the theatre? We had a magnificent house.’

‘I couldn’t; I met my mother-in-law.’

The red embers of the match that had fallen on the floor now went out, and the indication of their faces was swept away in the darkness.

‘Let me get a light, dear.’ The intonation of his voice as he said ‘dear’ caused her an involuntary feeling of voluptuousness. She trembled as the vague outline of his big cheeks became clear in the red flame of the match which he held in his hollowed hands.

‘Won’t you come in?’ she heard him say a moment after.

‘No, I couldn’t; I must go upstairs in a minute. I only came to tell you, for I didn’t want you to go away angry; it wasn’t my fault. I should so much have liked to have gone to the theatre.’

‘It was a pity you didn’t come; I was waiting at the door for you. I could have sat by you the whole time.’

Kate’s heart died within her at thought of what she had lost, and after a long silence she said very mournfully:

‘Perhaps when you come back another time I shall be able to go to the theatre.’

‘We’ve done so well here that we’re going to get another date. I’ll write and let you know.’

‘Will you? And will you come back and lodge here?’

‘Of course, and I hope that I shan’t be so unlucky the next time as to fall down amid the crockery.’

At this they both laughed, and the conversation came to a pause.

‘I must bid you good-night now.’

‘But won’t you kiss me—just a kiss, so that I may have something to think of?’

‘Why do you want to kiss me? You have Miss Leslie to kiss.’

‘I never kissed Leslie; that’s all nonsense, and I want to kiss you because I love you.’

Kate made no answer, and, following her into the heavy darkness that hung around the foot of the staircase, he took her in his arms. She at first made no resistance, but the passion of his kiss caused her a sudden revolt, and she struggled with him.

‘Oh, Mr. Lennox, let me go, I beg of you,’ she said, speaking with her lips close to his. ‘Let me go, let me go; they will miss me.’

Possibly fearing another fall, Mr. Lennox loosed his embrace, and she left him.

Chapter VII

Next morning about eleven the mummer took off his hat in his very largest manner to the ladies, and the bow was so deferential, and seemed to betoken so much respect for the sex, that even Mrs. Ede could not help thinking that Mr. Lennox was very polite. Ralph too was impressed, as well he might be, so attentively did Dick listen to him, just as if nothing in the world concerned him as much as this last attack of asthma, and it was not until Mrs. Ede mentioned that they would be late for church that it occurred to Dick that his chance of catching the eleven o'clock train was growing more and more remote. With a hasty comment on his dilatoriness, he caught up a parcel and rug and shook hands with them all.

The cab rattled away, and Ralph proceeded up the red, silent streets towards the Wesleyan church, walking very slowly between his womankind.

'There's no doubt but that Mr. Lennox is a very nice man,' he said, after they had gone some twenty or thirty paces - 'a very nice man indeed; you must admit, mother, that you were wrong.'

'He's polite, if you will,' replied Mrs. Ede, who for the last few minutes had been considering the ungodliness of travelling on a Sunday.

'Don't walk so fast,' Ralph cried.

'Well, then, we shall be late for church!'

'Which, then, is the most important in your eyes—Mr. Peppencott's sermon or my breath?'

'I'm not thinking of Mr. Peppencott's sermon.'

'Then of his voice in the prayer. Lennox may be no better than an actor,' he continued, 'but he's more fellow-feeling than you have. You saw yourself how interested he was in my complaint, and I shall try the cigarettes that used to give his mother relief.' He appealed to Kate, who answered him that it would be as well to try the cigarettes, and her thoughts floated away into a regret that Mr. Lennox had not been able to come to church with them, for she was reckoned to have a good voice. It may have been a memory of Dick that enabled her to pour her voice into the hymn, singing it more lustily than Mrs. Ede ever heard her sing it before. It seemed to Mrs. Ede that only God's grace could enable anyone to sing as Kate was singing, and when the minister began to preach and Kate sat down, her eyes fixed, Mrs. Ede rejoiced. 'The word of God has reached her at last,' she said. 'Never have I seen her listen so intently before to Mr. Peppencott.' Kate sat quite still, almost unconscious of the life around her, remembering that it was on her way from the potteries that she had learnt that there is a life within us deeper and more intense than the life without us. Dick's kisses had angered her at the moment, but in recollection they were inexpressibly dear to her. Her fear had been that time would dim her recollection of them, and her great joy was to discover that this was not so, and that she could recall the intonations of his voice and the colour of his eyes and the words he spoke to her, reliving them in imagination more intensely than while she was actually in his arms just before that terrible fall or in the shop and frightened lest Mrs. Ede or Ralph should come in and surprise them. But in imagination she was secure from interruption and hindrance, and could taste over and over again the words that he had spoken: 'I shall be back in three months, dear one.'

A great part of her happiness was in the fact that it was all within herself, that none knew of it; had she wished to communicate it, she could not have done so. It was a life within her life,

a voice in her heart which she could hear at any moment, and it was a voice so sweet and intense that it could close her ears to her husband and her mother-in-law, who during dinner fell into one of their habitual quarrels.

Ralph, who had not forgotten his mother's lack of sympathy on their way to church, maintained the favourable opinion he had formed of Mr. Lennox. 'It's unchristian,' he said, 'to condemn a man because of the trade or profession he follows,' and somewhat abashed, his mother answered: 'I've always been taught to believe that people who don't go to church lead godless lives.'

Sunday was kept strictly in this family. Three services were attended regularly. Kate hoped to recover the sensations of the morning, and attended church in the afternoon. But the whole place seemed changed. The cold white walls chilled her; the people about her appeared to her in a very small and miserable light, and she was glad to get home. Her thoughts went back to the book she had fallen asleep over last Sunday night when she sat by her husband's bedside, and when the house was quiet she went upstairs and fetched it. But after reading a few pages the heat of the house seemed to her intolerable. There was no place to go to for a walk except St. John's Road, and there, turning listlessly over the pages of the old novel, the time passed imperceptibly. It was like sitting on the sea-shore; the hills extended like an horizon, and as the sea dreamer strives to pierce the long illimitable line of the wave and follows the path of the sailing ship, so did Kate gaze out of the sweeping green line that enclosed all she knew of the world, and strove to look beyond into the country to where her friend was going.

Northwood, with its hundreds of sharp roofs and windows, seemed to be dropping into a Sunday doze, under pale salmon-coloured tints, and the bells of its church sounded clearer and clearer at each peal. Warm airs passed over the red roofs of Southwark, and below in the vast hollow of the valley all was still, all seemed abandoned as a desert; no whiff of white steam was blown from the collieries; no black cloud of smoke rolled from the factory chimneys, and they raised their tall stems like a suddenly dismantled forest to a wan, an almost colourless sky. The hills alone maintained their unchangeable aspect.

Chapter VIII

By well-known ways the dog comes back to his kennel, the sheep to the fold the horse to the stable, and even so did Kate return to her sentimental self. One day she was turning over the local paper, and suddenly, as if obeying a long forgotten instinct, her eyes wandered to the poetry column, and again, just as in old time, she was caught by the same simple sentiments of sadness and longing. She found there the usual song, in which *regret* rhymes to *forget*. The same dear questions which used to enchant seven years ago were again asked in the same simple fashion; and they touched her now as they had before. She refound all her old dreams. It seemed as if not a day had passed over her. When she was a girl she used to collect every scrap of love poetry that appeared in the local paper, and paste them into a book, and now, the events of the week having roused her from the lethargy into which she had fallen, she turned for a poem to the *Hanley Courier* as instinctively as an awakened child turns to the breast.

The verses she happened to hit on were after her own heart, and just what were required to complete the transformation of her character:

‘I love thee, I love thee, how fondly, how well
Let the years that are coming my constancy tell;
I think of thee daily, my night-thoughts are thine;
In fairy-like vision thy hand presses mine;
And even though absent you dwell in my heart;
Of all that is dear to me, dearest, thou art.’

In reading these lines Kate’s heart began to beat quickly, her eyes filled with tears, and wrapped in brightness, like a far distant coast-line, a vision of her girlhood arose. She recalled the emotions she once experienced, the books she had read, and the poetry that was lying upstairs in an old trunk pushed under the bed. It seemed to her wonderful that it had been forgotten so long; her memory skipped from one fragment to the other, picking up a word here, a phrase there, until a remembrance of her favourite novel seized her; she became the heroine of the absurd fiction, substituting herself for the lady who used to read Byron and Shelley to the gentleman who went to India in despair.

As the fitness of the comparison dawned upon her, she yielded to an ineffable sentiment of weakness: George was the husband’s name in the book, she was Helene, and Dick was the lover to whom she could not, would not, give herself, and who on that account had gone away in despair. The coincidence appeared to her as something marvellous, something above nature, and she turned it over, examined it in her mind, as a child would a toy, till, forgetful of her desire to overlook these relics of old times, she went upstairs to the workroom.

The missed visit to the theatre was a favourite theme of conversation between the two women. Kate listened to what went on behind the scenes with greater indulgence, and she seemed to become more accustomed to the idea that Bill and Hender were something more than friends. She was conscious of disloyalty to her own upbringing and to her mother-in-law who loved her, and she often blamed herself and resolved never to allow Hender to speak ill again of Mrs. Ede. But the temptation to complain was insidious. It was not every woman who would consent, as she did, to live under the same roof as her mother-in-law, and Hender, who hated Mrs. Ede, who spoke of her as the ‘hag,’ never lost an opportunity of pointing out the fact that the house was Kate’s house and not Mrs. Ede’s. The first time Hender said, ‘After all, the house is yours,’ Kate was pleased, but the girl insisted too much, and Kate was

often irritated against her assistant, and she often raged inwardly. It was abominable to have her thoughts interpreted by Hender. She loved her mother-in-law dearly, she didn't know what she'd do without her, but—So it went on; struggle as she would with herself, there still lay at the bottom of her mind the thought that Mrs. Ede had prevented her from going that evening to the theatre, and turn, twist, and wander away as she would, it invariably came back to her.

Frequently Miss Hender had to repeat her questions before she obtained an intelligible answer, and often, without even vouchsafing a reply, Kate would pitch her work aside nervously. Her thoughts were not in her work; she waited impatiently for an opportunity of turning out the old trunk, full of the trinkets, books, verses, remembrances of her youth, which lay under her bed, pushed up against the wall. But a free hour was only possible when Ralph was out. Then her mother-in-law had to mind the shop, and Kate would be sure of privacy at the top of the house.

There was no valid reason why she should dread being found out in so innocent an amusement as turning over a few old papers. Her fear was merely an unreasoned and nervous apprehension of ridicule. Ever since she could remember, her sentimentality was always a subject either of mourning or pity; in allowing it to die out of her heart she had learned to feel ashamed of it; the idea of being discovered going back to it revolted her, and she did not know which would annoy her the most, her husband's sneers or Mrs. Ede's blank alarm. Kate remembered how she used to be told that novels must be wicked and sinful because there was nothing in them that led the soul to God, and she resolved to avoid further lectures on this subject. She devoted herself to the task of persuading Ralph to leave his counter and to go out for a walk. This was not easy, but she arrived at last at the point of helping him on with his coat and handing him his hat; then, conducting him to the door, she bade him not to walk fast and to be sure to keep in the sun. She then went upstairs, her mind relaxed, determined to enjoy herself to the extent of allowing her thoughts for an hour or so to wander at their own sweet will.

The trunk was an oblong box covered with brown hair; to pull it out she had to get under the bed, and it was with trembling and eager fingers that she untied the old twisted cords. Remembrance with Kate was a cult, but her husband's indifference and her mother-in-law's hard, determined opposition had forced the past out of sight; but now on the first encouragement it gushed forth like a suppressed fountain that an incautious hand had suddenly liberated. And with what joy she turned over the old books! She examined the colour of the covers, she read a phrase here and there: they were all so dear to her that she did not know which she loved the best. Scenes, heroes, and heroines long forgotten came back to her, and in what minuteness, and how vividly! It appeared to her that she could not go on fast enough; her emotion gained upon her until she became quite hysterical; in turning feverishly over some papers a withered pansy floated into her lap. Tears started to her eyes, and she pressed the poor little flower, forgotten so long, to her lips. She could not remember when she gathered it, but it had come to her. Her lips quivered, the light seemed to be growing dark, and a sudden sense of misery eclipsed her happiness, and unable to restrain herself any longer, she burst into a tumultuous storm of sobs.

But after having cried for a few minutes her passion subsided, and she wiped the tears from her hands and face, and, smiling at herself, she continued her search. Everything belonging to that time interested her, verses and faded flowers; but her thoughts were especially centred on an old copybook in which she kept the fragments of poetry that used to strike her fancy at the moment. When she came upon it her heart beat quicker, and with mild sentiments of regret she read through the slips of newspaper; they were all the same, but as long as anyone was

spoken of as being the nearest and the dearest Kate was satisfied. Even the bonbon mottoes, of which there were large numbers, drew from her the deepest sighs. The little Cupid firing at a target in the shape of a heart, with ‘Tom Smith & Co., London,’ printed in small letters underneath, did not prevent her from sharing the sentiment expressed in the lines:

‘Let this cracker, torn asunder,
Be an emblem of my heart;
And as we have shared the plunder,
Pray you of my love take part.’

Sitting on the floor, with one hand leaning on the open trunk, she read, letting her thoughts drift through past scenes and sensations. All was far away; and she turned over the relics that the past had thrown up on the shore of the present without seeing any connection between them and the needs of the moment until she lit on the following verses:

‘Wearily I’m waiting for you,
For your absence watched in vain
Ask myself the hopeless question,
Will he ever come again?

‘All these years, am I forgotten?
Or in absence are you true?
Oh, my darling, ‘tis so lonely,
Watching, waiting here for you!

‘Has your heart from its allegiance
Turned to greet a fairer face?
Have you welcomed in another
Charms you missed in me, and grace?

‘Long, long years I have been waiting,
Bearing up against my pain;
All my thoughts and vows have vanished,
Will they ever come again?

‘Yes, for woman’s faith ne’er leaves her,
And my trust outweighs my fears;
And I still will wait his coming,
Though it may not be for years.’

As the deer, when he believes he has eluded the hounds, leaves the burning plains and plunges into the cool woodland water, Kate bathed her tired soul, letting it drink its fill of this very simple poem. The sentiment came to her tenderly, through the weak words; and melting with joy, she repeated them over and over again.

At last her sad face lit up with a smile. It had occurred to her to send the poem that gave her so much pleasure to Dick. It would make him think of her when he was far away; it would tell him that she had not forgotten him. The idea pleased her so much that it did not occur to her to think if she would be doing wrong in sending these verses to her lodger, and with renewed ardour and happiness she continued her search among her books. There was no question in her mind as to which she would read, and she anticipated hours of delight in tracing resemblances between herself and the lady who used to read Byron and Shelley to her aristocratic lover. She feared at first she had lost this novel, but when it was discovered it was put aside for immediate use. The next that came under her hand was the story of a country doctor. In this instance the medical hero had poisoned one sister to whom he was secretly

married in order that he might wed a second. Kate at first hesitated, but remembering that there was an elopement, with a carriage overturned in a muddy lane, she decided upon looking it through again. Another book related the love of a young lady who found herself in the awkward predicament of not being able to care for anyone but her groom, who was lucky enough to be the possessor of the most wonderful violet eyes. The fourth described the distressing position of a young clergyman who, when he told the lady of his choice that his means for the moment did not admit of his taking a wife, was answered that it did not matter, for in the meantime she was quite willing to be his mistress. This devotion and self-sacrifice touched Kate so deeply that she was forced to pause in her search to consider how those who have loved much are forgiven. But at this moment Mrs. Ede entered.

'Oh, Kate, what are you doing?'

Although the question was asked in an intonation of voice affecting to be one of astonishment only, there was nevertheless in it an accent of reproof that was especially irritating to Kate in her present mood. A deaf anger against her mother-in-law's interference oppressed her, but getting the better of it, she said quietly, though somewhat sullenly:

'You always want to know what I'm doing! I declare, one can't turn round but you're after me, just like a shadow.'

'What you say is unjust, Kate,' replied the old woman warmly. 'I'm sure I never pry after you.'

'Well, anyhow, there it is: I'm looking out for a book to read in the evenings, if you want to know.'

'I thought you'd given up reading those vain and sinful books; they can't do you any good.'

'What harm can they do me?'

'They turn your thoughts from Christ. I've looked into them to see that I may not be speaking wrongly, and I've found them nothing but vain accounts of the world and its worldliness. I didn't read far, but what I saw was a lot of excusing of women who couldn't love their husbands, and much sighing after riches and pleasure. I thanked God you'd given over such things. I believed your heart was turned towards Him. Now it grieves me bitterly to see I was mistaken.'

'I don't know what you mean. Ralph never said that there was any harm in my reading tales.'

'Ah! Ralph, I'm afraid, has never set a good example. I wouldn't blame him, for he's my own son, but I'd wish to see him not prizing so highly the things of the world.'

'We must live, though,' Kate answered, without quite understanding what she said.

'Live—of course we have to live; but it depends how we live and what we live for—whether it be to indulge the desires of the flesh, the desire of the eye, or to regain the image of God, to have the design of God again planted in our souls. This is what we should live for, and it is only thus that we shall find true happiness.'

Though these were memories of phrases heard in the pulpit, they were uttered by Mrs. Ede with a fervour, with a candour of belief, that took from them any appearance of artificiality; and Kate did not notice that her mother-in-law was using words that were not habitual to her.

'But what do you want me to do?' said Kate, who began to feel frightened.

'To go to Christ, to love Him. He is all we have to help us, and they who love Him truly are guided as to how to live righteously. Whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, it springs from or leads to the love of God and man.'

These words stirred Kate to her very entrails; a sudden gush of feeling brought the tears to her eyes, and she was on the point of throwing herself into Mrs. Ede's arms.

The temptation to have a good cry was almost irresistible, and the burden of her pent-up emotions was more than she could bear. But communing the while rapidly within herself, she hesitated, until an unexpected turn of thought harshly put it before her that she was being made a fool of—that she had a perfect right to look through her books and poetry, and that Hender's sneers were no more than she deserved for allowing a mother-in-law to bully her. Then the tears of sorrow became those of anger, and striving to speak as rudely as she could, she said:

'I don't talk about Christ as much as you, but He judges us by our hearts and not by our words. You would do well to humble yourself before you come to preach to others.'

'Dear Kate, it's because I see you interested in things that have no concern with God's love that I speak to you so. A man who never knows a thought of God has been staying here, and I fear he has led you— - '

At these words Kate threw the last papers into the trunk, pushed it away, and turned round fiercely.

'Led me into what? What do you mean? Mr. Lennox was here because Ralph wished him to be here. I think that you should know better than to say such things. I don't deserve it.'

On this Kate left the room, her face clouded and trembling with a passion that she did not quite feel. To just an appreciable extent she was conscious that it suited her convenience to quarrel with her mother-in-law. She was tired of the life she was leading; her whole heart was in her novels and poetry; and, determined to take in the *London Reader* or *Journal*, she called back to Mrs. Ede that she was going to consult Ralph on the matter.

He was in capital spirits. The affairs in the shop were going on more satisfactorily than usual, a fact which he did not fail to attribute to his superior commercial talents. 'A business like theirs went to the bad,' he declared, 'when there wasn't a man to look after it. Women liked being attended to by one of the other sex,' and beaming with artificial smiles, the little man measured out yards of ribbon, and suggested 'that they had a very superior thing in the way of petticoats just come from Manchester.' His health was also much improved, so much so that his asthmatic attack seemed to have done him good. A little colour flushed his cheeks around the edges of the thick beard. In the evenings after supper, when the shop was closed, an hour before they went up to prayers, he would talk of the sales he had made during the day, and speak authoritatively of the possibilities of enlarging the business. His ambition was to find someone in London who would forward them the latest fashions; somebody who would be clever enough to pick out and send them some stylish but simple dress that Kate could copy. He would work the advertisements, and if the articles were well set in the window he would answer for the rest. The great difficulty was, of course, the question of frontage, and Mr. Ede's face grew grave as he thought of his little windows. 'Nothing,' he said, 'can be done without plate-glass; five hundred pounds would buy out the fruit-seller, and throw the whole place into one'; and Kate, interested in all that was imaginative, would raise her eyes from the pages of her book and ask if there was no possibility of realizing this grand future.

She was reading a novel full of the most singular and exciting scenes. In it she discovered a character who reminded her of her husband, a courtier at the Court of Louis XIV., who said sharp things, and often made himself disagreeable, but there was something behind that pleased, and under the influence of this fancy she began to find new qualities in Ralph, the existence of which she had not before suspected. Sometimes the thought struck her that if he

had been always like what he was now she would have loved him better, and listening to a dispute which had arisen between him and his mother regarding the purchase of the fruiterer's premises, her smile deepened, and then, the humour of the likeness continuing to tickle her, she burst out laughing.

'What are you laughing at, Kate?' said her husband, looking admiringly at her pretty face. Mrs. Ede sternly continued her knitting, but Ralph seemed so pleased, and begged so good-naturedly to be told what the matter was, that the temptation to do so grew irresistible.

'You won't be angry if I tell you?'

'Angry, no. Why should I be angry?'

'You promise?'

'Yes, I promise,' replied Ralph, extremely curious.

'Well then, there is a cha-cha-rac-ter so—so like— - '

'Oh, if you want to tell me, don't laugh like that. I can't hear a word you're saying.'

'Oh it is so—so—so like— - '

'Yes, but do stop laughing and tell me.'

At last Kate had to stop laughing for want of breath, and she said, her voice still trembling:

'Well, there's a fellow in this book—you promise not to be angry?'

'Oh yes, I promise.'

'Well, then, there's someone in this book that does remind me so much—of you—that is to say, when you're cross, not as you are now.'

At this announcement Mrs. Ede looked up in astonishment, and she seemed as hurt as if Kate had slapped her in the face, whereas Ralph's face lighted up, his smile revealing through the heavy moustache the gap between his front teeth which had been filled with some white substance. Kate always noticed it with aversion, but Ralph, who was not susceptible to feminine revulsions of feelings, begged her to read the passage, and with an eagerness that surprised his mother. Without giving it a second thought she began, but she had not read half a dozen words before Mrs. Ede had gathered up her knitting and was preparing to leave the room.

'Oh, mother, don't go! I assure you there's no harm.'

'Leave her alone. I'm sick of all this nonsense about religion. I should like to know what harm we're doing,' said Ralph.

Kate made a movement to rise, but he laid his hand upon her arm, and a moment after Mrs. Ede was gone.

'Oh, do let me go and fetch her,' exclaimed Kate. 'I shouldn't—I know I shouldn't read these books. It pains her so much to see me wasting my time. She must be right.'

'There's no right about it; she'd bully us all if she had her way. Do be quiet, Kate! Do as I tell you, and let's hear the story.'

Relinquishing another half-hearted expostulation which rose to her lips, Kate commenced to read. Ralph was enchanted, and, deliciously tickled at the idea that he was like someone in print, he chuckled under his breath. Soon they came to the part that had struck Kate as being so particularly appropriate to her husband. It concerned a scene between this ascetic courtier

and a handsome, middle-aged widow who frequently gave him to understand that her feelings regarding him were of the tenderest kind; but on every occasion he pretended to misunderstand her. The humour of the whole thing consisted in the innocence of the lady, who fancied she had not explained herself sufficiently; and harassed with this idea, she pursued the courtier from the Court hall into the illuminated gardens, and there told him, and in language that admitted of no doubt, that she wished to marry him. The courtier was indignant, and answered her so tartly that Kate, even in reading it over a second time, could not refrain from fits of laughter.

‘It is—is so—s-o like what you w-wo-uld say if a wo-wo-man were to fol-low you,’ she said, with the tears rolling down her cheeks.

‘Is it really?’ asked Ralph, joining in the laugh, although in a way that did not seem to be very genuine. The fact was that he felt just a little piqued at being thought so indifferent to the charms of the other sex, and looked at his wife for a moment or two in a curious sort of way, trying to think how he should express himself. At last he said:

‘I’m sure that if it was my own Kate who was there I shouldn’t answer so crossly.’

Kate ceased laughing, and looked up at him so suddenly that she increased his embarrassment; but the remembrance that he was after all only speaking to his wife soon came to his aid, and confidentially he sat down beside her on the sofa. Her first impulse was to draw away from him—it was so long since he had spoken to her thus.

‘Could you never love me again if I were very kind to you?’

‘Of course I love you, Ralph.’

‘It wasn’t my fault if I was ill—one doesn’t feel inclined to love anyone in illness. Give me a kiss, dear.’

A recollection of how she had kissed Dick flashed across her mind, but in an instant it was gone; and bending her head, she laid her lips to her husband’s. It in no way disgusted her to do so; she was glad of the occasion, and was only surprised at the dull and obtuse anxiety she experienced. They then spoke of indifferent things, but the flow of conversation was often interrupted by complimentary phrases. While Ralph discoursed on his mother’s nonsense in always dragging religion into everything, Kate congratulated him on looking so much better; and, as she told him of the work she would have to get through at all costs before Friday, he either squeezed her hand or said that her hair was getting thicker, longer, and more beautiful than ever.

* * * * *

Next morning Kate received a letter from Dick, saying he was coming to Hanley on his return visit, and hoped that he would be able to have his old rooms.

Chapter IX

She would have liked to talk to Hender first, but Hender would not arrive for another hour, and nothing had ever seemed to her so important as that Dick should lodge with them. It was therefore with bated breath that she waited for Ralph to speak. They could not hope, he said, to find a nicer lodger; the little he had seen of him made him desirous of renewing the acquaintance, and he continued all through breakfast to eulogize Mr. Lennox. His mother, whose opinions were attacked, sat munching her bread and butter with indifference. But it was not permitted to anyone to be indifferent to Ralph's wishes, and, determined to resent the impertinence, he derisively asked his mother if she had any objections.

'You've a right to do what you like with your rooms; but I should like to know why you so particularly want this actor here. One would think he was a dear friend of yours to hear you talk. Is it the ten shillings a week he pays for his room and the few pence you make out of his breakfast you're hankering after?'

'Of course I want to keep my rooms let. Perhaps you might like to have them yourself; you could have all the clergymen in the town to see you once a week, and a very nice tea-party you'd make in the sitting-room.' Nor was this all; he continued to badger his mother with the bitterest taunts he could select. Quite calmly Kate watched him work himself into a passion, until he declared that he had other reasons more important than the ten shillings a week for wishing to have Mr. Lennox staying in the house. This statement caused Kate just a pang of uneasiness, and she begged for an explanation. Partly to reward her for having backed him up in the discussion, and through a wish to parade his own far-seeing views, he declared that Mr. Lennox might be of great use to them in their little business if he were so inclined. Kate could not repress a look of triumph; she knew now that nothing would keep him from having Dick in the house.

'Shall I write to him to-day, then, and say that we can let him have the rooms from next Monday?'

'Of course,' Ralph replied, and Kate went upstairs with Hender, who had just come in. The little girls were told to move aside; there was a lot of cutting to be done; this was said preparatory to telling them a little later on that they were too much in the way, and would have to go down and work in the front kitchen under the superintendence of Mrs. Ede. Hender was at the machine, but Kate, who had a dressing-gown on order, unrolled the blue silk and fidgeted round the table as if she had not enough room for laying out her pattern-sheets. Hender noticed these manoeuvres with some surprise, and when Kate said, 'Now, my dear children, I'm afraid you're very much in my way; you'd better go downstairs,' she looked up with the expression of one who expects to be told a secret. This manifest certitude that something was coming troubled Kate, and she thought it would be better after all to say nothing about Mr. Lennox, but again changing her mind, she said, assuming an air of indifference:

'Mr. Lennox will be here on Monday. I've just got a letter from him.'

'Oh, I'm so glad; for perhaps this time it will be possible to have one spree on the strict q.t.'

Kate was thinking of exactly the same thing, but Miss Hender's crude expression took the desire out of her heart, and she remained silent.

‘I’m sure it’s for you he’s coming,’ said the assistant. ‘I know he likes you; I could see it in his eyes. You can always see if a man likes you by his eyes.’

Although it afforded Kate a great deal of pleasure to think that Dick liked her, it was irritating to hear his feelings for her discussed; she could not forget she was a married woman, and she began to regret that she ever mentioned the subject at all, when Miss Hender said:

‘But what’s the use of his coming if you can’t get out? A man always expects a girl to be able to go out with him. The “hag” is sure to be about, and even if you did manage to give her the slip, there’s your husband. Lord! I hadn’t thought of that before. What damned luck! Don’t you wish he’d get ill again? Another fit of asthma would suit us down to the ground.’

The blood rushed to Kate’s face, and snapping nervously with the scissors in the air, she said:

‘I don’t know how you can bring yourself to speak in that way. How can you think that I would have my husband ill so that I might go to the theatre with Mr. Lennox? What do you fancy there is between us that makes you say such a thing as that?’

‘Oh, I really don’t know,’ Miss Hender answered with a toss of her head; ‘if you’re going to be hoighty-toighty I’ve done.’

Kate thought it very provoking that Hender could never speak except coarsely, and it would have given her satisfaction to have said something sharp, but she had let Hender into a good many of her secrets, and it would be most inconvenient to have her turn round on her. Not, indeed, that she supposed she’d be wicked enough to do anything of the kind, but still——

And influenced by these considerations, Kate determined not to quarrel with Hender, but to avoid speaking to her of Dick. Even with her own people she maintained an attitude of shy reserve until Dick arrived, declining on all occasions to discuss the subject, whether with her husband or mother-in-law. ‘I don’t care whether he comes or not; decide your quarrels as you like, I’ve had enough of them,’ was her invariable answer. This air of indifference ended by annoying Ralph, but she was willing to do that if it saved her from being forced into expressing an opinion—that was the great point; for with a woman’s instinct she had already divined that she would not be left out of the events of the coming week. But there was still another reason. She was a little ashamed of her own treachery. Otherwise her conscience did not trouble her; it was crushed beneath a weight of desire and expectancy, and for three or four days she moved about the house in a dream. When she met her husband on the stairs and he joked her about the roses in her cheeks, she smiled curiously, and begged him to let her pass. In the workroom she was happy, for the mechanical action of sewing allowed her to follow the train of her dreams, and drew the attention of those present away from her. She had tried her novels, but now the most exciting failed to fix her thoughts. The page swam before her eyes, a confusion of white and black dots, the book would fall upon her lap in a few minutes, and she would relapse again into thinking of what Dick would say to her, and of the hours that still separated them. On Sunday, without knowing why, she insisted on attending all the services. Ralph in no way cared for this excessive devotion, and he proposed to take her for a walk in the afternoon, but she preferred to accompany Mrs. Ede to church. It loosened the tension of her thoughts to raise her voice in the hymns, and the old woman’s gabble was pleasant to listen to on their way home—a sort of meaningless murmur in her ears while she was thinking of Dick, whom she might meet on the doorstep. It was, however, his portmanteau that they caught sight of in the passage when they opened the door. Ralph had taken it in; Lennox said that he had a lot of business to do with the acting manager, and would not return before they went up to prayers. Still Kate did not lose hope, and on the off chance that he might feel tired after his journey, and come home earlier than he expected, she endeavoured to prolong the conversation after supper. By turns she spoke to Mrs. Ede of the

sermons of the day, and to Ralph of the possibilities of enlarging the shop-front. But when she was forced to hear how the actor was to send them the new fashions from London, the old lady grew restive, as did Ralph when the conversation turned on the relative merits of the morning and afternoon sermon. It was the old story of the goat and the cabbage—each is uneasy in the other's company; and even before the usual time mother and son agreed that it would be better to say prayers and get to bed.

Kate would have given anything to see Dick that night, and she lay awake for hours listening for the sound of the well-known heavy footstep. At last it came, tramp, tramp, a dull, heavy, noisy flapping through the silence of the house. She trembled, fearing that he would mistake the door and come into their room; if he did, she felt she would die of shame. The footsteps approached nearer, nearer; her husband was snoring loudly, and, casting a glance at him, she wondered if she should have time to push the bolt to. But immediately after, Dick stumbled up the stairs into his room, and, hugging the thought that he was again under her roof, she fell to dreaming of their meeting in the morning, wondering if it would befall her to meet him on the stairs or in the shop face to face, or if she would catch sight of him darting out of the door hurrying to keep an appointment which he had already missed. Mrs. Ede usually took in the lodger's hot water, it not being considered quite right for Kate to go into a gentleman's room when he was in bed. But the next morning Mrs. Ede was out and Ralph was asleep, so there was nothing for it but to fill the jug.

Dick heard the door open, but didn't trouble to look round, thinking it was Mrs. Ede, and Kate glided to the wash handstand and put down the jug in the basin. But the clink of the delf caused him to look round.

'Oh, is that you, Kate?' he said, brushing aside with a wave of his bare arm his frizzly hair. 'I didn't expect to see so pretty a sight first thing in the morning. And how have you been?'

'I'm very well, thank you, sir,' Kate replied, retreating.

'Well, I don't see why you should run away like that. What have I done to offend you? You know,' he said, lowering his voice to a confidential whisper, 'I didn't write to you about the poetry you sent me (at least, I suppose it was from you, it had the Hanley post-mark; if it wasn't, I'll burn it), because I was afraid that your old mother or your husband might get hold of my letter.'

'I must go away now, sir; your hot water is there,' she said, looking towards the door, which was ajar.

'But tell me, wasn't it you who sent me the verses? I have them here, and I brought you a little something—I won't tell you what—in return.'

'I can't talk to you now,' said Kate, casting on him one swift glance of mingled admiration and love. Although somewhat inclined to corpulence, he was a fine man, and looked a tower of strength as he lay tossed back on the pillows, his big arms and thick brown throat bare. A flush rose to her cheeks when he said that he had brought her a little something; all the same, it was impossible to stop talking to him now, and hoping to make him understand her position, raising her voice, she said:

'And what can I get you for breakfast, sir? Would you like an omelette?'

'Oh, I shan't be able to wait for breakfast; I have to be up at our acting manager's by nine o'clock. What time is it now?'

'I think it's just going the half-hour, sir.'

‘Oh, then, I’ve lots of time yet,’ replied Dick, settling himself in a way that relieved Kate of all apprehension that he was going to spring out before her on the floor.

‘Then shall I get you breakfast, sir?’

‘No, thanks, I shan’t have time for that; I shall have something to eat up at Hayes’. But tell me, is there anyone listening?’ he said, lowering his voice again. ‘I want to speak to you now particularly, for I’m afraid I shall be out all day.’

Afraid that her husband might overhear her, Kate made a sign in the negative, and whispered, ‘Tomorrow at breakfast.’

Although the thought that he had a present for her delighted her all day, Kate was not satisfied; for there had been something pretty, something coquettish associated in her mind with carrying in his breakfast tray (doubtless a remembrance of the ribbon-bedecked chambermaids she had read of in novels), which was absent in the more menial office of taking in his hot water. Besides, had he not told her that he was going to be out all day? Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday she had dotted over with little plans; Thursday and Friday she knew nothing of. Saturday? Well, there was just a possibility that he might kiss her before going away. She felt irritated with herself for this thought, but could not rid herself of it; a bitter sense of voluptuousness burnt at the bottom of her heart, and she railed against life sullenly. She had missed him on Sunday; Monday had ended as abruptly as an empty nut, and Hender’s questions vexed and wearied her; she despaired of being able to go to the theatre. Nothing seemed to be going right. Even the little gold earrings which Dick took out of a velvet case and wanted to put into her ears only added a bitterer drop to her cup. All she could do was to hide them away where no one could find them. It tortured her to have to tell him that she could not wear them, and the kiss that he would ask for, and she could not refuse, seemed only a mockery. He was going away on Sunday, and this time she did not know when he would return. In addition to all these disappointments, she found herself obliged to go for a long walk on Tuesday afternoon to see a lady who had written to her about a dress. She did not get home until after six, and then it was only to learn that Mr. Lennox had been about the house all day, idling and talking to Ralph in the shop, and that they had gone off to the theatre together. Mrs. Ede was more than indignant, and when the little man was brought home at night, speaking painfully in little short gasps, she declared that it was a judgment upon him.

Next day he was unable to leave his room. When Dick was told what had happened he manifested much concern, and insisted on seeing the patient. Indeed, the sympathy he showed was so marked that Kate at first was tempted to doubt its sincerity. But she was wrong. Dick was truly sorry for poor Ralph, and he sat a long time with him, thinking what could be done to relieve him. He laid all the blame at his own door. He ought never to have kept a person liable to such a disease out so late at night. There was a particular chair in which Ralph always sat when he was affected with his asthma. It had a rail on which he could place his feet, and thus lift one knee almost on to a level with his chest; and in this position, his head on his hand, he would remain for hours groaning and wheezing. Dick watched him with an expression of genuine sorrow on his big face; and it was so clear that he regretted what he had done that for a moment even Mrs. Ede’s heart softened towards him. But the thaw was only momentary; she froze again into stone when he remarked that it was a pity that Mr. Ede was ill, for they were going to play *Madame Angot* on Thursday night, and he would like them all to come. The invitation flattered Ralph’s vanity, and, resolved not to be behindhand in civility, he declared between his gasps that no one should be disappointed on his account; he would feel highly complimented by Mr. Lennox’s taking Mrs. Ede to the play; and on the

spot it was arranged that Kate and Miss Hender should go together on Thursday night to see *Madame Angot*.

Kate murmured that she would be very pleased, and alluding to some work which had to be finished, she returned to the workroom to tell Hender the news.

‘That’s the best bit of news I’ve heard in this house for some time,’ Hender said.

Kate felt she could not endure another disappointment. All that was required of her now was to assume an air of indifference, and take care not to betray herself to Mrs. Ede, whom she suspected of watching her. But her excitement rendered her nervous, and she found the calm exterior she was so desirous of imposing on herself difficult to maintain. The uncertainty of her husband’s temper terrified her. It was liable at any moment to change, and on the night in question he might order her not to leave the house. If so, she asked herself if she would have the courage to disobey him. The answer slipped from her: it was impossible for her to fix her attention on anything; and although she had a press of work on her hands, she availed herself of every occasion to escape to the kitchen, where she might talk to Lizzie and Annie about the play, and explain to them the meaning of the poster, that she now understood thoroughly. Their childish looks and questions soothed the emotions that were burning within her.

Thursday morning especially seemed interminable, but at last the long-watched clock on their staircase struck the wished-for hour, and still settling their bonnet-strings, Kate and Hender strolled in the direction of the theatre. The evening was dry and clear, and over an embrasure of the hills beyond Stoke the sun was setting in a red and yellow mist. The streets were full of people; and where Piccadilly opens into the market-place, groups and couples of factory girls were eagerly talking, some stretching forward in a pose that showed the nape of the neck and an ear; others, graver of face, walking straight as reeds with their hands on their hips, the palms flat, and the fingers half encircling the narrow waists.

‘You must be glad to get out.’ Hender said. ‘To be cooped up in the way you are! I couldn’t stand it.’

‘Well, you see, I can enjoy myself all the more when I do get out.’

Kate would have liked to answer more tartly, but on second thoughts she decided it was not worth while. It bored her to be reminded of the humdrum life she led, and she had come to feel ashamed that she had been to the theatre only twice in her life, especially when it was mentioned in Dick’s presence.

‘We’re too soon,’ said Hender, breaking in jauntily on Kate’s reflections; ‘the doors aren’t open yet.’

‘I can see that.’

‘But what are you so cross about?’ asked Hender, who was not aware of what was passing in her employer’s mind.

‘I’m not cross. But how long shall we have to wait? Mr. Lennox said he’d meet us here, didn’t he?’

‘Oh, he can’t be long now, for here comes Wentworth with the keys to open the doors.’

The street they were in branched to the right and left rectangularly; opposite were large flat walls, red in colour, and roofed like a barn, and before one black doorway some fifty or sixty people had collected. The manager pushed his way through the crowd, and soon after, like a snake into a hole, the line began to disappear. Hender explained that this was the way to the pit, and what Kate took for a cellar was the stage entrance. A young man with a big nose,

whom she recognized as Mr. Montgomery, stared at them as he passed; then came two ladies—Miss Leslie and Miss Beaumont. Dick did not appear for some time after, but at last the big hat was seen coming along. Although, as usual, in a great hurry, he was apparently much pleased to see them, and he offered Kate his arm and conducted her across the street into the theatre.

‘You’re a bit early, you know. The curtain doesn’t go up for half an hour yet,’ he said, as they ascended a high flight of steps, at the top of which sat a woman with tickets in her hand.

‘We were afraid of being too late.’

‘It was very good of you to come. I hope you’ll have a pleasant evening; it would be quite a treat to act when you were in the house.’

‘But aren’t you going to act, sir?’

‘You mustn’t call me sir; everybody calls me Dick, and I don’t know anyone who has a better right to do so than you.’

‘But aren’t you going to act, Di—? I can’t say it.’

‘I don’t call it acting. I come on in the first act. I just do that to save the salary, for you know I have an interest in the tour.’

Kate had no idea as to what was meant by having ‘an interest in the tour,’ and she did not ask, fearing to waste her present happiness in questions. Her attention was so concentrated on the big man by her side that she scarcely knew she was in a theatre, and had as yet perceived neither the star-light nor the drop-curtain. Dick spoke to her of herself and of himself, but he said nothing that recalled any of the realities of her life, and when he suddenly lifted his hand from hers and whispered, ‘Here comes Miss Hender: we mustn’t appear too intimate before her,’ she experienced the sensation of one awaking out of a most delicious dream.

Hender cast a last retort at the two men with whom she was chaffing, and, descending through the chairs, said:

‘Mr. Lennox, you’re wanted behind.’

Dick promised to see them again when the act was over, and hastened away, and Hender, settling herself in her chair, looked at Kate in a way which said as distinctly as words, ‘Well, my young woman, you do go it when you’re out on the loose.’ But she refrained from putting her thoughts into words, possibly because she feared to turn her mistress from what she considered, too obviously, indeed, to be the right path.

They were sitting in the middle division of a gallery divided into three parts, where the twilight was broken by the yellow-painted backs of the chairs, and where a series of mirrors, framed in black wood, decorated the walls, reflecting monotonously different small corners of the house.

Only a dozen or fifteen people had as yet come in, and they moved about like melancholy shades; or, when sitting still, seemed like ink-spots on a dark background.

The two women looked down into the great pit, through which the crowd was rolling in one direction, a sort of human tide, a vague tumult in which little was distinguishable; a bald head or a bunch of yellow flowers in a woman’s bonnet flashed through the darkness for an instant like the crest of a wave. A dozen pale jets of a miserable iron gas-fitting hanging out of the shadows of the roof struggled in the gloom, leaving the outlines of the Muses above the proscenium as undefinable as the silhouettes of the shopkeepers in the pit. Over against the shopkeepers was the drop-curtain, the centre of which contained a romantic picture intended

to prepare the spectators for the play soon to begin. Kate admired the lake, and during the long interval it seemed to her bluer and more beautiful than any she had ever seen. Along the shores there were boats with sailors hoisting sails, and she began to wonder what was the destination of these boats, if the sailors were leaving their sweethearts or setting forth to regain them.

It seemed to Kate that the play was never going to begin, so long had she been kept waiting. She did not consult Hender, but possessed her soul in patience till a thin young man came up from under the stage, pushing his glasses higher on his beak-like nose. He took his place on the high stool; he squared his shoulders; looked around; waved his stick. The sparkling marriage chorus, with the fanciful peasants and the still more fanciful bridegroom in silk, the bright appearance of Clairette at the window, and the sympathy awakened by her love for the devil-may-care revolutionary poet seduced Kate like a sensual dream; and in all she saw and felt there was a mingled sense of nearness and remoteness, an extraordinary concentration, and an absence of her own proper individuality. Never had she heard such music. How suave it was compared with the austere and regular rhythm of the hymns she sang in church! The gay tripping measure of the market-woman's song filled her with visions and laughter. There was an accent of insincerity in the serenade that troubled her as a sudden cloud might the dreams of the most indolent of *lazzaroni*, but the beseeching passion of the duet revealed to her sympathies for parting lovers that even her favourite poetry had been unable to do. All her musical sensibilities rushed to her head like wine; it was only by a violent effort, full of acute pain, that she saved herself from raising her voice with those of the singers, and dreading a giddiness that might precipitate her into the pit, she remained staring blindly at the stage.

Her happiness would have been complete, if such violent emotions can be called happiness, had it not been for Hender. This young person, actuated probably by a desire of displaying her knowledge, could not be prevented from talking. As each actor or actress entered she explained their position in the company, and all she knew of their habits in private life. Mr. Mortimer's dispute the other night with Bill, the scene-shifter, necessitated quite a little tirade against drunkenness, and as it was necessary to tell of what had been said in the ladies' dressing-room, a description of Miss Beaumont's underclothing was introduced; it was very elegant—silk stockings and lace-trimmed chemises; whereas Miss Leslie's was declared to be much plainer. Once or twice Hender was asked to keep quiet, but Kate did not much mind. The thunder of applause which rose from a pit filled with noisy factory boys and girls was accepted in good faith, and it floated through her mind, elevating and exciting her emotions as the roar of the breakers on the shore does the dreams of a dreamer. But the star she was expecting had not yet appeared. She had seen Miss Leslie, Miss Beaumont, Joe Mortimer, and Frank Bret, and numberless other people, who had appeared in all sorts of dresses and had sung all kinds of enchanting songs, but Dick was nowhere to be found. She had searched vainly for him in the maze of colour that was being flashed before her eyes. Would he appear as a king, a monk, a shepherd, or would he wear a cocked hat? She did not know, and was too bewildered to think. She had a dim notion that he would do something wonderful, set everything to rights, that they would all bow down before him when he entered, and she watched every motion of the crowd, expecting it every moment to make way for him. But he did not appear, and at last they all went away singing. Her heart sank within her, but just when she had begun to lose hope, two men rushed across the stage and commenced to spy about and make plans. At first Kate did not recognize her lover, so completely was he disguised, but soon the dreadful truth commenced to dawn upon her. Oh, misery! Oh, horror! How could this be? And she closed her eyes to shut out her dreadful disappointment. Why had he done this thing? She had expected a king, and had found a policeman.

‘There he is, there he is!’ whispered Hender. ‘Don’t you see, ‘tis he who does the policeman? A French policeman! He drags the bride away at the end of the act, you know.’

Poor Kate felt very unhappy indeed. Her fanciful house of cards had fallen down and crushed her under the ruins. She felt she could no longer take an interest in anything. The rest of the act was torture to her. What pleasure could it be to her to see her lover, looking hideous, drag a bride away from her intended?

Kate wished that her lover had not chosen to act such a part, and she felt, dimly, perhaps, but intensely, that it was incongruous of him to exhibit himself to her as a policeman who at the end of the act dragged the bride away from her intended. And she could not understand why he should have chosen, if he loved her, to dress himself in such very unbecoming clothes. She thought she would like to run out of the theatre, but that was impossible. But when Dick came to her at the fall of the curtain and sat down by her side she forgot all about the foreign policeman; he was Dick again.

‘How did you like the piece, dear?’

‘Very much.’ It was on her tongue to ask him why he had chosen to play the policeman, but all that was over; why should she trouble him with questions? Yet the question in her mind betrayed itself, for, laying his hand affectionately on hers, he said that he felt that something had happened. Hender, who had seen Dick take Kate’s hand, thought that this was a moment for her to escape, but Kate begged of her to stay. Hender, however, feeling that her absence would be preferable to her company, mentioned that she must go; she had to speak to the manager on some business which she had forgotten till now.

‘Why did you want her to stay?’ said Dick, ‘don’t you like being alone with me?’ Kate answered him with a look, wondering all the while what could have induced him to play the part of that ugly policeman. ‘I’m sure you didn’t like the piece,’ he continued, ‘and yet I must say from behind it seemed to go very well; but then, there are so many things you miss from the wings.’

Kate understood nothing of what he said, but seeing that he was terribly sincere, and fearing to pain him, she hastened to give the piece her unqualified approbation.

‘I assure you I couldn’t have liked anything more—the music was so pretty.’

‘And how did you think I looked? It’s only a small part, you know, but at the same time it requires to be played. If there isn’t some go put into it the finale all goes to pot.’

Now Kate felt sure he was quizzing her, and at length she said, the desire to speak her mind triumphing over her shyness, ‘But why did you make yourself look like that? It wasn’t a nice part, was it?’

‘It’s only a trumpery bit of a thing, but it is better for me to take it than have another salary on the list. In the next act, you know, I come on as the Captain of the Guard.’

‘And will that be nice?’ Kate asked, her face flushing at the idea of seeing her lover in a red coat.

‘Oh yes, it looks well enough, but it isn’t an acting part. I’m only on for a few minutes. I’m only supposed to come on in search of the conspirators. I take a turn or two of the waltz with Miss Beaumont, who plays Lange, and it’s all over. Have you ever heard the waltz?’ Kate never had; so, drawing her close to him, he sang the soft flowing melody in her ear. In her nervousness she squeezed his hand passionately, and this encouraged him to say, ‘How I wish it were you that I had to dance with! How nice it would be to hold you in my arms! Would you like to be in my arms?’

Kate looked at him appealingly; but nothing more was said, and soon after Dick remembered he had to get the stage ready for the second act. As he hurried away, Hender appeared. She had been round to the 'pub.' to have a drink with Bill, and had been behind talking to her ladies, who, as she said, 'were all full of Dick's new mash.'

'They've seen you, and are as jealous as a lot of cats.'

'It's very wicked of them to say there's anything between Mr. Lennox and me,' replied Kate angrily. 'I suppose they think everybody is like themselves—a lot of actresses!'

Hender made no answer, but she turned up her nose at what she considered to be damned insulting to the profession.

However, in a few minutes her indignation evaporated, and she called Kate's attention to what a splendid house it was.

'I can tell you what; with a shilling pit, a sixpenny gallery, and the centre and side circles pretty well full, it soon runs up. There must be nigh on seventy pounds in—and that for Thursday night!'

They were now well on in the second act. The brilliancy of the 'Choeur des Merveilleuses,' the pleading pity of 'She is such a simple little thing,' the quaint drollery of the conspirators, made Kate forget the aspersions cast on Clairette's character. The light music foamed in her head like champagne, and in a whirling sense of intoxication a vision of Dick in a red coat passed and repassed before her. For this she had to wait a long time, but at last the sounds of trumpets were heard, and those on the stage cried that the soldiers were coming. Kate's heart throbbed, a mist swam before her eyes, and immediately after came a sense of bright calm; for, in all the splendour of uniform, Dick entered, big and stately, at the head of a regiment of girls in red tights. The close-fitting jacket had reduced his size, the top-boots gave a dignity to his legs. He was doubtless a fine man; to Kate he was more than divine. Then the sweet undulating tune he had sung in her ears began, and casting a glance of explanation in the direction of the gallery, he put his arm round Miss Beaumont's waist. The action caused Kate a heart-pang, but the strangeness of the scene she was witnessing distracted her thoughts. For immediately the other actors and actresses in their startling dresses selected partners, and the stage seemed transformed into a wonderful garden of colour swinging to the music of a fountain that, under the inspiration of the moonlight, broke from its monotonous chant into rhythmical variations. Dick, like a great tulip in his red uniform, turned in the middle, and Miss Beaumont, in her long yellow dress, sprawled upon him. Her dress was open at both sides, and each time she passed in front, Kate, filled with disgust, strove not to see the thick pink legs, which were visible to the knees. Miss Leslie in her bride's dress bloomed a lily white, as she danced with a man whose red calves and thighs seemed prolonged into his very chest. La Rivodière cast despairing glances at Lange, poor Pomponet strove to get to his bride, and all the blonde wigs and black collars of the conspirators were mixed amid the strange poke bonnets of the ladies, and the long swallow-tailed coats, reaching almost to the ground, flapped in and out of the legs of the female soldiers. Kate smiled feebly and drank in the music of the waltz. It was played over again; like a caged canary's song it haunted Clairette's orange-blossoms; like the voluptuous thrill of a nightingale singing in a rose-garden it flowed about Lange's heavy draperies and glistening bosom; like the varied chant of the mocking bird it came from under Ange Pitou's cocked hat. It was sung separately and in unison, and winding and unwinding itself, it penetrated into the deepest recesses of Kate's mind. It seduced like a deep slow perfume; it caressed with the long undulations of a beautiful snake and the mystery of a graceful cat; it whispered of fair pleasure places, where scent, music, and love are one, where lovers never grow weary, and where kisses endure for

ever. She was conscious of deep self-contentment, of dreamy idleness, of sad languor, and the charm to which she abandoned herself resembled the enervations of a beautiful climate, the softness of a church; she yearned for her lover and the fanciful life of which he was the centre, as one might for some ideal fatherland. The current of the music carried her far away, far beyond the great hills into a land of sleep, dream, and haze, and a wonderful tenderness swam within her as loose and as dim as the green sea depths, that a wave never stirs. She struggled, but it was only as one in a dream strives to lift himself out of the power that holds; and when the conductor waved his stick for the last time, and the curtain came down amid deafening applause, irritated and enervated, she shrank from Hender, as if anxious not to be wholly awakened.

The third act passed she scarcely knew how. She was overborne and over-tempted; all her blood seemed to be in her head and heart, and from time to time she was shaken with quick shudderings.

When Dick came to see her she scarcely understood what he said to her, and it annoyed her not to be able to answer him. When the word ‘love’ was pronounced she smiled, but her smile was one of pain, and she could not rouse herself from a sort of sad ecstasy. Gay as the tunes were, there was in every one a sort of inherent sadness which she felt but could not explain to Dick, who began to think that she was disappointed in the piece.

‘Disappointed! Oh no,’ she said, and they stood for a long while staring at a large golden moon, lighting up the street like a bull’s-eye.

‘How nice it is to be here out of that hot stuffy theatre!’ said Dick, putting his arm round her.

‘Oh, do you think so? I could listen to that music for ever.’

‘It is pretty, isn’t it? I’m so glad you liked it. I told you the waltz was lovely.’

‘Lovely! I should think so. I shall never forget it.’

She lost her habitual shyness in her enthusiasm, and sang the first bars with her face raised towards her lover’s; then, gaining courage from his look of astonishment and pleasure, she gave all the modulations with her full voice.

‘By Jove! you’ve a deuced nice soprano, and a devilish good ear too. ‘Pon my soul, you sing that waltz as well as Beaumont.’

‘Oh, Dick, you mustn’t laugh at me.’

‘I swear I’m not laughing. Sing it again; nobody’s listening.’

They were standing in the shade of a large warehouse; the line of slates making a crescent of the full moon, and amid the reverberating yards and brickways Kate’s voice sounded as penetrating and direct as a flute. The exquisite accuracy of her ear enabled her to give each note its just value. Dick was astonished, and he said when she had finished:

‘I really don’t want to flatter you, but with a little teaching you would sing far better than Beaumont. Your ear is perfect; it’s the production of the voice that wants looking to;’ and he talked to her of the different tunes, listening to what she had to say, and encouraging her to recall the music she had heard. He would beg her to repeat a phrase after him; he taught her how to emphasize the rhythm, and was anxious that she should learn the legend of Madame Angot.

‘Now,’ said Dick, ‘I’ll sing the symphony, and we’ll go through it with all the effects—one, two, three, four, ta ra ta ta ta ta ta.’

But as Kate attacked the first bar it was taken up by three or four male voices, the owners of which, judging by the sound, could not be more than forty or fifty yards away.

‘Here’s Montgomery, Joe Mortimer, and all that lot. I wouldn’t be caught here with you for anything.’

‘By going up this passage we can get home in two minutes.’

‘Can we? Well, let’s cut; but no, they’re too close on us. Do you go, dear; I’ll remain and tell them it was a lady singing out of that window. Here, take my latchkey. Off you go.’

Without another word Kate fled down the alley, and Dick was left to explain whatever he pleased concerning the mythical lady whom he declared he had been serenading.

When Kate arrived home that night she lay awake for hours, tossing restlessly, her brain whirling with tunes and parts of tunes. The conspirators’ chorus, the waltz song, the legend, and a dozen disconnected fragments of the opera all sang together in her ears, and in her insomnia she continued to take singing lessons from Dick. She was certain that he loved her, and the enchantment of her belief murmured in her ears all night long; and when she met Hender next morning, the desire to speak of Dick burnt her like a great thirst, and it was not until Hender left her to go to the theatre that she began to realize in all its direct brutality the fact that on the morrow she would have to bid him goodbye, perhaps for ever.

Her husband wheezed on the sofa, her mother-in-law read the Bible, sitting bolt upright in the armchair, and the shaded lamp covered the table with light, and fearing she might be provoked into shrieks or some violent manifestation of temper, she went to bed as early as she could. But there her torments became still more intolerable. All sorts of ideas and hallucinations, magnified and distorted, filled her brain, rendered astonishingly clear by the effects of insomnia. She saw over again the murders she had read of in her novels, and her imagination supplied details the author had not dreamed of. The elopements, with all their paraphernalia of moonlight and roses, came back to her…. But if she were never to see him again—if it were her fate to lie beside her husband always, to the end of her life! She buried her head in the pillows in the hopes of shutting out the sound of his snores.

At last she felt him moving, and a moment afterwards she heard him say, ‘There’s Mr. Lennox at the door; he can’t get in. Do go down and open it for him.’

‘Why don’t you go yourself?’ she answered, starting up into a sitting position.

‘How am I to go? You don’t want me to catch my death at the front door?’ Ralph replied angrily.

Kate did not answer, but quickly tying a petticoat about her, and wrapping herself in her dressing-gown, she went downstairs. It was quite dark, and she had to feel her way along the passage. But at last she found and pulled back the latch, and when the white gleam of moonlight entered she retreated timidly behind the door.

‘I’m so sorry,’ said Dick, trying to see who the concealed figure was, ‘but I forgot my latchkey.’

‘It doesn’t matter,’ said Kate.

‘Oh, it’s you, dear. I’ve been trying to get home all day to see you, but couldn’t. Why didn’t you come down to the theatre?’

‘You know that I can’t do as I like.’

‘Well, never mind; don’t be cross; give me a kiss.’

Kate shrunk back, but Dick took her in his arms. ‘You were in bed, then?’ he said, chuckling.

‘Yes, but you must let me go.’

‘I should like never to let you go again.’

‘But you’re leaving to-morrow.’

‘Not unless you wish me to, dear.’

Kate did not stop to consider the impossibility of his fulfilling his promise, and, her heart beating, she went upstairs. On the first landing he stopped her, and laying his hand on her arm, said, ‘And would you really be very glad if I were to stay with you?’

‘You know I would, Dick.’

They could not see each other, and after a long silence she said, ‘We mustn’t stop here talking. Mrs. Ede sleeps, you know, in the room at the back of the workroom, and she might hear us.’

‘Then come into the sitting-room,’ said Dick, taking her hands and drawing her towards him.

‘I cannot.’

‘I love you better than anyone in the world.’

‘No, no; why should you love me?’

‘Let us prove our love one to the other,’ he murmured, and frightened, but at the same time delighted by the words, she allowed him to draw her into his room.

‘My husband will miss me,’ she said as the door closed, but she could think no more of him; he was forgotten in a sudden delirium of the senses; and for what seemed to him like half an hour Ralph waited, asking himself what his wife could be doing all that time, thinking that perhaps it was not Lennox after all, but some rambling vagrant who had knocked at the door, and that he had better go down and rescue his wife. He would have done so had he not been afraid of a sudden draught, and while wondering what was happening he dozed away, to be awakened a few minutes afterwards by voices on the landing.

‘Let me go, Dick, let me go; my husband will miss me.’ She passed away from him and entered her husband’s room, and Ralph said: ‘Well, who was it?’

‘Mr. Lennox,’ she answered.

‘Our lodger,’ Ralph murmured, and fell asleep again.

Chapter X

‘Is this the stage entrance?’

‘Yes, ma’am; you see, during the performance the real stage-door is used as a pit entrance, and we pass under the stage.’

This explanation was given after a swaggering attitude had been assumed, and a knowing wink, the countersign for ‘Now I’m going to do something for your amusement,’ had been bestowed on his pals. The speaker, a rough man with a beard and a fez cap, became the prominent figure of a group loitering before a square hole with an earthward descent, cut in the wall of the Hanley Theatre.

Kate was too occupied with her own thoughts to notice that she was being laughed at, and she said instantly, ‘I want to see Mr. Lennox; will you tell him I’m here?’

‘Mr. Lennox is on the stage; unless yer on in the piece I don’t see ‘ow it’s to be done.’

At this rebuff Kate looked round the grinning faces, but at that moment a rough-looking fellow of the same class as the speaker ascended from the cellar-like opening, and after nudging his ‘pal,’ touched his cap, and said with the politeness of one who had been tipped, ‘This way, marm. Mr. Lennox is on the stage, but if you’ll wait a minute I’ll tell ‘im yer ‘ere. Take care, marm, or yer’ll slip; very arkerd place to get down, with all ‘em baskets in the way. This company do travel with a deal of luggage. That’s Mr. Lennox’s—the one as yer ‘and is on.’

‘Oh, indeed!’ Kate said, stopping on her way to read Mr. Lennox’s name on the basket.

‘We piles ‘em ‘gainst that ‘ere door so as to ‘ave ‘em ‘andy for sending down to the station ter-morrow morning. But if you will remain here a moment, marm, I’ll run up on the stage and see if I can see ‘im.’

The mention made by the scene-shifter of the approaching removal of Dick’s basket frightened her, and she remembered that she had scarcely spoken to him since last night. He had been obliged to go out in the morning before breakfast; and though he had tried hard to meet her during the course of the day, fate seemed to be against them.

She was in a large, low-roofed storeroom with an earthen floor. The wooden ceiling was supported by an endless number of upright posts that gave the place the appearance of a ship. At the farther end there were two stone staircases leading to opposite sides of the stage. In front of her were a drum and barrel, and the semi-darkness at the back was speckled over with the sparkling of the gilt tinsel stuff used in pantomimes; a pair of lattice-windows, a bundle of rapiers, a cradle and a breastplate, formed a group in the centre; a broken trombone lay at her feet. The odour of size that the scenery exhaled reminded her of Ralph’s room; and she wondered if the swords were real, what different uses the tinsel paper might be put to; until she would awake from her dream, asking herself bitterly why he did not come down to see her. In the pause that followed the question, she was startled by a prolonged shout from the chorus. The orchestra seemed to be going mad; the drum was thumped, the cymbals were clashed, and back and forward rushed the noisy feet, first one way, then the other; a soprano voice was heard for a moment clear and distinct, and was drowned immediately after in a general scream. What could it mean? Had the place taken fire? Kate asked herself wildly.

‘The finale of the act ‘as begun, marm; Mr. Lennox will be hoff the stage directly.’

‘Has nothing happened? Is the—?’

The scene-shifter’s look of astonishment showed Kate that she was mistaken, but before they had time to exchange many words, the trampling and singing overhead suddenly ceased, and the muffled sound of clapping and applause was heard in the distance.

‘There’s the act.’ said Bill; ‘he’ll be down now immediately; he’ll take no call for the perliceman,’ and a moment after a man attired in knee-breeches, with a huge cravat wound several times round his throat, came running down the stone staircase. ‘Oh, ‘ere he is,’ said Bill. ‘I’ll leave yer now, marm.’

‘And so you found your way, dear?’ said Dick, putting out his arm to draw Kate towards him.

But he looked so very strange with the great patches of coarse red on his cheeks, and the deep black lines drawn about his eyes, that she could not conceal her repulsion, and guessing the cause of her embarrassment, he said, laughing:

‘Ah! I see you don’t know me! A good makeup, isn’t it? I took a lot of trouble with it.’

Kate made no answer; but the sound of his voice soothed her, and she leaned upon his arm.

‘Give me a kiss, dear, before we go up,’ he said coaxingly.

Kate looked at him curiously, and then, laughing at her own foolishness, said, ‘Wait until you have the soldier’s dress on.’

At the top of the staircase the piled-up side-scenes made so many ways and angles that Kate had to keep close to Dick for fear of getting lost. However, at last they arrived in the wings, where gaslights were burning blankly on the whitewashed walls. A crowd of loud-voiced, perspiring girls in short fancy petticoats and with bare necks and arms, pushed their way towards the mysterious and ladder-like staircases and scrambled up them. Ange Pitou had taken off his cocked hat and was sharing a pint of beer with Clairette. It being her turn to drink, she said:

‘Noe, hold my skirts in, there’s a dear; this beer plays the devil with white satin.’

‘It isn’t on your skirts it will go if you spill it,’ Ange replied, ‘but into your bosom. Stop a second, and I’ll give the bottom of the pot a wipe, then you’ll be all right.’

In the meanwhile Pomponet and La Rivodière were engaged in a violent quarrel.

‘Just you understand,’ shouted Mortimer: ‘if you want to do any clowning you’d better fill your wig with sawdust. It had better be stuffed with something.’

This sally was received with smacks of approbation from a circle of supers, who were waiting in the hopes of hearing some spirited dialogue.

‘Clowning! And what can you do? I suppose your line is the legitimate. Go and play Don John again, and you’ll read us the notices in the morning.’

‘Notices … talking of notices, you never had one, except one to quit from your landlady, poor woman!’ replied Mortimer in his most nasal intonation of voice.

Enchanted at this witticism, the supers laughed, and poor Dubois would have been utterly done for if Dick had not interposed.

‘What do you think, dear?’ he said, drawing her aside; ‘shall I go and make my change now? I don’t come on till the end of the act, and we’ll be able to talk without interruption till then.’

She had expected him to explain the rights and wrongs of that terrible quarrel that so providentially had passed off without bloodshed, and he seemed to have forgotten all about it.

‘But those two gentlemen—the actors—what will happen? Are they going to go away?’

‘Lord, no! of course it is riling to have a fellow mugging behind you with his wig when you’re speaking, but one must go in for a bit of extra clowning on Saturday night.’

All this was Greek to her, and before she could ask Dick to explain he had darted down a passage. When he was with her it was well enough, but the moment his protection was withdrawn all her old fears returned to her. She did not know where to stand. The scene-shifters had come to carry away the scenes that were piled up in her corner, and one of the huge slips had nearly fallen on her. A troop of girls in single coloured gowns and poke bonnets had stopped to stare at her. She remembered their appearance from Thursday, but she had not seen their vulgar, everyday eyes, nor heard until now their coarse, everyday laughs and jokes. Amid this group Lange, fat and lumpy, perorated.

‘The most beastly place I ever was in, my dear. I always dread the week here. Just look round the house. I don’t believe there’s a man in front who has a quid in his pocket. Now at Liverpool there are lots of nice men. You should have seen the things I had sent me when I was there with Harrington’s company—and the bouquets! There were flowers left for me every day.’

What all this meant Kate did not know, and she did not care to guess. For a moment the strange world she found herself in had distracted her thoughts, but it could do so no longer; no, not if it were ten times as strange. What did she care for these actresses? What was it to her what they said or what they thought of her? She had come to look after her lover; that was her business, and that only. He was going away to-morrow, and they had arranged nothing! She did not know whether he was going to remain, or if he expected her to follow him. She hated the people around her; she hated them for their laughter, for their fine clothes; she hated them above all because they were all calling for him. It was Mr. Lennox here and Dick there. What did they want with him? Could they do nothing without him? It seemed to her that they were all mocking her, and she hated them for it.

The stage was now full of women. The men stood in the wings or ran to the ends of distant passages and called, ‘Dick, Dick, Dick!’

The orchestra had ceased playing, and the noise in front of the curtain was growing every moment angrier and louder.

At last Dick appeared, looking splendid in red tights and Hessian boots. He caught hold of two or three girls, changed their places, peeped to see if Montgomery was all right, and gave the signal to ring up.

But once the curtain was raised, he was surrounded by half a dozen persons all wanting to speak to him. Ridding himself of them he contrived to get to Kate’s side, but they had not exchanged half a dozen words before the proprietor asked if he could ‘have a moment.’ Then Hender turned up, and begged of Kate to come and see the dressing-rooms, but fearing to miss him, she declared she preferred to stay where she was. Nevertheless, it was difficult not to listen to her friend’s explanations as to what was passing on the stage, and in one of these unguarded moments Dick disappeared. It was heart-breaking, but she could do nothing but wait until he came back. Like an iron, the idea that she was about to lose her lover forced itself deeper into her heart. The fate of her life was hanging in the balance, and the few words that were to decide it were being delayed time after time, by things of no importance. Dick had now returned, and was talking with the gas-man, who wanted to know if the extra ‘hand’ he had engaged was to be paid by the company or the management. Every now and again an actress or an actor would rush through the wings and stare at her; sometimes it was the whole chorus, headed by Miss Beaumont, whose rude remarks reached her ears frequently.

She tried to retreat, but the rude eyes and words followed her. Occasionally the voice of the prompter was heard: ‘Now then, ladies, silence if you please; I can’t hear what’s being said on the stage.’ No one listened to him, and, like animals in a fair, they continued to crush and to crowd in the passage between the wings and the whitewashed wall. A tall, fat girl stood close by; her hand was on her sword, which she slapped slowly against her thighs. The odour of hair, cheap scent, necks, bosoms and arms was overpowering, and to Kate’s sense of modesty there was something revolting in this loud display of body. A bugle call was soon sounded in the orchestra, and this was the signal for much noise and bustle. The conspirators rushed off the stage, threw aside their cloaks, and immediately after the soft curling strains of the waltz were heard; then the bugle was sounded again, and the girls began to tramp.

‘Cue for soldiers’ entrance,’ shouted the prompter.

‘Now then, ladies, are you ready?’ cried Dick, as he put himself at the head of the army.

‘Yes,’ was murmured all along the line, and seeing her hero marching away at the head of so many women, any one of whom he could have had for the asking, it crossed her mind that it was unnatural for him to stoop to her, a poor little dressmaker of Hanley, who did not know anything except, perhaps, how to stitch the seams of a skirt. But after what had befallen her last night, it did not seem possible that her fate was to be left behind, stitching beside Hender and the two little girls, Annie and Lizzie; stitching bodice after bodice, skirt after skirt, till the end of her days, remembering always something that had come into her life suddenly and had gone out of it suddenly. ‘It cannot be,’ she cried out to herself - ‘it cannot be!’ And she remembered that he had said that her ear was true, and her voice as pure as Leslie’s. ‘A little throaty,’ he had said, ‘but that can be improved.’ What he meant by throaty she did not know, but no matter; and to convince herself that he had spoken truly she sang the refrain of the waltz till the gas-man pulled a rope and brought the curtain down. She was about to rush on the stage to speak to Dick, but the gas-man stopped her.

‘You must wait a moment, there’s a call,’ he said. Up went the curtain; the house burst into loud applause. Down went the curtain; up it went again. This time only the principals came on, and while they were bowing and smiling to the audience a great herd of females poured through the wings, and Kate found herself again among courtesans, conspirators, seducers, and wandering minstrels.

‘Who is she?’ they asked as they went by. And Kate heard somebody answer, ‘A spoon of Dick’s,’ and unable to endure the coarse jeering faces, which the strange costumes seemed to accentuate, she took advantage of a sudden break in the ranks and ran through the wings towards the back of the stage.

‘What’s the matter, dear?’ he said, drawing her to him.

‘Oh, Dick, you shouldn’t neglect me as you do! I’ve been waiting here among those horrid girls nearly an hour for you, and you’re talking to everybody but me.’

‘It wasn’t my fault, dear; I was on in the last act. They couldn’t have finished it without me.’

‘I don’t know, I don’t know; but you’re going away to-morrow, and I shall never see you again. It’s very hard on me that this last night—night— that— - ‘

‘Now, don’t cry like that, dear. I tell you what. It’s impossible to talk here; everybody’s after me. I’ll take off these things and we’ll go for a walk through the town—will that do? I know we’ve a lot of things to speak about.’

The serious way in which he spoke this last phrase brought courage to Kate, and she strove to calm herself, but she was sobbing so heavily that she could not answer.

‘Well, you’ll wait here, dear; no one will disturb you, and I shan’t be above two minutes.’

Kate nodded her head in reply, and five minutes after they were walking up the street together.

‘How did you get out, dear? Did they see you?’

‘No; Ralph is bad with his asthma, and mother is sitting upstairs with him. I said I had some sewing to do…. Oh, Dick, I cannot bear to think that you’re going away, and that I shall never see you again.’

‘Yes, you will, dear,’ he answered cheerfully. ‘Now I wonder if your husband would consent to your going on the stage?’

‘Who would do the dressmaking for him?’ she asked. ‘He talks about the business, but we would be starving if we relied upon what we sell.’ And stopping from time to time as their talk grew more earnest, they strolled through the crowded streets, Kate hanging on Dick’s arm, her face inspiring the jeers of the factory girls.

‘I wouldn’t kiss her if I were you,’ said the most impudent.

‘Wouldn’t you really?’ cried two youths, stealing up from behind and seizing two of the girls by the waist, and kissing them despite blows and laughter.

The combats that followed forced Kate and Dick into the roadway. ‘We cannot talk here,’ Dick said; ‘isn’t there a quiet street near by?’

‘There’s Market Street; don’t you remember, Dick, where you met me the day you took me to the potteries?’

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I do remember that day. What a crash! and all because you wouldn’t let me kiss you; just like those boys and girls. You were more determined than those girls were, for methinks, as we say in Shakespeare, they wished to be kissed; but you didn’t then.’

‘That was the day,’ she answered, ‘that I took round Mrs. Barnes’s dress after having stayed up all night to finish it. Here’s Market Street,’ and they walked towards the square of sky enframed in the end of the street, talking of the luck that had brought them together just at the moment when they thought that chance had divided them for ever.

‘It was a crash!’ Dick repeated, and they walked about the grass-grown mounds of cinders.

‘But, Dick, you won’t desert me,’ she said. ‘Tell me that you’ll take me away from Hanley. I couldn’t bear it when you were gone—I would sooner die.’

‘Of course I’ll take you away, my dear,’ said Dick, with a distinct vision of the Divorce Court in his mind; ‘but you know that will mean giving up everything and travelling about the country with me; I don’t know that you’ll like it.’

‘You mean that you don’t love me enough to take me away.’

‘I’ll take you away, dear, if you’ll come. I never liked a woman as I do you. The train call is for ten o’clock. We must contrive something. How are you to meet me at the station?’

It was Kate’s turn then to hesitate. She had never been out of the Potteries in her life; she had been born, reared and married here. And now she was going away without hope of ever being able to return, she was going into an unknown region to roam she did not know whither—adrift, and as helpless as a tame bird freed and delivered to the enmities of an unknown land. Half the truth dawned upon her in that moment, and lifting her eyes, she said:

‘Dick! You’re asking a great deal of me. What shall I do? Never, never, never to see Hanley again!’

‘I didn’t know that you cared so much about Hanley. And you accused me just now of not loving you enough to take you away. I think it’s you who don’t love me.’

‘Dick, you know that I love you better than anything in the world! But to give up everything, never to see what you have seen all your life.’

‘I don’t think you’ll regret it, dear; we’ll be very happy. We’re going from here to Derby, and from there to Blackpool, a very jolly place by the sea.’ And he talked to her about boating and picnicking, becoming all the while more convinced of her pretty face, and his memory of her pretty voice was active in him when he took her in his arms and said: ‘You mustn’t think any more about it, dear; I couldn’t leave this place without you. You’ll like Blackpool if you’re fond of boating.’

‘I don’t know,’ she said; ‘I’ve never seen the sea.’

‘Well, you can see it now,’ he answered. ‘Look out there; the valley between us and the hills filled with mist is more like the ocean than anything I’ve ever seen.’

‘The ocean,’ Kate repeated. ‘Have you been to America?’

‘Yes,’ he answered, ‘I have lived there for several years. I may take the company out there—probably next year, if all goes well.’

‘And will you take me with you?’

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘but you must come away to-morrow morning. Why do you hesitate?’

‘I’m not hesitating,’ she answered, ‘but those hills beyond the valley have always seemed to me very wonderful; ever since I was a little child I’ve asked myself what lies beyond those hills.’

For answer Dick kissed her, and they relapsed into contemplation.

The tall stems of the factory chimneys, the bottle-shaped pottery ovens, the intricate shafts of the collieries were hidden in the mist, and the furnace fires flashing through the mist enhanced the likeness of the Hanley Valley to a sea of stars; like stars these furnaces flamed, now here, now there, over the lower slopes of the hills, till at last one blazed into existence high amid the hills, so high that it must have been on the very lowest verge. It seemed to Kate like a hearth of pleasure and comfort awaiting her in some distant country, and all her fancies were centred in this distant light, till another light breaking suddenly higher up in the hills attracted her, and she deemed that it would be in or about this light that she would find happiness. She must ascend from one light to the next, but the light on which her eyes were fixed was not a furnace light, but a star. Would she never find happiness, then, in this world? she asked. Was Dick going to desert her? And without telling him that she had mistaken an earthly for a heavenly light, she threw her arms about him.

‘Of course, Dick, I’ll go with you; I will follow you wherever you may choose to go and do the work that you bid me to do. You’ve spoken well of my voice. Oh yes, Dick, I’ll go with you. Why shouldn’t I? You’re everything to me! I never knew what happiness was till I saw you; I’ve never had any amusement, I’ve never had any love; it was nothing but drudgery from morning to night. Better be dead than continue such an existence. Tell me, Dick, you’ll take me away.’

Dick listened calmly and quietly to these passionate beseechings, and taking her in his arms, he kissed her fervidly, though somewhat with the air of one who deems further explanation

unnecessary. But when he withdrew his face Kate continued, at first plaintively, but afterwards with more passion:

‘It’s very wicked—I know it is—but I can’t help myself. I was brought up religiously, nobody more so, but I never could think of God and forget this world like my mother and Mrs. Ede. I always used to like to read tales about lovers, and I used to feel miserable when they didn’t marry in the end and live happily. But then those people were good and pure, and were commanded to love each other, whereas I’m sinful, and shall be punished for my sin. I don’t know how that will be; perhaps you’ll cease to love me, and will leave me. When you cease to love me I hope I shall die. But you’ll never do that, Dick; tell me that you will not. You’ll remember that I gave up a great deal for you; that I left my home for you; that I left everything.’

Her feebleness attracted him as much as her pretty face, and he knew she loved him; and they were going away together; so much had been decided, and as far as he could see, there the matter ended. Besides, it was getting very late; the third act must be nearly over now, and he had a lot of business to get through. But it was difficult to suggest that they should go home, for Kate had burst into tears, unable to control herself any longer. He must console her.

‘You mustn’t cry, dear,’ he said softly; ‘we shall be far away from here to-morrow, and you’ll find out then how well I love you.’

‘But do you really love me? If I were only sure that it was so!’

‘If I didn’t love you, why should I ask you to go away with me? If I didn’t love you, could I kiss you as I do?’

‘Of course we’ve been very wicked,’ she continued as if she had not heard him, ‘and you can’t respect me very much; but then you made love to me so, and the music made me forget everything. It wasn’t all my fault, I think, and you were so different from all the other men I’ve seen—so much more like what I imagined a man should be, so much more like the heroes in the novels. You know in the books there’s always a tenor who comes and sings under the window in the moonlight, and sends the lady he loves roses. You never sent me any roses, but then there are no roses in Hanley. But you were so kind and nice, and spoke so differently, and when I looked at your blue eyes I couldn’t help feeling I loved you. I really think I knew—at least, I couldn’t talk to you quite in the same way as I did to other men. You remember when I was showing you over the rooms, how you stopped to talk to me about the pious cards Mrs. Ede had hung on the wall—well, since then I felt that you liked me. And it was so different since you came to live in the house. I didn’t see much of you, you were always so busy, but I used to lie awake at night to hear you come in.’

‘Look here, dear, I know you’re very fond of me—so am I of you—but I must get back to the theatre. You’ve no idea of the business I’ve to get through to-night, and as we’re going away together we’ll have to look out for some place to put up.’

This necessity for immediate action at once startled and frightened her, and bursting again into a passionate fit of sobbing, she exclaimed:

‘Oh, Dick, this is a terrible thing you’re asking me to do! Oh, what will become of me? But do you love me? Tell me again that you love me, and will not leave me.’

Dick drew her closer to him for answer. ‘We must not stay here any longer,’ he said.

‘But I cannot go home, Dick—to that house.’

‘You’ll sleep with me, dear, at the inn.’

‘Sleep with you?’ she repeated and allowed herself to be led.

The furnace fires had increased by tens; each dazzling line was now crossed and interwoven with other lines; and through the tears that blinded her eyes Kate saw an immense sea of fire, and beyond nothing but unfathomable grey.

Chapter XI

Next morning the sky was low and grey, and the house-tops appeared dimly through the mist. A little later the clouds began to gather, and it seemed like rain, but now and then a shaft of sunlight fell on a corner of the table within a few inches of Kate's impatiently moving fingers. She had not been able to eat any breakfast—had just crumbled a piece of bread and sipped a cup of tea, and begged Dick to hasten. It seemed that he hadn't a thought for her, of what her fate would be if they missed the train. She couldn't spend another night in Hanley.

'Dick, dear, do make haste. We shall miss the train.'

'We've plenty of time,' he answered, and she read in his face the desire for another plate of crumpets, and she prayed that he might not ask for another egg.

'Dick, it's ten minutes to ten.'

'I don't think it can be as much as that, dear.' He turned to look at the clock, which was behind him.

'Oh, Dick, Dick! Make haste, I beg of you; you don't know what I'm suffering. Supposing my husband was to come in now and find us here?'

'He can't know that we're here; the station is the first place he'd go to; there's no use hanging about there longer than we can help.'

'Oh dear, I'd give ten years of my life if we were once in the train.'

'There's no use exciting yourself like that, dear; I'll see that you don't meet anyone.'

'How will you manage that?'

'I'll tell you in the cab. I think on the whole we'd better start now. Luckily, we haven't much luggage to delay us. Waiter, bring the bill and call me a cab.'

'And how will you save me from meeting him if he's there before us?' she said to Dick as they drove away.

'I'll leave you in the cab, and cut down and see if he's there.'

'He might come and find me when you were gone, and that would be worse than anything. He might kill me, and I should have no one to save me.'

He was, in truth, a little puzzled, for there was no getting away from the fact that it was only too possible, not to say probable, that they would find Mr. Ede waiting for them. He thought of disguises and secret doors, and masks and wigs, of the wardrobe-baskets, but a moment's reflection convinced him of the impracticability of stowing Kate away in one of these. He then thought of wrapping a railway rug around his newly-acquired wife, and carrying her thus concealed in his arms; but that would not do either. Mr. Ede would be sure to ask him what he had there.

'Oh, Dick, dear, what shall we do if we find him waiting on the platform? You'll protect me, won't you? You won't desert me! I couldn't go back to him.'

'Of course not. Let him take you away from me? Not me! If you don't want to live with him any more you've a right to leave him. I'll knock him down if he gives me any of his cheek.'

'You won't do that, will you, dear? Remember how small and weak he is; you'd kill him.'

‘That’s true, so I would. Well, I’m damned if I know what to do; you’ll have to come with me even if he does kick up a row. It’ll be deuced unpleasant, and before the whole company too. Don’t you think that you could wait a moment in the cab while I have a look round—I won’t go far.’

‘Oh, I’d be too afraid! Couldn’t you ask someone to go for you?’

‘I’ll see who’s there,’ said Dick, twisting his neck to look round the corner. ‘By Jove! they’re all there—Beaumont, Dolly Goddard. I think I’ll ask Montgomery; he’s a devilish good chap. We had better stop the cab here and I’ll call to him.’

Kate consented, and a moment after the musician’s immense nose and scarecrow face was poked in the window.

‘Hey, old pal, what is it? Waiting—but—I beg— - ‘

‘Never mind that,’ said Dick, laying his hand on the young fellow’s arm; ‘I want you to do me a favour. Run down on the platform and see if there’s a little scraggy man about the height of Dubois hanging about anywhere. You can’t mistake him; he has a dirty dark beard that grows on his face like a bunch of grass, and he’s no chest, little thin shoulders, and he’d have on— - ‘

‘A pair of grey trousers, and a red woollen comforter round his neck,’ whispered Kate, feeling bitterly ashamed.

‘All right,’ said Montgomery, ‘I’ll spot him if he’s there. But you know the train goes in ten minutes or less, and Hayes says that he can’t take the tickets; you’ve all the coin.’

‘So I have; I forgot to send it round to him last night. Ask him to step up here, there’s a good fellow.’

‘Now, I bet you Hayes won’t be able to get the tickets right. He’s perfectly useless, always boozed—nipping, you know.’

Kate did not answer, and an uneasy silence ensued, which was broken at length by the appearance of a hiccuping, long-whiskered man.

‘How are you, o-o-old man? Eh! who is—? I don’t think I have the pleasure of this lady’s acquaintance.’

‘Mrs. Ede—Mr. Hayes, our acting manager. Now, look here, Hayes, you go and get the tickets. I can’t leave this lady. Thirty-five will do.’

‘How thirty-five? We travel forty-one.’

‘You know well enough that thirty-five is what we always get. Damn it, man, make haste!’

‘Don’t damn me. New member of the com-company, eh?’

‘I’ll tell you all about that after, old man,’ said Dick, leaning forward and pretending to whisper confidentially.

This satisfied the tippler, who, after pulling his silky whiskers and serving Kate to another drunken stare, hurried off, black bag in hand.

‘Confounded nuisance to have to deal with a fellow like that; he thinks he’s a dab at business, and goes about with the black bag for show.’

Two minutes passed, maybe three; it seemed to her an eternity, and then she heard Montgomery’s voice crying:

‘It’s all right, I’m sure.’

‘Then get out, dear,’ said Dick, ‘we haven’t a moment to lose.’

She jumped out, but hadn’t walked a dozen yards before she stopped panic-stricken.

‘Mrs. Ede—my mother-in-law—perhaps she’s there! Oh, Dick, what shall I do?’

‘She isn’t there,’ Montgomery answered; ‘I know her by sight,’ and that Montgomery should know her mother-in-law by sight meant to Kate as much as a footprint does to a lost one in a desert. For the sight of the company on the asphalt, and all the luggage, portmanteaux, and huge white baskets labelled ‘Morton and Cox’s Operatic Company,’ and the train waiting to carry them away to an unknown destination, made her feel more intensely than ever that she was adrift in a current that would carry her she knew not whither. All these strange people collected together were henceforth her world. She was not unnaturally frightened, but the baggage man especially filled her with alarm, so all-powerful did he seem, rushing up and down the platform, shouting at the porters, and throwing out bits of information to the ladies of the company as he passed them by.

‘We shall be off in a minute, dear,’ whispered Dick softly in her ear, ‘and then— - ‘

‘Whose carriage are you going in, Dick?’ said a little stout man who walked with a strut and wore a hat like a bishop’s.

‘I really don’t know; I don’t mind; anywhere except with the pipe-smokers. I can’t stand that lot.’

‘Perhaps he’s going to take a first-class compartment with hot-water pans,’ remarked Mortimer, and the little group of admirers all laughed consumedly. Dick, overhearing the remark, said to Kate: ‘One mustn’t take notice of what he says; I very nearly kicked him into the orchestra at Halifax about six months ago. But what compartment shall we take? Let’s go with Leslie and Dubois and Montgomery; they’re the quietest. Let me introduce you to Miss Leslie. Miss Leslie—Mrs. Ede, a lady I’m escorting to Blackpool; you two have a chat together. I’ll be back in a minute. I must go after Hayes; if I don’t he may forget all about the tickets.’

‘I’m afraid you’ll find us a very noisy lot, Mrs. Ede,’ said Miss Leslie, and in a way that made Kate feel intimate with her at once.

Miss Leslie had a bright smiling face, with clear blue eyes, and a mop of dyed hair peeped from under a prettily ribboned bonnet, and Kate noticed how beautifully cut were her clothes. Miss Beaumont sported large diamonds in her ears, and she wore a somewhat frayed yellow French cloak, which, she explained to the girls near her, particularly to her pal, Dolly Goddard, was quite good enough for travelling. No one in the company could understand the friendship between these two; the knowing ones declared that Dolly was Beaumont’s daughter; others, who professed to be more knowing, entertained other views. Dolly was a tiny girl with crumpled features, who wore dresses that were remade from the big woman’s cast-off garments. She sang in the chorus, was in receipt of a salary of five-and-twenty shillings a week, and was a favourite with everyone. Around her stood a group of girls; they formed a black mass of cotton, alpaca, and dirty cloth. Near them half a dozen chorus-men were talking of the possibility of getting another drink before the train came up. Their frayed boots and threadbare frock-coats would have caused them to be mistaken for street idlers, but one or two of their number exhibited patent leathers and a smart made-up cravat of the latest fashion. Dubois’s hat gave him the appearance of a bishop, his tight trousers confounded him with a groom; and Joe Mortimer made up very well for the actor whose friends once believed he was a genius.

The news had gone about that Dick was running away with a married woman, and that the husband was expected to appear every minute to stop her; it had reached even the ears of the chorus-men in the refreshment-room, and they gulped down their beer and hurried back to see the sport. Mortimer declared that they were going to see Dick for the first time in legitimate drama, and that he wouldn't miss it for the world. The joke was repeated through the groups, and before the laughter ceased the green-painted engine puffed into sight, and at the same moment Dick was seen making his way towards them from the refreshment room, dragging drunken Mr. Hayes along with them.

Then Kate felt glad, and almost triumphantly she dashed the tears from her eyes. No one could stop her now. She was going away with Dick, to be loved and live happy for ever. Beaumont was forgotten, and the fierce longing for change she had been so long nourishing completely mastered her, and, with a childlike impetuosity, she rushed up to her lover, and leaning on his arm, strove to speak.

'What is it, dear?' he said, bending towards her. 'What are you crying about?'

'Oh, nothing, Dick. I'm so happy. Oh, if only we were outside this station! Where shall I get in?'

Even if her husband did come, and she were taken back, she thought that she would like to have been at least inside a railway carriage.

'Get in here. Where's Montgomery? Let's have him.'

'And, oh, do ask Miss Leslie! She's been so kind to me.'

'Yes, she always travels with us,' said Dick, standing at the carriage door. 'Come, get in, Montgomery; make haste, Dubois.'

'But where's Bret?' shouted someone.

'I haven't seen him,' replied several voices.

'Is there any lady missing?' asked Montgomery.

'No,' replied Mortimer in the deepest nasal intonation he could assume, 'but I noticed a relation of the chief banker in the town in the theatre last night. Perhaps our friend has had his cheque stopped.'

Roars of laughter greeted this sally, the relevance of which no one could even faintly guess; and the guard smiled as he said to the porter:

'That's Mr. Mortimer. Amusing, is them theatre gentlemen.' Then, turning to Dick, 'I must start the train. Your friend will be late if he doesn't come up jolly quick.'

'Isn't it extraordinary that Bret can never be up to time? Every night there's a stage wait for him to come on for the serenade,' said Dick, withdrawing his head from the window. 'Here 'e is, sir,' said the guard.

'Come on, Bret; you'll be late,' shouted Dick.

A tall, thin man in a velvet coat, urged on by two porters, was seen making his way down the platform with a speed that was evidently painful.

'In here,' said Dick, opening the door.

Out of the dim station they passed into the bright air alongside of long lines of waggons laden with chimney-pots and tiles, the produce of Hanley. The collieries steamed above their cinder-hills, the factory chimneys vomited, and as Kate looked out on this world of work that

she was leaving for ever, she listened to the uncertain trouble that mounted up through her mind, and to the voices of the actors talking of comic songs and dances.

She put out her hand instinctively to find Dick's; he was sitting beside her, and she felt happy again.

At these intimacies none but Frank Bret was surprised, and the laugh that made Kate blush was occasioned by the tenor's stupid questioning look: it was the first time he had seen her; he had not yet heard the story of the elopement, and his glance went from one to the other, vainly demanding an explanation, and to increase the hilarity Dick said:

'But, by the way, Bret, what made you so late this morning? Were you down at the bank cashing a cheque?'

'What are you thinking about? There are no banks open on Sunday morning,' said Bret, who of course had not the least idea what was meant.

The reply provoked peals of laughter from all save Miss Leslie, and all possible changes were rung on the joke, until it became as nauseous to the rest of the company as to the bewildered tenor, who bore the chaff with the dignified stupidity of good looks.

The mummers travelled third class. Kate sat next the window, with her back to the engine; Dick was beside her, and Miss Leslie facing her; then came Dubois and Bret, with Montgomery at the far end.

The conversation had fallen, and Dick, passing his arm around Kate's waist, whispered to her and to Leslie:

'I want you two to be pals. Lucy is one of my oldest friends. I knew her when she was so high, and it was I who gave her her first part, wasn't it, Lucy?'

'Yes. Don't you remember, Dick, the first night I played Florette in *The Brigands*? Wasn't I in a fright? I never should have ventured on the stage if you hadn't pushed me on from the wings.'

Kate thought she had never seen anyone look so nice or heard anyone speak so sweetly. In fact, she liked her better off the stage than on. Leslie had a way of raising her voice as she spoke till it ended in a laugh and a display of white teeth. The others of the company she did not yet recognize. They were still to her figures moving through an agitated dream. Leslie was the first to awaken to life.

The tendency of Dick's conversation was to wander, but after having indulged for some time in the pleasures of retrospection he returned to the subject in point:

'Well, it's a bit difficult to explain,' Dick said, 'but, you see, this lady, Mrs. Ede, wasn't very happy at home, and having a nice voice—you must hear her sing some *Angot*—and such an ear! She only heard the waltz once, and she can give it note for note. Well, to make a long story short, she thought she'd cut it, and try what she could do with us.'

'You're all very kind to me, but I'm afraid I've been very wicked.'

'Oh my!' said Miss Leslie, laughing, 'you mustn't talk like that; you'll put us all to the blush.'

'I wonder how such theories would suit Beaumont's book,' said Dick.

'You see,' Dick continued, 'she's left Hanley without any clothes except those she's wearing, and we'll have to buy everything in Derby,' and he begged Bret to move down a bit and allow him to take the seat next to Leslie.

The tenor, conductor, and second low comedian had spread a rug over their knees, and were playing nap. They shouted, laughed, and sang portions of their evening music when they made or anticipated making points, and Kate was therefore left to herself, and she looked out of the window.

They were passing through the most beautiful parts of Staffordshire, and for the first time she saw the places that seemed to her just like the spot where the lady with the oval face used to read Shelley to the handsome baronet when her husband was away doctoring the country-folk.

The day was full of mist and sun. Along the edges of the woods the white vapours loitered, half concealing the forms of the grazing kine; and the light shadows floated on the grass, long and prolonged, even as the memories that were now filling the mind of this sentimental workwoman. It seemed to her that she was now on the threshold of a new life—the life of which she had so long dreamed. Her lover was near her, but in a railway carriage filled with smoke and with various men and women; and it seemed to her that they should be walking in sunny meadows by hedgerows. The birds were singing in the shaws; but in her imagination the clicking of needles and the rustling of silk mingled with the songs of the birds, and forgetting the landscape, with a sigh she fell to thinking of what they would be saying of her at home.

She knew Mrs. Ede would have the whole town searched, and when it was no longer possible to entertain a doubt, she would say that Kate's name must never again be mentioned in her presence. A letter! there was much to say: but none would understand. The old woman who had once loved her so dearly would for ever hate and detest her. And Ralph? Kate did not care quite so much what he thought of her; she fancied him swearing and cursing, and sending the police after her; and then he appeared to her as a sullen, morose figure moving about the shop, growling occasionally at his mother, and muttering from time to time that he was devilish glad that his wife had gone away. She would have wished him to regret her; and when she remembered the little girls, she felt the tears rise to her eyes. What explanation would be given to them? Would they learn to hate her? She thought not; but still, they would have to give up coming to the shop—there was no one now to teach them sewing. Her absence would change everything. Mrs. Ede would never be able to get on with Hender, and even if she did, neither of them knew enough of dressmaking to keep the business going, and she asked herself sorrowfully: 'What will become of them?' They would not be able to live upon what they sold in the shop—that was a mere nothing. Poor Ralph's dreams of plate-glass and lamps! Where were they now? Mrs. Ede's thirty pounds a year would barely pay the rent. A vision of destruction and brokers passed before her mind, and she realized for the first time the immense importance of the step she had taken. Not only was her own future hidden, but the future of those she had left behind. The tedium of her life in Hanley was forgotten, and she remembered only the quiet, certain life she might have led, in and out from the shop to the front kitchen, and up to her workroom—the life that she had been born into. Now she had nothing but this man's love. If she were to lose it!

Leslie smiled at the lovers, and moving towards the card-players, she placed her arm round Bret's shoulders and examined his hand. Then the three men raised their heads. Dubois, with the cynicism of the ugly little man who has ever had to play the part of the disdained lover both in real or fictitious life, giggled, leered, and pointed over his shoulder. Montgomery smiled too, but a close observer would detect in him the yearnings of a young man from whose plain face the falling fruit is ever invisibly lifted. Bret looked round also, but his look was the indifferent stare of one to whom love has come often, and he glanced as idly at the picture as a worn-out gourmet would over the bill of fare of a table d'hôte dinner.

A moment after all eyes were again fixed on the game, and Dick began to speak to Kate of the clothes she would have to buy in Derby.

‘I can give you twenty pounds to fit yourself out. Do you think you could manage with that?’

‘I’m afraid I’m putting you to a lot of expense, dear.’

‘Not more than you’re worth. You don’t know what a pleasant time we shall have travellin’ about; it’s so tiresome bein’ always alone. There’s no society in these country towns, but I shan’t want society now.’

‘And do you think that you won’t get tired of me? Will you never care again for any of these fine ladies?’ and her brilliant eyes drew down Dick’s lips, and when they entered a tunnel the temptation to repeat the kiss was great, but owing to Dubois’s attempt to light matches it ended in failure. Dick bumped his head against the woodwork of the carriage; Kate felt she hated the little comedian, and before she recovered her temper the train began to slacken speed, and there were frequent calls for Dick from the windows of the different compartments.

‘Is the railway company going to stand us treat this journey?’ shouted Mortimer.

‘Yes,’ replied Dick, putting his head out, ‘seven the last time and seven this; we should have more than a couple of quid.’

When the train stopped and a voice was heard crying, ‘All tickets here!’ he said to Dubois, Bret, and Montgomery, ‘Now then, you fellows, cut off; get Mortimer and a few of the chorus-men to join you; we’re seven short.’

As they ran away he continued to Leslie: ‘I hope Hayes won’t bungle it; he’s got the tickets to-day.’

‘You shouldn’t have let him take them; you know he’s always more or less drunk, and may answer forty-two.’

‘I can’t help it if he does; I’d something else to look after at Hanley.’

‘Tickets!’ said the guard.

‘Our acting manager has them; he’s in the end carriage.’

‘You know I don’t want anything said about it; Hayes and I are old pals; but it’s a damned nuisance to have an acting manager who’s always boozed. I have to look after everythin’, even to making up the returns. But I must have a look and see how he’s gettin’ on with the guard,’ said Dick, jumping up and putting his head out of the window.

After a moment or two he withdrew it and said hastily, ‘By Jove! there’s a row on. I must go and see what’s up. I bet that fool has gone and done something.’

In a minute he had opened the carriage door and was hurrying down the platform.

‘Oh, what’s the matter?—do tell me,’ said Kate to Miss Leslie. ‘I hope he won’t get into any trouble.’

‘It’s nothing at all. We never, you know, take the full number of tickets, for it is impossible for the guard to count us all; and besides, there are some members who always run down the platform; and in that way we save a good deal of coin, which is spent in drinks all round.’ But guessing what was passing in Kate’s mind Leslie said: ‘It isn’t cheating. The company provides us with a carriage, and it is all the same to them if we travel five-and-thirty or forty-two.’

Chapter XII

The rest of the journey was accomplished monotonously, the conversation drifting into a discussion, in the course of which mention was made of actors, singers, theatre, prices of admission, ‘make-ups,’ stage management, and music. It was in Birmingham that Ashton, Leslie’s understudy, sang the tenor’s music instead of her own in the first act of the *Cloches*: and poor So-and-so, who was playing the Grenicheux—how he did look when he heard his B flat go off!

‘Flat,’ murmured Montgomery sorrowfully, ‘isn’t the word. I assure you it loosened every tooth in my head. I broke my stick trying to stop her, but it was no bloody good.’

Then explanations of how the different pieces had been produced in Paris were volunteered, and the talents of the different composers were discussed; and all held their sides and roared when Dubois, who, Kate began to perceive, was the company’s laughingstock, declared that he thought Offenbach too polkaic.

At last the train rolled into Derby, and Dick asked a red pimply-faced man in a round hat if he had secured good places for his posters.

‘Spiffing,’ the man answered, and he saluted Leslie. ‘But I couldn’t get you the rooms. They’re let; and, between ourselves, you’ll ‘ave a difficulty in finding what you want. This is cattle-show week. You’d better come on at once with me. I know an hotel that isn’t bad, and you can have first choice—Beaumont’s old rooms; but you must come at once.’

Kate was glad to see that Mr. Bill Williams, the agent in advance, did not remember her. She, however, recognized him at once as the man who had sent Dick to her house.

‘Cattle-show week! All the rooms in the town let!’ cried Leslie, who had overheard part of Mr. Williams’s whisperings. ‘Oh dear! I do hope that my rooms aren’t let. I hate going to an hotel. Let me out; I must see about them at once. Here, Frank, take hold of this bag.’

‘There’s no use being in such a hurry; if the rooms are let they are let. What’s the name of the hotel you were speaking of, Williams?’

‘I forget the name, but if you don’t find lodgings, I’ll leave you the address at the theatre,’ said the agent in advance, winking at Dick.

‘You’re too damned clever, Williams; you’ll be making somebody’s fortune one of these days.’

Kate had some difficulty in keeping close to Dick, for he was surrounded the moment he stepped out on the platform. The baggage-man had a quantity of questions to ask him, and Hayes was desirous of re-explaining how the ticket-collector had happened to misunderstand him. Pulling his long whiskers, the acting manager walked about murmuring, ‘Stupid fool! stupid darned fool!’ And there were some twenty young women who pleaded in turn, their little hands laid on the arm of the popular fat man.

‘Yes, dear; that’s it,’ he answered. ‘I’ll see to it to-morrow. I’ll try not to put you in Miss Crawford’s dressing-room, since you don’t agree.’

‘And, Mr. Lennox, you will see that I’m not shoved into the back row by Miss Dacre, won’t you?’

‘Yes, dear—yes, dear; I’ll see to that too; but I must be off now; and you’d better see after lodgings; I hear that they are very scarce. If you aren’t able to get any, come up to the Hen and Chickens; I hear they have rooms to let there. Poor little girls!’ he murmured to Williams as they got into a cab. ‘They only have twenty-five bob a week; one can’t see them robbed by landladies who can let their rooms three times over.’

‘Just as you like,’ said Williams, ‘but you’ll have the hotel full of them.’

As they drove through the town Dick called attention to the animated appearance of the crowds, and Williams explained the advantages of the corners he had chosen; and at last the cab stopped at the inn, or rather before the archway of a stone passage some four or five yards wide.

‘There’s no inn here!’

‘Oh yes, there is, and a very nice inn too; the entrance is a little way up the passage.’

It was an old-fashioned place—probably it had been a fashionable resort for sporting squires at the beginning of the century. The hall was wainscotted in yellow painted wood; on the right-hand side there was a large brown press, with glass doors, surmounted by a pair of buffalo horns; on the opposite wall hung a barometer; and the wide, slowly sloping staircase, with its low thick banisters, ascended in front of the street door. The apartments were not, however, furnished with archaeological correctness.

A wall-paper of an antique design contrasted with a modern tablecloth, and the sombre red curtains were ill suited to the plate-glass which had replaced the narrow windows of old time. Dick did not like the dust nor the tarnish, but no other bed and sitting-room being available, a bargain was soon struck, and the proprietor, after hoping that his guests would be comfortable, informed them that the rule of his house was that the street door was barred and locked at eleven o’clock, and would be reopened for no one.

He was a quiet man who kept an orderly house, and if people could not manage to be in before midnight he did not care for their custom. After grumbling a bit, Dick remembered that the pubs closed at eleven, and as he did not know anyone in the town there would be no temptation to stay out.

Williams, who had been attentively examining Kate, said that he was going down to the theatre, and asked if he should have the luggage sent up.

This was an inconvenient question, and as an explanation was impossible before the hotel-keeper, Dick was obliged to wish Kate good-bye for the present, and accompany Williams down to the theatre.

She took off her bonnet mechanically, threw it on the table, and, sitting down in an armchair by the window, let her thoughts drift to those at home.

Whatever doubt there might have been at first, they now knew that she had left them—and for ever.

The last three words cost her a sigh, but she was forced to admit them. There could be no uncertainty now in Ralph’s and his mother’s mind that she had gone off with Mr. Lennox. Yes, she had eloped; there could be no question about the fact. She had done what she had so often read of in novels, but somehow it did not seem at all the same thing.

This was a startling discovery to make, but of the secret of her disappointment she was nearly unconscious; and rousing herself from the torpor into which she had fallen, she hoped Dick

would not stop long away. It was so tiresome waiting. But soon Miss Leslie came running upstairs.

‘Dinner has been ordered for five o’clock, and we’ve made up a party of four—you, Dick, myself, and Frank.’

‘And what time is it now?’

‘About four. Don’t you think you’ll be able to hold out till then?’

‘Oh, dear me, yes; I’m not very hungry.’

‘And I’ll lend you anything you want for to-night.’

‘Thanks, it’s very kind of you.’ Kate fell to wondering if her kindness had anything to do with Dick, and with the view to discovering their secret, if they had one, she watched them during dinner, and was glad to see that Mr. Frank Bret occupied the prima donna’s entire attention.

Soon after dinner the party dispersed.

‘You’ll not be able to buy anything to-night,’ Dick said, and Kate answered:

‘Leslie said she’d lend me a nightgown.’

‘And to-morrow you’ll buy yourself a complete rig-out,’ and he gave her five-and-twenty pounds and told her to pal with Leslie, that she was the best of the lot. It seemed to her quite a little fortune, and as Dick had to go to London next morning, she sent up word to Leslie to ask if she would come shopping with her. The idea of losing her lover so soon frightened her, and had it not been for the distraction that the buying of clothes afforded her the week she spent in Derby would have been intolerable. Leslie, it is true, often came to sit with Kate, and on more than one occasion went out to walk with her. But there were long hours which she was forced to pass alone in the gloom of the hotel sitting-room, and as she sat making herself a travelling dress, oppressed and trembling with thoughts, she was often forced to lay down her work. She had to admit that nothing had turned out as she had expected; even her own power of loving appeared feeble in comparison to the wealth of affection she had imagined herself lavishing upon Dick. Something seemed to separate them; even when she lay back and he held her in his arms, she was not as near to him as she had dreamed of being; and try as she would, she found it impossible to wipe out of her mind the house in Hanley. It rose before her, a dark background with touches of clear colour: the little girls working by the luminous window with the muslin curtains and the hanging pot of greenstuff; the stiff-backed woman moving about with plates and dishes in her hands; the invalid wheezing on the little red calico sofa. The past was still reality, and the present a fable. It didn’t seem true: lying with a man who was still strange to her; rising when she pleased; getting even her meals when she pleased. She could not realize the fact that she had left for ever her quiet home in the Potteries, and was travelling about the country with a company of strolling actors. The spider that had spun itself from the ceiling did not seem suspended in life by a less visible thread than herself. Supposing Dick were never to return! The thought was appalling, and on more than one occasion she fell down on her knees to pray to be preserved from such a terrible misfortune.

But her hours of solitude were not the worst she had to bear. Impelled by curiosity to hear all the details of the elopement, and urged by an ever-present desire to say unpleasant things, Miss Beaumont paid Kate many visits, and sitting with her thick legs crossed, she insinuated all she dared. She did not venture upon a direct statement, but by the aid of a smile and an indirect allusion it was easy to suggest that love in an actor’s heart is brief. As long as Miss

Beaumont was present Kate repressed her feelings, but when she found herself alone tears flowed down her cheeks, and sobs echoed through the dusty sitting-room.

It was in one of these trances of emotion that Dick found her when he returned, and that night she accompanied him to the theatre. The piece played was *Les Cloches de Corneville*. Miss Beaumont as Germaine disappointed her, and she could not understand how it was that the Marquis was not in love with Serpolette. But the reality that most grossly contradicted her idea was that Dick should be playing the part of the Baillie; and when she saw her hero fall down in the middle of the stage and heard everybody laugh at him, she felt both ashamed and insulted. The romantic character of her mind asserted itself, and, against her will, forced her to admire the purple-cloaked Marquis. Then her thoughts turned to considering if she would be able to act as well as any one of the ladies on the stage. It did not seem to her very difficult, and Dick had told her that, with a little teaching, she would be able to sing as well as Beaumont. The sad expression that her face wore disappeared, and she grew impatient for the piece to finish so that she might speak to Dick about taking lessons. They were now in the third act, and the moment the curtain was rung down she hurried away, asking as she went the way to the stage-door. It was by no means easy to find. She lost herself once or twice in the back streets, and when she at last found the right place, the hall-keeper refused her admittance.

‘Do you belong to the company?’

After a moment’s hesitation Kate replied that she did not; but that moment’s hesitation was sufficient for the porter, and he at once said, ‘Pass on; you’ll find Mr. Lennox on the stage.’

Timidly she walked up a narrow passage filled with men talking at the top of their voices, and from thence made her way into the wings. There she was told that Mr. Lennox was up in his room, but would be down shortly.

For a moment Kate could not realize where she was, so different was the stage now from what it had been whenever she had seen it before. The present aspect was an entirely new one.

It was dark like a cellar, and in the flaring light that spurted from an iron gas-pipe, the stage carpenter carried rocking pieces of scenery to and fro. The auditorium was a round blank overclouded in a deep twilight, through which Kate saw the long form of a grey cat moving slowly round the edge of the upper boxes.

Getting into a corner so as to be out of the way of the people who were walking up and down the stage, she matured her plans for the cultivation of her voice, and waited patiently for her lover to finish dressing. This he took some time to do, and when he did at length come downstairs, he was of course surrounded; everybody as usual wanted to speak to him, but, gallantly offering her his arm, and bending his head, he asked in a whisper how she liked the piece, and insisted on hearing what she thought of this and that part before he replied to any one of the crowd of friends who in turn strove to attract his attention. This was very flattering, but she was nevertheless obliged to relinquish her plan of explaining to him there and then her desire to learn singing. He could not keep his mind fixed on what she was saying. Mortimer was telling a story at which everybody was screaming, and just at her elbow Dubois and Montgomery were engaged in a violent argument regarding the use of consecutive fifths. But besides these distractions there was a tall thin man who kept nudging away at Dick’s elbow, begging of him to come over to his place, and saying that he would give him as good a glass of whisky as he had ever tasted. Nobody knew who the man was, but Dick thought he had met him somewhere up in the North.

‘I’ve been about, gentlemen, in America, and in France, and I lead a bachelor life. My house is across the way, and if you’ll do me the honour to come in and have a glass with me, I shall feel highly honoured. If there’s one thing I do enjoy more than another, it’s the conversation of intellectual men, and after the performance of to-night I don’t see how I can do better than to come to you for it. But,’ he continued gallantly, ‘if I said just now that I was a bachelor, it is, I assure you, not because I dislike the sex. My solitary state is my misfortune, not my fault, and if these ladies will accompany you, gentlemen, need I say that I shall be charmed and honoured?’

‘We’ll do the honouring and the ladies will do the charming,’ Mortimer said, and on these words the whole party followed the tall thin man to his house, a small affair with a porch and green blinds such as might be rented by a well-to-do commercial traveller.

The furniture was mahogany and leather, and when the sideboard was opened, the acrid odour of tea and the sickly smells of stale bread and rank butter were diffused through the room; but these were quickly dominated by the fumes of the malt. A bottle of port was decanted for the ladies. To the host nothing was too much trouble; his guests must eat as well as drink, and he went down to the kitchen and helped the maid-servant to bring up all the eatables that were in the house—some cold beef and cheese—and after having partaken of these the company stretched themselves in their chairs. Hayes drank his whisky in silence, while Montgomery, his legs thrown over the arm of his chair, tried to get in a word concerning the refrain of a comic song he had just finished scoring; but as the song was not going to be sung in any of the pieces they were touring with, no one was interested, and Mortimer’s talk about the regeneration of the theatre was becoming so boring that Leslie and Beaumont had begun to think of bedtime, and might have taken their departure if Dubois had not said that all the great French actresses had lovers and that the English would do well to follow their examples. A variety of opinions broke forth, and everyone seemed to wake up; anecdotes were told that brought the colour to Kate’s cheeks and made her feel uncomfortable. Dubois had lived a great deal in France; it was not certain that he had not acted in French, and sitting with his bishop’s hat tilted on the back of his head, he related that Agar had described George Sand as a sort of pouncing disease that had affected her health more than all her other lovers put together. Dubois was declared to have insulted the profession; Dick agreed that Dubois did not know what he was talking about—George Sand was a woman, not a man—and Montgomery, who had a sister-in-law starring in Scotland, refused to be appeased until he was asked to accompany Leslie and Bret in a duet. The thin man, as everybody now called him, said he had never been so much touched in his life, a statement which Beaumont did her best to justify by going to the piano and singing three songs one after another. The third was a signal for departure, and while Montgomery vowed under his breath that it was quite enough to have to listen to Beaumont during business hours, Dick tried to awaken Hayes. He had fallen fast asleep. Their kind host said that he would put him up for the night, but the mummers thought they would be able to get him home. So, bidding the kindest of farewells to their host, whom they hoped they would see the following evening at the theatre, they stumbled into the street, pushing and carrying the drunken man between them. It was very hard to get Hayes along; every ten or a dozen yards he would insist on stopping in the middle of the roadway to argue the value and the sincerity of the friendship his comrades bore for him. Mortimer strove to pacify him, saying that he would stand in a puddle all night if by doing so he might prove that he loved him, and Dubois entreated him to believe him when he said that to sit with him under a cold September moon talking of the dear dead days would be a bliss that he could not forego. But the comedian’s jokes soon began to seem idle and flat, and the ladies proposed to walk on in front, leaving the gentlemen to get their friend home as best they could.

‘You’re thinking of your beds,’ Dick cried, and that reminded him that the hotel-keeper had told him that he shut his doors at eleven and would open them for no one before morning.

‘What are we to do?’ asked Leslie; ‘it’s very cold.’

‘We’ll ring him up,’ said Dubois.

‘But if he doesn’t answer?’ suggested Bret.

‘I’ll jolly soon make him answer,’ said Dick. ‘Now then, Hayes, wake up, old man, and push along.’

‘Pou-sh-al-long! How can—you—talk to me like that? Yer—yer—shunting me—me—for one of those other fellows.’

‘We’ll talk about that in the morning, old man. Now, Mortimer, you get hold of his other arm and we’ll run him along.’

Mr. Hayes struggled, declaring the while he would no longer believe in the world’s friendship; but with Montgomery pushing from behind, the last hundred yards were soon accomplished, and the drunken burden deposited against the wall of the passage.

Dick pulled the bell; the whole party listened to the distant tinkling, and after a minute or two of suspense, Mortimer said:

‘That won’t do, Dick; ring again. We shall be here all night.’

Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle, went the bell, and a husky voice, issuing from the dark shadow of the wall, said:

‘I rang for another whisky, waiter, that’s all.’

‘The still-room maid has gone to sleep, sir,’ Mortimer answered; and the bell was rung again and again, and whilst one of the company was pulling at the wire, another was hammering away with the knocker. All the same, no answer could be obtained, and the mummers consulted Leslie and Bret, who proposed that they should seek admittance at another hotel; Dubois, that they should beg hospitality of the other members of the company; Montgomery, that they should go back to the theatre. But the hotel-keeper had no right to lock them out, and they had a perfect right to break into his house, and the chances they ran of ‘doing a week’ were anxiously debated as they searched for a piece of wood to serve as a ram. None of sufficient size could be found, much to the relief of the ladies and Dubois, who strongly advised Dick to renounce this door-smashing experiment.

‘Oh, Dick, pray don’t,’ whispered Kate. ‘What does it matter; it will be daylight in a few hours.’

‘That’s all very well, but I tell you he has no right to lock us out; he’s a licensed hotel-keeper. Are you game, Mortimer? We can burst in the door with our shoulders.’

‘Game!’ said Mortimer, in a nasal note that echoed down the courtyard; ‘partridges are in season in September. Here goes!’ and taking a run, he jumped with his full weight against the door.

‘Out of the way,’ cried Dick, breaking away from Kate, and hurling his huge frame a little closer to the lock than the comedian had done.

The excitement being now at boiling pitch, the work was begun in real earnest, and as they darted in regular succession out of the shadow of the buttress across the clear stream of moonlight flowing down the flagstones, they appeared like a procession of figures thrown on a cloth by a magic-lantern. Mr. Hayes’ white stocking served for a line, and bump, bump,

they went against the door. Each effort was watched with different degrees of interest by the ladies. When little Dubois toddled forward, and sprang with what little impetus his short legs could give him, it was difficult not to laugh, and when Montgomery's reed-like shanks were seen passing, Kate clung to Miss Leslie in fear that he would crush his frail body against the door; but when it came to the turn of any of the big ones, the excitement was great. Mortimer and Bret were watched eagerly, but most faith was placed in Dick, not only for his greater weight, but for his superior and more plucky way of jumping. Springing from the very middle of the passage, his head back and his shoulder forward, he went like a thunderbolt against the door. It seemed wonderful that he did not bring down the wall as well as the woodwork, and a round of applause rewarded each effort. Hayes, who fancied himself in bed, and that the waiter was calling him at some strange hour in the morning, shouted occasionally the most fearful of curses from his dark corner. The noise was terrific, and the clapping of hands, shrieks of laughter, and cries of encouragement reverberated through the echoing passage and the silent moonlight.

At last Dick's turn came again, and enraged by past failures, he put forth his whole strength and jumped from the white stocking with his full weight against the door. It gave way with a crash, and at that moment the proprietor appeared, holding a candle in his hand.

Everybody made a rush, and picking up Dick, who was not in the least hurt, they struck matches on the wall and groped their way up to their rooms, heedless of the denunciations of the enraged proprietor, who declared that he would take an action against them all. In his dressing-gown, and by the light of his candle, he surveyed his dismantled threshold, thinking how he might fasten up his house for the night. The first object he caught sight of was Mr. Hayes' white stocking. As he did so a wicked light gleamed in his eyes, and after a few efforts to awake the drunkard he walked to the gateway and looked up and down the street to see if a policeman were in sight. In real truth he was doubtful as to his rights to lock visitors out of their hotel, and, did not feel disposed to discuss the question before a magistrate. But what could be said against him for requesting the removal of a drunken man? He did not know who he was, nor was he bound to find out. So argued the proprietor of the Hen and Chickens, and Mr. Hayes, still protesting he did not want to be called before ten, was dragged off to the station.

Next morning the hotel-keeper denied knowing anything whatever about the matter. It was true he had called the policeman's attention to the fact that there was a man asleep under the archway, but he did not know that the man was Mr. Hayes. This story was rejected by the company, and vowing that they would never again go within a mile of his shop, they all went to see poor Hayes pulled out before the beak. It was a forty-shilling affair or the option of a week, and in revenge, Dick invited last night's party to dinner at a restaurant. They weren't going to put their money into the pocket of that cad of an inn-keeper. Hayes was the hero of the hour, and he made everybody roar with laughter at the way in which he related his experiences. But after a time Dick, who had always an eye to business, drew his chair up to Mortimer's, and begged of him to try to think of some allusions to the adventures which could be worked into the piece. The question was a serious one, and until it was time to go to the theatre the art of gagging was warmly argued. Dubois held the most liberal views. He said that after a certain number of nights the author's words should be totally disregarded in favour of topical remarks. Bret, who was slow of wit, maintained that the dignity of a piece could only be maintained by sticking to the text, and cited examples to support his opinion. It was, however, finally agreed that whenever Mortimer came on the stage, he should say, 'Derby isn't a safe place to get drunk in,' and that Dubois should reply, 'Rather not.'

Owing to these little emendations, the piece went with a scream, the receipts were over a hundred, and Morton and Cox's Operatic Company, having done a very satisfactory week's business, assembled at the station on Sunday morning bound for Blackpool.

Kate and Dick jumped into a compartment with the same people as before, plus a chorus-girl who was making up to Montgomery in the hopes of being allowed to say on the entrance of the duke, 'Oh, what a jolly fellow he is!' Mortimer shouted to Hayes, who always went with the pipe-smokers, and Dick spoke about the possibility of producing some new piece at Liverpool. Dubois, Mortimer, Bret, and the chorus-girl settled down to a game of nap. Dick, Leslie, and Montgomery were singing tunes or fragments of tunes to each other, and talking about 'effects' that might be introduced into the new piece. But would Dick produce a new piece?

The conversation changed, and it was asked if no money could be saved this trip in the taking of the tickets, and Dick was closely questioned as to when, in his opinion, it would be safe to try their little plant on again. Instead of answering he leant back, and gradually a pleasant smile began to trickle over his broad face. He was evidently maturing some plan. 'What is it, Dick? Do say like a good fellow,' was repeated many times, but he refused to give any reply. This aroused the curiosity of the company, and it grew to burning pitch when the train drew up at a station and Dick began a conversation with the guard concerning the length of time they would have at Preston, and where they would find the train that was to take them on to Blackpool.

'You'll have a quarter of an hour's wait at Preston. You'll arrive there at 4.20 and at thirty-five past you'll find the train for Blackpool drawn up on the right-hand side of the station.'

'Thanks very much,' replied Dick as he tipped the guard; and then, turning his head towards his friends, he whispered, 'It's as right as a trivet; I shall be back in a minute.'

'Where's he off to?' asked everybody.

'He's just gone into the telegraph office,' said Montgomery, who was stationed at the window.

A moment after Dick was seen running up the platform, his big hat giving him the appearance of an American. As he passed each compartment of their carriage he whispered something in at the window.

'What can he be saying? What can he be arranging?' asked Miss Leslie.

'I don't care how he arranges it as long as I get a drink on the cheap at Preston,' said Mortimer.

'That's the main point,' replied Dubois.

'Well, Dick, what is it?' exclaimed everybody, as the big man sat down beside Kate.

'The moment the train arrives at Preston we must all make a rush for the refreshment-rooms and ask for Mr. Simpson's lunch.'

'Who's Mr. Simpson? What lunch? Oh, do tell us! What a mysterious fellow you are!' were the exclamations reiterated all the way along the route. But the only answer they received was, 'Now what does it matter who Mr. Simpson is? Eat and drink all you can, and for the life of you don't ask who Mr. Simpson is, but only for his lunch.'

And as soon as the train stopped actors, actresses, chorus-girls and men, conductor, prompter, manager, and baggage-man rushed like a school towards the glass doors of the refreshment-room, where they found a handsome collation laid out for forty people.

‘Where’s Mr. Simpson’s lunch?’ shouted Dick.

‘Here, sir, here; all is ready,’ replied two obliging waiters.

‘Where’s Mr. Simpson’s lunch?’ echoed Dubois and Montgomery.

‘This way, sir; what will you take, sir? Cold beef, chicken and ham, or a little soup?’ asked half a dozen waiters.

The ladies were at first shy of helping themselves, and hung back a little, but Dick drove them on, and, the first step taken, they ate of everything. But Kate clung to Dick timidly, refusing all offers of chicken, ham, and cold beef.

‘But is this paid for?’ she whispered to him.

‘Of course it is. Mr. Simpson’s lunch. Take care of what you’re sayin’. Tuck into this plate of chicken; will you have a bit of tongue with it?’ and not having the courage to refuse, Kate complied in silence. Dick crammed her pockets with cakes. But soon the waiters began to wonder at the absence of Mr. Simpson, and had already commenced their inquiries.

Approaching Mortimer, the head waiter asked that gentleman if Mr. Simpson was in the room.

‘He’s just slipped round to the bookstall to get a Sunday paper. He’ll be back in a minute, and if you’ll get me another bit of chicken in the meantime I shall feel obliged.’

In five minutes more the table was cleared, and everybody made a movement to retire, and it was then that the refreshment-room people began to exhibit a very genuine interest in the person of Mr. Simpson. One waiter begged of Dick to describe the gentleman to him, another besought of Dubois to say at what end of the table Mr. Simpson had had his lunch. In turn they appealed to the ladies and to the gentlemen, but were always met with the same answer. ‘Just saw him a minute ago, going up to the station; if you run after him you’re sure to catch him.’ ‘Mr. Simpson? Why, he was here a minute ago; I think he was speaking about sending a telegram; perhaps he’s up in the office.’ The train bell then rang, and, like a herd in motion, the whole company crowded to the train. The guard shouted, the panic-stricken waiters tumbled over the luggage, and, running from carriage to carriage, begged to be informed as to Mr. Simpson’s whereabouts.

‘He’s in the end carriage, I tell you, back there, just at the other end of the train.’

The seedy black coats were then seen hurrying down the flags, but only to return in a minute, breathless, for further information. But this could not last for ever, and the guard blew his whistle, the actors began gagging. And, oh, the singing, the whistling, the cheers of the mummers as the train rolled away into the country, now all agleam with the sunset! Tattoos were beaten with sticks against the woodwork of each compartment. Dick, with his body half out of the window and his curls blowing in the wind, yelled at Hayes. Montgomery disputed with Dubois for possession of the other window, and three chorus-girls giggled and, munching stolen cakes, tried to get into conversation with Kate. But though love had compensated her for virtue, nothing could make amends to her for her loss of honesty. She could break a moral law with less suffering than might be expected from her bringing up, but the sentiment the most characteristic, and naturally so, of the middle classes is a respect for the property of others; and she had eaten of stolen bread. Oppressed and sickened by this idea, she shrank back in her corner, and filled with a sordid loathing of herself, she moved instinctively away from Dick.

At Blackpool Mr. Williams’s pimply face was the first thing that greeted them. There was the usual crowd of landladies who presented their cards and extolled the comfort and cleanliness

of their rooms. One of these women was introduced and specially recommended by Mr. Williams. He declared that her place was a little paradise, and an hour later, still plunged in conscientious regrets at having eaten a luncheon that had not been paid for, Kate sat sipping her tea in a rose-coloured room.

Chapter XIII

But next morning at Blackpool Kate woke up languid, and seeing Dick fast asleep, she thought it would be a pity to awaken him, and twisting her pretty legs out of bed, she went into the sitting-room, with the intention of looking after Dick's breakfast, and found it laid out on the round table in the rose-coloured sitting-room, the napery of exceeding whiteness. The two armchairs drawn by the quietly burning fire inspired indolence, and tempted at once by the freshness of her dressing-gown and the warmth of the room, she fell into a sort of happy reverie, from which she awoke in a few minutes prompted by a desire to see Dick; to see him asleep; to awaken him; to talk to him; to upbraid him for his laziness. The room, full of the intimacy of their life, enchanted her, and half in shame, half in delight, she affected to arrange the pillows while he buttoned his collar. When this was accomplished she led him triumphantly to the breakfast table, and with one arm resting on his knees watched the white shapes of the eggs seen through the bubbling water. This was the great business of the morning. He would pay twopence apiece to have fresh eggs, and was most particular that they should be boiled for three minutes, and not one second more. The landlady brought up the beefsteak and the hot milk for the coffee, and if any friend came in orders were sent down instantly for more food. Such extravagance could not fail to astonish Kate, accustomed as she had been from her earliest years to a strict and austere mode of life. Frequently she begged of Dick to be more economical, but having always lived Bohemian-like on the money easily gained, he paid very little attention to what she said, beyond advising her to eat more steak and put colour into her cheeks. And once the ice of habit was broken, she likewise began to abandon herself thoroughly to the pleasures of these rich warm breakfasts, and to look forward to the idle hours of digestion which followed, and the happy dreams that could then be indulged in. Before the tea-things were removed Dick opened the morning paper, and from time to time read aloud scraps of whatever news he thought interesting. These generally concerned the latest pieces produced in London; and, as if ignorant of the fact that she knew nothing of what he was speaking of, he explained to her his views on the subject—why such and such plays would, and others would not, do for the country. Kate listened with riveted attention, although she only understood half of what was told her, and the flattery of being taken into his confidence was a soft and fluttering joy. In these moments all fear that he would one day desert her died away like an ugly wind; and, with the noise of the town drumming dimly in the distance, they abandoned themselves to the pleasure of thinking of each other. Dick congratulated himself on the choice he had made, and assured himself that he would never know again the ennui of living alone. She was one of the prettiest women you could see anywhere, and, luckily, not too exacting. In fact, she hadn't a fault if it weren't that she was a bit cold, and he couldn't understand how it was; women were not generally cold with him. The question interested him profoundly, and as he considered it his glance wandered from the loose blue masses of hair to the white satin shoe which she held to the red blaze.

'Dick, do you think you'll always love me as you do now?'

'I'm sure of it, dear.'

'It seems to me, if one really loves once one must love always. But I don't know how I can talk to you like this, for how can you respect me? I've been so very wicked.'

'What nonsense, Kate! How can you talk like that? I wouldn't respect you if you went on living with a man you didn't care about.'

‘Well, I liked him well enough till you came, dear, but I couldn’t then—it wasn’t all my fault; but if you should cease to care for me I think I should die. But you won’t; tell me that you won’t, dear Dick.’

At that moment the door opened; it was Montgomery come to see them. Kate jumped off Dick’s knees, and, settling her skirts with the pretty movement of a surprised woman, threw herself into a chair on the opposite side of the fireplace. The musician had come to speak about his opera, especially the opening chorus, about which he could not make up his mind.

‘My boy,’ said Dick, ‘don’t be afraid of making it too long. There’s nothing like having a good strong number to begin with—something with grip in it, you know.’

Montgomery looked vaguely into space; he was obviously not listening, but was trying to follow out some musical scheme that was running in his head. After a long silence he said:

‘What I can’t make up my mind about is whether I ought to concert that first number or have it sung in unison. Now listen. The scene is the wedding festivities of Prince Florimel, who is about to wed Eva, the daughter of the Duke of Perhapsburg—devilish good name, you know. Well then, the flower-girls come on first, scattering flowers; they proceed two by two and arrange themselves in line on both sides of the stage. They are followed by trumpeters and a herald; then come the ladies-in-waiting, the pages, the courtiers, and the palace servants. Very well; the first four lines, you know - “Hail! hail! the festive day”—that, of course, is sung by the sopranos.’

‘You surely don’t want to concert that, do you?’ interrupted Dick.

‘Of course not; you must think me an ignoramus. The first four lines are sung naturally in unison; then there is a repeat, in which the tenors and basses are singing against the women’s voices. By that time the stage will be full. Well, then, what I’m thinking of doing, when I get to the second part, you know - “May the stars much pleasure send you, may romance and love attend you,” is to repeat “May the stars.”‘

‘Oh, I see what you mean,’ said Dick, who began to grow interested. You’ll give “May the stars” first to the sopranos, and then repeat with the tenors and basses?’

‘That’s it. I’ll show you,’ replied Montgomery, rushing to the piano. ‘Here are the sopranos singing in G, “May the stars”; tenors, “May the stars”; tenors and sopranos, “Much pleasure send you”; basses an octave lower, “May the stars—may stars.” Now I’m going to join them together - “May the Stars.”‘

Twisting round rapidly on the piano-stool, Montgomery pushed his glasses high up on his beak-like nose, and demanded an opinion. But before Dick could say a word a kick of the long legs brought the musician again face to the keyboard, and for several minutes he crashed away, occasionally shouting forth an explanatory remark, or muttering an apology when he failed to reach the high soprano notes. The love song, however, was too much for him, and, laughing at his own breakdown, he turned from the piano and consented to resume the interrupted conversation. Then the plot and musical setting of Montgomery’s new work was discussed. The names of Offenbach and Hervé were mentioned; both were admitted to be geniuses, but the latter, it was declared, would have been the greater had he had the advantage of a musical education. Various anecdotes were related as to how the latter had achieved his first successes, and Montgomery, who questioned the possibility of a man who could not write down the notes being able to compose the whole score of an opera, maintained it was ridiculous to talk of dictating a finale.

Kate often asked herself if she would ever be able to take part in these artistic discussions; she was afraid not. Even when she succeeded in picking up the thread of an idea, it soon got

tangled with another, and she began to fear she would never know why Hervé was a better composer than Offenbach, and why a certain quintette was written on classical lines and such-like. She asked Montgomery to explain things to her, but he was more anxious to speak of his own music, and when the names of the ladies of the company were being run over in search of one who could take the part of a page, with a song and twenty lines of dialogue to speak, Dick said:

'Well, perhaps it isn't for me to say it, but I assure you that I don't know a nicer soprano voice than Mrs. Ede's.'

'Ho, ho!' cried Montgomery, twisting his legs over the arm of the chair, 'how is it I never heard of this before? But won't you sing something, Mrs. Ede? If you have any of your songs here I'll try the accompaniment over.'

Kate, who did not know a crotchet from a semiquaver, grew frightened at this talk of trying over accompaniments, and tried to stammer out some apologies and excuses.

'Oh, really, Mr. Montgomery, I assure you Dick is only joking. I don't sing at all—I don't know anything about music.'

'Don't you mind her; 'tis as I say: she's got a very nice soprano voice; and as for an ear, I never knew a better in my life. There's no singing flat there, I can tell you. But, seriously speaking,' he continued, taking pity on Kate, whose face expressed the agony of shame she was suffering, 'of course I know well enough she don't know how to produce her voice; she never had a lesson in her life, but I think you'll agree with me, when you hear it, that the organ is there. Do sing something, Kate.'

Kate cast a beseeching glance at her lover, and murmured some unintelligible words, but they did not save her. Montgomery crossed himself over the stool, and, after running his fingers over the keys, said:

'Now, sing the scale after me—do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, la—that's the note; try to get that clear—sol, do!' and Kate, not liking to disoblige Dick, sang the scale after Montgomery in the first instance, and then, encouraged by her success, gave it by herself, first in one octave and then in the other. 'Well, don't you agree with me?' said Dick. 'The organ is there, and there's no fluffing the notes; they come out clear, don't they?'

'They do indeed,' replied Montgomery, casting a warm glance of admiration at Kate; 'but I should so much like to hear Mrs. Ede sing a song.'

'Oh, I really couldn't - '

'Nonsense! Sing the song of "The Bells" in the *Cloches*,' said Dick, taking her by the arm. She pleaded and argued, but it was no use, and when at last it was decided she was to sing, Montgomery, who had in the meantime been trying the finale of his first act in several different ways, stopped short and said suddenly:

'Oh, I beg your pardon; you're going to sing the song of "The Bells." I'll tell you when to begin—now, "Though they often tell us of our ancient masters."'

When Kate had finished singing Montgomery spun round, bringing himself face to face with Dick, and speaking professionally, said:

''Pon my word, it's extraordinary. Of course it is a head voice, but as soon as we get a few chest notes—you know I don't pretend to be able to teach singing, but after a year's training under my grandfather Beaumont wouldn't be in the same street with you.'

‘Yes, but as he isn’t here,’ replied Dick, who always kept an eye on the possible, ‘don’t you think it would be as well for her to learn a little music?’

‘I shall be only too delighted to teach Mrs. Ede the little I know myself. I’ll come in the morning, and we’ll work away at the piano; and you know,’ continued Montgomery, who began to regret the confession of his inability to teach singing, ‘although I don’t pretend to be able to do what my grandfather could with a voice, still, I know something about it. I used to attend all his singing-classes, and am pretty well up in his method, and—and—if Mrs. Ede likes, I shall be only too happy to do some singing with her; and, between you and me, I think that in a few lessons I could get rid of that throatiness, and show her how to get a note or two from the chest.’

‘I’m sure you could, my boy; and I shall be delighted with you if you will. Of course we must consider it as a matter of business.’

‘Oh, nonsense, nonsense, between pals!’ exclaimed Montgomery, who saw a perspective of long hours passed in the society of a pretty woman—a luxury which his long nose and scraggy figure prevented him from indulging in as frequently as he desired.

After some further discussion, it was arranged that Montgomery should call round some time after breakfast, and that Dick should then leave them together to work away at do, re, mi, fa. Hamilton’s system was purchased, and it surprised and amused Kate to learn that the notes between the spaces spelt ‘face.’ But it was in her singing lessons that she took the most interest, and her voice soon began to improve both in power and quality. She sang the scales for three-quarters of an hour daily, and before the end of the week she so thoroughly satisfied Montgomery in her rendering of a ballad he had bought for her that he begged Dick to ask a few of the ‘Co.’ in to tea next Sunday evening. The shine would be taken out of Beaumont, he declared with emphasis. Kate, however, would not hear of singing before anybody for the present, and she gave up going to the theatre in the evening so that she might have two or three hours of quiet to study music-reading by herself. In the morning she woke to talk of Montgomery, who generally came in while they were at breakfast; and when the lesson was over he would often stop on until they were far advanced in the afternoon; and, looking at each other from time to time, they spoke of the next town they were going to, and alluded to the events of their last journey. Kate would have liked to speak much of Dick, but she felt ashamed, and listened with interest to all Montgomery told her of himself, of the difficulties he had to contend against, of his hopes for the future. He spoke a great deal of his opera, and often sprang up in the middle of a sentence to give a practical illustration of his meaning on the instrument. But these musical digressions did not weary Kate, and to the best of her ability she judged the different versions of the finale. ‘Give the public what they want,’ was his motto, and he intended to act up to it. He had written two or three comic songs that had been immense successes, not to speak of the yards of pantomime music he had composed, and he knew that when he got hold of a good book in three acts he’d be able to tackle it. What he was doing now was not much more than a curtain-raiser; but never mind, that was the way to begin. You couldn’t expect a manager to trust you with the piece of the evening until you’d proved that you could interest the public in smaller work. At this point of the argument Montgomery generally spoke of Dick, whom he declared was a dear good fellow, who would be only too glad to give a pal a lift when the time came. Kate, on her side, longed to hear something of her lover from an outside source. All she knew of him she had learned from his own lips. Montgomery, in whose head all sorts of reveries concerning Kate were floating, was burning to talk to her of her lover, and to hear from her own lips of the happiness which he imagined a true and perfect affection bestowed upon human life. Kate had not spoken on this important subject; and Montgomery, for fear of wounding her feelings, had avoided it;

but they were conscious that the restraint jarred their intimacy. One afternoon Dick suddenly burst in upon them, and after some preamble told them that he had arranged to meet there some gentleman with whom he had important business to transact. Montgomery took up his hat and prepared to go, and Kate offered to sit with the landlady in the kitchen.

'I'm afraid you'll bore yourself, dear,' Dick said after a pause. 'But I'll tell you what you might do—I shan't be able to take you out to-day. Why not go for a walk with Montgomery?'

'I shall be delighted; I'll take you for a charming walk up the hill, and show you the whole town.'

Kate had no objection to make, and she returned to the sitting-room sooner than they expected her. 'A quick-change artist,' Dick said.

She wore a brown costume, trimmed with feathers to match; a small bonnet crowned the top of her head, and her face looked adorably coquettish amid the big bows into which she had tied the strings. Her companion was very conscious of this fact, and with his heart full of pride he occasionally jerked his head round to watch the passers-by, doubting at the same time if any were as happy as he.

It was a great pleasure to be alone with Kate in the open air, walking by her side, escorting her, and telling her as they walked all he knew about Blackpool: that it bore the same relation to the other towns of Lancashire as the seventh day does to the other six of the week; that it was the huge Lancashire Sunday, where the working classes of Accrington, Blackburn, Preston, and Burnley, during a week or a fortnight of the year, go to recreate themselves.

'The streets are built with large pavements,' he told her, 'so that jostling may be avoided, and there are many open spaces where people may loiter and congregate; the bonnets exhibited in the plate-glass windows, you can see, are obviously intended for holiday wear.' She stopped to look at these. 'Not one,' he said, 'is as pretty as the one you're wearing.'

'It's a pretty little hat,' she answered, and he pointed to the spider-legged piers and to a high headland, a sort of green cap over the ocean.

'Do you know that the fellow who owns that building has made a fortune?' said Montgomery, pointing to the roofs which began to appear above the edge of the common.

'Did he really?' replied Kate, trying to appear interested.

'Yes; he began with a sort of shanty where he sold ginger-beer and lemonade. It became the fashion to go out there, and now he's got dining-rooms and a spirit licence. We went up there last week, a lot of us, and we had such fun; we went donkey-riding, and Leslie had a fall. Did she tell you of it?'

'No; I've scarcely spoken to her for the last few days.'

'How's that? I thought you were such friends.'

'I like her very much; but she's always on the stage at night, and I don't like—I mean I should like—but I don't know that she would like me to go and see her.'

'And why not, pray?'

'Well, I thought she mightn't like me to come and see her, because, I'm—well, on account of Dick.'

'There's nothing between them now; that's all over ages ago, and she's dead nuts on Bret.'

Kate had been nearly a fortnight with the mummers, but she had lived almost apart. She had not yet learnt that in the company she was in no opprobrium was attached to the fact of a

woman having a lover, and she still supposed that because she had left her husband Leslie might not like to associate with her. To learn, then, that she had only replaced another woman in Dick's affections came upon her with a shock, and it was the very suddenness of the blow that saved her from half the pain; for it was impossible for a woman who saw in the world nothing but the sacrifice she had made for the man she loved, to realize the fact that Dick's love of her was a toy that had been taken up, just as love of Miss Leslie was a toy that had been laid down. It did not occur to her to think that the man she was living with might desert her, nor did she experience any very cruel pangs of jealousy; she was more startled than anything else by the appearance of a third person in the world which for the last week had seemed so entirely her own.

'What do you mean?' she said, stopping abruptly. 'Was Dick in love with Miss Leslie before he knew me?'

Montgomery coloured, and strove to improvise excuses.

'No,' he said, 'of course he wasn't really in love with her; but we used to chaff him about her; that's all.'

'Why should you do that, when she is in love with Bret?' said Kate harshly.

Montgomery, who dreaded a quarrel with Dick as he would death, grasped at a bit of truth to help him out of his difficulty.

'But I assure you Bret and Leslie's affair only began a couple of months ago, when we first went out on tour. We joked Dick about her to vex him, that's all. If you don't believe me, you can ask the rest of the company.'

To this Kate made no reply, and with her eyes upon the ground she remained for some moments thinking. The light and the matter-of-course way in which her companion spoke of the affections troubled her exceedingly, and very naïvely she asked herself if the company did not admit fornication among the sins.

''Tis too bad to be taken up in that way,' he said. 'There's always a bit of chaff going on; but if it were all taken for gospel truth I don't know where we should be. I give you my word of honour that I don't think he ever looked twice at her; anyhow, he didn't hesitate between you; nor could he, for, of course, you know you're a fifty times prettier woman.'

Kate answered the flattery with a delightful smile, and Montgomery thought that he had convinced her. But the young man was deceived by appearances. He had succeeded more in turning the current of her thoughts than in persuading her.

'You seem to think very lightly of such things,' she said, raising her brown eyes with a look that melted her face to a heavenly softness.

Montgomery did not understand, and she was forced to explain. This was difficult to do, but, after a slight hesitation, she said:

'Then you really do believe that Miss Leslie and Mr. Bret are lovers?'

'Oh, I really don't know,' he said hastily, for he saw himself drawn into a fresh complication; 'I never pry into other people's affairs. They seem to like each other, that's all.'

It was now Kate's turn to see that indiscreet questions might lead to the quarrels she was most anxious to avoid, and they walked along the breezy common in silence, seeing the sea below them, and far away the weedy waste of stone filled with the white wings of gulls, touched here and there with the black backs of the shrimp-fishers.

‘How strange it is that the sea should go and come like that! I’d never seen it as it is now till the day before yesterday, and Dick was so amused, for I thought it was going to dry up. The morning after our arrival here we sat down by the bathing-boxes on the beach and listened to the waves. They roared along the shore. It’s very wonderful. Don’t you think so?’

‘Yes, indeed I do. When I was here before, I spent one whole morning listening to the waves, and their surging suggested a waltz to me. This is the way it went,’ and leaning on the rough paling that guarded the precipitous edge, Montgomery sang his unpublished composition. ‘I never got any further,’ he said, stopping short in the middle of the second part; ‘I somehow lost the character of the thing; but I like the opening.’

‘Oh, so do I. I wonder how you can think of such tunes. How clever you must be!’

Montgomery smiled nervously, and he proposed that they should go over to the hotel to have a drink.

‘Oh, I don’t like to go up there,’ she said, after examining for some moments this hillside bar-room. ‘There’re too many men.’

‘What does it matter? We’ll have a table to ourselves. Besides, you’d better have something to eat, for now we’re out we may as well stay out. There’s no use going back yet awhile;’ and he talked so rapidly of his waltz—of whether he should call it the ‘Wave,’ the ‘Seashore,’ or the ‘Cliff,’ that he didn’t give her time to collect her thoughts.

‘I can’t go in there,’ she said; ‘why, it’s only a public-house.’

‘Everybody comes up here to have a drink. It’s quite the fashion.’

The men round the doorway stared at her, and seeing some of the chorus-girls coming from where the donkeys were stationed, in the company of young men with high collars and tight trousers, she almost ran into the bar-room.

‘Now you see what a scrape you’ve led me into, I wouldn’t have met those people for anything.’

‘What does it matter? If it were wrong do you think I’d bring you in here? You ask Dick when you get home.’

A doubt of the possibility of Dick thinking anything wrong clouded Kate’s mind, and Montgomery ordered sandwiches and two brandies-and-sodas. The sandwiches were excellent, and Kate, who had scarcely tasted anything but beer in her life, thought the brandy-and-soda very refreshing. The question then came of how to get out of the place, and after much hesitation and conjecturing, they slipped out the back way through the poultry-yard and stables.

In front of them was a very steep path that led to the sea strand. Large masses of earth had given way, and these had formed ledges which, in turn, had somehow become linked together, and it was possible to climb down these.

‘Do you think you could manage?’ he said, holding out his hand.

‘I don’t know; do you think it dangerous?’

‘No, not if you take care; but the cliff is pretty high; it would not do to fall over. Perhaps you’d better come back across the common by the road.’

‘And meet all those girls?’

‘I don’t see why you should be afraid of meeting them,’ said Montgomery, who was secretly anxious to show the chorus that if he were not the possessor, he was at least on intimate terms of friendship with this pretty woman.

‘No, I’d sooner not meet them, and coming out of a public-house; I don’t see why we shouldn’t come down this way. I’m sure I can manage it if you’ll give me your hand and go first.’

The descent then began. Kate’s high-heeled boots were hard to walk in, and every now and then her feet would fail her, and she would utter little cries of fear, and lean against the cliff’s side. It was delightful to reassure her, and Montgomery profited by those occasions to lay his hands upon her shoulders and hold her arms in his hands. No human creature was in hearing or in sight, and solitude seemed to unite them, and the mimic danger of the descent to endear them to each other. The quiet and enchantment of earth and air melted into her thoughts until she enjoyed a perfect bliss of unreasoned emotion. He, too, was conscious of the day, and his happiness, touched with a diffused sense of desire, was intense, even to a savour of bitterness. Like all young men, he longed to complete his youth by some great passion, but out of horror of the gross sensualities with which he was always surrounded, his delicate artistic nature took refuge in a half-platonic affection for his friend’s mistress. It was an infinite pleasure, and could it have lasted for ever he would not have thought of changing it. To take her by the hand and help her to cross the weedy stones; to watch her pretty stare of wonderment when he explained that the flux and the reflux of the tides were governed by the moon; to hear her speak of love, and to dream what that love might be, was enough.

Along the coast there were miles and miles of reaches, and to gain the sea they were obliged to make many detours. Sometimes they came upon long stretches of sand separated by what seemed to them to be a river, and Montgomery often proposed that he should carry Kate across the streamlet. But she would not hear of it, although on one occasion she did not refuse until he had placed his arms around her waist. Escaping from him, she ran along the edge, saying she would find a crossing. Montgomery pursued her, amused by the fluttering of her petticoats; but after a race of twenty or thirty yards, they found that their discovered river was only a long pool that owned no outlet to the sea, and they both stopped like disappointed children.

‘Well, never mind,’ said Kate; ‘did you ever see such beautiful clear water? I must have a drink.’

‘You’ve no cup,’ he said, turning away so that she should not see him laughing. ‘You might manage to get up a little in your hands.’

‘So I might. Oh, what fun! Tell me how I’m to do it.’

He told her how to hollow her hands, and waited to enjoy the result, and, forgetful that the sea was salt she lifted the brine to her lips; but when she spat out the horrible mouthful and turned on him a questioning face, he only answered that if she didn’t take care she would be the death of him.

‘And didn’t ums know the sea was salt, and did ums think it very nasty, and not half as nice as a brandy-and-soda?’

Kate watched him for a moment, and then her face clouded, and pouting her pretty lips, she said:

‘Of course I don’t pretend to be as clever as you, but if you’d never seen the sea until a week ago you might forget.’

‘Yes, yes, for-for-get that it—it wasn’t as nice as brandy-and-soda,’ cried Montgomery, holding his sides.

‘I wasn’t going to say that, and it was very rude of you to interrupt me in that way.’

‘Now come, don’t get cross. You should understand a joke better than that,’ he replied, for seeing the tears in her eyes he began to fear that he had spoilt the delight of their day.

‘I think it is unkind of you to laugh at me and play tricks on me like that,’ said Kate, trying to master her emotion; and as they walked under the sunset, Montgomery broke long and irritating silences by apologizing for his indiscretion, but Kate did not answer him until they arrived at a place where a little boy and girl were fishing for shrimps. Here there was quite a little lake, and amid the rocks and weedy stones the clear water flowed as it might in an aquarium, the liquid surface reflecting as perfectly as any mirror the sky’s blue, with clouds going by and many delicate opal tints, and the forms of the children’s plump limbs.

‘Oh, how nice they look! What little dears!’ exclaimed Kate, but as she pressed forward to watch the children her foot dislodged a young lobster from the corner of rock in which he had been hiding.

‘That’s a lobster,’ cried Montgomery.

‘Is it?’ cried Kate, and she pursued the ungainly thing, which sought vainly for a crevice.

After an animated chase, with the aid of her parasol she caught it, and was about to take it up with her fingers when Montgomery stopped her.

‘You’d better take care; it will pretty well nip the fingers off you.’

‘You aren’t joking?’ she asked innocently.

‘No, indeed I’m not; but I hope you don’t mind my telling you.’

At that moment their eyes met, and Kate, seeing how foolish she had been, burst into fits of laughter.

‘No, no, no, I—I don’t mind your telling me that—that a lobster bites, but - ‘

‘But when it comes to saying sea-water is not as nice as brandy-and-soda,’ he replied, bursting into a roar of merriment, ‘we cut up rough, don’t we?’

The children climbed up on the rocks to look at them, and it was some time before Kate could find words to ask them to show what they had caught.

The little boy was especially clever at his work, and regardless of wetting himself, he plunged into the deepest pools, intercepting with his net at every turn the shrimps that vainly sought to escape him. His little sister, too, was not lacking in dexterity, and between them they had filled a fairly-sized basket. Kate examined everything with an almost feverish interest. She tore long gluey masses of seaweed from the rocks and insisted on carrying them home; the mussels she found on the rocks interested her; she questioned the little shrimp fishers for several minutes about a dead starfish, and they stared in open-eyed amazement, thinking it very strange that a grown-up woman should ask such questions. At last the little boy showed her what she was to do with the lobster. He wedged the claws with two bits of wood, and attached a string whereby she might carry it in her hand, and in silences that were only interrupted by occasional words they picked their way along the strand.

Kate thought of Dick—of what he was doing, of what he was saying. She saw him surrounded by men; there were glasses on the table. She looked into his large, melancholy blue eyes, and dreamed of the time she would again sit on his knees and explain to him for

the hundredth time that love was all-sufficing, and that he who possessed it could possess nothing more. Montgomery was also thinking of Dick, and for the conquest of so pretty a woman the dreamy-minded musician viewed his manager with admiration. The morality of the question did not appeal to him, and his only fear was that Kate would one day be deserted. ‘If so, I shall have to support her.’ He thought of the music he would have to compose—songs, all of which would be dedicated to her.

‘Have you known Dick,’ she asked suddenly, ‘a long time?’

‘Two or three years or so,’ replied Montgomery, a little abashed at a question which sounded at that moment like a distant echo of his own thoughts. ‘Why do you ask?’

‘For no particular reason, only you seem such great friends.’

‘Yes, I like him very much; he’s a dear good fellow, he’d divide his last bob with a pal.’

The conversation then came to a pause. Both suddenly remembered how they had set out on their walk determined to seek information of each other on certain subjects.

Montgomery wished to hear from Kate how Dick had persuaded her to run away with him; Kate wanted to learn from Montgomery something of her lover’s private life—if he were faithful to a woman when he loved her, if he had been in love with many women before.

As she considered how she would put her questions a grey cloud passed over her face, and she thought of Leslie. But just as she was going to speak Montgomery interrupted her. He said:

‘You didn’t know Dick before he came to lodge in your house at Hanley, did you?’

Kate raised her eyes with a swift and startled look, but being anxious to speak on the subject she replied, speaking very softly:

‘No, and perhaps it would have been well if he had never come to my house.’

There was not so much insincerity in the phrase as may at first appear. Nearly all women consider it necessary to maintain to themselves and to others that they deeply regret having sinned. The delusion at once pleases and consoles them, and they cling to it to the last.

‘I often think of you,’ said Montgomery. ‘Yours appears to me such a romantic story … you who sat all day and mi-mi - ‘ he was going to say minding a sick husband, but for fear of wounding her feelings he altered the sentence to ‘and never, or hardly ever, left Hanley in your life, should be going about the country with us.’

Kate, who guessed what he had intended saying, answered:

‘Yes, I’m afraid I’ve been very wicked. I often think of it and you must despise me. That’s what makes me ashamed to go about with the rest of the company. I’m always wondering what they think of me. Tell me, do tell me the truth; I don’t mind hearing it. What do they say about me? Do they abuse me very much?’

‘Abuse you? They abuse you for being a pretty woman, I suppose; but as for anything else, good heavens! they’d look well! Why, you’re far the most respectable one among the lot. Don’t you know that?’

‘I suspected Beaumont was not quite right, perhaps; but you don’t mean to say there isn’t one? Not that little thing with fair hair who sings in the chorus?’

‘Well, yes, they say she’s all right. There are one or two, perhaps; but when it comes to asking me if Beaumont and Leslie are down on you—well!’ Montgomery burst out laughing.

This decided expression of opinion was grateful to Kate's feelings, and the conversation might have been pursued with advantage, but seeing an opportunity of speaking of Dick, she said:

'But you told me there was nothing between Mr. Bret and Miss Leslie.'

'I told you I didn't know whether there was or not; but I'm quite sure there never was between her and Dick. You see I can guess what you're trying to get at.'

'I can scarcely believe it. Now I think of it, I remember she was in his room the night of the row, when he turned me out.'

'Yes, yes; but there were a lot of us. The principals in a company generally stick together. It's extraordinary how you women will keep on nagging at a thing. I swear to you that I'm as certain as I stand here there was never anything between them. Do let us talk of something else.'

They had now wandered back to the fine pebbly beach, to within a hundred yards of the pier, and above the high cliff they could just see the red chimney-stacks of the town.

Montgomery sang his waltz softly over, but before he arrived at the second part his thoughts wandered, and he said:

'Have you heard anything of your husband since you left Hanley?'

The abruptness of the question made Kate start; but she was not offended, and she answered:

'No, I haven't. I wonder what he'll do.'

'Possibly apply for a divorce. If he does, you'll be able to marry Dick.'

A flush of pleasure passed over Kate's face, and when she raised her eyes her look seemed to have caught some of the brightness of the sunset. But it died into grey gloom even as the light above, and she said sighing:

'I don't suppose he'd marry me.'

'Well, if he wouldn't, there are lots who would.'

'What do you mean?' asked Kate simply.

'Oh, nothing; only I should think that anyone would be glad to marry you,' the young man answered, hoping that she would not repeat the conversation to her lover.

'I hope he will; for if he were to leave me, I think I should die. But tell me—you will, won't you? For you are my friend, aren't you?'

'I hope so,' he replied constrainedly.

'Well, tell me the truth: do you think he can be constant to a woman? Does he get tired easily? Does he like change?'

Kate laid her hand on Montgomery's shoulder, and looked pleadingly in his face.

'Dick is an awful good fellow, and I'm sure he couldn't but behave well to anyone he liked—not to say loved; and I know that he never cared for anybody as he does for you; he as much as told me.'

Kate's smile was expressive of pleasure and weariness, and after a pause, she said:

'I hope what you say is true; but I don't think men ever love as women do. When we give our heart to one man, we cannot love another. I don't know why, but I don't believe that a man could be quite faithful to a woman.'

‘That’s all nonsense. I’m sure that if I loved a woman it wouldn’t occur to me to think of another.’

‘Perhaps you might,’ she answered; and, unconsciously comparing them with Dick’s jovial features, she examined intently the enormous nose and the hollow, sunken cheeks. Montgomery wondered what she was thinking of, and he half guessed that she was considering if it were possible that any woman could care for him. To die without ever having been able to inspire an affection was a fear that was habitual to him, and often at night he lay awake, racked by the thought that his ugliness would ever debar him from attaining this dearly desired end.

‘Were you ever in love with anybody?’ she asked, after a long silence.

‘Yes, once.’

‘And did she care for you?’

‘Yes, I think she did at first. We used to meet at dinner every day; but then she fell in love with an acrobat—I suppose you would call him an acrobat—I mean one of those gutta-percha men who tie their legs in a knot over their heads. The child was deformed. I was awfully cut up about it at the time, but it’s all over now.’

The conversation then came to a pause. Kate did not like to ask any further questions, but as she stared vaguely at the pale sun setting, she wondered what the acrobat was like, and how a girl could prefer a gutta-percha man to the musician. As the minutes passed, the silence grew more irritating, and the evening colder.

‘I’m afraid we shall catch a chill if we remain here much longer, said Montgomery, who had again begun to sing his waltz over.

‘Yes, I think we’d better be getting home,’ Kate answered dreamily.

After some searching, they found a huge stairway cut for the use of bathers in the side of the cliff, and up this feet-torturing path Montgomery helped Kate carefully and lovingly.

Chapter XIV

From Blackpool Morton and Cox's opera company proceeded to Southport, and, still going northward, they visited Newcastle, Durham, Dundee, Glasgow, and Edinburgh. But in no one town did they remain more than a week. Every Sunday morning, regardless as swallows of chiming church-bells, they met at the station and were whirled as fast as steam could take them to new streets, lodging-houses, and theatres. To Kate this constant change was at once wearying and perplexing, and she often feared that she would never become accustomed to her new mode of life. But on the principle that we can scarcely be said to be moving when all around is moving in a like proportion, Kate learned to regard locality as a mere nothing, and to fix her centre of gravity in the forty human beings who were wandering with her, bound to her by the light ties of *opéra bouffe*.

Wherever she went her life remained the same. She saw the same faces, heard the same words. Were they likely to do good business? was debated when they alighted from the train; that they had or had not done good business was affirmed when they jumped into the train. Soon even the change of apartments ceased to astonish her, and she saw nothing surprising in the fact that her chest of drawers was one week on the right and the following on the left-hand side of her bed. Nor did she notice after two or three months of travelling whether wax flowers did or did not decorate the corners of her sitting-room, and it seemed to her of no moment whether the Venetian blinds were green or brown. The dinners she ate were as good in one place as in another; the family resemblance which slaveys bear to each other satisfied her eyes, and the difference of latitude and longitude between Glasgow and Aberdeen she found did not in the least alter her daily occupations.

Montgomery came to see her every morning, and the tunefulness of the piano was really all that reminded them of their change of residence. From twelve until three they worked at music, both vocal and instrumental. Dick sought for excuses to absent himself, but when he returned he always insisted that Montgomery should remain to dinner. All formalities between them were abolished, and Kate did not hesitate to sit on her lover's knees in the presence of her music-master. But he did not seem to care, he only laughed a little nervously. Kate sometimes wondered if he really disliked witnessing such familiarities. In her heart of hearts she was conscious that there were affinities of sentiment between them, and during the music lessons they talked continually of love. The sight of Montgomery's lanky face often interrupted an emotional mood, but she recovered it again when he sat looking at her, talking to her of his music. In this way he became a necessity to her existence, a sort of spiritual light. They never wearied of talking about Dick; between them it was always Dick, Dick, Dick! He told her anecdotes concerning him—how he had acted certain parts; how he had stage-managed certain pieces; of supper parties; of adventures they had been engaged in. These stories amused Kate, although the odour of woman in which they were bathed, as in an atmosphere, annoyed and troubled her. As if to repay him for his kindness, she became confidential, and one day she told him the story of her life.

It would, she said, were it taken down, make the most wonderful story-book ever written; and beginning at the beginning, she gave rapidly an account of her childhood, accentuating the religious and severe manner in which she had been brought up, until the time she and her mother made the acquaintance of the Edes. There it was necessary to hesitate. She did not wish to tell an absolute lie, but was yet desirous to convey the impression that her marriage with Mr. Ede had been forced upon her; but Montgomery had already accepted it as a foregone conclusion. With his fingers twisted through his hair, and his head thrust forward in

the position in which we are accustomed to see composers seeking inspiration depicted, he listened, passionately interested. And when it came to telling of the mental struggle she had gone through when struggling between her love for Dick and her duty towards her husband, Montgomery's face, under the influence of many emotions, straightened and contracted. He asked a hundred questions, and was anxious to know what she had thought of Dick when she saw him for the first time. She told him all she could remember. Her account of the visit to the potteries proved very amusing, but before she told him of their fall amid the cups and saucers she made Montgomery swear he would never breathe a word. 'Oh, the devil! Was that the way he cut his legs? He told us that he had forgotten his latchkey, and that he had done it in getting over the garden-wall.'

Running his hand over the piano, Montgomery begged of Kate to continue her story; but as she proceeded with the analysis of her passion the events became more and more difficult to narrate; and she knew not how to tell the tale how one dark night her husband sent her down to open the door to Dick; but she must tell everything so that the whole of the blame should not fall upon him. She alluded vaguely to violence and to force; Montgomery's face darkened and he protested against his friend's conduct.

To Kate it was consoling to meet someone who thought she was not entirely to blame, and the conversation came to a pause.

'And now I'm going about the country with you all, and am thinking of going on the stage.'

'And will be a success, too—that I'll bet my life.'

'Do you really think so? Do tell me the real truth; do you think I shall ever be able to sing?'

'I'm sure of it.'

'Well, I'm glad to hear you say so, for it's now more necessary than ever.'

'How do you mean? Has anything fresh happened? You're not on bad terms with Dick, are you? Tell me.'

'Oh, not the least! Dick is very good to me; but if I tell you something you promise not to mention it?'

'I promise.'

'Well, we were—I don't know what you call it—summoned, I think—by a man before we left Blackpool to appear in the Divorce Court.'

For nearly half a minute they looked at each other in silence; then Montgomery said:

'I suppose it was after all about the best thing that could happen.'

This answer surprised Kate. 'Why,' she said, 'do you think it's the best thing that could happen to me?'

'Because when you get your divorce, if you play your cards well, you'll be able to get Dick to marry you.'

Kate made no reply, and for some time both considered the question in silence. She wondered if Dick loved her sufficiently to make such a sacrifice for her: Montgomery reflected on the best means of persuading his friend 'to do right by the woman.' At last he said:

'But what did you mean just now when you said that it was more necessary than ever that you should go on the stage?'

‘I don’t know, only that if I’m going to be divorced I suppose I’d better see what I can do to get my living.’

‘Well, it isn’t my fault if you aren’t on the stage already. I’ve been trying to induce you to make up your mind for the last month past.’

‘Oh, the chorus! that horrid chorus! I never could walk about before a whole theatre full of people in those red tights.’

‘There’s nothing indecent in wearing tights. Our leading actresses play in travestie. In Faust Trebelli Bettini wears tights, and I’m sure no one can say anything against her.’

Tights were a constant subject of discussion between the three, friend, mistress, and lover. All sorts of arguments had been adduced, but none of them had shaken Kate’s unreasoned convictions on this point. A sense of modesty inherited through generations rose to her head, and a feeling of repugnance that seemed almost invincible, forbade her to bare herself thus to the eyes of a gazing public. But although inborn tendencies cannot be eradicated, the will that sustains them can be broken by force of circumstances, and her resolutions began to fail her when Dick declared that the thirty shillings a week she would thus earn would be a real assistance to them.

In reality the manager had no immediate need of the money, but it went against his feelings to allow principles, and above all principles he could not but think absurd, to stand in the way of his turning over a bit of coin. ‘Besides, he said, ‘how can I put you into a leading business all at once? No matter how well you knew your words, you’d dry up when you got before the footlights. You must get over your stage fright in the chorus. On the first occasion I’ll give you a line to speak, then two or three, and then when you’ve learnt to blurt them out without hesitation, we’ll see about a part.’

These and similar phrases were dinned into her ears, until at last the matter got somehow decided, and the London costumier was telegraphed to for a new dress. When it arrived a few days after, the opening of the package caused a good deal of merriment. Dick held up the long red stockings, as Kate called the tights, before Montgomery. It was too late now to retract. The dress looked beautiful, and tempted on all sides, she consented to appear that night in *Les Cloches*. So at half-past six she walked down to the theatre with her bundle under her arm. Dick had not allotted to her a dressing-room, and to avoid Miss Beaumont, who was always rude, she went of her own accord up to number six. An old woman opened the door to her, and when Kate had explained what she had come for, she said:

‘Very well, ma’am. I’m sure I don’t mind; but we’re already eight in this room, and have only one basin and looking-glass between the lot. I’m afraid you won’t be very comfortable.’

‘Oh! that won’t matter. It may be only for to-night. If I’m too much in the way I’ll ask Mr. Lennox to put me somewhere else.’

On that Kate entered. It was a long, narrow, whitewashed room, smelling strongly of violet-powder and clothes. Nobody had arrived yet, and the dresses lay spread out on chairs awaiting the wearers. One was a peasant-girl’s dress—a short calico skirt trimmed with wreaths of wild flowers, and she regretted that she could not exchange the page’s attire for one of these.

‘And as regards the tights,’ added the old woman, ‘you’d have to wear them just the same with peasant-girls’ frocks as with these trunks, for, as you can see, the skirts only just come below the knees.’

At this moment the conversation was interrupted by the clattering of feet on the rickety staircase and two girls entered talking loudly; Kate had often spoken to them in the wings. Then some more women arrived, and Kate withdrew her chair as far out of reach as possible of the flying petticoats and the scattered boots and shoes. One lady could not find her tights, another insisted on the bodice of her dress being laced up at once; three voices shouted at once for the dresser, and the call-boy was heard outside:

'Ladies! ladies! Mr. Lennox is waiting; the curtain is going up.'

'All right! all right!' cried an octave of treble voices, and tripping over their swords, those who were ready hurried downstairs, leaving the others screaming at the dresser, who was vainly attempting to tidy the room.

When Kate got on the stage the first person she saw was Montgomery, the very one she wished most to avoid. After having conducted the overture he had come up to find out the reason of the 'wait.' Dick was rushing about, declaring that if this ever occurred again half a-crown would be stopped out of all the salaries.

'Oh! how very nice we look! and they're not thin,' exclaimed Montgomery, pushing his glasses up on his nose. And forgetting his difficulties as if by magic, Dick smiled with delight as, holding her at arm's length, he looked at her critically.

'Charming, my dear! There won't be a man in front who won't fall in love with you. But I must see where I can place you.'

All the rest passed as rapidly as in a dream, and before she could again think distinctly she was walking round the stage in the company of a score of other girls. Treading in time to the music, they formed themselves into lines, making place for Leslie, who came running down to the footlights. There was no time for thinking; she was whirled along. Between the acts she had to rush upstairs to put on another dress; between the scenes she had to watch to know when she had to go on. Sometimes Dick spoke to her, but he was generally far away, and it was not until the curtain had been rung down for the last time that she got an opportunity of speaking to him.

As they walked home up the dark street when all was over, she laid her hand affectionately on his arm:

'Tell me, Dick, are you satisfied with me? I've done my best to please you.'

'Satisfied with you?' replied the big man, turning towards her in his kind unctuous way, 'I should think so: you looked lovely, and your voice was heard above everybody's. I wish you'd heard what Montgomery said. I'll give you a line to speak when you've got a bit of confidence. You're a bit timid, that's all.' And delighted Kate listened to Dick, who had begun to sketch out a career for her. Her voice, he said, would improve. She'd have twice the voice in a year from now, and with twice the voice she'd not only be able to sing Clairette in *Madame Angot*, but all Schneider's great parts.

He talked on and on, and in the early hours of the morning he was relating how *The Brigands* had failed at the Globe, the conditions of his capitalist being that his mistress was to play one of the leading parts at a high salary, and that he was to take over the bars. That was thirty pounds a week gone; and the woman sang so fearfully out of tune that she was hissed—a pity, for the piece contained some of Offenbach's best music. A casual reference to the dresses led up to a detailed account of how he had bought the satin down at the Docks at the extraordinary low price of two shillings a yard, and this bargain prepared the way for a long story concerning a girl who had worn one of these identical dresses. She was now a leading London actress, and every step of her upward career was gone into. Then followed several

biographies. Charlie —— sang in the chorus and was now a leading tenor. Miss —— had married a rich man on the Stock Exchange; and so on. Indeed, everybody in that ill-fated piece seemed to have succeeded except the manager himself. But no such criticism occurred to Kate. Her heart was swollen with admiration for the man who had been once at the head of all this talent, and the rich-coloured future he would shape for her flowed hazily through her mind.

And Kate grew happier as the days passed until she began to think she must be the happiest woman living. Her life had now an occupation, and no hour that went pressed upon her heavier than would a butterfly's wing. The mornings when Dick was with her had always been delightful; and the afternoons had been taken up with her musical studies. It was the long evenings she used to dread; now they had become part and parcel of her daily pleasures. They dined about four, and when dinner was over it was time to talk about what kind of house they were going to have, to fidget about in search of brushes and combs, the curling-tongs, and to consider what little necessaries she had better bring down to the theatre with her. At first it seemed very strange to her to go tripping down these narrow streets at a certain hour—streets that were filled with people, for the stage and the pit entrance are always within a few yards of each other, and to hear the passers-by whisper as she went by, 'She's one of the actresses.' One day she found a letter addressed to her under the name chosen by Dick—a picturesque name he thought looked well on posters—and not suspecting what was in it, she tore open the envelope in presence of half-a-dozen chorus-girls, who had collected in the passage. A diamond ring fell on the floor, and in astonishment Kate read:

'DEAR MISS D'ARCY,—In recognition of your beauty and the graceful way in which you play your part, I beg to enclose you a ring, which I hope to see on your finger to-night. If you wear it on the right hand I shall understand that you will allow me to wait for you at the stage-door. If, however, you decide that my little offering suits better your left hand, I shall understand that I am unfortunate.

'(Signed) AN ADMIRER.'

'Who left this here?' asked Kate of the doorkeeper.

'A tall young gent—a London man, I should think, by the cut of him, but he left no name.'

'A very pretty ring, anyhow,' said a girl, picking it up.

'Not bad,' said another; 'I got one like it last year at Sheffield,'

'But what shall I do with it?' asked Kate.

'Why, wear it, of course,' answered two or three voices simultaneously.

'Wear it!' she repeated, and feeling very much like one in possession of stolen goods, she hurried on to the stage, intending to ask Dick what she was to do with the ring. She found him disputing with the property man, and it was some time before he could bring himself to forget the annoyance that a scarcity of daggers had occasioned him. At last, however, with a violent effort of will, he took the note from her hand and read it through. When he had mastered the contents a good-natured smile illumined his chub-cheeked face, and he said:

'Well, what do you want to say? I think the ring a very nice one; let's see how it looks on your hand,'

'You don't mean that I'm to wear it?'

'And why not? I think it's a very nice ring,' the manager said unaffectedly. 'Wear it first on one hand and then on the other, dear; that will puzzle him,'

‘But supposing he comes to meet me at the stage-door?’

‘Well, what will that matter? We’ll go out together; I’ll see that he keeps his distance. But now run up and get dressed.’

‘Now then, come in,’ cried Dolly, who was walking about in a pair of blue stockings. ‘You’re as bashful as an undergraduate.’

A roar of laughter greeted this sally, and feeling humiliated, she began to dress.

‘You haven’t heard Dolly’s story of the undergraduate?’ shouted a girl from the other end of the room.

‘No, and don’t want to,’ replied Kate, indignantly. ‘The conversation in this room is perfectly horrid. I shall ask Mr. Lennox to change me. And really, Miss Goddard, I think you might manage to dress yourself with a little more decency.’

‘Well, if you call this dress,’ exclaimed Dolly, fanning herself. ‘I suppose one must take off one’s stockings to please you. You’re as bad as— - ‘

Dolly was the wit of No. 6 dressing-room, and having obtained her laugh she sought to conciliate Kate. To achieve this she began by putting on her tights.

‘Now, Mrs. Lennox,’ she said, ‘don’t be angry; if I’ve a good figure I can’t help it. And I do want to hear about the diamond ring.’

This was said so quaintly, so cunningly, as the Americans would say, that Kate couldn’t help smiling, and abandoning her hand she allowed Dolly to examine the ring.

‘I never saw anything prettier in my life. It wasn’t an undergra—?’ said the girl, who was a low comedian at heart and knew the value of repetition.

‘I must drink to his health. Who has any liquor? Have you, Vincent?’

‘Just a drain left,’ said a fat girl, pulling a flat bottle out of a dirty black skirt, ‘but I’m going to keep it for the end of the second act.’

‘Selfishness will be your ruin,’ said Dolly. ‘Let’s subscribe to drink the gentleman’s health,’ she added, winking at the bevy of damsels who stood waiting, their hands on their hips. And it being impossible for Kate to misunderstand what was expected of her she said:

‘I shall be very glad to stand treat. What shall it be?’

After some discussion it was agreed that they could not do better than a bottle of whisky. The decrepit dresser was given the money, with strict injunctions from Dolly not to uncork the bottle. ‘We can do that ourselves,’ the girl added, facetiously; and a noisy interest was manifested in the ring, the sender and the letter. Kate said that Dick had advised her to wear the ring first on one hand and then on the other.

‘To keep changing it from one hand to another,’ cried Dolly; ‘not a bad idea; and now to the health and success of the sender of the ring.’

‘I cannot drink to that toast,’ Kate answered, laying aside her glass.

‘That the word “success” be omitted from the toast!’ cried Dolly, and the merriment did not cease until the call-boy was heard crying, ‘Ladies, ladies! Mr. Lennox is waiting on the stage.’ Then there was a scramble for the glass and the dresser, and Dolly’s voice was heard screaming:

‘Now then, Mother Hubbard, have you the sweet-stuff I told you to get? I don’t want to go downstairs stinking of raw spirit.’

‘I couldn’t get any,’ said the old woman, ‘but I brought two slices of bread; that’ll do as well.’

‘You’re a knowing old card,’ said Dolly. ‘Eat a mouthful or two, it’ll take the smell off, Mrs. Lennox,’ and the girls rattled down the staircase, arriving on the stage only just in time for their cue.

‘Cue for soldiers’ entrance,’ the prompter cried, and on they went, Montgomery taking the music a little quicker than usual till Kate, who was now in the big eight, clean forgot how often she had changed her ring from the left hand to the right. But she did wear it on different hands, and no admirer came up and spoke to her at the stage-door. Dick was there waiting for her; she felt quite safe on his arm, and as soon as they had had a mouthful of supper they began the weekly packing.

Next morning it was train and station, station and train, but despite many delays they managed to catch the train, and on Monday night her gracefulness was winning for her new admirers: in every town the company visited she received letters and presents; none succeeded, however, in weakening her love, or persuading her from Dick.

‘Yet lovers around her are sighing,’ Montgomery chuckled, and Dick began to consider seriously the means to be adopted to secure Kate’s advancement in her new profession. One night Montgomery returned home with them after the performance, bringing with him the script, and till one in the morning the twain sat together trying to devise some extra lines for the first scene in *Les Cloches*.

‘The scene,’ Dick said, ‘is on the seashore. The girls are on their way to market.’

‘Supposing she said something like this, eh? “Mr. Baillie, do you like brown eyes and cherry lips?” And then another would reply, “Cherry brandy most like.”‘

‘No, I don’t think the public would see the point; you must remember we’re not playing to a London public. I think we’d better have something broader.’

‘Well, what?’

‘You remember the scene in *Chilpéric* when— - ‘

The conversation wandered; and Mr. Diprose’s version of the opera and his usual vile taste in the stage management was severely commented on. In such pleasant discussion an hour was agreeably spent; but at last the sudden extinguishing of a cigarette reminded them that they had met for the purpose of writing some dialogue. After a long silence Dick said:

‘Supposing she were to say, “Mr. Baillie, you’ve a fine head.” You know I want something she’d get a laugh with.’

‘If she said the truth, she’d say a fat head,’ replied Montgomery with a laugh.

‘And why shouldn’t she? That’s the very thing. She’s sure to get a laugh with that - “Mr. Baillie, you have a fat head.” Let’s get that down first. But what shall she say after?’ And in silence they ransacked their memories for a joke which could be fitted to the one they had just discovered.

After some five minutes of deep consideration, and wearied by the unaccustomed mental strain put upon his mind, Dick said:

‘Do you know the music of *Trône d’Écosse*? Devilish good. If the book had been better it would have been a big success.’

‘The waltz is about the prettiest thing Hervé has done.’

This expression of opinion led up to an animated discussion, in which the rival claims of Hervé and Planquette were forcibly argued. Many cigarettes were smoked, and not until the packet was emptied did it occur to them that only one ‘wheeze’ had been found.

‘I never can do anything without a cigarette; do try to find me one in the next room, Kate, dear. Listen, Montgomery, we’ve got “Baillie, you’ve a fat head.” That’ll do very well for a beginning; but I’m not good at finding wheezes.’

‘And then I can say, “Baillie, you’ve a fine head,”‘ said Kate, who had been listening dreamily for a long time, afraid to interrupt.

‘Not a bad idea,’ said Dick. ‘Let’s get it down.’

‘And then,’ screamed Montgomery, as he perched both his legs over the arm of his chair, ‘she can say, “I mean a great head, Mr. Baillie.”‘

For a moment Dick’s eyes flashed with the light of admiration, and he seemed to be considering if it were not his duty to advise the conductor that his talents lay in dialogue rather than in music. But his sentiments, whatever they may have been, disappeared in the burst of inspiration he had been waiting for so long.

‘We can go through the whole list of heads,’ he exclaimed triumphantly. ‘Fat head, fine head, broad head, thick head, massive head—yes, massive head. The Baillie will appear pleased at that, and will repeat the phrase, and then she will say “Dunderhead!” He’ll get angry, and she’ll run away. That’ll make a splendid exit—she’ll exit to a roar.’

Dick noted down the phrases on a piece of paper, to be pasted afterwards into the script. When this was done, he said:

‘My dear, if you don’t get a roar with these lines, you can call me a ——. And when we play the piece at Hull, I shouldn’t be surprised if you got noticed in the papers. But you must pluck up courage and check the Baillie. We must put up a rehearsal to-morrow for these lines. Now listen, Montgomery, and tell me how it reads.’

Chapter XV

‘Rehearsal to-morrow at twelve for all those in the front scene of the *Cloches*,’ cried the stage-door keeper to half-a-dozen girls as they pushed past him.

‘Well I never! and I was going out to see the castle and the ramparts of the town,’ said one girl.

‘I wonder what it’s for,’ said another; ‘it went all right, I thought—didn’t you? Did you hear any reason, Mr. Brown?’

‘I ‘ear there are to be new lines put in,’ replied the stage-door keeper, surlily, ‘but I don’t know. Don’t bother me.’

At the mention of the new lines the faces of the girls brightened, but instantly they strove to hide the hope and anxiety the announcement had caused them, and in the silence that followed each tried to think how she could get a word with Mr. Lennox. At length one more enterprising than the rest said:

‘I must run back. I’ve forgotten my handkerchief.’

‘You needn’t mind your handkerchief, you won’t see Mr. Lennox to-night,’ exclaimed Dolly, who always trampled on other people’s illusions as readily as she did on her own. ‘The lines aren’t for you nor me, nor any of us,’ she continued. ‘You little silly, can’t you guess who they’re for? For his girl, of course!’

Murmurs of assent followed this statement, and, her hands on her hips, Dolly triumphantly faced her auditors.

‘It’s damned hard, but you can’t expect the man to take her out of her linen-drapery for nothing.’

The old stage-door keeper, whose attention had been concentrated on what he was eating out of a jam-pot, now suddenly woke up to the fact that the passage was blocked, and that a group of musicians with boxes in their hands were waiting to get through.

‘Now, ladies, I must ask you to move on; there’re a lot of people behind you.’

‘Yes, get on, girls; we’re all up a tree this time, and the moral of it is that we haven’t yet learnt how to fall in love with the manager. The paper-collar woman has beaten us at our own game.’

A roar of laughter followed this remark, which was heard by everybody, and pushing the girls before her, Dolly cleared the way.

These girls, whose ambitions in life were first to obtain a line—that is to say, permission to shout, in their red tights, when the low comedian appears on the stage, ‘Oh, what a jolly good fellow the Duke is!’—secondly, to be asked out to dinner by somebody they imagine looks like a gentleman, revolted against hearing this paper-collar woman, as they now called her, speak the long-dreamed-of, long-described phrases; and at night they did everything they dared to ‘queer’ her scene. They crowded round her, mugged, and tried to divert the attention of the house from her.

She had to say, ‘Mr. Baillie, you’ve a fine head.’ *Baillie (patting his crown)*: ‘Yes, a fine head!’ *Kate*: ‘A fat head.’ *Baillie (indignantly)*: ‘A fat head!’ *Kate (hurriedly)*: ‘I mean a

broad head.' *Baillie*: 'Yes, a broad head.' *Kate*: 'A thick head.' *Baillie (indignantly)*: 'A thick head!' *Kate*: 'No, no; a solid head.' And so on *ad lib.* for ten minutes.

The scene went splendidly. The pit screamed, and the gallery was in convulsions, and in the street next day nothing was heard but ironical references to fat and thick heads. The girls had not succeeded in spoiling the scene, for, encouraged by the applause, Kate had chaffed and mocked at the Baillie so winningly that she at once won the sympathy of the house. But the following night a tall, sour-faced girl, who wore pads, and with whom Kate had had some words concerning her coarse language, hit upon an ingenious device for 'queering the scene!' Her trick was to burst into a roar of laughter just before she had time to say, 'A fat head.' The others soon tumbled to the trick, and in a night or two they worked so well together that Kate grew nervous and she could not speak her lines. This made her feel very miserable; and her stage experience being limited, she ascribed her non-success to her own fault, until one night Dick rushed on to the stage as soon as the curtain was down, and putting up his arms with a large gesture, he called the company back.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' he said, 'I've noticed that the front scene in this act has not been going as well as it used to. I don't want anyone to tell me why this is so; the reason is sufficiently obvious, at least to me. I shall expect, therefore, the ladies whom this matter concerns to attend a rehearsal to-morrow at twelve, and if after that I notice what I did tonight, I shall at once dismiss the delinquents from the company. I hope I make myself understood.'

After this explanation, any further interference with Kate's scene was, of course, out of the question, and the verdict of each new town more and more firmly established its success. But if Dick's presence controlled the girls whilst they were on the stage, his authority did not reach to the dressing-rooms. Kate's particular enemy was Dolly Goddard. Not a night passed that this girl did not refer to the divorce cases she had read of in the papers, or pretended to have heard of. Her natural sharp wit enabled her to do this with considerable acidity. 'Never heard such a thing in my life, girls,' she would begin. 'They talk of us, but what we do is child's play compared with the doings of the respectable people. A baker's wife in this blessed town has just run away with the editor of a newspaper, leaving her six little children behind her, one of them being a baby no more than a month old.'

'What will the husband do?'

'Get a divorce.' (Chorus - 'He'll get a divorce, of course, of course, of course!')

To this delicate irony no answer was possible, and Kate could only bite her lips, and pretend not to understand. But it was difficult not to turn pale and tremble sometimes, so agonizing were the anecdotes that the active brain of Dolly conjured up concerning the atrocities that pursuing husbands had perpetrated with knife and pistol on the betrayers of their happiness. And when these scarecrows failed, there were always the stories to fall back upon. A word sufficed to set the whole gang recounting experiences, and comparing notes. A sneer often curled the corners of Kate's lips, but to protest she knew would be only to expose herself to a rude answer, and to appeal to Dick couldn't fail to excite still further enmity against her. Besides, what could he do? How could he define what were and what were not proper conversations for the dressing-rooms? But she might ask him to put her to dress with the principals, and this she decided to do one evening when the words used in No. 6 had been more than usually warm.

Dick made no objection, and with Leslie and Beaumont Kate got on better.

‘I’m so glad you’ve come,’ said Leslie, as she bent to allow the dresser to place a wreath of orange-blossom on her head. ‘I wonder you didn’t think of asking Mr. Lennox to put you with us before.’

‘I didn’t like to. I was afraid of being in your way,’ Kate answered. ‘I hope Beaumont won’t mind my being here.’

‘What matter if she does? Beaumont isn’t half a bad sort once you begin to understand her. Just let her talk to you about her diamonds and her men, and it will be all right.’

‘But why haven’t you been to see me lately? I want you to come out shopping with me one day next week. We shall be at York. I hear there are some good shops there.’

‘Yes, there are, and I should have been to see you before, but Frank has just got some new scores from London, and he wanted me to try them over with him. There’s one that’s just been produced in Paris—the loveliest music you ever heard in all your life. Come up to my place to-morrow and I’ll play it over to you. But talking of music, I hear that you’re getting on nicely.’

‘I think I’m improving; Montgomery comes to practise with me every morning.’

‘He’s all very well for the piano, but he can’t teach you to produce your voice. What does he know? That brat of a boy! I’ll tell you what I’ll do,’ cried Leslie, suddenly confronting Kate: ‘we’re going to York next week. Well, I’ll introduce you to a first-rate man. He’d do more with you in six lessons than Montgomery in fifty. And the week after we shall be at Leeds. I can introduce you to another there.’

‘The curtain is just going up, Miss Leslie,’ cried the call boy.

‘All right,’ cried the prima donna, throwing the hare’s-foot to the dresser, ‘I must be off now. We’ll talk of this to-morrow.’

Immediately after the stately figure of Beaumont entered. Putting her black bag down with a thump on the table she exclaimed:

‘Good heavens! not dressed yet! My God! you’ll be late.’

‘Late for what?’ asked Kate in astonishment.

‘Didn’t Mr. Lennox tell you that you had to sing my song, the market-woman’s song, in the first act?’

‘No, I heard nothing of it.’

‘Then for goodness’ sake make haste. Here, stick your face out. I’ll do your make-up while the dresser laces you. But you’ll be able to manage the song, won’t you? It’s quite impossible for me to get dressed in time. I can’t understand Mr. Lennox not having told you.’

‘Oh yes, I shall be able to get through it—at least I hope so,’ Kate answered, trembling with the sudden excitement of the news. ‘I think I know all the words except the encore verse.’

‘Oh, you won’t need that,’ said Beaumont, betrayed by a twinge of professional jealousy. ‘Now turn the other cheek. By Jove! we’ve no time to lose; they’re just finishing the wedding chorus. If you’re late it won’t be my fault. I sent down word to the theatre to ask if you’d sing my song in the first act, as I had some friends coming down from London to see me. You know the Marquis of Shoreham—has been a friend of mine for years. That’ll do for the left eye.’

‘If you put out your leg a little further I’ll pull your stocking, and then you’ll be all right,’ said the dresser, and just staying a moment to pull up her garters in a sort of nervous trance,

she rushed on to the stage, followed into the wings by Beaumont, who had come to hear how the song would go.

She was a complete success, and got a double encore from an enthusiastic pit. But in *Madame Favart* she had nothing to do, and wearied waiting in the chorus for another chance which never came, for after her success with the fish-wife's song in *Madame Angot*, Beaumont took good care not to give her another chance. What was to be done? Dick said he couldn't sack the principals.

'Kate could play Serpolette as it was never played before,' exclaimed Montgomery, 'and I see no reason why she shouldn't understudy Leslie.'

'But What's-her-name is understudying it.'

'Why shouldn't there be two understudies?'

Dick could advance no reason, and once begun, the studies proceeded gaily. Apparently deeply interested, Dick lay back in the armchair smoking perpetual cigarettes. Montgomery hammered with nervous vigour at the piano, and Kate stood by his side, her soul burning in the ardours of her task. She would have preferred the part of Germaine; it would have better suited her gentle mind than the frisky Serpolette; but it seemed vain to hope for illness or any accident that would prevent Beaumont from playing. True, Leslie was often imprudent, and praying for a bronchial visitation they watched at night to see how she was wrapped up.

As soon as Kate knew the music, a rehearsal was called for her to go through the business, and it was then that the long-smouldering indignation broke out against her. In the first place the girl who till now had been entrusted with the understudy, and had likewise lived in the hopes of coughs and colds, burst into floods of passionate tears and storms of violent words. She attacked Kate vigorously, and the scene was doubly unpleasant, as it took place in the presence of everybody. Bitter references were made to dying and deserted husbands, and all the acridness of the chorus-girl was squeezed into allusions anent the Divorce Court. This was as disagreeable for Dick as for Kate. The rehearsal had to be dismissed, and the lady in question was sent back to London. Sympathy at first ran very strongly on the side of the weak, and the ladies of the theatre were united in their efforts to make it as disagreeable as possible for Kate. But she bore up courageously, and after a time her continual refusal to rehearse the part again won a reaction in her favour; and when Miss Leslie's cold began to grow worse, and it became clear that someone must understudy Serpolette, the part fell without opposition to her share.

And now every minute of the day was given to learning or thinking out in her inner consciousness some portion of her part. In the middle of her breakfast she would hurriedly lay down her cup with a clink in the saucer and say, 'Look here, Dick; tell me how I'm to do that run in—my first entrance, you know.'

'What are your words, dear?'

'"Who speaks ill of Serpolette?"'

The breakfast-table would then be pushed out of the way and the entrance rehearsed. Dick seemed never to weary, and the run was practised over and over again. Coming home from the theatre at night, it was always a question of this effect and that effect; of whether Leslie might not have scored a point if she had accentuated the lifting of her skirt in the famous song.

That was, as Dick declared, the 'number of grip'; and often, at two o'clock in the morning, just as she was getting into bed, Kate, in her chemise, would begin to sing:

“Look at me here! look at me there!
Criticize me everywhere!
From head to feet I am most sweet,
And most perfect and complete.”

There was a scene in the first act in which Serpolette had to run screaming with laughter away from her cross old uncle, Gaspard, and dodge him, hiding behind the Baillie, and to do this effectively required a certain *chic*, a gaiety, which Kate did not seem able to summon up; and this was the weak place in her rendering of the part. ‘You’re all right for a minute, and then you sober down into a Germaine,’ Dick would say, at the end of a long and critical conversation. The business she learned to ‘parrot.’ Dick taught her the gestures and the intonations of voice to be used, and when she had mastered these Dick said he would back her to go through the part quite as well as Leslie.

Leslie! The word was now constantly in their minds. Would her cold get worse or better? was the question discussed most frequently between Dick, Kate, and Montgomery. Sometimes it was better, sometimes worse; but at the moment of their greatest despondency the welcome news came that she had slipped downstairs and sprained her foot badly.

‘Oh, the poor thing!’ said Kate; ‘I’m so sorry. Had I known that was— - ‘

‘Was going to happen you wouldn’t have learnt the part,’ exclaimed Montgomery, with his loud, vacant laugh.

She beat her foot impatiently on the ground, and after a long silence she said, ‘I shall go and see her.’

‘You’d much better run through your music with Montgomery, and don’t forget to see the dresser about your dress. And, for God’s sake, do try and put a bit of gaiety into the part. Serpolette is a bit of a romp, you know.’

‘Try to put a bit of gaiety into the part,’ rang in Kate’s ears unceasingly. It haunted her as she took in the waist of Leslie’s dress, while she leaned over Montgomery’s shoulder at the piano or listened to his conversation. He was enthusiastic, and she thought it very pretty of him to say, ‘I’m glad to have had a share in your first success. No one ever forgets that—that’s sure to be remembered.’

It was the nearest thing to a profession of love he had ever made, but she was preoccupied with other thoughts, and had to send him away for a last time to study the dialogue before the glass.

‘Try to put a little gaiety into the part. Serpolette is a romp, you know.’

‘Yes, a romp; but what is a romp?’ Kate asked herself; and she strove to realize in detail that which she had accepted till now in outline.

Chapter XVI

‘Ladies and gentlemen,’ said Mr. Hayes, who had been pushed, much against his will, before the curtain of the Theatre Royal, Bristol, to make the following statement, ‘I’m sorry to inform you that in consequence of indisposition—that is to say, the accidental spraining of her ankle—Miss Leslie will not be able to appear to-night. Your kind indulgence is therefore requested for Miss D’Arcy, who has, on the shortest notice, consented to play the part of Serpolette.’

‘Did yer ever ‘ear of anyone spraining an ankle on purpose?’ asked a scene-shifter.

‘Hush!’ said the gas-man, ‘he’ll ‘ear you.’

Amid murmurs of applause, Mr. Hayes backed into the wings.

‘Well, was it all right?’ he asked Dick.

‘Right, my boy, I should think it was; there was a touch of Gladstone in your accidentally sprained ankle.’

‘What do you mean?’ said the discomfited acting manager.

‘I haven’t time to tell you now. Now then, girls, are you ready?’ he said, rushing on to the stage and hurriedly changing the places of the choristers. Putting his hand on a girl’s shoulder, he moved her to the right or left as his taste dictated. Then retiring abruptly, he cried, ‘Now then, up you go!’ and immediately after thirty voices in one sonority sang:

“In Corneville’s wide market-pla-a-ces,
Sweet servant-girls, with rosy fa-a-ces,
Wait here, wait here.”

‘Now, then, come on. You make your entrance from the top left.’

‘I don’t think I shall ever be able to do that run in.’

‘Don’t begin to think about anything. If you don’t like the run, I’ll tell you how to do it,’ said Dick, his face lighting up with a sudden inspiration; ‘do it with a cheeky swagger, walking very slowly, like this; and then when you get quarter of the way down the stage, stop for a moment and sing, “Who speaks ill of Serpolette?” Do you see?’

‘Yes, yes, that will suit me better; I understand.’

Then standing under the sloping wing, they both listened anxiously for the cue.

‘She loves Grenicheux.’

‘There’s your cue. On you go; give me your shawl.’

The footlights dazzled her; a burst of applause rather frightened than reassured her, and a prey to a sort of dull dream, she sang her first lines. But she was a little behind the beat. Montgomery brought down his stick furiously, the *répliques* of the girls buffeted her ears like palms of hands, and it was not until she was halfway through the gossiping couplets, and saw Montgomery’s arm swing peacefully to and fro over the bent profiles of the musicians that she fairly recovered her presence of mind. Then came the little scene in which she runs away from her uncle Gaspard and hides behind the Baillie. And she dodged the old man with such sprightliness from one side of the stage to the other that a murmur of admiration floated over

the pit, and, arising in echoes, was prolonged almost until she stepped down to the footlights to sing the legend of Serpolette.

The quaintly tripping cadences of the tune and the humour of the words, which demanded to be rather said than sung, were rendered to perfection. It was impossible not to like her when she said:

"I know not much of my relations,
I never saw my mother's face;
And of preceding generations
I never found a single trace."

"I may have fallen from the sky,
Or blossomed in a rosebud sweet;
But all I know is this, that I
Was found by Gaspard in his wheat."

A smile of delight filled the theatre, and Kate felt the chilling sense of separation which exists between the public and a debutante being gradually filled in by a delicious but almost incomprehensible notion of contact—a sensation more delicate than the touch of a lover's breath on your face. This reached a climax when she sang the third verse, and had not etiquette forbade, she would have had an encore for it alone.

"I often think that perhaps I may
The heiress to a kingdom be,
But as I wore no clothes that day
I brought no papers out with me."

These words, that had often seemed coarse in Leslie's mouth, in Kate's seemed adorably simple. So winning was the smile and so coquettishly conscious did she seem of the compromising nature of the statement she was making, that the entire theatre was actuated by the impulse of one thought: Oh! what a little dear you must have been lying in the wheat-field! The personality of the actress disappeared in the rosy thighs and chubby arms of the foundling, and notwithstanding the length of the song, she had to sing it twice over. Then there was an exit for her, and she rushed into the wings. Several of the girls spoke to her, but it was impossible for her to reply to them. Everything swam in and out of sight like shapes in a mist, and she could only distinguish the burly form of her lover. He wrapped a shawl about her, and a murmur of amiable words followed her, and, with her thoughts fizzing like champagne, she tried to listen to his praises.

Then followed moments in which she anxiously waited for her cues. She was nervously afraid of missing her entrance, and she dreaded spoiling her success by some mistake. But it was not until the end of the act when she stepped out of the crowd of servant-girls to sing the famous coquetting song that she reached the summit of her triumph.

Kate was about the medium height, a shade over five feet five. When she swung her little dress as she strutted on the stage she reminded you immediately of a pigeon. In her apparent thinness from time to time was revealed a surprising plumpness.

For instance, her bosom, in a walking dress no more than an indication, in a low body assumed the roundness of a bird's, and the white lines of her falling shoulders floated in long undulations into the blue masses of her hair. The nervous sensibility of her profession had awakened her face, and now the brown eyes laughed with the spiritual maliciousness with which we willingly endow the features of a good fairy. The hips were womanly, the ankle

was only a touch of stocking, and the whole house rose to a man and roared when coquettishly lifting the skirt, she sang:

"Look at me here! look at me there!
Criticize me everywhere!
From head to feet I am most sweet,
And most perfect and complete."

The audience, principally composed of sailors—men home from months of watery weariness, nights of toil and darkness, maddened by the irritating charm of the music and the delicious modernity of Kate's figure and dress, looked as if they were going to precipitate themselves from the galleries. Was she not the living reality of the figures posted over the hammocks in oil-smelling cabins, the prototype of the short-skirted damsels that decorated the empty match-boxes which they preserved and gazed at under the light of the stars?

Her success was enormous, and she was forced to sing

'Look at me here!'

five times before her friends would allow the piece to proceed. At the end of the act she received an ovation. Two reporters of the local newspapers obtained permission to come behind to see her. London engagements were spoken of, and in the general enthusiasm someone talked about grand opera. Even her fellow artists forgot their jealousies, and in the nervous excitement of the moment complimented her highly. Beaumont, anxious to kick down her rival, declared, 'That, to say the least of it, it was a better rendering of the part than Leslie's.' And on hearing this, Bret, whose forte was not repartee, moved away; Mortimer, in his least artificial manner, said that it was not bad for a beginning and that she'd get on if she worked at it. Dubois strutted and spoke learnedly of how the part had been played in France, and he was pleased to trace by an analysis which was difficult to follow a resemblance between Kate and Madame Judic.

The second act went equally well. And after seeing the ghosts she got a bouquet thrown to her, so cheekily did she sing the refrain:

'For a regiment of soldiers wouldn't make me afraid.'

She had therefore now only to maintain her prestige to the end, and when she had got her encore for the cider song, and had been recalled before the curtain at the end of the third act, with unstrung nerves she wandered to her dressing-room, thinking of what Dick would say when they got home. But the pleasures of the evening were not over yet: there was the supper, and as she came down from her dressing-room she whispered to Montgomery in the wings that they hoped to see him at their place later on. He thanked her and said he would be very glad to come in a little later on, but he had some music to copy now and must away, and feeling a little disappointed that he had to leave she walked up and down the rough boards, stepping out of the way of the scene-shifters. 'By your leave, ma'am,' they cried, going by her with the long swinging wings. She was glad now that Montgomery had left her, for alone she could relive distinctly every moment of the performance.

As the chorus-girls crossed the stage they stopped to compliment her with a few mechanical words and a hard smile. Kate thanked them and returned to her dream all aglow and absorbed in remembrances of her success. The word 'success' returned in her thoughts like the refrain of a song. Yes, she had succeeded. Wherever she went she would be admired. There was something to live for at last.

The T-light flared, and she stopped and began to wonder at the invention, so absurd did it seem; and then feeling that such thoughts were a waste of time, she took up the thread of her

memories and had just begun to enjoy again a certain round of applause when Beaumont and Dolly Goddard awoke her with the question, had she seen Dick? Kate tried to remember. A scene-shifter going by said that he had seen Mr. Lennox leave the theatre some twenty minutes ago.

‘I suppose he will come back for me,’ Kate said; ‘or perhaps I’d better go on? Are you coming my way?’

Beaumont and Dolly said they were and proposed that they should pop into a pub before closing time. Kate hesitated to accept the invitation, but Beaumont insisted, and as it was a question of drinking to the night’s success she consented to accompany them.

‘No, not here,’ said Beaumont, shoving the swing-doors an inch or so apart: ‘it’s too full. I’ll show you the way round by the side entrance.’

And giggling, the girls slipped into the private apartment.

‘What will you have, dear?’ asked Beaumont in an apologetic whisper.

‘I think I’ll have a whisky.’

‘You’ll have the same, Dolly?’

‘Scotch or Irish?’ asked the barman.

The girls consulted a moment and decided in favour of Irish.

With nods and glances, the health of Serpolette was drunk, and then fearing to look as if she were sponging, Kate insisted on likewise standing treat. Fortunately, when the second round had been drunk, closing time was announced by the man in the shirtsleeves, and bidding her friends good-bye, Kate stood in the street trying to think if she ought to return to the theatre to look after Dick or go home and find him there.

She decided on the latter alternative and walked slowly along the street. A chill wind blew up from the sea, and the sudden transition from the hot atmosphere of the bar brought the fumes of the whisky to her head and she felt a little giddy. An idea of drunkenness suggested itself; it annoyed her, and repulsing it vehemently, her thoughts somewhat savagely fastened on to Dick as the culprit. ‘Where had he gone?’ she asked, at first curiously, but at each repetition she put the question more sullenly to herself. If he had come back to fetch her she would not have been led into going into the public-house with Beaumont; and, irritated that any shadow should have fallen on the happiness of the evening, she walked sturdily along until a sudden turn brought her face to face with her lover.

‘Oh!’ he said, starting. ‘Is that you, Kate? I was just cutting back to the theatre to fetch you.’

‘Yes, a nice time you’ve kept me waiting,’ she answered; but as she spoke she recognized the street they were in as the one in which Leslie lived. The blood rushed to her face, and tearing the while the paper fringe of her bouquet, she said, ‘I know very well where you’ve been to! I want no telling. You’ve been round spending your time with Leslie.’

‘Well,’ said Dick, embarrassed by the directness with which she divined his errand, ‘I don’t see what harm there was in that; I really thought that I ought to run and see how she was.’

Struck by the reasonableness of this answer, Kate for the moment remained silent, but a sudden remembrance forced the anger that was latent in her to her head, and facing him again she said:

‘How dare you tell me such a lie! You know very well you went to see her because you like her, because you love her.’

Dick looked at her, surprised.

‘I assure you, you’re mistaken,’ he said. But at that moment Bret passed them in the street, hurrying towards Leslie’s. The meeting was an unfortunate one, and it sent a deeper pang of jealousy to Kate’s heart.

‘There,’ she said, ‘haven’t I proof of your baseness? What do you say to that?’

‘To what?’

‘Don’t pretend innocence. Didn’t you see Bret passing? You choose your time nicely to pay visits—just when he should be out.’

‘Oh!’ said Dick, surprised at the ingenuity of the deduction. ‘I give you my word that such an idea never occurred to me.’

But before he could get any further with his explanation Kate again cut him short, and in passionate words told him he was a monster and a villain. So taken aback was he by this sudden manifestation of temper on the part of one in whom he did not suspect its existence, that he stopped, to assure himself that she was not joking. A glance sufficed to convince him; and making frequent little halts between the lamp-posts to argue the different points more definitely, they proceeded home quarrelling. But on arriving at the door, Kate experienced a moment of revolt that surprised herself. The palms of her hands itched, and consumed with a childish desire to scratch and beat this big man, she beat her little feet against the pavement. Dick fumbled at the lock. The delay still further irritated her, and it seemed impossible that she could enter the house that night.

‘Aren’t you coming in?’ he said at last.

‘No, not I. You go back to Miss Leslie; I’m sure she wants you to attend to her ankle.’

This was too absurd, and Dick expostulated gently. But nothing he could say was of the slightest avail, and she refused to move from the doorstep. Then began a long argument; and in brief phrases, amid frequent interruptions, all sorts of things were discussed. The wind blew very cold; Kate did not seem to notice it, but Dick shivered in his fat; and noticing his trembling she taunted him with it, and insultingly advised him to go to bed. Not knowing what answer to give to this, he walked into the sitting-room and sat down by the fire. How long would she remain on the doorstep? he asked himself humbly, until his reflections were interrupted by the sound of steps. It was Montgomery, and chuckling, Dick listened to him reasoning with Kate. The cold was so intense that the discussion could not be continued for long; and when the two friends entered Dick was prepared for a reconciliation. But in this he was disappointed. She merely consented to sit in the armchair, glaring at her lover. Montgomery tried to argue with her, but he could scarcely succeed in getting her to answer him, and it was not until he began to question Dick on the reason of the quarrel that she consented to speak; and then her utterances were rather passionate denials of her lover’s statements than any distinct explanation. There were also long silences, during which she sat savagely picking at the paper of the bouquet, which she still retained. At last Montgomery, noticing the supper that no one cared to touch, said:

‘Well, all I know is, that it’s very unfortunate that you should have chosen this night of all others, the night of her success, to have a row. I expected a pleasant evening.’

‘Success, indeed!’ said Kate, starting to her feet. ‘Was it for such a success as this that he took me away from my home? Oh, what a fool I was! Success! A lot I care for the success, when he has been spending the evening with Leslie.’ And unable to contain herself any longer, she tore a handful of flowers out of her bouquet and threw them in Dick’s face.

Handful succeeded handful, each being accompanied by a shower of vehement words. The two men waited in wonderment, and when passionate reproaches and spring flowers were alike exhausted, a flood of tears and a rush into the next room ended the scene.

Chapter XVII

As soon as it was announced that Miss Leslie suffered so much with her ankle that she would be unable to travel, the whole company called to see the poor invalid; the chorus left their names, the principals went up to sit by the sofa-side, and all brought her something: Beaumont, a basket of fruit; Dolly Goddard, a bouquet of flowers; Dubois, an interesting novel; Mortimer, a fresh stock of anecdotes. Around her sofa sprains were discussed. Dubois had known a *première danseuse* at the Opera House, in Paris, but the handing round of cigarettes prevented his story from being heard, and Beaumont related instead how Lord Shoreham in youth had broken his legs out hunting. The relation might not have come to an end that evening if Leslie had not asked Bret to change her position on the sofa, and when he and Dick went out of the room a look of inquiry was passed round.

'You needn't be uneasy. I wouldn't let Bret stop for anything. I shall be very comfortable here. My landlady is as kind as she can be and the rooms are very nice.'

A murmur of approval followed these words, and continuing Miss Leslie said, laying her hand on Kate's:

'And my friend here will play my parts until I come back. You must begin to-night, my dear, and try to work up Clairette. If you're a quick study you may be able to play it on Wednesday night.'

This was too much; the tears stood in Kate's eyes. She had in her pocket a little gold *porte-bonheur* which she had bought that morning to make a present of to her once hated rival, but she waited until they were alone to slip it on the good natured prima donna's wrist. The parting between the two women was very touching, and being in a melting mood Kate made a full confession of her quarrel with Dick, and, abandoning herself, she sought for consolation. Leslie smiled curiously, and after a long pause said:

'I know what you mean, dear, I've been jealous myself; but you'll get over it, and learn to take things easily as I do. Men aren't worth it.' The last phrase seemed to have slipped from her inadvertently, and seeing how she had shocked Kate she hastened to add, 'Dick is a very good fellow, and will look after you; but take my advice, avoid a row; we women don't gain anything by it.'

The words dwelt long in Kate's mind, but she found it hard to keep her temper. Her temper surprised even herself. It seemed to be giving way, and she trembled with rage at things that before would not have stirred an unquiet thought in her mind. Remembrances of the passions that used to convulse her when a child returned to her. As is generally the case, there was right on both sides. Her life, it must be confessed, was woven about with temptations. Dick's character easily engendered suspicion, and when the study of the part of Clairette was over, the iron of distrust began again to force its way into her heart. The slightest thing sufficed to arouse her. On one occasion, when travelling from Bath to Wolverhampton, she could not help thinking, judging from the expression of the girl's face, that Dick was squeezing Dolly's foot under the rug; without a word she moved to the other end of the carriage and remained looking out of the window for the rest of the journey. Another time she was seized with a fit of mad rage at seeing Dick dancing with Beaumont at the end of the second act of *Madame Angot*. There were floods of tears and a distinct refusal 'to dress with that woman.' Dick was in despair! What could he do? There was no spare room, and unless she went to dress with the chorus he didn't know what she'd do.

‘My God!’ he exclaimed to Mortimer, as he rushed across the stage after the ‘damned property-man,’ ‘never have your woman playing in the same theatre as yourself; it’s awful!’

For the last couple of weeks everything he did seemed to be wrong. Success, instead of satisfying Kate, seemed to render her more irritable, and instead of contenting herself with the plaudits that were nightly showered upon her, her constant occupation was to find out either where Dick was or what he had been doing or saying. If he went up to make a change without telling her she would invent some excuse for sending to inquire after him; if he were giving some directions to the girls at one of the top entrances, she would walk from the wing where she was waiting for her cue to ask him what he was saying. This watchfulness caused a great deal of merriment in the theatre, and in the dressing-rooms Mortimer’s imitation of the catechism the manager was put to at night was considered very amusing.

‘My dear, I assure you you’re mistaken. I only smoked two cigarettes after lunch, and then I had a glass of beer. I swear I’m concealing nothing from you.’

And this is scarcely a parody of the strict surveillance under which Dick lived, but from a mixture of lassitude and good nature it did not seem to annoy him too much, and he appeared to be most troubled when Kate murmured that she was tired, that she hated the profession and would like to go and live in the country. For now she complained of fatigue and weariness; the society of those who formed her life no longer interested her, and she took violent and unreasoning antipathies. It was not infrequent for Mortimer and Montgomery to make an arrangement to grub with the Lennoxes whenever a landlady could be discovered who would undertake so much cooking. But without being able to explain why, Kate declared she could not abide sitting face to face with the heavy lead. She saw and heard quite enough of him at the theatre without being bothered by him in the day-time. Dick made no objection. He confessed, and, willingly, that he was a bit tired of disconnected remarks, and the wit of irrelevancies; and Mortimer, he said, fell to sulking if you didn’t laugh at his jokes. Montgomery continued to board with them, the young man very uncertain always whether he would be as unhappy away from her as he was with her. He often dreamed of sending in his resignation, but he could not leave the company, having begun to look upon himself as her guardian angel; and, without consulting Dick, they arranged deftly that Dubois should be asked to take Mortimer’s place. Dick approved when the project was unfolded to him, the natty appearance of the little foreigner was a welcome change after Mortimer’s draggled show of genius. He could do everything better than anybody else, but that did not matter, for he was amusing in his relations. Whether you spoke of Balzac’s position in modern fiction or the rolling of cigarettes, you were certain to be interrupted with, ‘I assure you, my dear fellow, you’re mistaken’ uttered in a stentorian voice. On the subject of his bass voice a child could draw him out, and, under the pretext of instituting a comparison between him and one of the bass choristers, Montgomery never failed to induce him to give the company an idea of his register. At first to see the little man settling the double chin into his chest in his efforts to get at the low D used to convulse Kate with laughter, but after a time even this grew monotonous, and wearily she begged Montgomery to leave him alone. ‘Nothing seems to amuse you now’ he would say with a mingled look of affection and regret. A shrug of the shoulder she considered a sufficient answer for him, and she would sink back as if pursuing to its furthest consequences the train of some far-reaching ideas.

And in wonder these men watched the progress of Kate’s malady without ever suspecting what was really the matter with her. She was homesick. But not for the house in Hanley and the dressmaking of yore. She had come to look upon Hanley, Ralph, Mrs. Ede, the apprentices and Hender as a bygone dream, to which she could not return and did not wish to

return. Her homesickness was not to go back to the point from which she had started, but to settle down in a house for a while.

‘Not for long, Dick,’ she said, ‘a month; even a fortnight would make all the difference. We spent a fortnight at Blackpool, but we have never stayed a fortnight at the same place since.’

‘I know what’s the matter with you, Kate,’ he answered; ‘you want a holiday; so do I; we all want a holiday. One of these days we shall get one when the tour comes to an end.’

It did not seem to Kate that the tour would ever come to an end: she would always be going round like a wheel.

Dick begged her to have patience, and she resolved to have patience, but one Saturday night in the middle of her packing the vision of the long railway journey that awaited her on the morrow rose up suddenly in her mind, and she could not do else than spring to her feet, and standing over the half-filled trunk she said:

‘Dick, I cannot, I cannot; don’t ask me.’

‘Ask you what?’ he said.

‘To go to Bath with you to-morrow morning,’ she answered.

‘You won’t come to Bath!’ he cried. ‘But who will play Clairette?’

‘I will, of course.’

‘I don’t understand, Kate,’ Dick replied.

‘I only want one day off. Why shouldn’t I spend the Sunday in Leamington and go to church? I want a little rest. I can’t help it, Dick.’

‘Well, I never! You seem to get more and more capricious every day.’

‘Then you won’t let me?’ said Kate, with a flush flowing through her olive cheeks.

‘Won’t let you! Why shouldn’t you stay if it pleases you, dear? Montgomery is staying too; he wants to see an aunt of his who lives in the town.’

Dick’s unaffected kindness so touched Kate’s sensibilities that the tears welled up into her eyes, and she flung herself into his arms sobbing hysterically. For the moment she was very happy, and she looked into the dream of the long day she was going to spend with Montgomery, afraid lest some untoward incident might rob her of her happiness. But nothing fell out to blot her hopes, everything seemed to be happening just as she had foreseen it, and trembling with pleasurable excitement the twain hurried through the town inquiring out the way to the Wesleyan Church. At last it was found in a distant suburb, and her emotion almost from the moment she entered into the peace of the building became so uncontrollable that to hide the tears upon her cheeks she was forced to bury her face in her hands, and in the soft snoring of the organ, recollections of her life frothed up; but as the psalm proceeded her excitement abated, until at last it subsided into a state of languid ecstasy. Nor was it till the congregation knelt down with one accord for the extemporary prayer that she asked pardon for her sins. ‘But how could God forgive her her sins if she persevered in them?’ she asked herself. ‘How could she leave Dick and return to Hanley? Her husband would not receive her; her life had got into a tangle and might never get straight again. But all is in the hands of God,’ and thinking of the woman that had been and the woman that was, she prayed God to consider her mercifully. ‘God will understand,’ she said, ‘how it all came about; I cannot.’

Montgomery was kneeling in the pew beside her, and he wondered at seeing her so absorbed in prayer; he did not know that she was so pious, and thought that such piety as hers was not

in accord with the life she had taken up and the company with which they were touring. But perhaps it was a mere passing emotion, a sudden recrudescence of her past life which would fade away and never return again; he hoped that this was the case, for he believed in her talent, and that a London success awaited her. He kept his eyes averted from her, knowing that his observation would distress her, and after church she said she would like to go for a walk and he suggested the river.

In the shade of spreading trees they watched the boats passing, and in the course of the afternoon talked of many things and of many people, and it pleased and surprised them to find that their ideas coincided, and in the pauses of the conversation they wondered why they had never spoken to each other like this before. He was often tempted to hold out prospects of a London success with a view to cheering her, but he felt that this was not the moment to do so. But she, being a little less tactful, spoke to him of his music with a view to pleasing him, but he could not detach his thoughts from her, and could only tell her that he heard her voice in the music as he composed it.

'The afternoon is passing,' he said; 'it's time to begin thinking of tea.' Whereupon they rose to their feet and walked a long way into the country in search of an inn, and finding one they had tea in a garden, and afterwards they dined in a sanded parlour and enjoyed the cold beef, although they could not disguise from themselves the fact that it was a little tough. But what matter the food? It was the close intimacy and atmosphere of the day that mattered to them, and they returned to Leamington thinking of the day that had gone by, a day unique in their experience, one that might never return to them.

The ways were filled with Sunday strollers—mothers leading a tired child moved steadily forward; a drunken man staggered over a heap of stones; sweethearts chased each other; occasionally a girl, kissed from behind as she stretched to reach a honeysuckle, rent the airless evening with a scream.

Kate had not spoken for a long while, and Montgomery's apprehensions were awakened. Of what could she be thinking? 'Something was on her mind,' he said to himself. 'Something has been on her mind all day,' he continued, and he began to ask himself if he should put his arm around her and beg of her to confide in him. He would have done so if the striking of a clock had not reminded him that they had little time before them if they wished to catch the train, so instead of asking her to confide in him he asked her to try to walk a little faster. She was tired. He offered her his arm.

'We've just time to get to the station and no more; it's lucky we have our tickets.'

The guard on the platform begged them to hasten and to get in anywhere they could. A moment afterwards they jumped into the carriage, and the train rolled with a slight oscillating motion out of the station into the open country. Dim masses of trees, interrupted by spires and roofs, were painted upon a huge orange sky that somehow reminded them of an *opéra bouffe*.

'What are you crying for?' Montgomery asked, bending forward.

'Oh, I don't know!—nothing,' exclaimed Kate, sobbing; 'but I'm very unhappy. I know I've been very wicked, and am sure to be punished for it.'

'Nonsense! Nonsense!'

'God will punish me—know He will. I felt it all to-day in church. I'm done for, I'm done for.'

'You've made a success on the stage. I never saw anyone get on so well in so short a time; and you're loved,' he added with a certain bitterness, 'as much as any woman could be.'

‘That’s what you think, but I know better. I see him flirting every day with different girls.’

‘You imagine those things. Dick couldn’t speak roughly to anyone if he tried; but he doesn’t care for any woman but you.’

‘Of course, you say so. You’re his friend.’

‘I assure you ‘pon my word of honour; I wouldn’t tell you so if it weren’t true. You’re my friend as much as he, aren’t you?’ and then, as if afraid that she should read his thoughts, he added:

‘I’m sure he hasn’t kissed anyone since he knew you. I can’t put it plainer than that, can I?’

‘I’m glad to hear you say so. I don’t think you’d tell me a lie; it would be too cruel, wouldn’t it? For you know what a position I am in: if Dick were to desert me to-morrow what should I do?’

‘You’re in a mournful humour. Why should Dick desert you? And even if he did, I don’t see that it would be such an awful fate.’

Startled, Kate raised her eyes suddenly and looked him straight in the face.

‘What do you mean?’ she said.

The abruptness of her question made him hesitate. In a swift instant he regretted having risked himself so far, and reproached himself for being false to his friend; but the temptation was irresistible, and overcome by the tenderness of the day, and irritated by the memory of years of vain longing, he said:

‘Even if he did desert you, you might, you would, find somebody better—somebody who’d marry you.’

Kate did not answer and they sat listening to the rattle of the train. At last she said:

‘I could never marry anyone but Dick.’

‘Why? Do you love him so much?’

‘Yes, I love him better than anything in the world; but even if I didn’t, there are reasons which would prevent my marrying anyone but him.’

‘What reasons?’

A desire that someone should know of her trouble smothered all other considerations, and after another attempt to speak she again dropped into silence.

Montgomery tried to rouse her: ‘Tell me,’ he said, ‘tell me why you couldn’t marry anyone but Dick.’

The sound of his voice startled her, and then, in a moment of sudden naturalness, she answered:

‘Because I’m in the family way.’

‘Then there’s nothing else for him to do but to marry you.’

She knew he was at that moment his own proper executioner, but the intensity of her own feelings did not leave her time for pity.

Why after all shouldn’t she marry Dick? Why hadn’t she asked for this reparation before? ‘I dare say you’re right,’ she said. ‘When I tell him— - ‘

‘What! haven’t you told him yet?’ Montgomery cried.

‘No,’ Kate answered timidly, ‘I was afraid he wouldn’t care to hear it.’

‘Then you must do so at once,’ Montgomery said, and the poor vagrant musician, whom nobody had ever loved, said: ‘I will speak to him about it the first time I get a chance. It would be wicked of him not to. He couldn’t refuse even if he didn’t love you, which he does.’

The last streak of yellow had died out of the sky telling of the day that had gone by, and in a deep tranquillity of mind Kate inhaled the sweetness of her luck as a convalescent might a bunch of freshly culled violets.

Chapter XVIII

It never rains but it pours. She was called before the curtain after every act in *Madame Angot* and *Les Cloches de Corneville*, and Dick told her that she would cut out all the London prima donnas, giving them the go-by, and establish herself one of the great Metropolitan favourites if he could get a new work over from France.

'Why a new work?' she asked, and he told her that to draw the attention of the critics and the public upon her, she must appear in a new title role, and sitting in his armchair when they came home from the theatre at night, he brooded many projects, the principal one of which was to obtain a new work from France. But which of the three illustrious composers, Hervé, Offenbach and Lecocq, should he choose to write the music? The book of words would have to be written before the music was composed, and so far as he knew the only French composer who could set English words was Hervé.

It seemed to Kate that he never would cease to draw forth a cigarette case, or to cross and uncross his legs. Did this man never wish to go to bed? She hated stopping up after one o'clock in the morning. But, anxious to be a serviceable companion to him on all occasions, she strove against her sleepiness and listened to him whilst he considered whether her voice was heard to most advantage in Offenbach or in Hervé. She had not yet played the *Grande Duchesse*, and there were parts in that opera that would suit her very well. He would like to see her in *La Belle Hélène* and the *Princess of Trebizond*, but the last-named opera was never a success in England, and he was not certain about the power of *La Périchole* to draw audiences in the provinces.

It was pleasant to Kate to hear her talent discussed, analyzed, set forth in the works of great men, but her thought had now turned from her artistic career to her domestic. She wanted to be married.

It had always been vaguely understood that they were to be married, that is to say, it had been taken for granted that when a fitting occasion presented itself they would render their cohabitation legal. This understanding had satisfied her till now. In the first months, in the first year after the escape from Hanley, her happiness had been so great that she had not had a thought of pressing matters further. She had feared to do anything lest she might destroy her happiness by doing so, and Dick, who let everything slide until necessity forced him to take steps, had not troubled himself about his marriage, although quite convinced that he would end by marrying Kate. He had treated his marriage exactly as he did his theatrical speculations.

'There is no hurry,' he answered her, and proposed that they should be married in London.

'But why in London?'

He spoke of his relations and his friends. He would like Kate to know his old mother.

'But, Dick, dear, why not at once? We're living in a life of sin, and at times the thought of the sin makes me miserable.'

Out of his animal repose Dick smiled at the religious argument, and being on the watch always for a sneer, the blood rushed to her face instantly and she exclaimed:

'If you did seduce me, if you did drag me away from my peaceful home, if you did make a travelling actress of me, you might at least refrain from insulting my religion.'

Dick looked up, surprised. Kate had put down her knife and fork and was pouring herself out a large glass of sherry. She was evidently going to work herself up into one of her rages.

‘I assure you, my dear, I never intended to insult your religion; and I wish you wouldn’t drink all that wine, it only excites you.’

‘Excites me! What does it matter to you if I excite myself or not?’

‘My dear Kate, this is very foolish of you. I don’t see why—if you’ll only listen to reason— - ‘

‘Listen to reason!’ she said, spilling the sherry over the table, ‘ah! it would have been better if I’d never listened to you.’

‘You really mustn’t drink any more wine; I can’t allow it,’ said Dick, passing his arm across her and trying to take away the decanter.

This was the climax, and her pretty face curiously twisted, she screamed as she struggled away from him:

‘Leave me go, will you! leave me go! Oh! I hate you!’ Then clenching her teeth, and more savagely, ‘No, I’ll not be touched! No! no! no! I will not!’

Dick was so astonished at this burst of passion that he loosed for a moment the arms he was holding, and profiting by the opportunity Kate seized him by the frizzly hair with one hand and dragged the nails of the other down his face.

At this moment Montgomery entered; he stood aghast, and Kate, whose anger had now expended itself, burst into a violent fit of weeping.

‘What does this mean?’ Montgomery said, speaking very slowly.

Neither answered. The man sought for words; the woman walked about the room swinging herself; and as she passed before him Montgomery stopped her and begged for an explanation. She gave him a swift look of grief, and breaking away from him, shut herself in the bedroom.

‘What does this mean?’

Dick looked round vaguely, astonished at the authoritative way the question was put, but without inquiring he answered:

‘That’s what I want to know. I never saw anything like it in my life. We were speaking of being married, when suddenly Kate accused me of insulting her religion, and then—well, I don’t remember any more. She fell into such a passion—you saw it yourself.’

‘Did you say you wouldn’t marry her?’

‘No, on the contrary. I can’t make it out. For the last month her caprices, fancies, and jealousies have been something awful!’

Montgomery made a movement as if he were going to reply, but checking himself, he remained silent. His face then assumed the settled appearance of one who is inwardly examining the different sides of a complex question. At last he said:

‘Let’s come out for a walk, Dick, and we’ll talk the matter over.’

‘Do you think I can leave her?’

‘It’s the best thing you can do. Leave her to have her cry out,’ and adopting the suggestion, Dick picked up his hat, and without further words the men went out of the house, walking slowly arm in arm.

‘I cannot understand what is the matter with Kate. When I knew her first she hadn’t a bad temper.’

To this Montgomery made no answer. He was thinking.

After a pause Dick continued, as if speaking to himself:

‘And the way she does badger me with her confounded jealousies; I’m afraid now to tell a girl to move up higher on the stage. There are explanations about everything, and I can’t think what it’s all about. She has everything she requires. She hasn’t been a year on the stage, and she’s playing leading parts, and scoring successes too.’

‘Perhaps she has reasons you don’t know of.’

‘Reasons I don’t know of? What do you mean?’

‘Well, you haven’t told me yet what the row was about.’

‘Tell you! That’s just what I want to know myself.’

‘What were you speaking about when it began?’ asked Montgomery, who was still feeling his way.

‘About our marriage.’

‘Well, what did you say?’

‘What did I say? I really don’t remember; the row has put it all out of my head. Let me think. I was saying—I mean she was asking me when we should be married.’

‘And what did you say to that? Did you fix a day?’

‘Fix a day!’ said Dick, looking in astonishment at his friend. ‘How could I fix a day?’

‘I think if I loved a woman and she loved me I could manage somehow to fix a day.’

These words were spoken with an earnestness that attracted Dick’s attention, and he looked inquiringly at the young man.

‘So you think I ought to marry her?’

‘Think you ought to marry her?’ exclaimed Montgomery indignantly; ‘really, Dick, I didn’t think you were—Just remember what she’s given up for you. You owe it to her. Good heavens!’

‘Well, you needn’t get into a passion; I’ve had enough of passions for one day.’

The impetuousness of the youth had struck through the fat nonchalance of the man, and he said after a pause:

‘Yes, I suppose I do owe it to her.’

The apologetic, easy-going air with which this phrase was spoken maddened Montgomery; he could have struck his friend full in the face, but for the sake of the woman he was obliged to keep his temper.

‘Putting aside the question of what you owe and what you don’t owe, I’d like to ask you where you could find a nicer wife? She’s the prettiest woman in the company, she’s making

now five pounds a week, and she loves you as well as ever a woman loved a man. I should like to know what more you want.'

This was very agreeable to hear, and after a moment's reflection Dick said:

'That's quite true, my boy, and I like her better than any other woman. I don't think I could get anything better. If it weren't for that infernal jealousy of hers. Really, her temper is no joke.'

'Her temper is all right; she was as quiet as a mouse when you knew her first. Take my word for it, there are excellent reasons for her being a bit put out.'

'What do you mean?'

'Can't you guess?'

The two men stopped and looked each other full in the face, and then resuming his walk, Montgomery said:

'Yes, it's so; she told me in the train coming up from Leamington.'

Tears glittered in Dick's eyes, and he became in that moment all pity, kindness, and good-nature.

'Oh, the poor dear! Why didn't she tell me that before? And I'd scolded her for ill-temper.'

His humanity was as large as his fat, and although he had never thought of the joys of paternity, now, in the warmth of his sentiments, he melted into one feeling of rapture. After a pause, he said:

'I think I'd better go back and see her.'

'Yes, I think you'd better; fix a day for your marriage.'

'Of course.'

Nothing further was said; each absorbed in different thoughts the two men retraced their steps, and when they arrived at the door, Montgomery said:

'I think I'd better wish you good-bye.'

'No, come in, old man; she'd like to see you.'

And as if anxious to torture himself to the last, Montgomery entered. Kate was still locked in the bedroom, but there was such an unmistakable accent of trepidation and anxiety in Dick's fingers and voice that she opened immediately. Her beautiful black hair was undone, and fell in rich masses about her. Dick took her in his arms, and held her sobbing on his shoulder. All he could say was, 'Oh, my darling, I'm so sorry; you will forgive me, won't you?'

Chapter XIX

‘Well, what are you going to give her? Do you see anything you like here?’

‘Do you think that paper-cutter would do?’

‘You can’t give anything more suitable, ma’am. Then there are these card-cases; nobody could fail to like them.’

‘What are you going to give, Annie?’

‘Oh, I’m going to give her the pair of earrings we saw yesterday; but if I were you I wouldn’t spend more than half a sovereign: it’s quite enough.’

‘I should think so indeed—a third of a week’s screw,’ whispered Dolly, ‘but she ain’t a bad one, and Dick will like it, and may give me a line or so in *Olivette*. How do you think she’ll do in the part?’

‘We’ll talk about that another time. Are you going to buy the paper-cutter?’

Casting her eyes in despair around the walls of the fancy-goods shop to see if she could find anything she liked better, Dolly decided in favour of the paper-cutter and paid the money after a feeble attempt at bargaining.

In the street they saw Mortimer, who had now allowed his hair to grow in long, snake-like curls completely over his shoulders.

‘For goodness’ sake come away,’ cried Beaumont, ‘I do hate speaking to him in the street, everybody stares so.’

The girls turned to fly, but the heavy lead was upon them, and in his most nasal tones said:

‘Well, my dear young ladies, engaged in the charming occupation of buying nuptial gifts?’

‘How very sharp you are, Mr. Mortimer,’ answered Dolly in her pertest manner; ‘and what are you going to give? We should so much like to know.’

After a moment’s hesitation he said, throwing up his chin after the manner of a model sitting for a head of Christ:

‘My dear young lady, you must not exhibit your curiosity in that way; it’s not modest.’

‘But do tell us, Mr. Mortimer; you’re a person of such good taste.’

The comic tragedian considered for a moment what he could say most ill-natured and so get himself out of his difficulty.

‘I tell you, young lady, I’m not decided, but I think that a copy of Wesley’s hymns bound up with the book of the *Grand Duchess* might not be inappropriate.’

‘But how do you think she’ll play the Countess?’ asked Beaumont.

‘Oh, we mustn’t speak of that now she’s going to be married,’ and, thinking he could not better this last remark, Mortimer bade the ladies good-bye and went off with curls and coat-tails alike swinging in the breeze. Farther up the street Beaumont and Dolly were joined by Leslie, Bret, and Dubois, and the same topics were again discussed. ‘What are you going to give?’ ‘Have you bought your present?’ ‘Have you seen mine?’ ‘Do you know who’s going to be at the wedding breakfast? They can’t ask more than a dozen or so.’ ‘Have you heard that the chorus have clubbed together to buy Dick a chain?’ ‘It’s very good of them, but

they'll feel hurt at not being asked to the breakfast.' 'What will the Lennoxes do?' These and a hundred other questions of a similar sort had been asked in the dressing-rooms, in the wings, in the streets at every available moment since Morton and Cox's *opéra bouffe* company had arrived in Liverpool. Everybody professed to consider the event the happiest and most fortunate that could have happened, but Mortimer's words, 'There's many a slip between the ring and the finger,' recurred to them whenever the conversation came to a pause, and they hoped the marriage might yet be averted, even when they stood one bright summer morning assembled on the stage, awaiting the arrival of the bride and bridegroom. The name of the church had been kept a secret, and all that was known was that Leslie—who had joined another company in Liverpool—Bret, Montgomery, and Beaumont had gone to attend as witnesses, and that they would be back at the theatre at twelve to run through the third act of *Olivette* before producing it that night.

Many false alarms were given, but when at last the bridal party walked from the wings on to the stage, Dick's appearance provoked a little good-natured laughter, so respectable did he look in a spick-and-span new frock-coat and his tall hat. Kate never looked prettier; Mortimer said her own husband wouldn't know her.

She wore a dark green silk pleated down the front, from underneath which a patent-leather boot peeped as she walked; a short jacket showed the drawing of her shoulders, the delicacy of her waist, and the graceful fall of the hips. She carried in her hand a bouquet of yellow and pink roses, a present from Montgomery.

'Now, ladies and gentlemen, I won't detain you long, but do let us run through the third act, so as to have it right for the night. Montgomery, will you oblige me by playing over that sailor-chorus?'

Dick took the girls in sections and placed them in the positions he desired them to hold.

'Now, then; enter the Countess. Who's in love with the Countess?'

'Well, if you don't know, I don't know who does,' said Mortimer. 'I hear you've been swearing all the morning "till death do us part."'

A good deal of laughter greeted this pleasantry and Dick himself could not refrain from joining in. At last he said:

'Now, Kate, dear, do leave off laughing and run through your song.'

'I-I-ca-n't—can-'t; you—you—are—t-t-too funny.'

'We shall never get through this act,' said Dick, who had just caught Miss Leslie walking off with Bret into the green-room. Now, Miss Leslie, can't you wait until this rehearsal is over?'

'They'll be late for church to-day; they may as well wait.'

Another roar of laughter followed this remark, and Kate said:

'You'd better give it up, Dick, dear; it will be all right at night. I assure you I shall be perfect in my music and words.'

'I must go through the act. The principals are responsible for themselves, but I must look to the chorus. Where's that damned property-master?'

On the subject of rehearsals Dick was always firm, and seeing that it could not be shirked, the chorus pulled themselves together, and the act was run through somehow. Then a few more invitations were whispered in the corners on the sly, and the party in couples and groups repaired to the Lennoxes' lodgings. Mortimer, Beaumont, Dick, and Kate walked together, talking of the night's show. Dubois crushed his bishop's hat over his eyes, straddled his

ostler-like legs, and discussed Wagner's position in music with Montgomery and Dolly Goddard. A baronet's grandson, a chorus singer, told how his ancestor had won the Goodwood Cup half a century ago, to three ladies in the same position in the theatre as himself. Bret and Leslie followed very slowly, apparently more than ever enchanted with each other.

For the wedding breakfast, the obliging landlady had given up her own rooms on the ground-floor. The table extended from the fireplace to the cabinet, the panels of which Mortimer was respectfully requested not to break when he was invited to take the foot of the table and help the cold salmon. The bride and bridegroom took the head, and the soup was placed before them; for this was not, as Dick explained, a breakfast served by Gunter, but a dinner suitable to people who had been engaged for some time back. At this joke no one knew if they should laugh or not, and Mortimer slyly attracted the attention of the company to Bret and Leslie, who were examining the cake.

Then all spoke at once of the presents. They were of all sorts, and had come from different parts of the country. Mr. Cox had given a large diamond ring. Leslie had presented Kate with a handsome inkstand. Bret had bought her a small gold bracelet. Dubois, whose fancies were light, offered a fan; Beaumont, a pair of earrings; Hayes, a cigarette case; Dolly Goddard, a paper-knife; Montgomery, a brooch which must have cost him at least a month's salary. Mortimer exclaimed that his wife had been behaving rather badly lately, and that in consequence he had been unable to obtain from her—what he had not been able to obtain Dick did not stop to listen to. At that moment the gold chain, the present from the chorus, caught his eye. The kindness of the girls seemed to affect him deeply, and, interrupting Kate, who was thanking her friends for all their tokens of good-will, he said:

'I must really thank the ladies of the chorus for the very handsome present they made me. How sorry I am that they are not all here to receive my thanks I cannot say; but those who are here will, I hope, explain to their comrades how we were pressed for space.'

'One would think you were refusing a free admission,' snarled Mortimer.

'What a bore that fellow is!' whispered Dick to Mr. Cox, the proprietor of the company, who had come down from London to arrange some business with his manager.

'I'm sure, Mr. Lennox, we were only too glad to be able to give you something to show you how much we appreciate your kindness,' said a tall girl, speaking in the name of the chorus.

'We must have some fizz after the show to-night on the stage. What do you think. Cox?' said Dick. 'And then I shall be able to express my thanks to everyone.'

'And we must have a dance,' cried Leslie. 'My foot is all right now.'

Chairs had to be fetched in from the bedroom and even from the kitchen to seat the fifteen people who had been invited. The ladies did not like sitting together and the supply of gentlemen was not sufficient—drawbacks that were forgotten when the first few spoonfuls of soup had been eaten and the sherry tasted. The women examined Mr. Cox with looks of deep inquiry, but his face told them nothing; it was grave and commercial, and he spoke little to anyone except Kate and her husband. The baronet's son sat in the middle of the table with the three chorus-girls, whom he continued to pester with calculations as to how much he would be worth, but for his ancestor's ambition to win the Derby with Scotch Coast. Leslie and Bret were on the other side of the wedding cake, and they leant towards each other with a thousand little amorous movements. Beaumont spoke of the evening's performance, putting questions to Montgomery with a view to attracting Mr. Cox's attention.

‘Do you think, Mr. Montgomery, that to take an encore for my song will interfere with the piece?’

‘I never heard of a lady putting the piece before herself,’ said Montgomery, with a loud laugh, for he, too, was anxious to attract Mr. Cox’s attention, and availing himself of Miss Beaumont’s question as a ‘lead up,’ he said, ‘I hope that when my opera is produced I shall find artists who will look as carefully after my interests.’

‘But when will you have your opera ready?’ Kate asked.

‘My opera?’ he said, as soon as she averted the brown eyes that burnt into his soul. ‘It’s all finished. It’s ready to put on the stage when Dick likes.’

The ruse proved successful, for Mr. Cox, bending forward, said in an interested voice:

‘May I ask what is the subject of your opera, Mr. Montgomery?’

This was charming, and the musician at once proceeded to enter into a complicated explanation, in which frequent allusion was made to a king, a band of conspirators, a neighbouring prince, a beautiful daughter unfortunately in love with a shepherd, and a treacherous minister. Beaumont listened wearily, and, seeing that no mention she could make of her singing would avail her, she commenced to fidget abstractedly with one of her big diamond earrings. In the meanwhile Montgomery’s difficulties were increasing. To follow successfully the somewhat intricate story of king, conspirators, and amorous shepherd a sustained effort of attention was necessary, and this Dick, Kate, and Mr. Cox found it difficult to grant; for in the middle of a somewhat involved bit—in which it was not quite clear whether the king or the minister had entered disguised—the landlady would beg to be excused—if they would just make a little way, so that she might remove the soup.

This lady, in her Sunday cap, assisted by the maid-of-all-work, from whose canvas-grained hands soap and water had not been able to extract the dirt, strove to lift large dishes of food over the heads of the company. There was a sirloin of beef that had to be placed before Mortimer. Then came two pairs of chickens, the carving of which Dick had taken upon himself. A piece of bacon with cabbage, and a pigeon-pie, adorned the sides of the table. The cutlets were handed round; and for some time conversation gave way to the more necessary occupation of eating. Even Bret and Leslie left off billing and cooing; the grandson of the baronet, forgetful of his family’s misfortunes on the turf, dug vigorously into the pigeon-pie and liberally distributed it. The clattering of knives and forks swelled into a sustained sound, which was only broken by observations such as ‘Thanks, Mr. Lennox, anything that’s handy—a leg, if you please.’ ‘May I ask you, Montgomery, for a slice of bacon? No cabbage, thank you.’ ‘Mr. Mortimer, a little more and some gravy; that’ll do nicely.’

It was not until the first helping had been put away, and eyes began to wander in search of what would be best to go on with, that conversation was resumed. To Mortimer, who had had a good deal of trouble with the beef, Dick said, ‘I hope you are satisfied with your part, Mortimer, and that we shall have some good roars. The piece ought to go with a scream.’

‘I think I shall knock ‘em this time, old boy,’ said the comic man, drawling his words slowly through his nose. ‘It pretty well killed me when I read it over to myself, so I don’t know what it will be when I spit it out at them.’

This was deemed unnecessarily coarse, and for a moment it was feared that Mortimer was as drunk as Mr. Hayes, whose eyes were now beginning to blink pathetically. He awoke up, however, with a start and a smile when the first champagne cork went off, and holding out his glass, said, ‘Shall be very glad to drink your health, a wedding only comes once in a lifetime.’

Mortimer tried to turn the embarrassing pause that followed this remark to his profit. The beef having kept him silent during the early part of the dinner, he resolved now to prove what a humorist he was, and by raising his voice he strove to attract the attention of the company to himself. This, however, was not easily done. Dubois had begun to pinch the backside of the canvas-handed maid, who was lifting a plate of custards over his head; but these frivolities did not prevent him from discussing Carlyle's place in English literature with the baronet's son on his left, and arguing from time to time with Montgomery on his right against certain effects employed by Wagner in his orchestration. Kate laid down her spoon and stared vaguely into space and again laid her hand on Dick's.

The past seemed now to be completely blotted out. What more could she desire? She would go on acting, and Dick would continue to love her. By some special interposition of Providence all the hazards of existence over which she might have fallen had been swept aside. What broader road could a woman hope to walk in than the one that lay before her in all its clear and bland serenity? God had been good to her! and He was going to be good to her. What a tie the child would be, what an influence, what a source of future happiness! They would work for their child; a boy or girl, which? Would it not give them courage to work? Would it not give them strength to live? It would be something to hope for. Oh, how good God had been to her; and how wicked she had been to Him! Her heart filled with a fervour of faith she had never felt before; and facing the gracious future which a child and husband promised her, she offered up thanksgivings for her happiness, which she accepted as eternal, so inherent did it seem in herself.

'Oh, just look at him!' said Kate, waking up with a start from her reveries. 'How can he make such a beast of himself?'

'Don't take any notice of him, dear; that's the best way.'

But Mortimer, who had been vainly struggling for the last five minutes to draw Beaumont from the memory of a lord, Dubois from his Wagnerian argument, and Bret and Leslie from their flirtation, now seized on poor Hayes's drunkenness as a net wherein he could capture everybody. Raising his voice so as to ensure silence, he said, addressing himself to Mr. Cox at the other end of the table, 'How very affecting he is now, how severely natural; the innocence of a young girl in her teens is not, to my mind, nearly so touching as that of a boozer in his cups. Have you ever heard how he fancied the waiter was calling him in the morning when the policeman was hauling him off to the station?'

Mr. Cox had not heard; and the whole story of how they bumped in the hotel door at Derby had to be gone through. Having thus got the company by the ear, Mortimer showed for a long time no signs of letting them go. He went straight through his whole repertoire. He told of a man who wanted to post a letter, but not being able to find the letterbox, he applied to a policeman. The bobby showed him something red in the distance, and explained that that was the post. 'Keep the red in your eye, my boy,' said the drunkard; and this he did until he found himself in a public-house trying to force his letter down a soldier's collar. He had mistaken the red coat for the pillar. This was followed by a story of a man who apologized to the trees in St. James's Park, and explained to them that he had come from a little bachelor's party, until he at last sat down saying, 'This is no good; I mus-mush wait till the bloody pro-prochession has passed.' A heavy digestive indifference to everything was written on each countenance; and in the slanting rays of the setting sun the curling smoke vapours assumed the bluest tints. Odours of spirits trailed along the tablecloth. Disconnected fragments of conversation, heard against the uninterrupted murmur of Mortimer's story-telling, struck the ear. The baronet's son was now explaining to his three ladies that no woman could expect to get on in life unless she were very immoral or very rich; Dubois argued across the table with

Leslie and Bret concerning the production of the voice: Beaumont cast luminous and provoking glances at Mr. Cox, and tried to engage him in conversation regarding the inartistic methods of most stage-managers in arranging the processions.

‘Dick, dear, the cake hasn’t yet been cut.’

‘No more it hasn’t,’ Dick answered, and when the white-sugared emblem of love and fidelity was distributed, the wedding party awoke to a burst of enthusiasm. Everyone suggested something, and much whisky and water was spilt on the tablecloth.

But matters, although they were advanced a stage, did not seem to be much expedited. The bride’s health had to be drunk, and Dick had to return thanks. He did not say very much, but his remarks concerning *Olivette* suggested a good deal of comment. Mortimer took a different view of the question, and Dubois explained at length how the piece had been done in France. Leslie insisted that Bret should say something; and once on his legs, to the surprise of everybody, the silent tenor became surprisingly garrulous.

It was Kate, however, who first guessed the reason of Montgomery’s despondency, and in pity for him, she made a sign to the ladies, and the room was left to the flat chests and tweed coats. Montgomery prayed that this after-dinner interval would not prove a long one, for he dreaded the smutty stories. The baronet’s son sprang off with a clear lead, watched by Mortimer and Dubois. In the way of anecdotes these two would have been rivals had it not been for the latter’s fancy for more serious discussions. Still, in the invention and collection of the most atrocious, they both employed the energy and patience of the entomologist. A chance word, out of which a racy story might be extracted, was pursued like a rare moth or a butterfly. Dubois’s were more subtle, but Mortimer’s, being more to the point, were more generally effective.

They waited eagerly for the baronet’s son to conclude, and he had hardly pronounced the last phrase when Mortimer, coming with a rush, took the lead with ‘That reminds me of - ‘ Dubois looked discomfited, and settled himself down to waiting for another chance. This, however, did not come just at once; Mortimer told six stories, each nastier than the last. Everybody was in roars except Montgomery and Dubois; whilst one thought of his opera, the other searched his memory for something that would out-Mortimer Mortimer. This was difficult, but when his turn came he surprised the company. Mr. Cox leaned over the table with a glass of whisky and water in his hand declaring that he had never spent so pleasant a day in his life: and thus encouraged Dubois was just beginning to launch out into the intricacies of a fresh tale when Montgomery, beside himself with despair, said to Dick:

‘It was arranged that I should play the music of my new opera over to Mr. Cox. If you don’t put a stop to this it will go on for ever.’

‘Yes, my boy, it’s getting a bit long, isn’t it: just let Dubois finish and we’ll go upstairs.’

The story proved a weary one; but like a long railway journey it at last drew to an end, and they went upstairs. There they found the ladies yawning and looking at the presents. Kate ran to Dick to ask him to arrange about the music, but Beaumont had been a little before her and had taken Mr. Cox out on the balcony. Bret was not in the room; Leslie did not know the music, and in the face of so many difficulties, Dick’s attention soon began to wander, and Kate was left to console the disappointed musician. Once or twice she attempted to renew the subject, but was told that they were all going down to the theatre in half an hour, and that it had better be put off to another time.

Montgomery made no answer, but he could not cast off the bitter and malignant thought that haunted him, ‘I’m as unfortunate in art as in love.’

Chapter XX

The ebb of the company's prosperity dated from Kate's marriage. Somehow things did not seem to go well after. In the first place the production of *Olivette* was not a success. Mortimer was drunk, did not know his words, and went 'fluffing all over the shop.' Kate, excited with champagne and compliments, sang the wrong music on one occasion; and to complete their misfortunes, the Liverpool public did not in the least tumble to Miss Beaumont's rendering of the part of the heroine. The gallery thought she was too fat, the papers said she was not sprightly enough, and on Wednesday night the old *Cloches* had to be put up. By this failure the management sustained a heavy loss. They had laid out a lot of money on dresses, property and scenery, all of which were now useless to them; and the other two operas were beginning to droop and lose their drawing power, having been on the road for the last three years. The country, too, was suffering from a great commercial crisis, and no one cared to go to the theatre. In many of the towns they visited strikes were on, and the people were convulsed with discussions, projects for resistance, and hopes of bettering their condition. Great social problems, the tyranny of capital, and such-like, occupied the minds of men, and there was naturally little taste for the laughing nonchalance of *La Fille de Madame Angot* or the fooling of the Baillie in the *Cloches*. As forty thousand men had struck work, our band of travelling actors rolled out of Leeds, and they left it bearing with them only a reminiscence of empty benches, and street-corners crowded with idling, sullen-faced men. At Newcastle they were not more fortunate, at Wigan they fared even worse, and at Hull it was equally bad. Gaiety seemed to have fled out of the North; the public-house and the platform drew away the pit and the gallery; the frequenters of the boxes and dress-circle remained at home, to talk around their firesides of their jeopardized fortunes. When the workers grow weary of work a hard time sets in for the sellers of amusement, and the fate of Morton and Cox's Operatic Company proved no exception to the rule. Money was made nowhere, and every Friday night a cheque for five-and-twenty pounds had to be sent down from London to make up the deficit in the salary list. Nevertheless for two months matters went on very smoothly. The remembrance of large profits made in preceding years was still fresh in the minds of Messrs. Morton and Cox, and they had not yet begun to grumble; but an unintermittent drain of twenty-five to forty pounds a week keeps a man from his sleep at night, and after a big failure in the city, in which Mr. Cox was muleted to the extent of a couple of thousand pounds, he wrote to Dick suggesting that he had better look out for another opera. This was welcome news to Montgomery; but no sooner had Dick raised him to the seventh heaven of bliss, than he had to knock him down to earth again: a letter arrived from Mr. Cox, saying that no opera was to be put up; that it would be useless to try anything new in such bad times; they had better try to reduce expenses instead.

'Reduce expenses? How are we to reduce expenses except by cutting down the salaries?'

'I'm sure I don't know,' said Montgomery; 'and the expense of mounting my piece would be very slight.'

Without attempting to discuss so vain a question, Dick said, 'I must speak to Hayes.'

But Hayes only pulled his silky whiskers, blinked his Chinese eyes, drank three glasses of whisky, and changed the position of his black bag several times, and the matter was scarcely alluded to again until the following fortnight, when Dick found himself forced to write to Mr. Cox demanding a cheque for thirty-five pounds, to meet Saturday's treasury and the current

expenses of the following week. The cheque arrived, but the letter that came with it read very ominously indeed. It read as follows:

‘DEAR MR. LENNOX,—I enclose you the required amount; but of course you will understand that this cannot go on. I intend running down to see you on Tuesday evening. Will you have the company assembled to meet me at the theatre, as I have an important explanation to make to them.’

Dick had too much experience in theatrical speculations not to know that this must mean either a reduction of salaries or a break-up of the tour; but as two whole days still stood between him and the evil hour, it did not occur to him to give the matter another thought, and it was not until they returned home after the theatre, to prepare for the Sunday journey, that he spoke to Kate of the letter he had received.

Their portmanteaus were spread out before them, and Kate was counting her petticoats when Dick said:

‘I’ll tell you what, Kate, I shouldn’t be surprised if the company broke up shortly, and we all found ourselves obliged to look out for new berths.’

‘What do you mean?’ she said, with a startled look on her face.

‘Well, only that I think that Morton and Cox are beginning to get tired of losing money. As you know, we’ve been doing very bad business lately, and I think they’ll give us all the sack.’

‘Give us all the sack!’ Kate repeated.

‘Yes,’ said Dick, pursuing his own reflections ‘I’m afraid it’s so. It’s a deuced bore, for we were very pleasant together. But I don’t think I showed you the letter I got this morning. What’s the matter, dear?’

Pale as the petticoat at her feet, Kate stood with raised eyebrows and hands that twitched at the folds of her dress.

‘Oh, Dick! what shall we do? We shall starve; we shan’t have any place to go to!’

‘Starve!’ said Dick in astonishment. ‘Not if I know it. We shall easily find something else to do. Besides, I don’t care if he does break up the tour. I believe there’s a good bit of coin to be made out of the pier theatre at Blackpool. I’ve been thinking of it for some time—with a good entertainment, you know; and then there’s the drama Harding did for me—a version of Wilkie Collins’s story—*The Yellow Mask*—devilish good it is, too. I was reading it the other day. We might take a company out with it. Let me see, whom could we get to play in it?’ And, sitting over his portmanteau, the actor proceeded to cast the piece, commenting as he went along on the qualifications of the artists, and giving verbal sketches of the characters in the play. ‘Beaumont would play Virginie first rate, you know—a strong, determined, wicked woman, who stops at nothing. I’d like to play the father; Mortimer would be very funny as the uncle. We’ll have to write in something for you. You couldn’t take the sympathetic little girl yet; you haven’t had enough experience.’

The expenses of scenery, properties, and posting were gone into, and while listening to the different estimates Kate looked at her husband vaguely, and plunged in a sort of painful wonderment, asking herself how standing on the brink of ruin he could calmly make plans for the future. But to the actor, whose life had never run for a year without getting entangled in some difficult knot or other, the present hitch did not give the slightest uneasiness. A strange town to face and half a crown in his pocket might cause him some temporary embarrassment, but a hundred pounds at the bank, and the notoriety of having been for two years the manager of a travelling company, was to Dick an exceptionally brilliant start in life, and it did not

occur to him to doubt that he would hop into another shop as good as the one he had left. But as the woman had been engaged in none of these anxious battles for existence, the news of a threatened break-up of her world fell with a cruel shock upon her, and she experienced in an aggravated form the same dull nervous terror from which she had suffered in the early days when she had first joined the company, but then the full tide of love and prosperity bore their bark along, and quieted her fears. But now in the first puff of the first squall she saw herself like one wrecked and floating on a spar in a wide and unknown sea of trouble. Sitting on the bed where she would never sleep again, she watched Dick counting on his fingers and looking dreamily into the spaces of some impossible future, and asked herself what was to become of them. For the twentieth time since she had donned them the robes of the Bohemian fell from her, and she became again in instincts and tastes a middle-class woman longing for a home, a fixed and tangible fireside where she might sit in the evening by her husband's side, mending his shirts, after the work of the day. A bitter detestation of her wandering life rose to her head, and she longed to beg of her husband to give up theatricals, and try to find some other employment; and the next day it appeared to her more than usually sinful to drive to the station as the church bells were chiming, spending the hours, that should have been passed in praying, in playing 'nap,' smoking cigarettes, and talking of wigs, make-ups, choruses, and such-like. But apparently there was no help for it, and on Monday night, in her excitement, increased by the arrival of Mr. Cox, she could not help getting out of bed to beseech God to be merciful to them; her husband's heavy breathing often interrupted her, but it told her that he was her husband, and that was her only consolation.

It astonished her that he could sleep as he did, having in front of him the terrible to-morrow, when perhaps Mr. Cox would cast them adrift; and she trembled in every fibre when she stood on the stairs leading to the manager's room. There was a great crowd: the chorus-girls wedged themselves into a solid mass, and murmured good-mornings to each other; Mortimer told a long story from the top step; Dubois tried to talk of Balzac to Montgomery, who listened, puzzled and interested, fancying it was a question of a libretto; whilst Bret, till now silent as the dead, suddenly woke up to the conclusion that it would probably all end in a reduction of salaries. At last Dick appeared and called them into the presence of Mr. Cox. Whisky and water was on the table, and with the silky whiskers plunged in the black bag, Mr. Hayes fumbled aimlessly with many papers. The 'boss' looked very grave and twitched at a heavy moustache; and when they were all grouped about him, in his deepest and most earnest tones, he explained his misfortunes. For the last four months he had been forced to send down a weekly cheque of not less than five-and-twenty pounds; sometimes, indeed, the amount had run up to forty pounds. This, of course, could not go on for ever, he had not the Bank of England behind him. But talking of banks, although there was no reason why he should inflict on them an account of his bad luck, he could not refrain from saying that had it not been for a certain bank he should be forced to ask them to accept half salaries. The words brought a flush of indignation to Beaumont's cheeks. She made a slight movement, as if she were going to repudiate the suggestion violently, but the silence of those around calmed her, and she contented herself with murmuring to Dolly:

'This is an old dodge.'

'I will leave you now,' said Mr. Cox, 'to consult among yourselves as to whether you will accept my proposal, or if you would prefer me to break up the tour at the end of the week, and pay you your fares back to London.'

As Mr. Cox left the room there was a murmur of inquiry from the chorus ladies, and one or two voices were heard above the rest saying that they did not know how they could manage on less than five-and-twenty shillings a week. These objections were soon silenced by Dick,

who in a persuasive little speech explained that the reduction of salaries applied to the principals only.

‘Then why derange these ladies and gentlemen by asking them to attend at this meeting?’ said Mortimer.

To this question Dick made answer by telling the ladies and gentlemen of the chorus they might withdraw, and the discussion was resumed by those whom it concerned. Beaumont objected to everything. Bret spoke of going back to Liverpool. Dubois explained his opinions on the management of theatres in general, until Dick summoned him back to the point. Were they or were they not going to accept half salaries? At length the matter was decided by Mortimer getting upon a chair and shouting through his nose as through a pipe:

‘I don’t know if you’re all fond of hot weather, but if you are you’ll find it to your taste in London; all the theatres are closed, and the cats are baking on the tiles.’

This brought the argument to a pause, during which Beaumont remembered that grouse were shot in August, and settling her diamonds in her ears, she agreed that the tour was to be continued. A few more remarks were made, and then the party adjourned to a neighbouring ‘pub.’ to talk of *opéra bouffes* and bad business.

The next places they visited were Huddersfield and Bradford, but the houses they played to were so poor that Mr. Cox summoned a general meeting on the Sunday morning, and told them frankly that he could not go on losing money any longer; he would, however, lend them the dresses, and they might start a commonwealth if they liked. After much discussion it was decided to accept his offer, and the afternoon was spent in striving to decide how the business was to be carried on. A committee was at last formed consisting of Dick, Mortimer, Dubois, Montgomery, Bret, and Mr. Hayes, and they settled, as they went on to Halifax by an evening train, that the chorus was, hit or miss, to be paid in full, and the takings then divided among the principals proportionately to the salary previously received.

In the face of the bad times it was a risky experiment, and Williams, the agent in advance, was anxiously looked out for at the station. What did he think? Was there a chance of their doing a bit of business in the town? Were there bills up in all the public-houses? Williams did not at first understand this unusual display of eagerness, but when the commonwealth was explained to him, his face assumed as grey an expression as the pimples would allow it. He shoved his dust-eaten pot-hat on one side, scratched his thin hair, and after some pressing, admitted that he didn’t think that they would do much good in the place; as far as he could see, everybody’s ideas were on striking and politics; the general election especially was playing the devil with managers; at least that was what the company that had just left said.

This was chilling news, and, alas! each subsequent evening proved only the correctness of Mr. Williams’s anticipations. Seven-pound houses were the rule. On Friday and Saturday they had two very fair pits, but this could not compensate for previous losses, and in the end, when all expenses were paid, only five-and-thirty shillings remained to be divided among the principals. Their next try was at Oldham, but matters grew worse instead of better, and on Saturday night five-and-twenty shillings was sorrowfully portioned out in equal shares. It did not amount to much more than half a crown apiece. Rochdale, however, was not far distant, and, still hoping that times would mend, Morton and Cox’s band of travelling actors sped on their way, dreaming of how they could infuse new life into their mumming, and whip up the jaded pleasure-tastes of the miners. But for the moment comic songs proved weak implements in the search for ore, and the committee sitting in the green-room, used likewise as a dressing-room by the two ladies, counted out a miserable four-and-ninepence as the result of a week’s hard labour.

Beaumont fumed before the small glass, arranging her earrings as if she anticipated losing them; Kate trembled and clung to her husband's arm, Montgomery cast sentimental glances of admiration at her, and Mortimer tried to think of something funny, while Dubois came to the point by asking:

'Well, what are you going to do with that four-and-ninepence? It isn't worth dividing. I suppose we'd better drink it.'

At the mention of drinks Mr. Hayes blinked and shifted the black bag from the chair to the ground.

'Yes, that's easily arranged,' said Dick, 'but what about the tour? I for one am not going on at four-and-ninepence a week.'

'Sp-pend—it—in drinks,' stuttered Mr. Hayes, awakening to a partial sense of the situation.

Everybody laughed, but in the pause that ensued, each returned to the idea that there was no use going on at four-and-ninepence a week.

'For we can't live on drink, although Beaumont can upon love,' said Mortimer, determined to say something.

But the joke amused no one, and for some time only short and irrelevant sentences broke the long silences. At last Dick said:

'Well, then, I suppose we'd better break up the tour.'

To this proposal no one made much objection. Murmurs came from different sides that it was a great pity they should have to part company in this way after having been so long together. Montgomery and Dubois contributed largely to this part of the conversation, and through an atmosphere of whisky and soap-suds arose a soft penetrating poetry concerning the delights of friendship. It was very charming to think and speak in this way, but all hoped, with perhaps the exception of Montgomery, that no one would insist too strongly on this point, for in the minds of all new thoughts and schemes had already begun to germinate. Mortimer remembered a letter he had received from a London manager; Dubois saw himself hobnobbing again with the old 'pals' in the Strand; Bret silently dreamed of Miss Leslie's dyed hair and blue eyes, and of his chances of getting into the same company.

'Then, if it is decided to break up the tour, we must make a subscription to send the chorus back to London,' said Dick after a long silence.

Nobody till now had thought of these unfortunate people and their twenty-five shillings a week, but always ready to help a lame dog over a stile, Dick planked down two 'quid' and called on the others to do what they could in the same way. Mr. Hayes strewed the table instantly with the money he had in his pocket. Mortimer spoke about his wife and mentioned details of an intimate nature to show how hard up he was; he nevertheless stumped up a 'thin 'un.' Beaumont, rampant at the idea of 'parting,' contributed the same; indignant looks were levelled at her, and Dick continued to exhort his friends to be generous. 'The poor girls,' he declared, 'must be got home; it would never do to leave them starving in Lancashire.' Kate gave a sovereign of her savings, and in this way something over ten pounds was made up; with that Dick said he thought he could manage.

The trouble he took to manage everything was touching. On Sunday, when Kate was at church, he was down at the railway station trying to find out what were the best arrangements he could make. And on Monday morning when they were all assembled on the platform to bid good-bye to their fellow-workers, it was curious to see this huge man, who at a first impression would be taken for a mere mass of sensuality, rushing about putting buns and

sandwiches in paper bags for his poor chorus-girls, encouraging them with kind words, and when the train began to move, waving them large and unctuous farewells with his big hat.

Since the first shock of the threatened break-up of the tour Kate had gradually grown accustomed to the idea and now wept in silence. Without precisely suffering from any pangs of fear for the future, an immense sadness seemed to ache within her very bones. All things were passing away. The flock of girls in whose midst she had lived was gone; a later train would take Mortimer to London; Bret was bidding them good-bye; Beaumont was consulting a Bradshaw. How sad it seemed! The theatre and artists were vanishing into darkness like a dream. Not a day, nor an hour, could she see in front of her.

'What shall we do now?' she whispered to Dick, as she trotted along by his side.

'Well, I haven't quite made up my mind. I was thinking last night that it wouldn't be a bad idea to make up a little entertainment—four or five of us—and see what we could do in the manufacturing towns. Lancashire is, you know, honeycombed with them. Our travelling expenses would amount to a mere nothing. We must have someone to operate on the piano. I wonder if Montgomery would care about coming with us.'

Kate thought that he would, and as she happened at that moment to catch sight of the long tails of the Newmarket coat at the other side of the station, she begged Dick to call to the erratic musician. No sooner was the proposition put forward than it was accepted, and in five minutes they were at luncheon in a 'pub,' arranging the details of the entertainment.

'We shall want an agent-in-advance, a bill-poster, or something of that kind,' said Montgomery.

'I've thought of that,' replied Dick; 'Williams is our man, he'll see to all that; and I don't know if you know, but he can sing a good song on his own account.'

'Can he? Well, then, we can't have anyone better—and what shall we take out?'

'Well, we must have a little operetta, and I don't think we can do better than Offenbach's *Breaking the Spell*.'

'Right you are,' said Montgomery, pulling out his pocket-book. '*Breaking the Spell*, so far so good; now we must have a song or a character sketch to follow, and I don't think it would be a bad idea if we rehearsed a comedietta. What do you say to *The Happy Pair*?'

'Right you are, pencil it down, can't do better, it always goes well; and then I can sing between "The Men of Harlech."'

Montgomery looked a little awry at the idea of having to listen to 'The Men of Harlech,' sung by Dick, but in the discussion that followed as to what Kate was to do, 'The Men of Harlech' was forgotten.

As Dick anticipated, Williams declared himself delighted to accompany them in the double capacity of bill-poster and occasional singer; and after a fortnight's rehearsal at Rochdale, the Constellation Company started on its wanderings. Many drinks had been consumed in seeking for the name; many strange combinations of sound and sense had been rejected, and it was not until Dick began to draw lines on a piece of paper, affixing names to the end of each, that the word suggested itself. What joy! What rapture! A rush was made to the printers, and in a few hours the following bill was produced:

THE CONSTELLATION COMPANY.

MISS KATE D’ARCY.
MR. R. LENNOX. *———-* MR. P. MONTGOMERY.
MR. B. WILLIAMS.

Chapter XXI

As the Constellation Company drove to the station, Kate noticed that Rochdale and Hanley were not unlike, and the likeness between the two towns set her thinking how strange it was. Here was the same red town, narrow streets, built of a brick that, under a dull sky, glared to a rich geranium hue. The purplish tints of Hanley alone were wanting, but the heavy smoke-clouds, and the tall stems of the chimneys, were as numerous in Rochdale as in her native place. And, coincidence still more marvellous, Nature had apparently aided and abetted what man's hand had contrived, for in either town a line of hills swept around the sky. The only difference was, that the characteristics of Rochdale were not so marked as those of Hanley. The hills were not so high, nor were they in such close array as those of the Staffordshire town, and the Lancashire valley was not so deep and trench-like as the one that engirdles the potteries. It may be that as much smoke hung over it, but the smoke did not seem so black and poisonous, at least not to Kate's eyes; and, as the train sped along a high embankment a group of factory chimneys emerged from a fold in the hills, and comparing the two landscapes it seemed to her there were more fields in the Lancashire valley, water-courses, trees and hedges—stunted hedges, it is true—but she did not remember any hedges about Hanley. At one moment she was minded to turn to Dick and to call his attention to the likeness in the country they were travelling through to the country she had come from; had she been alone with him she might have asked him, but he was now busy talking of the comic songs and sketches in which they were to act. 'The Mulligan Guards' was one of the items on their programme, and she and Dick were going to sing it together. This would be the first time they had ever sung together. Dick had very little voice, but he was a good actor, and she thought they would be able to make a success of it. He called her attention and the attention of the other members of the Constellation Company to the scattered towns and villages they were passing through.

'The very country for our kind of entertainment,' he said; and all the mummers rose from their seats and gazed at the wolds and factories. Under the green waste of a wold a chimney had been run up; sheds and labourers' cottages had followed, and in five years, if the factory prospered, this beginning would swell into a village, in twenty it would possess twenty thousand inhabitants; for just as in old times the towns followed the castles, so do they now follow in the wake of the factories. The mummers gaped and wondered at the arsenic green sides of the wolds, striped with rough stone walls or blackened with an occasional coalpit, the ridges fringed with trees blown thin by sea-breezes. In the distance, within the folds of the hills, tall chimneys clustered and great clouds of smoke hung listless in the still autumn air. Cold rays of sunlight strayed for a moment on the dead green of the fields, pale as invalids enjoying the air for the last time before a winter seclusion. And later on, when the light mists of evening descended and bore away the landscape, the phantom shapes of the wolds took on a strange appearance, producing in Kate a sensation of mobility, which to escape from, for it frightened her, she turned to Dick and asked how far they were from Bacup. He told her they would be there in about half an hour, and half an hour afterwards Williams, who had gone on in front, met them at the station, and began at once the tale of his industry, saying that he had been in every public-house, and had stood at the corners of all the principal streets distributing bills.

'I think we shall do pretty well,' he said; 'my only bit of bad news is that I haven't been able to find any lodgings for you; there's but one hotel, and all the rooms are taken.'

Dick, who on such occasions always took time by the forelock, insisted on starting at once on their search—and up and down the murky streets of the manufacturing town they walked until it was time for them to repair to the Mechanics' Hall, where they were going to play, and get ready for the entertainment.

'The Mulligan Guards' proved a great success, as did also the operetta, *Breaking the Spell*. Kate's pretty face and figure won the hearts of the factory hands, and she was applauded whenever she appeared on the stage; and so frequent were the encores that it was half-past ten before they had finished their programme, and close on eleven o'clock before they got out of the hall into the street. Then the search for lodgings had to begin again. Montgomery and Williams, being single men, obtained beds, but Kate and Dick were not so easily satisfied, and they found themselves standing under a porch with the lights going out on all sides, and the prospect of spending a wet night in the street before them. At last Dick bethought himself of the police station, but on applying to a policeman he was directed to the backdoor of a public-house. 'He was pretty sure,' whispered the boy in blue, 'to get put up there.' The door was opened with precaution, and they were allowed in. The place was full of people; it took them a long time to get served, and they were at length told that in the way of a room nothing could be done for them. Every bed in the house was occupied. Kate raised her eyes to Dick, but her look of misery was anticipated by a rough-faced carter who stood at the counter.

'You bear up, little woman,' he said abruptly; 'don't yo' look so froightent. Yo' shall both come up to my place, if yo' will; it isna up to much, but oi'll do th' best I can for yo'.'

There was no mistaking the kindness with which the offer was made, though the idea of going to sleep at this rough man's house for the moment staggered even the mummer. But as it was now clear that they would have either to accept their new friend's hospitality, or spend the night on the doorstep, it did not take them long to decide on the former alternative. Their only reason for hesitating was their inability to understand what were his motives for asking them to come to his place. Then, as if divining the reason of their uncertainty, he said:

'I know yo' well, tho' yo' don't know me. I was up at the 'all to-night, and yo' did make me so laugh that I wouldna' see yo' in the streets for nothing. Neaw, let it be yea or nay, master.'

For answer, Dick put out his hand; and when he had thanked the hospitably inclined carter, put some questions to him about the entertainment. Soon the two began to 'pal,' and after another drink they all went off together.

After wading down a few sloppy streets, he stopped before a low doorway, and ushered them into what looked like an immense kitchen. They saw rafters overhead and an open staircase ascending to the upper rooms, as a ladder might through a series of lofts; and when a candle had been obtained, the first thing their host did was to pull his wife out of bed, and insist on his guests getting into it, a request which the woman joined in as heartily as her husband as soon as the reason for this unceremonious awakening had been explained to her. And so wearied out were Kate and Dick, and so tempting did any place of rest look to them, that they could offer no opposition to the kind intentions of their host and hostess, and they slept heavily until roused next morning by a loud trampling of feet passing through their room. It was the family coming down from the lofts above, and as they descended the staircase they wished their guests a broad Lancashire good-morning.

And when Kate and Dick had recovered from their astonishment, they dressed and went out to buy some provisions, which they hoped to be allowed to cook in the rough kitchen; but when they returned with their purchases they found the carter's daughter standing before an elaborately prepared breakfast, consisting of a huge beefsteak and a high pile of cakes.

'Lor, marm, why did yo' buy those things?' said the girl, disappointed.

‘Well,’ said Kate, ‘we couldn’t think of trespassing on you in that fashion. You must, you will, I hope, let us prepare our own breakfast.’

‘Feyther will never ‘ear of it, I know,’ said the girl; and immediately after, the carter, with his brawny arms, pushed Kate and Dick down into two seats at the big table. Both cake and meat were delicious, and Dick’s appetite showed such signs of outdoing the carter’s that Kate, in the hope of diverting attention, commenced an interesting conversation with the buxom maiden by her side, and so successful were her efforts that a friendship was soon established between the women; and, when the morning’s work was done, Mary, of her own accord, sought out Kate, and as she knitted the thick woollen stocking, was easily led into telling the inevitable love story.

We change the surroundings, but a heart bleeds under all social variations; and in this grim manufacturing town when the bridal dress was taken out of its lavender and darkness it seemed to possess a gleam of poetic whiteness that it could not have had even if set off by the pleasant verdure of a Devonshire lane.

‘But you’ll keep it for another; another will be sure to come by very soon,’ said Kate, trying to console.

‘Nay, nay, I’ll have no other,’ said the girl. ‘I’ll just keep the dress by; but I’ll have no other.’

Then the talk hesitated and fell at last into a long narrative concerning tender hopes and illusions to which Kate listened, as all women do, to the story of heart-aches and deceptions; and in after years, when all other remembrances of the black country were swept away, the remembrance of this white dress remained.

From Bacup they went to Whitworth, a town in such immediate neighbourhood that it might be called a suburb of the former place, and there they played in the Co-operative Hall to an audience consisting of a factory man, two children, and a postman who came in on the free list. This was not encouraging; but they, nevertheless, resolved to try the place again; and next day at dinner-time, as the ‘hands’ were leaving the factories, they distributed some hundreds of bills. Dick said he should never forget it; to watch Pimply Face cutting about, shoving his bills into the women’s aprons, was the funniest thing he had ever seen in his life. But their efforts were all in vain. It rained, and not a soul came to see them; and, in addition to their other troubles, they found Whitworth was an awkward place to stop at. Dick and his wife had a room in a pub, but Montgomery and Williams had to walk over each evening to sleep at Bacup. One day their landlady spoke of Clayton-le-Moors, where, she said, a fair was being held, and she advised the Constellation Company to try their entertainment there. This was considered as a sensible suggestion, and the four mummers started for the fair on the top of an omnibus with their wigs and dresses and make-ups stuck under their legs. The weather at least was in their favour. The sunlight rolled over the great white sides of the booths, Aunt Sallies were being shied at, the pubs were all open, and a huge, rollicking population, fetid with the fermenting sweat of the factories, was disporting on whisky and fresh air. Never were the spirits of dejected strolling players buoyed up with a fairer prospect of a harvest.

The next thing to do was to distribute the handbills, and find a place where they could set up their show, and, to conduct their search more thoroughly, they separated, after having decided on a tryst. In this way the town was thoroughly ransacked; but it was not until Kate, who had gone off on her own accord, learnt from the landlord of a public-house, where she had entered to get a drink, that he had a large concert-room overhead, that there seemed to be the slightest chance of the Constellation Company being able to turn the joviality of the factory hands at the fair to any account. Matters now seemed to be looking up, and a very neat little arrangement was entered into with the proprietor of the pub. Four entertainments of ten

minutes each were to be given every hour, for each of which the sum of threepence a head was to be charged, twopence to go to the artists, a penny to the landlord, who would, of course, make his ‘bit’ also out of the drink supplied. And what a success they had that day! Not only did the factory hands come in, but they paid their threepence over and over again. They seemed never to grow tired of hearing Dick and Kate sing ‘The Mulligan Guards,’ and when she called out ‘Corps’ and he touched his cap, and they broke into a dance, the delight of the workpeople knew no bounds, and they often stopped the entertainment to hand up their mugs of beer to the mummers with a ‘Ave a soop, mon.’

From twelve o’clock in the day until eleven at night the affair was kept going; Kate, Dick, and Williams dancing and singing in turn, and Montgomery all the while spanking away at the dominoes. It was heavy work, but the coin they took was considerable, and it came in handy, for in the next three towns they did very badly. But at Padiham a curious accident turned out in the end very luckily for them. There were but five people in the house, one of whom was drunk. This fellow very humorously in the middle of the entertainment declared that he was going to sing a song; he even wanted to appropriate Williams’s wig, and when Dick, who was always chucker-out on such occasions, attempted to eject him, he climbed out of reach and lodged himself in one of the windows. From there he proceeded to call to the people in the street, and with such excellent result that they made £18 in the hall during the evening.

This, and similar slices of good fortune, kept the Constellation Company rolling from one adventure to another. Sometimes a wet day came to their assistance; sometimes a dispute between some factory hands and the masters brought them a little money. Their wants were simple; a bed in a pub, and a steak for dinner was all they asked for. But at last, as winter wore on, ill-fortune commenced to follow them very closely and persistently. They had been to four different towns and had not made a ten-pound note to divide between the lot of them. In the face of such adversity it was not worth while keeping on; besides, Kate’s expected confinement rendered it impossible to prolong their little tour much farther. For these reasons, one November morning the Constellation Company, hoping they would soon meet again, under more auspicious circumstances, bade each other good-bye at the railway station. Williams and Montgomery went to Liverpool, Kate and Dick to make a stay at Rochdale, where they had heard that many companies were coming. The companies came, it is true, but they were, unfortunately, filled up, and Lennox and his wife could not get an engagement in any of them. The little money saved out of their tour enabled them to keep body and soul together for about a month; but in the fifth week they were telling the landlady lies, and going through all the classic excuses—expecting a letter every day, by Monday at the very latest, etc. In the face of Kate’s approaching confinement this was a state of things that made even Dick begin to look anxiously round and fear for the safety of the future. Kate, on the contrary, although fretted and wearied, took matters more easily than might have been expected; and the changing of their last ten shillings frightened her less than had the first announcement of the possible breaking up of Morton and Cox’s Operatic Company. Bohemianism had achieved in her its last victory; and having lately seen so many of the difficulties of life solving themselves in ways that were inexplicable to her, she had unconsciously come to think that there was no knot that chance, luck, or fate would not untie. Besides, her big Dick’s resources were apparently unlimited; the present weakness of her condition tended to induce her to rely more than ever upon his protection; and in the lassitude of weak hopes, she contented herself with praying occasionally that all would yet come right. But her lover, although he told her nothing of his fears, was not so satisfied. Never before had he been quite so hard pressed. They now owed a week’s rent, besides other small debts; all of which they were unable to pay unless they pawned the remainder of their clothes. He said it would be far

better for them to go to Manchester, leaving their things, to be redeemed some day, as a security with the landlady—that is to say, if they failed to get out of the house without being perceived by her. They still had half a crown, which would pay Kate's railway fare, and as regards himself, Dick proposed that he should do the journey on foot; he would be able to walk the distance easily in three hours, and at eleven o'clock would join his wife at an address which he gave her, with many injunctions as to the story that was to be told to the landlady. So, as the clock was striking seven one cold winter's morning, they stole quietly downstairs, Dick carrying a small portmanteau. On the table of their room a letter was left, explaining that a telegram received overnight called them to Manchester, but that they hoped to be back again in a few days—a week at latest.

This assurance Dick considered would amply satisfy the old dame, and holding the portmanteau on his shoulder with one arm, and supporting Kate with the other, he made his way to the station.

The day had not yet begun to break. A heavy, sluggish night hung over the town. The streets were filled with puddles and flowing mud; and Kate was frequently obliged to stop and rest against the lamp-posts. She complained of feeling very ill, and she walked with difficulty. In the straggling light of the gas, Dick looked at her pale, pretty features, accentuated by suffering; he felt that he had never known before how dearly he loved her, and the pity for her that filled his heart choked him when he attempted to speak: and his eyes misted with tears and he could not bring his mind to leave her. He thought of the old dodge of travelling on the luggage, but fearing that the woman to whose house they were going would not let them in unless they had at least one portmanteau to show, he determined to adhere to the original plan of sending Kate on in front; and although tortured by many fears, he hid them, assuring her that their troubles would be over once they set foot in Manchester: all he had to do was to go down to the Theatre Royal to get an engagement. And he spoke so kindly that his kindness seemed to repay her for her sufferings.

For some days past she had been subject to violent nauseas and acute pains, and as she bade him goodbye out of the railway-carriage window, she had to bend and press herself against it. And feeling he must encourage her he ran along the platform till the train began to leave him behind, and he stopped out of breath with a cloud of melancholy upon his cheeks, generally so restful in a happy animalism—yet the fat hand lifted the big-brimmed black felt hat, the frizzly curls blew in the cold wind, the train oscillated and then rolled and disappeared round a bend in the line.

That was all. What had been done was over, as completely as the splash made by a stone dropped into a well, and the actor awoke to a feeling that something new had again to be begun.

After descending the steps of the station, he asked to be directed, and for a long time his way lay through a street, made by red brick houses with stucco porches; but at length these commenced to divide into cottages, and after many inquiries, he was shown into what he was told was an old Roman road, called 'Going over Tindel.' The wind blew bitterly, and against a murky sky the fretted trees on the higher ridges were like veils of grey lace.

Walking was not Dick's forte, and leaning against a farm gate, his eyes embraced the wild black scenery, and remembrances of the Hanley hills drifted through his thoughts. There were the same rolling wastes, and like the pieces on a chess-board the factory chimneys appeared at irregular intervals. But these topographical similarities attracted Dick only so far as they filled his mind with old memories and associations, and his thoughts flowed from the time he had stood with his wife at the top of Market Street to the present hour. He neither praised nor

blamed himself. He accepted things as they were without criticism, and they appeared to him like a turgid dream swollen and bleak as the confused expanse of distance before him.

The stupor into which he occasionally fell endured until a quick thought would strike through the mental gloom that oppressed him, and relinquishing the farm gate he would moodily resume his walk through the heavy slosh of the wet roads. As he did so the vision of Kate's pain-stricken face haunted him, and at every step his horror of the danger she ran of being taken ill before arriving in Manchester grew darker, and he toiled up hill after hill, yearning to be near her, desiring only the power to relieve and to help. Often the intensity of his longing would force him into a run, and then the farm labourers would turn from their work to gaze on this huge creature, who stood on a hill-top wearily wiping his forehead.

And then he grew sick of the long, staring, rolling landscape, with its thousand sinuosities, its single trees, its detailed foreground of scrub, hedges, brooks, spanned by small brick bridges, the melting distance, the murky sky, the belching chimneys: he asked himself if it would never end, if it would never define itself into the streets of Manchester. And as he descended each incline his eyes searched for the indication of a town, until at last he saw lines of smoke, factories, and masses of brick on his left, and he hastened.

All the markings of the way were looked forward to, the outlying streets seemed endless, and so great was his hurry that before he discovered he was in Oldham, he had walked into the middle of the town.

His disappointment was bitter indeed, almost unbearable, and for the moment he felt that he could go no farther; his courage was exhausted, it was impossible he could face that bleak mocking landscape again. Besides, he was fainting for want of food. Had he possessed a few pence to treat himself to a glass of beer and a bit of bread and cheese, he thought he would be able to pull himself together and make another effort; but he was destitute. Still, he was forced to try again. The thought of Kate burned in his brain, and after having inquired the way, with weary and aching feet he once more trudged manfully on. A fretful suspicion now haunted him that she might not find the landlady as agreeable as would under the circumstances be desirable, and he reasoned with himself as he crossed into the open country, until anxiety became absorbed by fatigue. Of every passer-by did he ask the way, and as he passed the stately villas Dick felt that had there been much farther to walk he would have had to beg a lift from one of the waggoners who passed him constantly driving their heavy teams. But he was now in Manchester, and wondering if he had taken longer to walk than he had expected, he looked into the shop windows in search of a clock, and when he rang at the door of the lodging-house his heart beat as rapidly as the jangling bell that pealed through the house The maid who answered the door told him that she knew of no such person and was about to shut the door in his face, but Dick's good-natured smile compelled her into parley, and she admitted that, having been out on an errand, she had not seen the missus since ten o'clock. A lady might have called, but she wasn't in the house now; they were as full as they could hold.

'And are you certain that a lady might have called about ten or half-past without your having seen her?'

'I was out on a herrant at that time, so I'm sure she might, for missus wouldn't mind to tell me if I wasn't to get rooms ready for her.'

'And what would your mistress do in the case of not being able to supply a lady with rooms?'

'I should think she would send round to Mrs.——well—I don't remember right the name.'

'Do you know the address?'

‘I know it’s behind the station, one of those streets where—nay—but I don’t think I could direct you right.’

‘Then what shall I do?’

‘Missus will be in shortly. If you’ll take a seat in the ‘all—I can’t ask you into any other room, they’re all occupied.’

There was nothing to do but to accept, and after having asked when the landlady might be expected in, and receiving the inevitable ‘Really couldn’t say for certain, sir, but I don’t think she’ll be long,’ he sat down in a chair, weary and footsore; there were times when struck by a sudden thought he would make a movement as if to start from his seat; but instantly remembering his own powerlessness, he would slip back into his attitude of heavy fatigue. In the dining-room the clock ticked, and he listened to the passing of the minutes, tortured by the idea that his wife was suffering, dying, and that he was not near to help, to assist, to assuage. He forgot that they were penniless, homeless; all was lost in a boundless pity, and he listened to the footsteps growing sharper as they approached, and duller as they went. At last the sound of the latchkey was heard in the lock, and Dick started to his feet. It was the landlady.

‘Have you seen my wife?’

‘Yes, sir,’ exclaimed the astonished woman; ‘she was here this morning; all our rooms are let, so I couldn’t— - ‘

‘Where has she gone to, do you know?’

‘Well, sir, I was going to say, she asked me if I could recommend her to some quiet place, and I sent her to Mrs. Hurley’s.’

‘And will you give me Mrs. Hurley’s address?’

‘Yes, sir, certainly; but if I may make so bold, you’re looking very tired—may I offer you a glass of beer? And Mrs. Lennox is looking very bad too, she is - ‘

‘I’m much obliged, but I’ve no time; if you’d give me the address….’

No sooner were the words spoken than, forgetful of his aching feet, Dick rushed away, and dodging the passers-by he ran until he laid hands on the knocker and bell in question.

‘Is Mrs. Lennox staying here?’ he asked of the lady who opened the door.

‘There was a lady of that name who inquired for rooms here this morning.’

‘And isn’t she here? Why didn’t she take the rooms?’

‘Well, sir, she said she was expecting to be confined, and I didn’t care to have illness in my house.’

‘You don’t mean to tell me that you turned her out? Oh, you atrocious—! If you were a man….’

Overpowered with rage he stopped for words, and the woman, fearing he would strike her, strove to shut the door. But Dick, with his thick leg, prevented her, and at this moment they were joined by the maid, who screamed over her mistress’s shoulder:

‘The lady said she would come round here in a couple o’ hours’ time to ask for you, and I advised her to try for rooms at No. 28 in this street. You’ll find her there.’

This was enough for Dick, and loosing his hold on the door he made off; streets, carriages, passers-by, whirled before his eyes.

‘Is Mrs. Lennox here?’ he asked so roughly when the door was opened, that the maid regretted having said yes as soon as the word had passed her lips.

‘On what floor?’

‘The first, sir; but you’d better let me go up first. Mrs. Lennox is not very well; she’s expecting her husband.’

‘I’m her husband.’

And on that Dick rushed at the staircase. A few strides brought him on to the first landing; but a sudden disappointment seized him—the sitting-room was empty. Thinking instantly of the bedroom, he flung open the door, and there he saw Kate sitting on the edge of the bed rocking herself to and fro. She rose to her feet and the expression of weary pain was changed to one of joy as she fell into Dick’s arms.

‘I thought you’d never come, and they would take me in nowhere.’

‘Yes, my darling, I know all about it; I know all.’

He laid kisses on the rich black-blue hair and the pale tired face; he felt light hands resting on him; she felt strong arms clasped about her, and each soul seemed to be but the reflection of the other, just as the sky and the sea are when the sun is at its meridian.

Then, at this brief but ineffable moment of spiritual unison faded words returned to them, and Kate spoke of all she had suffered. She whispered the story she had told the landlady, and how she had ordered a big dinner, and everything of the best, so that they might not be suspected of being hard up. Dick approved of these arrangements; but just as he smacked his lips, a foretaste of the leg of mutton in his mouth, Kate uttered a sort of low cry, and turning pale, pressed her hands to her side. A sharp pain had suddenly run through her, and as quickly died away; but a few minutes after this was succeeded by another, which lasted longer and gripped her more acutely. Supporting her tenderly he helped her across the room and laid her on the bed. There she seemed to experience some relief; but very soon she was again seized by the most acute pangs. It seemed to her that she was bound about with a buckler of iron, and frightened Dick rang for the landlady. The worthy woman saw at a glance what was happening, and sent him off, weary as he was, to fetch a doctor and the needful assistance.

Chapter XXII

The doctor and nurse arrived almost simultaneously and passed into the sick-room, bidding Dick, who came running upstairs a moment after, be of good cheer. The mummer took his hat from his head and stood for a moment staring vacantly at the bedroom door, as if striving to read there the secrets of life, birth, and death. Then he remembered how tired he was, and with a large movement of fatigue he sat down on the sofa. A gloomy yellow sky filled the room with an oppressive and mournful twilight, and to relieve his aching feet Dick had kicked off his shoes, and with his folded arms pressed against his stomach he sat hour after hour, too hungry to sleep, listening to the low moaning that came through the chinks of the door. He appeared to be totally forgotten; voices whispered on the staircase, people passed hurriedly through the sitting-room, but none asked him if he wanted anything: no one even noticed him, and when the landlady lighted the gas she uttered a cry of astonishment, as if she had discovered an intruder in the room.

‘Oh, lawks! Mr. Lennox, we’d forgotten all about you, and you sittin’ there so quiet. But your wife is getting on nice; she has just had a cup of beef-tea: in about another couple of hours it will be all over.’

‘Is she suffering much?’

‘Well, sir, yes, I wouldn’t consider it an easy confinement; but I think it will be all right: you’ll see your wife and child alive and well to-morrow morning.’

Dick could not help doubting the truth of the woman’s statement unless she came to his assistance with food. Although almost starving, he was afraid to call for dinner lest she should ask him for some money in advance, but at that moment a cramp seized him, and turning pale he had to lean over the table to suppress the moan which rose to his lips.

‘What’s the matter, sir? You look quite ill,’ the woman asked.

‘Oh, ‘twas only a sudden pain,’ Dick said, making an effort to recover himself. ‘I’ve eaten nothing all day—have had no time, you know.’

‘Then we shall have you laid up as well as your wife, and there’s the leg of mutton she ordered stewing away all these hours. I’m afraid you won’t be able to eat it?’

Absurd as the question appeared to him, Dick answered adroitly:

‘It will do very well, if you’ll bring it up as soon as you can; I may have to go out.’

This was intended as a ruse to deceive the landlady, for so tired was he that had it been to save Kate’s life he did not think he would have walked downstairs. He could think of nothing but putting something into his stomach, and hard and dry as the mutton was it seemed to him the most delicious thing he had ever tasted. His pain melted away with the first mouthful, and the glass of beer ran through and warmed his entire system. Down the great throat the victuals disappeared as if by magic, and the unceasing cry that seemed now to fill the entire house passed almost unheeded.

For a moment he would listen pityingly, and then like an animal return to his food. He cut slice after slice from the joint, and as his hunger seemed to grow upon him he thought he could finish it, and even longed to take the bone in his hand and pick it with his teeth; but he reasoned with himself; it would not do to let the landlady suspect they had no money, and as he gazed at the last potato, which he was afraid to eat, he considered what he should say in

apology for his appetite; but as he sought for a nice phrase, something pleasantly facetious, he remembered that he would have to find money and at once; he must have some no later than to-morrow. There were a thousand things that would have to be paid for—the baby's clothes, the cradle, the—he tried to think of what was generally wanted under such circumstances, but the cries in the next room, which had gradually swelled into shrieks, appalled him, and involuntarily the thought struck him that there might be a funeral to pay for as well as a birth.

At that moment the bell tinkled, and the maid came running up. She carried a jug of hot water and flannels in her hand, and pushing past him she declared that she hadn't a moment. The door of the bedroom was ajar; a fire burned, candles flared on the mantelpiece, a basin stood on the floor, and at times nothing was heard but a long moan, mingling with the murmuring voices of the doctor and nurse.

The room seemed like a sanctuary in which some mysterious rite was being performed. But suddenly the silence was broken by shrieks so passionate and acute that all the earlier ones were only remembered as feeble lamentations.

Dick raised his big face from his hands, the movement threw back the mass of frizzly hair, and in the intensity of this emotion he looked like a lion.

'Was this life,' he asked himself, 'or death? And by whose order was a human creature tortured thus cruelly?' But the idea of God did not arrest his attention, and his thoughts fixing themselves on the child, he asked himself, what was this new life to him?

'Oh, I never will again! Oh, how I hate him—I could kill him! I'll never love him, never no more.'

The cry touched the fat mummer through all the years of gross sensuality, through the indigestion of his big dinner, and, struck by the sense of her words, he shuddered, remembering that it was he who was the cause of this outrageous suffering and not the innocent child. Was it possible, he asked himself, that she would never love him again? He didn't know. Was it possible that he was culpable? Strange notions respecting the origin, the scheme, the design of the universe, flashed in dim chiaro-oscuro through his thoughts, and for a full hour Dick pondered, philosopher-like, on the remote causes and the distant finalities of men and things.

An hour full of moans and cries of suffering, then a great silence came, and the whole house seemed to sigh with a sense of relief.

'The baby must be born,' he said; and immediately after a little thin cry was heard, and in his heart it was prolonged like a note of gladness, and his thoughts became paternal.

He wondered if it were a girl or a boy; he fancied he'd like a girl best. If she were pretty, and had a bit of a voice, he'd be able to push her to the front, whereas with a boy it would be more difficult. Relinquishing his dreams at this point, Dick listened to the silence. He did not dare to knock at the door, but the murmur of satisfied voices assured him that all was right. Still it was very odd that they did not come out and announce the result to him. Did he count for nobody? Did they fancy that it was nothing to him if his wife and child were dead or alive? The idea of being thus completely unconsidered in an affair of such deep concern irritated him, and he walked towards the sofa to brood over his wrongs. Should he, or should he not, knock at the door? At last he decided that he should, and, after a timid rap, tried the handle. He was immediately confronted by the nurse.

'It's all right, sir; you shall come in in a moment when the baby is washed.'

‘Yes, but I want to know how my wife is.’

‘She’s doing very well, sir; you shall see her presently.’

The door was then gently but firmly closed, and Dick was kept waiting, and almost collapsing he staggered into the room when the nurse called for him to come in.

Kate lay amid the sheets pale and inert, her beautiful black hair making an ink stain on the pillows. She stretched an exhausted hand to him, and looked at him earnestly and affectionately. To both of them their lives seemed completed.

‘Oh, my darling, my darling!’ he murmured; and his heart melted with happiness at the faint pressure of fingers which he held within his. The nurse standing by him held something red wrapped up in flannels. He scarcely noticed it until he heard Kate say:

‘It’s a little girl. Kiss it, dear.’

He awkwardly touched with his lips the tiny whining mass of flesh the nurse held forward, feeling, without knowing why, ashamed of himself.

‘Hearing that madam was taken all unexpected, I brought these flannels with me,’ said the large woman with the long-tailed cap; ‘but to-morrow I can recommend you, if you like, sir, to a shop where you can get everything required.’

This speech brought Dick with a cruel jerk to the brink of the atrocious situation in which he had so unexpectedly found himself. To-morrow he would have to find money, and a great deal too. How he was going to do it he did not know, but money would have to be found.

‘Yes, yes, I’ll see to all that to-morrow,’ he said, awakening from his lethargy, like a jaded horse touched in some new place by the spur, ‘but now I’m so tired I can scarcely speak.’

‘That’s so,’ said the landlady. ‘These walking tours is dreadful. He’s been over from Rochdale to-day, not counting the runnin’ about he did after his wife. You know they refused to take her in at number fifteen. But, sir, I don’t well know how we shall manage. I don’t see how I’m to offer you a bed. The best I can do for you is to make you up something on the sofa in the parlour.’

‘Oh, the sofa will do very well. I think I could sleep on the tiles; so good-night, dear,’ he said as he leaned over and kissed his wife; ‘I’m sorry to leave you so soon.’

‘It isn’t a bit too soon,’ said the doctor. ‘She must lie still and not talk.’

On this Dick was led away. The nurse and doctor consulted by the bed where the woman would lie for days, too weak even to dream, while the man went off into the Manchester crowd to search for food. Beyond the bare idea of ‘going down to see what they were doing at the theatre,’ he had no plans. The scavenger dog that prowls about the gutter in search of offal could not have less. But he felt sure that something would turn up; he was certain to meet someone to whom he could sell a piano or for whom he could build a theatre. He never made plans. There was no use in making plans; they were always upset by an accident. Far better, he thought, to trust to the inspiration of the moment; and when he awoke in the morning, heavy with sleep, he felt no trepidation, no fear beyond that of how he should get his sore feet into his shoes. It was only with a series of groans and curses that he succeeded in doing this, and the limps by which he proceeded down the street were painful to watch. At the stage-door of the Theatre Royal a conciliatory tone of voice was mechanically assumed as he asked the porter if Mr. Jackson was in. But before the official could answer, Dick caught sight of Mr. Jackson coming along the passage.

‘How do you do, old man? Haven’t seen you for a long time.’

‘What, you, Dick, in Manchester? Come and have a drink, old man. Very glad to see you. Stopping long here?’

‘Well, I’m not quite decided. My wife was confined, you know, last night.’

‘What! you a father, Dick?’

Mr. Jackson leered, poked him in the ribs, and commenced a list of anecdotes. To these Dick had to listen, and in the hopes of catching his friend in an unwary moment of good-humour, he laughed heartily at all the best points. But digressive as conversation is in which women are concerned, sooner or later a reference is made to the cost and the worth, and at last Mr. Jackson was incautious enough to say:

‘Very expensive those affairs are, to be sure.’

This was the chance that Dick was waiting for, and immediately buttonholing his friend, he said:

‘You’re quite right, they are: and to tell you the truth, old man, I’m in the most devilish awkward position I ever was in my life. You heard about the breaking up of Morton and Cox’s company? Well, that left me stranded.’

At the first words gaiety disappeared from Mr. Jackson’s face, and during Dick’s narrative of the tour in Lancashire he made many ineffectual wriggles to get away. Dick judged from these well-known indications that to borrow money might be attended with failure, and after a pathetic description of his poverty he concluded with:

‘So now, my dear fellow, you must find something for me to do. It does not matter what—something temporary until I can find something better, you know.’

It was difficult to resist this appeal, and after a moment’s reflection Mr. Jackson said:

‘Well, you know we’re all made up here. There’s a small part in the new drama to be produced next week; I wouldn’t like to offer it as it is, but I might get the author to write it up.’

‘It will do first rate. I’m sure to be able to make something of it. What’s the screw?’

‘That’s just the point. We can’t afford to pay much for it; our salary list is too big as it is.’

‘What did you intend giving for it?’

‘Well, we meant to give it to a super, but for you I can have it written up. What do you say to two-ten?’

Dick thought it would be judicious to pause, and after a short silence he said:

‘I’ve had, as you know, bigger things to do; but I’m awfully obliged to you, old pal. You’re doing me a good turn that I shan’t forget; we can consider the matter as settled.’

This was a stroke of luck, and Dick congratulated himself warmly, until he remembered that £2 10s. at the end of next week did not put a farthing into his present pocket. Money he would have to find that day, how he did not know. He called upon everybody he had ever heard of; he visited all the theatres and ball-rooms, drank interminable drinks, listened to endless stories, and when questioned as to what he was doing himself, grew delightfully mendacious, and, upon the slight basis of his engagement for the new drama at the Royal, constructed a fabulous scheme for the production of new pieces. In this way the afternoon went by, and he was beginning to give up hopes of turning over any money that day, when he met a dramatic author. After the usual salutations - ‘How do you do, old boy? How’s business?’ etc.—had been exchanged, the young man said:

‘Had a bit of luck; just sold my piece—you know the drama I read you, the one in which the mother saves her child from the burning house?’

‘How much did you get?’

‘Seventy-five pound down, and two pounds a night.’

At the idea of so much money Dick’s eyes glistened, and he immediately proceeded to unfold a scheme he had been meditating for some time back for the building of a new theatre. The author listened attentively, and after having dangled about the lamp-post for half an hour, they mutually agreed to eat a bit of dinner together and afterwards go home and read another new piece that was, so said the fortunate author, a clinker. No better excuse than his wife’s confinement could be found for fixing the meeting hour at the young man’s lodging, and in the enthusiasm which the reading of the acts engendered, it was easy for Dick to ask for, and difficult for his friend to refuse, a cheque for £15.

Chapter XXIII

In about a week Kate was sufficiently restored to sit up in bed. Her very weakness and lassitude were a source of happiness; for, after long months of turmoil and racket, it was pleasant to lie in the covertures, and suffer her thoughts to rise out of unconsciousness or sink back into it without an effort. And these twilight trances flowed imperceptibly into another period, when with coming strength a feverish love awoke in her for the little baby girl who lay sleeping by her side. And for hours in the reposing obscurity of the drawn curtains mother and child would remain hushed in one long warm embrace. To see, to feel, this little life moving against her side was enough. She didn't look into the future, nor did she think of what fate the years held in store for her daughter, but content, lost in emotive contemplation, she watched the blind movements of hands and the vague staring of blue eyes. This puling pulp that was more intimately and intensely herself than herself developed strange yearnings in her, and she often trembled with pride in being the instrument through which so much mystery was worked; to talk to herself of the dark dawn of creation, and of the day sweet with maternal love that lay beyond, was a great source of joy; to hear the large, hobbling woman tell of the different babies she had successfully started that year on their worldly pilgrimage never seemed to weary her. She interested herself in each special case, and when the nurse told her she must talk no more she lay back to dream of the great boy with the black eyes who had so nearly been the death of his little flaxen haired mother.

She felt great interest in this infant, who, if he went on growing at the present rate, it was prophesied would be in twenty years' time the biggest man in Manchester. But the nurse admitted that all the children were not so strong and healthy. Indeed, it was only last week that a little baby she had brought into the world perfectly safely had died within a few days of its birth, for no cause that anyone could discover; it had wilted and passed away like a flower. The tears rolled down Kate's cheeks as she listened, and she pressed her own against her breast and insisted on suckling her infant although expressly forbidden to do so by the doctor.

These days were the best of her life. She felt more at peace with the world, she placed more confidence in her husband than she had ever done before; and when he came in of an afternoon and sat by her side and talked of herself and of their little baby, softened in all the intimate fibres of her sex, she laid her hand in his, and sighed for sheer joy. The purpose of her life seemed now to show a definite sign of accomplishment.

The only drawback to their happiness was their poverty. The fifteen pounds of borrowed money had gone through their hands like water, and God knows what would have become of them if Dick had not been fortunate to make another tenner by looking after a piece given at a morning performance. What with the doctor's bills, the nurse's wages, the baby's clothes, they were for ever breaking into their last sovereign. Dick spoke of their difficulties with reluctance, not wishing to distress her, but he felt he must rouse her out of the apathy into which she had fallen, and he begged of her to take the next engagement he could find for her. It seemed to him that she was now quite well, but when he pressed for a promise the first time she answered: 'Yes, Dick, I should like to get to work again,' but when he came to her with a proposal of work, she was quick to find excuses. The baby was foremost among them; she did not like to put the child out to nurse. 'If the child were to die, I should never forgive myself,' she would say. 'Don't ask me, Dick, don't ask me.'

'But, Kate, we cannot go on living here on nothing. We owe the landlady for three weeks.'

At these words Kate would burst into tears, and when he succeeded in consoling her she would remind him that if she went back to work before she was quite well she might be laid up for a long time, which would be much worse than the loss of a miserable three or four pounds a week. To convince Dick completely she would remind him that as she had been playing leading parts it would not be wise to accept the first thing she could get. 'If one lets oneself down, Dick, in the profession, it's difficult to get up again.'

'Well, dear,' Dick would answer, 'I must try and find something to do myself. You shall not be asked again to go back to work until you feel like it. When you come to tell me that you're tired of staying at home.

'Don't speak like that, Dick, for it seems as if you were laying blame upon me, and I'm not to blame. You will be able to judge for yourself when I'm fit to go back to work, and one of these days you will come with the news of a leading part.'

Accompanying him to the door she said she would like to return to the stage in a leading part, but not in any of the parts she had already played in, but in something new. These objections and excuses brought a cloud into Dick's face which she did not notice, but when he had gone she would begin to think of his kindness towards her and of what she could do to reward him. His shirts wanted mending, and as soon as they were mended she made hoods and shoes for the baby.

In many little ways the old life that she thought she had left behind in Hanley began to reappear, and when Dick came into the room and found her reading a novel by the fire she reminded him of Ralph's wife rather than of his own.

While she was touring in the country she had given up reading without being aware that she had done so. She had once bought a copy of the *Family Herald*, hoping that it would help away the time on the long railway journey, but having herself come into a life of passion, energy and infinite variety, she could not follow with any interest the story of three young ladies in reduced circumstances who had started a dressmaking business and who were destined clearly to marry the men they loved and who loved them and who would continue to love them long after the silver threads had appeared among the gold. But now in the long lonely days spent with her baby in the lodging (Dick went away early in the morning and sometimes did not return till twelve o'clock at night), a story in a copy of *The Family Herald* lent to her by the landlady, on the whole a very kind and patient soul, took hold of Kate's imagination, and when she raised her eyes a tear of joy fell upon the page, and in the effusion of these sensations she would take her little girl and press it almost wildly to her breast.

Before leaving, the nurse had given Kate many directions. The baby was to have its bath in the morning; to be kept thoroughly clean, and to be given the bottle at certain times during the day and night. Kate was devoted to her child, but the attention she gave it was unsustained, a desultory attention. Sometimes she put too much water in the milk, sometimes too little.

The christening had awakened in her many forgotten emotions, and now that she was an honest married woman, she did not see why she should not resume her old church-going ways. The story she was reading was full of allusions to the vanity of this world and the durability of the next; and her feet on the fender, penetrated with the dreamy warmth of the fire, she abandoned herself to the seduction of her reveries. Everything conspired against her. Being still very weak the doctor had ordered her to keep up her strength with stimulants; a table-spoonful of brandy and water taken now and then was what was required. This was the ordinance, but the drinks in the dressing-rooms had taught her the comforts of such

medicines, and during the day several glasses were consumed. Without getting absolutely drunk, she rapidly sank into sensations of numbness, in which all distinctions were blurred, and thoughts trickled and slipped away like the soothing singing of a brook. It was like an amorous tickling, and as her dreams balanced between a tender declaration of love and the austere language of the Testament, the crying of the sick child was unheeded.

Once Kate did not hear it for hours; she did not know she had forgotten to warm its milk, and that the poor little thing was shivering with cold pain. And when at last she awoke, and went over to the cot trying to collect her drink-laden thoughts, the little legs were drawn up, the face was like ivory, and a long thin wail issued from the colourless lips. Alarmed, Kate called for the landlady, who, after feeling the bottle, advised that the milk should be warmed. When this was done the child took a little and appeared relieved.

Shortly after a bell was heard ringing, and the landlady said:

‘I think it’s your husband, ma’am.’

It was usual for Dick, when he came in at night, to tell what Kate termed ‘the news.’ It amused her to hear what had been done at the theatre, what fresh companies had come to town. On this occasion it surprised him that she took so little interest in the conversation, and after hazarding a few remarks, he said:

‘But what’s the matter, dear? Aren’t you well?’

‘Oh yes, I’m quite well,’ Kate answered stolidly.

‘Well, what’s the matter? You don’t speak.’

‘I’m tired, that’s all.’

‘And how’s the baby?’

‘I think she’s asleep; don’t wake her.’

But Dick went over, and holding a candle in one hand he looked long and anxiously at his child.

‘I’m afraid the little thing is not well; she’s fidgeting, and is as restless as possible.’

‘I wish you’d leave her alone; if she awakes, it’s I who will have the trouble of her, not you. It’s very unkind of you.’

Dick looked at his wife and said nothing; but as she continued to speak, the evidences of drink became so unmistakable that he said, trying not to offend her:

‘I’m afraid you’ve been drinking a little too much of the brandy the doctor ordered you.’

At this accusation, Kate drew herself up and angrily denied having touched a drop of anything that day.

‘How dare you accuse me of being drunk? You ought to respect me more.’

‘Drunk, Kate? I never said you were drunk, but I thought you might have taken an overdose.’

‘I suppose you’ll believe me when I tell you that I’ve not had a teaspoonful of anything.’

‘Of course I believe you, dear,’ said Dick, who did not like to think that Kate was telling him a deliberate lie, and to avoid further discussion he suggested bed. Kate did not answer him, and he heard her trying to get undressed, and wondering at her clumsiness he asked himself if he should propose to unlace her stays for her. But he was afraid of irritating her, and thought it would be better to leave her alone to undo the knot as best she could. She tugged at the

laces furiously, and thinking she might break them and accuse him of unwillingness to come to her assistance, he said, ‘Shall I— - ‘

But she cut him short. ‘Let me alone, let me alone!’ she cried, and Dick kicked off his shoes.

‘How can you be so unkind, or is it that you’ve no thought for that poor sick child?’ she said; and Dick answered:

‘I assure you, my dear, it couldn’t be helped; the shoe slipped off unexpectedly,’ and as if the world had set its face against her, Kate burst into tears. At first Dick tried to console her, but seeing that this was hopeless, he turned his face to the wall and went to sleep.

She had not drawn the curtains of the window, and the outlines of the room showing through the blue dusk frightened her, so ghostlike did they appear. The cradle stood under the window, the child’s face just visible on the pallor of the pillow. ‘Baby is asleep,’ she said; ‘that’s a good sign,’ and watched the cradle, trying to remember how long it was since baby had had her bottle; and while wondering if she could trust herself to wake when baby cried she began to notice that the room was becoming lighter. ‘It cannot be the dawn,’ she thought; ‘the dawn is hours away; we’re in December. Besides, the dawn is grey, and the light is green, a sort of pantomime light,’ she said. It seemed to her very like a fairy tale. The giant snoring, and her baby stirring in her cradle with the limelight upon her, or was she dreaming? It might be a dream out of which she could not rouse herself. But the noise she heard was Dick’s breathing, and she wished that Ralph would breathe more easily. Ralph, Ralph! No, she was with Dick. Dick, not Ralph, was her husband. It was with a great effort that she roused herself. ‘It was only a dream’ she murmured. ‘But baby is crying. Her cry is so faint,’ she said; and, slinging her legs over the side of the bed, she tried to find her dressing-gown, but could not remember where she had laid it ‘Baby wants her bottle,’ she said, and sought for the matches vainly at first, but at last she found them, and lighted a spirit lamp. ‘One must get the water warmed, cold milk would kill her;’ and while the water was heating she walked up and down the room rocking her baby, talking to her, striving to quiet her; and when she thought the water was warm she tried to prepare baby’s milk as the doctor had ordered it. Her hope was that she had succeeded in mixing the milk and water in right proportions, for the last time she had given the baby her bottle she was afraid the water was not warm enough. Perhaps that was why baby was crying, or it might be merely a little wind that was troubling her. She held the baby upright, hoping that the pain would pass away with a change of position, and she walked up and down the room rocking the child in her arms and crooning to her for fully half an hour. At last the child ceased to wail, and she laid her in her cradle and sat watching, thinking that if she were to lose her baby she must go mad…. She had lost Dick’s love, and if the baby were taken away there would be nothing left for her to live for. ‘Nothing left for me to live for,’ she repeated again and again, till the cold winter’s night striking through her nightgown reminded her that she was risking her life, which she had no right to do, for baby needed her. ‘Who would look after poor baby if I were taken away?’ she asked, and shaking with cold, was about to crawl into bed; but on laying her knee on the bedside she remembered that a little spirit often saved a human life; and going to the chest of drawers took out the bottle she had hidden from Dick and filled a glass.

The spirit diffused a grateful warmth through her, and she drank a second glass slowly, thinking of her child and husband, and how good she intended to be to both of them, until ideas became broken, and she tumbled into bed, awaking Dick, who was soon asleep again, with Kate by his side watching a rim of light rising above a dark chimney stack and wondering what new shows must be preparing. Already the rim of light had become a crescent, and before her eyes closed in sleep the full moon looked down through the window into the cradle, waking the sleeping child. But her cries were too weak; her mother lay in

sleep beyond reach of her wails, heart-breaking though they were. The little blankets were cast aside, and the struggle between life and death began: soft roundnesses fell into distortions; chubby knees were wrenched to and fro, muscles seemed to be torn, and a few minutes later little Kate, who had known of this world but a ray of moonlight, died—a glimpse of the moon was all that had been granted to her. After watching for an hour or more, the moon moved up the skies; and in Kate's dream the moon was the great yellow witch in the pantomime, who, before striding her broomstick, cries back: 'Thou art mine only, for ever and for ever!'

Chapter XXIV

The passing of a funeral in our English streets is so common a sight that hearses and plumes and mutes and carriages filled with relatives garbed in crape have almost ceased to remind us that our dust too is on the way to the graveyard; and it is not until we catch sight of a man walking in the carriage way carrying a brown box under his arm that we start like someone suddenly stung and remember the mystery of life and death. Even Dick remembered it, and wondered as he plodded after little Kate's coffin why it was that she should have been called out of the void and called back into the void so quickly. 'Whether our term be but a month or ninety years, life and death beckon us but once,' he said, and he fell to envying Kate her tears, tears seeming to him more comforting than thoughts, and he would gladly have shed a few to help the journey away: not a long one, however, for the Lennoxes lived in an unfrequented part of the town by the cemetery.

'We shall soon be there,' he whispered, and Kate, raising her weeping face, looked round.

All the shops were filled with funeral emblems, wreaths of everlasting flowers, headstones with dates in indelible ink, crosses of consolation, and kneeling angels.

'If we only had money,' Kate cried, 'to buy a monument to put on her grave,' and she called upon Dick to admire a kneeling angel.

'It's very beautiful,' Dick said, 'I wish we had the money to buy it. Poor little Kate! it's a pity she didn't live; she was very like you, dear.'

He had been offered an engagement for Kate to play the part of the Countess in *Olivette*, and had accepted it, hoping in the meanwhile to be able to persuade her to take it. It was rather hard to ask her to play the day after the funeral, but there was no help for it. The company would arrive in town to-morrow, and Dick thought it would be a pity to let the chance slip. But her grief was so great that he had not dared to speak to her about it.

'Did you ever see so many graves?' she asked. 'We shall never be able to find her when we come to seek the grave out. An angel—a headstone, at least, would be a help. Oh, Dick, she continued, 'to think they'll put her down into the ground, and that we shall perhaps never even see her grave again. We may be a hundred miles from here tomorrow, or after.'

Dick, who had had credit of the undertaker, looked around uneasily; but seeing that Kate had not been overheard, he said:

'Poor little thing! It's sad to lose her, isn't it? I should have liked to have seen her grow up.'

The coffin was first deposited in the middle of the church, and Dick twisted the brim of his big hat nervously, troubled by the service the parson in a white flowing surplice read from the reading-desk. Kate, on the contrary, appeared much consoled, and prayed silently, and the parson mumbled so many prayers that Dick began to consider the time it would take to learn a part of equal length. And all this while the little brown box remained like a piece of lost luggage, lonely in the greyness of this station-house-looking church; and when the mutes came to claim it Kate again burst into tears. Her tears reminded the parson that he was here to console, and in soft and unctuous words he assured the weeping mother that her child had only been removed to a better and brighter world, and that we must all submit to the will of God. But in the porch his attention was drawn from the weeping mother to the weather. 'A little more of this' he thought, 'and others will be doing for me what I'm now doing for others.'

But there being no help for it, he followed the procession through the tombstones, his white surplice blowing, Dick wondering how the little grave had been found amongst so many, but the sexton knew. The parson sprinkled earth upon the coffin, and the sound of the withdrawn ropes cut the mother's heart even more than the rattle of the earth and stones on the coffin lid. Kate threw some flowers into the grave, and it seemed to Dick certain that if she didn't pull herself together she would not be able to play the Countess in *Olivette* on the morrow. She was so fearfully haggard and worn that he doubted if any amount of rouge would make her look the part.

He would have done anything in the world for his little girl while she was alive, but now that she was dead—Besides, after all, she was only a baby. For some time past this idea had occurred to him as an excellent argument to convince Kate that there was really no reason why she should not go to rehearsal on the following morning. If he had not yet spoken in this way it was only because he was afraid that she would round on him, and call him a heartless beast, and he would do anything to evade a sulky look; and now, when the funeral was over and they were walking home wet, sorrowful, and tired, it was curious to watch how he gave his arm to Kate, and the timidity with which he introduced the subject. At first he only spoke of himself, and his hopes of being able to obtain a better part and a higher salary in the new drama. But mention to a mummer who is lying on his death-bed that a new piece is going to be produced, and he will not be able to resist asking a question or two about it; and Kate, weary as she was, at once pricked up her ears, and said:

'Oh, they're going to do a new piece! You didn't tell me that before.'

'It was only decided last night,' replied Dick.

The spell was now broken, and when they reached home and had dinner the conversation was resumed in a strain that might be considered as being almost jovial after the mournful tones of the last few days. Dick felt as if a big weight had been lifted from his mind, and the thought again occurred to him that there was no use in making such a fuss over a baby that was only three weeks old. Kate, too, seemed to be awakening to the conviction that there was no use in grieving for ever. The state of torpor she had been living in—for to stifle remorse she had been drinking heavily on the quiet—now began to wear off, and her brain to uncloud itself; and Dick, surprised at the transformation, could not help exclaiming:

'That's right, Kate; cheer up, old girl. A baby three weeks old isn't the same as a grown person.'

'I know it isn't, but if you only knew—I'm afraid I neglected the poor little thing.'

'Nonsense!' replied Dick, for having an eye constantly on the main chance, he wished to avoid any fresh outburst of grief. 'You looked after it very well indeed; besides, you'll have another,' he added with a smile.

'I want no other,' replied Kate, vexed at being misunderstood, and yet afraid to explain herself more thoroughly.

At last Dick said:

'I wish there was a part for you in the new piece.'

'Yes, so do I. I haven't been doing anything for a long while now.'

And thus encouraged he told her that in the so-and-so company the part of the Countess might be had for the asking.

'Only they play to-morrow night.'

‘Oh, to-morrow night! It would be dreadful to act so soon after my poor baby’s death, wouldn’t it?’

‘I can’t see why. We shall be as sorry for it in a week’s time as now, and yet one must get to work some time or other.’

Dick considered this a very telling argument, and, not wishing to spoil its effect, he remained silent, so as to give Kate time to digest the truth of what he had said. He waited for her to ask him when he would take her to see the manager, but she said nothing, and he was at last obliged to admit that he had made an appointment for to-morrow. She whined a bit but accompanied him to the theatre. The manager was delighted with her appearance. He told her that the photo that Dick had forwarded did not do her justice; and, handing her the script, he said:

‘Now you must make your entrance from this side.’

‘What’s the cue?’

‘Here it is. I think I shall now beat a retreat in the direction of home.’

‘Ah! I see.’

And, striving to decipher the manuscript, Kate walked towards the middle of the stage. ‘I haven’t seen the Duke for twenty-four hours, and that means misery.’

‘You’ll get a laugh for that if you’ll turn up your eyes a bit,’ said Dick. Then, turning to the manager, he murmured, ‘I wish you’d seen her as Clairette. The notices were immense. But I must be off now to my own show.’

This engagement relieved the Lennoxes for the time being of their embarrassments. At four they dined, at six bade each other good-bye, and repaired to their respective theatres. Dick was playing in drama, Kate in *opéra bouffe*; and something before a quarter to eleven she expected him to meet her at the stage-door of the Prince’s. On this point she was very particular; if he were a few moments late she questioned him minutely as to where he had been, what he had been doing, and little by little the jealousies and suspicions which her marriage had appeased returned, and tortured her night and day. At first the approach of pain was manifested by a nervous anxiety for her husband’s presence. She seemed dissatisfied and restless when he was not with her, and after breakfast in the mornings, when he took up his hat to go out, she would beg of him to stay, and find fault with him for leaving her. He reasoned with her very softly, assuring her that he had the most important engagements. On one occasion it was a man who had given him an appointment in order to speak with him concerning a new theatre, of which he was to have the entire management; another time it was a man who was writing a drama, and wanted a collaborator to put the stage construction right; and as these séances of collaboration occupied both morning and afternoon, Kate was thrown entirely on her own resources until four o’clock. The first two or three novels she had read during her convalescence had amused her, but now one seemed so much like the other that they ended by boring her; and, too excited to be able to fix her attention, she often read without understanding what she was reading: on one side the memory of her baby’s death preyed upon her—she still could not help thinking that it was owing to her neglect that it had died—on the other, the thought that her husband was playing her false goaded her to madness. Sometimes she attempted to follow him, but this only resulted in failure, and she returned home after a fruitless chase more dejected than ever.

‘Ah! if the baby had not died, there would have been something to live for,’ she murmured to herself a thousand times during the day, until at last her burden of remorse grew quite unbearable, and she thought of the brandy the doctor had ordered her. Since her engagement

to play the Countess she had forgotten it, but now a strange desire seized her suddenly as if she had been stung by a snake. There was only a little left in the bottle, but that little cheered and restored her even more than she had expected. Her thoughts came to her more fluently, she ate a better dinner, and acted joyously that night at the theatre. ‘There’s no doubt,’ she said to her self, ‘the doctor was right. What I want is a little stimulant.’ Of the truth of this she was more than ever convinced when next morning she found herself again suffering from the usual melancholy and dulness of spirits. The very sight of breakfast disgusted her, and when Dick left she wandered about the room, unable to interest herself in anything, with a yearning in her throat for the tingling sensation that brandy would bring; and she longed for yesterday’s lightness of conscience. But there was neither brandy nor whisky in the house, not even a glass of sherry. What was to be done? She did not like to ask the landlady to go round to the public-house. Such people were always ready to put a wrong interpretation upon everything. But Mrs. Clarke knew that the doctor had ordered her to take a little brandy when she felt weak. All the same, she determined to wait until dinner-time.

Half an hour of misery passed, and then, excited till she could bear with the craving for drink no longer, she remembered that it would be very foolish to risk her health for the sake of a prejudice. To obey the doctor’s orders was her first duty—a consoling reflection that relieved her mind of much uncertainty; and ringing the bell, she prepared her little speech.

‘Oh! Mrs. Clarke, I’m sorry to trouble you, but—I’m feeling so weak this morning—and, if you remember, the doctor ordered me to take a little brandy when I felt I wanted it. Do you happen to have any in the house?’

‘No, ma’am, I haven’t, but I can send out for it in a minute. And you do look as if you wanted something to pick you up.’

‘Yes,’ said Kate, throwing as much weakness as she could into her voice, ‘somehow I’ve never felt the same since my confinement.’

‘Ah! I know well how it pulls one down. If you only knew how I suffered with my third baby!’

‘I can well imagine it.’

The conversation then came to a pause, and Mrs. Clarke, not seeing her way to any further family confidences, said:

‘What shall I send for, ma’am—half a pint? The grocer round the corner keeps some very nice brandy.’

‘Yes, that will do,’ said Kate, seeing an unending perspective of drinks in half a pint.

‘Shall I put that down in the bill, or will you give me the money now, ma’am?’

This was very awkward, for Kate suddenly remembered that she had given over her salary to Dick this week without keeping anything out of it. There was no help for it now, and putting as bold a face on it as she could, she told Mrs. Clarke to book it. What did it matter whether Dick saw it or not? Had not the doctor told her she required a little stimulant?

Henceforth brandy-drinking became an established part of Kate’s morning hours. Even before Dick was out of bed she would invent a pretext for stealing into the next room so that she might have a nip on the sly before breakfast. The bottle, and a packet of sweetstuff to take the smell off her mouth, were kept behind a large oleograph representing Swiss scenery. The fear that Dick might pop out upon her at any moment often nearly caused her to spill the liquor over the place; but existence was impossible without brandy, and she felt she was bound to get rid of the miserable moods of mind to which she woke. Before eleven o’clock

Dick was out of the house, and this left Kate four hours of lonely idleness staring her blankly in the face. Sometimes she practised a little music, but it wearied her. She had courage for nothing now, and brandy and water was the only thing that killed the dreariness that ached in heart and head. Many half-pint bottles had succeeded the first, and, ashamed to admit her secret drinking, she now paid the landlady regularly out of her own money. When funds were low, a little bill was run up, and this was produced and talked over when the two women were having a glass together of a morning. To pay these debts Kate had to resort to lying. All kinds of lies had to be concocted. Her first idea was to tell Dick she intended to continue her music lessons. He would never, she was sure, ask her a question on the subject; but Dick, who was still hard pressed for money, begged of her to wait until they were better off before incurring new expenses, and, annoyed, she fell back on the subject of clothes, and when he asked her if she could not manage to go on with what she had for a bit, it astonished him to see the mad rage into which she fell instantly. Was it not her own money? Had she not earned it, and was he going to rob her of it? Did he only keep her to work for him? If so, she'd very soon put that to rights by chucking up her engagement; then he would be forced to keep her; she wasn't going to be bullied. In his usual kind way Dick tried to calm her, explaining to her their position, telling her of his projects; but the fear of discovery was a fixed thought in her mind, and she refused to listen to reason until he put his hand in his pocket and gave her two pounds ten. This was just the sum required to pay what she owed at the Ayre Arms. And seeing her difficulties removed, her better nature asserted itself. She begged of Dick to forgive her, pleading that she had lost her temper, and didn't know what she was saying. For an instant she thought of confessing the truth, then the idea died in a resolution to amend. It was not worth speaking of; she was getting stronger, and would soon need no more stimulants.

For two days Kate kept to her promise; instead of sitting at home, she called on one of the ladies of the theatre, and passed a pleasant morning with her. She paid visits to other members of the company, and went out shopping with them. But when three or four met at the corner of a street, after a few introductory remarks, a drink was generally proposed—not as men would propose it, but slyly, and with much affectation; and skirting furtively along the streets, a quiet bar would be selected, and then, 'What will you have, dear?' would be whispered softly. 'A drop of gin, dear.' On one of these occasions Kate only just escaped getting drunk. As luck would have it, Dick did not return home to dinner, and a good sleep and a bottle of soda-water pulled her together, so that she was able to go down to the theatre and play her part without exciting observation. And this decided her not to trust herself again to the temptation of her girl friends. She asked Dick to allow her to accompany him sometimes. He made a wry face at this proposal, hesitated, and explained that his collaborator suffered no one to interrupt their séances; he was a timid man, and couldn't work in the presence of a third person. Kate only sighed, but although she did not attempt to dispute the veracity of this statement, she felt that it was cruel that she should be left alone hour after hour. But she deceived herself with resolutions and hopes that she would require no more brandy. In her heart of hearts she knew that she would not be able to resist, and, docile as the sheep under the butcher's hand, she recognized her fate, and accepted it. A fresh bill was run up at the grocer's, and the mornings were passed in a state of torpor. Without getting absolutely drunk, she drank sufficiently to confuse her thoughts, to reduce them to a sort of nebulae, enough to blend and soften the lines of a too hard reality to a long sensation of tickling, in which no idea was precise, no desire remained long enough to grow to a pain, but caressed and passed away. Sometimes, of course, she overdosed herself, but on these occasions, when she found consciousness slipping a little too rapidly from her, she was cunning enough to go and lie down. And living, as she did, in constant fear of detection, she endowed the simplest words and looks with a double meaning, and she could not help hating

Dick if he asked her questions or dared to accuse her of being sleepy and heavy about the eyes. Did he intend to insult her—was that it? If so, she wasn't going to stand it. One day he stood before the oleograph, apparently examining with deep interest the different aspects of the Swiss scenery. In reality, his thoughts were far away, but Kate, who did not know this, grew so nervous and angry, that it was with difficulty she kept calm.

On half a dozen different pretexts she had tried to get him away from the picture, and fearing every moment that he would look behind it or touch it, she caught up a plate from the table and dashed it to the ground. The crash caused Dick to jump round, and she began her tirade, beginning with the question, was she so utterly beneath his notice that he couldn't answer a question? Almost every day a dispute of this sort arose: she was always being poked up by some new fear of discovery, and engendered, if not hatred, a fierce resentment; and to deceive herself as to the true reason she criticized his conduct and manner of life bitterly and passionately from every point of view. Jealousy was natural to her, and she was more subject than ever to attacks of it. Once or twice it had blazed into flame, but circumstances had quenched it for the time being. Now there was nothing to oppose it, and all things served as fuel.

She was conscious of no wrongdoing, she believed, and believed sincerely, that she was acting legitimately in defence of her own interests. She was certain that Dick was deceiving her, and the want of moral courage in the man, which forced him to tell lies—lies in which he was sometimes found out—tended to confirm her in this belief. For a few days past she had been preparing for a quarrel, but the time for fight had not yet come, and she chafed under the delay. At last her chance came. He kept her waiting half an hour at the stage-door. Where had he been? What had he been doing all this while? were the questions she put to him in many different forms as they walked home. He sought to pacify his wife, assuring her he had been detained by his manager, who wanted to speak with him concerning a new production; he told a long story regarding the arrangement of some of the processions. But Kate would not accept any of these excuses, and, convinced he had been after a woman, she stuck to her opinion, and the bickering continued for an hour or more, to end as it had begun. These sudden silences were very welcome, for Dick had many things to think out; and nothing more was said until they got up to their room, and then Dick, as usual, forgetful of even the immediate past, began to speak of his manager's intentions regarding a new piece. But he did not get far before he was brought to a sudden standstill by a fresh explosion of wrath.

'What have I done now?' he asked.

'Done! Do you suppose I want to hear about that woman?'

'What woman!'

'Oh! you needn't do the innocent with me!'

'Really! I give you my word— - '

'Your word! a nice thing, indeed!'

'Well, what do you want me to do?'

'To leave me in peace,' said Kate, breaking the string of her stays.

Dick was very tired, and, without attempting to argue the point further, undressed and got into bed. In bed the quarrel was resumed; it was continued, and for an hour or more, he lying with his head turned close to the wall, hers dancing over the extreme edge of the pillow.

'Why don't you go away and leave me? I cannot think how you can be so cruel, and to me, who gave up everything for you!'

It was the wail of petulant anger; but as yet she showed no violence, and her temper did not overcome her until her husband, worn out by two hours of unceasing lamentations, begged of her to allow him to go to sleep. Her mood was different in the morning, and it was not until she had paid a couple of visits to the blue Swiss mountains that she became again taciturn. Dick did not as yet suspect his wife of confirmed drunkenness; he merely thought that she had grown lately very ill-tempered, and that a jealous woman was about the most distressing thing in existence; and, anxious to avoid another scene, he hurried through his breakfast. She watched him eating in silence, knowing well he was counting the minutes till he could get away. At last she said:

'Will you take me to church to-day?'

'My dear, I'm afraid I've an appointment, but I'll try to come back if I can,' and a few minutes later he slipped away, leaving her to invite the landlady to come up and have a glass with her if she felt so inclined. But feeling somewhat out of humour for the conversation of that respectable woman, she put on her hat and ran after her husband, determined to watch him. But he was already out of sight, and after roaming aimlessly about for some time she turned into a church, and sat through the whole of the service without once attempting to fix her attention on what was going on; her thoughts were on Dick, but to stand and to kneel was in itself a relief, and when church was over she returned home, after visiting several public houses, slightly boozed.

'Mrs. Clarke, has my husband come in?'

'I haven't heard him, Mrs. Lennox,' was the answer that came up the kitchen stairs.

This was unfortunate, for her heart that had been softening towards him tightened into bitterness, and madness was near the thought that at the moment she was patiently waiting dinner for him he might be in the arms of another woman. She told the landlady, who came upstairs a second time in hope of a sociable glass, that she might bring the soup up (they always had soup on Sundays); if Mr. Lennox didn't choose to come in for his meals he might go without them. At that moment a ring at the door was heard, and, throwing himself in an armchair, Dick said he was tired.

'I dare say you are; I can easily understand that,' was the curt reply.

An expression of pain passed over his face.

'Goodness me, Kate!' he said in a perplexed voice. 'You don't mean to say you're angry still!'

No attention was paid to the landlady, who was placing the soup on the table, and she, being pretty well accustomed to their quarrels, said with an air of indifference as she left the room:

'Dinner is served. I shall bring the leg of mutton up when you ring.'

No answer was made to her, and the couple sat moodily looking at each other. After a pause Dick tried to be conciliatory, and in the most affectionate phrases he could select he besought Kate to make it up.

'I assure you, you're wrong,' he said. 'I've been after no woman. Do, for goodness' sake, make it up.'

Then approaching her chair, he tried to draw her toward him, but pulling herself away passionately, she exclaimed:

'No, no; leave me alone—leave me alone—don't touch me—I hate you.'

This was not encouraging, but at the end of another silence he attempted to reason with her again. But it was useless; and worn and impatient he begged of her at least to come to dinner.

‘If you aren’t hungry, I am.’

There was no answer; lying back in her chair she sulked, deaf to all entreaty.

‘Well, if you won’t, I will,’ he said, seating himself in her place.

Her eyes flashed with a dull lurid light, and walking close to the table, she looked at him steadily, fidgeting as she did so with the knives and glasses.

‘I can’t think how you treat me as you do; what have I done to you to deserve it? Nothing. But I shall be revenged, that I will; I can bear it no longer.’

‘Bear what?’ he asked despairingly.

‘You know well enough. Don’t aggravate me. I hate you! Oh yes,’ she said, raising her voice, ‘I do hate you!’

‘Sit down and have some dinner, and don’t be so foolish,’ he said, trying to be jocular, as he lifted the cover from the soup.

‘Eat with you? Never!’ she answered theatrically. But the interest he showed in the steaming liquid annoyed her so much that, overcome by a sudden gust of passion, she upset the tureen into his lap. Dick uttered a scream, and in starting back he overturned his chair. Although not scalding, the soup was still hot enough to burn him, and he held his thighs dolorously. The tablecloth was deluged, the hearthrug steamed; and, regardless of everything, Kate rushed past, accusing her husband of cruelty, of unfaithfulness, stopping only to reproach him with a desire to desert her. While Dick in dripping trousers asked what he had done to deserve having the soup flung over him, Kate’s hair became unloosened and hung down her shoulders like a sheaf of black plumes. Dick thought of changing his trousers, but the intensity of her passion detained him. Stopping suddenly before the table, she poured out a tumbler of sherry, and drank it almost at a gulp. It was as nauseous to her taste as lukewarm water, and she yearned for brandy. It would sting her, would awaken the dull ache of her palate, and she knew well where the bottle was; she could see it in her mind’s eye, the black neck leaning against the frame of the picture. Why should she not go and fetch it, and insult him with the confession of her sin? Was it not he who drove her to it? So Kate thought in her madness, and the lack of courage to execute her wishes angered her still further against the fat creature who lay staring at her, lying back in the armchair. She applied herself again to the sherry and swallowed greedily.

‘For goodness’ sake,’ said Dick, who began to get alarmed, ‘don’t drink that! You’ll get drunk.’

‘Well, what does it matter if I do? It’s you who drive me to it. If you don’t like it, go to Miss Vane.’

‘What! You’ve not finished with that yet? Haven’t I told you twenty times that there’s nothing between me and Miss Vane? I haven’t spoken to her for the last three days.’

‘That’s a lie!’ shrieked Kate. ‘You went to meet her this morning. I saw you. Do you take me for a fool? But oh! I don’t know how you can be such a beast! If you wanted to desert me, why did you ever take me away from Hanley? But you can go now, I don’t want the leavings of that creature.’

Taken aback by what was nothing more than a random guess, Dick hesitated, and then, deciding that he might as well be caught out in two lies as in one, he said, as a sort of forlorn hope:

‘If you saw us you must have seen that she was with Jackson, and that I didn’t do any more than raise my hat.’

Kate made no answer; she was too excited to follow out the train of the simplest idea, and continued to rave incoherent statements of all kinds. The landlady came up to ask when she should bring up the leg of mutton, but she went away frightened. There was no dinner that day. Amid screams and violent words the evening died slowly, and the room darkened until nothing was seen but the fitful firelight playing on Dick’s hands; but still the vague form of the woman passed through the shadows like a figure of avenging fate. Would she never grow tired and sit down? Dick asked himself a thousand times. It seemed as if it would never cease, and the incessant repetition of the same words and gestures turned in the brain with the mechanical movement of a wheel, dimming the sense of reality and producing the obtuse terror of a nightmare. But from this state of semi-consciousness he was suddenly awakened by the violent ringing of the bell.

‘What do you want? Can I get you anything?’

Kate did not deign to answer him. When the landlady appeared, she said:

‘I want some more sherry; I’m dying of thirst.’

‘You shall not have any more,’ said Dick, interposing energetically. ‘Mrs. Clarke, I forbid you to bring it up.’

‘I say she shall,’ replied Kate, her face twitching with passion.

‘I say she shall not.’

‘Then I’ll go out and get it.’

‘No, I’ll see you don’t do that,’ said Dick, getting between her and the door. As he did so he turned his back to speak to the landlady, and Kate, taking the opportunity, seized a handful of the frizzly hair and almost pulled him to the ground. Twisting round he took her by the wrist and freed himself, but this angered and still further excited her.

‘You’d better let her have her way,’ the landlady said. ‘I won’t bring up much, and it may put her to sleep.’

Dick, who at the moment would have given half his life for a little peace, nodded his head affirmatively, and went back to his chair. He did not know what to do. Never had he witnessed so terrible a scene before. Since three or four days back this quarrel had been working up crescendo; and when the landlady brought up the sherry, Kate seized the decanter, and, complaining that it was not full, resumed her drinking.

‘So you see I did get it, and I’ll get another bottle if I choose. You think that I like it. Well, you’re mistaken; I don’t, I hate it. I only drink it because you told me not, because I know that you begrudge it to me; you begrudge me every bit that I put into my mouth, the very clothes I wear. But it was not you who paid for them. I earned the money myself, and if you think to rob me of what I earn you’re mistaken. You shan’t. If you try to do so I shall apply to the magistrate for protection. Yes, and if you dare to lay a hand on me I shall have you locked up. Yes, yes—do you hear me?’ she screamed, advancing towards him, spilling as she did the glass of wine she held in her hand over her dress. ‘I shall have you locked up, and I should love to do so, because it was you who ruined me, who seduced me, and I hate you for it.’

She spoke with a fearful volubility, and her haranguing echoed in Dick's ears with the meaningless sound of a water-tap heard splashing on the flagstones of an echoing courtyard.

Sometimes he would get up, determined to make one more effort, and in his gentlest and most soothing tones would say:

'Now look here, dear; will you listen to me? I know you well, and I know you're a bit excited; if you will believe me— - '

But it was no use. She did not seem to hear him; indeed, it almost seemed as if her ears had become stones. Her hands were clenched, and dragging herself away from him, she would resume her tigerish walk. Sometimes Dick wondered at the strength that sustained her, and the thrill of joy that he experienced was intense when, about two o'clock, after eight or ten hours of the terrible punishment, he noticed that she seemed to be growing weary, that her cries were becoming less articulate. Several times she had stopped to rest, her head sank on her bosom, and every effort she made to rouse herself was feebler than the preceding one. At length her legs gave way under her, and she slipped insensible on the floor.

Dick watched for a time, afraid to touch her, lest by some horrible mischance she should wake up and recommence the terrible scene that had just been concluded, and at least half an hour elapsed before he could muster up courage to undress her and put her to bed.

Chapter XXV

Next morning Kate was duly repentant and begged Dick to forgive her for all she had said and done. She told him that she loved him better than anything in the world, and she persuaded him that if she had taken a drop too much, it was owing to jealousy, and not to any liking for the drink itself.

Dick adopted the theory willingly (every man is reluctant to believe that his wife is a drunkard), and deceived by the credulity with which he had accepted the excuse, Kate resolved to conquer her jealousy, and if she could not conquer it, she would endure it. Never would she seek escape from it through spirit again. And had she remained in Manchester, or had she even been placed in surroundings that would have rendered the existence of a fixed set of principles possible, she might have cured herself of her vice. But before two months her engagement at the Prince's came to an end, and Dick's at the Royal very soon followed. They then passed into other companies, the first of which dealt with Shakespearean revivals. Dick played Don John successfully in *Much Ado About Nothing*, the Ghost in *Hamlet*, the Friar in *Romeo and Juliet*. Kate on her side represented with a fair amount of success a series of second parts, such as Rosalind in *Romeo*, Bianca in *Othello*, Sweet Ann Page in the *Merry Wives*. It is true there were times when her behaviour was not all that could be desired, sometimes from jealousy, sometimes from drink; generally from a mixture of the two; but on the whole she managed very cleverly, and it was not more than whispered, and always with a good-natured giggle, that Mrs. Lennox was not averse to a glass.

From the Shakespearean they went to join a dramatic company, where houses were blown up, and ships sank amid thunder and lightning. Dick played a desperate villain, and Kate a virtuous parlourmaid, until one night, having surprised him in the act of kissing the manager's wife, she ran off to the nearest pub, and did not return until she was horribly intoxicated, and staggered on to the stage calling him the vilest names, accusing him at the same time of adultery, and pointing out the manager's wife as his paramour. There were shrieks and hysterics, and Dick had great difficulty in proving his innocence to the angry impresario. He spoke of his honour and a duel, but as the lady in question was starring, the benefit of the doubt had to be granted her, and on these grounds the matter was hushed up. But after so disgraceful a scandal it was impossible for the Lennoxes to remain in the company. Dick was very much cut up about it, and without even claiming his week's salary, he and his wife packed up their baskets and boxes and returned to Manchester. And there he entered into a quantity of speculations, of the character of which she had not the least idea; all she knew was, that she never saw him from one end of the day to the other. He was out of the place at ten o'clock in the morning, and never returned before twelve at night. These hours of idleness and solitude were hard to bear, and Kate begged of Dick to get her an engagement. But he was afraid of another shameful scene, and always gave her the same answer—that he had as yet heard of nothing, but as soon as he did he would let her know. She didn't believe him, but she had to submit, for she could never muster up courage to go and look for anything herself, and the long summer days passed wearily in reading the accounts of the new companies, and the new pieces produced. This sedentary life, and the effects of the brandy, which she could now no longer do without, soon began to tell upon her health, and the rich olive complexion began to fade to sickly yellow. Even Dick noticed that she was not looking well; he said she required change of air, and a few days after, he burst into the room and told her gaily that he had just arranged a tour to go round the coast of England and play little comic sketches and operettas at the pier theatres. This was good news, and the next few days

were fully occupied in trying over music, making up their wardrobes, and telegraphing to London for the different books from which they would make their selections. A young man whom Dick had heard singing in a public-house proved a great hit. He wrote his own words, some of which were considered so funny that at Scarborough and Brighton he frequently received a couple of guineas for singing a few songs at private houses after the public entertainment. Afterwards he appeared at the Pavilion, and for many years supplied the axioms and aphorisms that young Toothpick and Crutch was in the habit of using to garnish the baldness of his native speech.

For a time the sea proved very beneficial to Kate's health, but the never-ending surprises and expectations she was exposed to finished by so straining and sharpening her nerves that the stupors, the assuagements of drink, became, as it were, a necessary make-weight. Her love for Dick pressed upon and agonized her; it was like a dagger whose steel was being slowly reddened in the flames of brandy, and in this subtilization of the brain the remotest particles of pain detached themselves, until life seemed to her nothing but a burning and unbearable frenzy. She did not know what she wanted of him, but with a longing that was nearly madness she desired to possess him wholly; she yearned to bury her poor aching body, throbbing with the anguish of nerves, in that peaceful hulk of fat, so calm, so invulnerable to pain, marching amid, and contented in, its sensualities, as a gainly bull grazing amid the pastures of a succulent meadow.

He was never unkind to her; the soft sleek manner that had won her remained ever the same, but she would have preferred a blow. It would have been something to have felt the strength of his hand upon her. She wanted an emotion; she longed to be brutalized. She knew when she tortured him with reproaches she was alienating from herself any affection he might still bear for her; but she found it impossible to restrain herself. There seemed to be a devil within her that goaded her until all power of will ceased, and against her will she had to obey its behests. A blow might exorcise this spirit. Were he to strike her to the ground she thought she might still be saved; but, alas! he remained as kind and good-natured as ever; and to disguise her drunkenness she had to exaggerate her jealousy. The two were now mingled so thoroughly in her head that she could scarcely distinguish one from the other. She knew there were women all around him; she could see them ogling him out of the little boxes at the side of the stage. How they could be such beasts, she couldn't conceive. They stood for hours behind the scenes waiting for him, and she was told they had come for engagements. Baskets of food, pork pies and tongue, came for him, but these she pitched out of the window; and she soundly boxed the ears of one little wretch, whom she had found loitering about the stage-door. Kate was right sometimes in her suspicions, sometimes wrong, but in every case they accentuated the neurosis, occasioned by alcohol, from which she was suffering. Still, by some extraordinary cunning, she contrived for some time to regulate her drinking so that it should not interfere with business, and on the rare occasions when Dick had to apologize to the public for her non-appearance she insisted that it was not her fault; and from a mixture of vanity and a wish to conceal his wife's shame from himself, Dick continued to persuade himself that his wife had no real taste for drink, and never touched it except when these infernal fits of jealousy were upon her. But the words that had come into his mind - 'except when these infernal fits of jealousy are upon her'—called up many vivid memories; one especially confounded him. He had seen her frightened to cross the dressing-room lest she might fall, glancing from the table to the chair, calculating the distance. It was on his lips to ask her if she did not feel too ill to appear that day: that perhaps it would be better for him to go before the curtain and apologize to the public. But he had not dared to say anything, and to his astonishment she was able to overcome the influence of the drink (if she had taken any), and he had never heard her sing and dance better. How she had managed it he did not know.

‘All the same,’ he said, ‘drink will get the upper hand of her and conquer her if she doesn’t make up her mind to conquer it. The day will come when she will not be able to go on the stage, or will go on and fall down.’ Dick shut his eyes to exclude from them the horrible spectacle. She would then be an unmitigated burden on his hands. ‘Not a pleasant prospect’, he said to himself.

He had now been in the provinces for some years and had lived down the memory of many disastrous managements. He had managed the tour of the Morton and Cox’s Opera Company very successfully till the crash came. ‘But it will be the success that will be remembered and not the crash when I return to London. Many changes must have happened in town. Many new faces and many old faces that absence will make new again. If only Kate were not so jealous. If I could cure her of jealousy I could cure her of drink.’ And he thought of all the notices she had had for Clairette, for Serpolette, for Olivette. He would like to see her play the Duchess. At that moment his thoughts returned to the last time he had seen her, about half an hour ago; the memory was not a pleasant one, and he was glad that he had run out of the house and come down to the pier. And in the silence and solitude of the pier at midday he asked himself again why he should not return to town and take his chance of getting into a new company or being sent out to manage another provincial tour. In London he might be able to persuade his wife to go into a home, and he fell to thinking of the men and women who he had heard had been cured of drunkenness. His thoughts melted into dreams and then, passing suddenly out of dreams into words, he said: ‘She will never consent to go into a home, and if she did she would only be thinking all the time that I’d put her there so that I might be after another woman.’ His thoughts were interrupted by a lancinating pain in his feet, and he withdrew into the shade, and resting the heel of the right boot on the toe of the left, a position that freed him from pain for the time being, he looked round and seeing everywhere a misted sky filled with an inner radiance, he said: ‘To-day will be the hottest day we’ve had yet, and there won’t be a dozen people in the theatre; everybody will be too hot to leave their houses.’ There was languor in the incoming wave. ‘We shan’t have five pounds in the theatre,’ he muttered to himself, and catching sight of one of the directors he continued, ‘And those fellows won’t think of the heat, but will put down the falling off in the audience to our performance. Never,’ he added after a pause, ‘have I seen the pier so empty,’ and he wondered who the woman was coming towards him.

A tall, gaunt woman of about forty-five whose striding gait caused a hooped and pleated skirt of green silk, surmounted by a bustle, to sway like a lime-tree in a breeze, wore a bodice open in front, with short sleeves, the fag end of some other fashion, but the long draggled-tailed feather boa belonged to the eighties, as did the Marie Stuart bonnet. Her blackened eyebrows and a thickly painted face attracted Dick’s attention from afar, and when she approached nearer he was struck by the dark, brilliant, restless eyes. ‘A strange and exalted being,’ he said to himself. ‘An authoress perhaps,’ for he noticed that she carried some papers in her hand; ‘or a poet,’ he added; and prompted by his instinct he began to see in her somebody that might be turned to account, and before long he was thinking how he might introduce himself to her.

‘She’s forgotten her parasol; I might borrow one for her from the girl at the bar,’ and the project seeming good to him he rose, and with a specially large movement of the arm lifted his hat from his head.

‘You will excuse me, I hope, madam, addressing you, and if I do so it is because I am in an official capacity here, but may I offer you a parasol?’

‘It’s very kind of you,’ she replied with a smile that lighted up her large mouth, dispersing its ugliness.

‘She’s got a fine set of teeth,’ Dick said to himself, and he answered that he would borrow a parasol for her in the theatre.

‘It’s very kind of you,’ she returned, smiling largely and becomingly upon him. ‘It’s true I forgot to bring a parasol with me, and the sun is very fierce at this time. It will be kind of you,’ and much gratified that his proposal had been so graciously received, he hobbled away in the direction of the theatre, to return a few moments after with the bar girl’s parasol, which he had borrowed and which he opened and handed to the lady.

‘Might I ask,’ she said, ‘if you’re one of the directors of the theatre?’

‘No,’ he answered, ‘I’m an actor.’

‘An actor in this theatre,’ she replied. ‘But they only sing trivial songs and dance in this theatre, and you look to me like one of Shakespeare’s imaginations. Henry the Eighth, almost any one of the Henries. King John.’

‘Not Romeo,’ Dick interposed.

‘Perhaps not Romeo. Romeo was but sixteen or seventeen, eighteen at the most. But when you were eighteen….’

‘Yes,’ Dick answered, ‘I was thin enough then.’

‘But you must not disparage yourself. Heroes are not always thin. Hamlet was fat and scant of breath. I can see you as Hamlet, whereas to cast you for Falstaff would be too obvious.’

‘I’ve played Falstaff,’ Dick replied, ‘but I never could do much with the part, and I never saw anyone who could. The lines are very often too high-falutin for the character, and they don’t seem to come out, no matter who plays it; the critics look on it as the best acting part, but in truth it is the worst.’

‘Macduff would fit you, no; Lear,’ the lady cried.

Dick thought he would like to have a shot at the king, and they were soon talking about a Shakespearean theatre devoted to the performance of Shakespearean plays. ‘A theatre,’ she said, ‘that would devote itself to the representation of all the heroes in the world; those who spoke noble thoughts and performed noble deeds, thought and deed encompassing each other, instead of which we have a thousand theatres devoted to the representations of the fashions of the moment. So I’m forced to come here at midday, for at midday there is solitude and sacred silence, or else the clashing of waves. Here at midday I can fancy myself alone with my heroes.’

‘And who are your heroes, may I ask?’ said Dick.

‘Many are in Shakespeare,’ she answered, ‘and many are here in this manuscript. The heroes of the ancient world, when men were nearer to the gods than they are now. For men,’ she added, ‘in my belief, are not moving towards the Godhead, but away from it.’

‘And who are the heroes that you’ve written about?’ Dick asked, and fearing she would enter into too long an explanation he asked if the manuscript she held in her hand was a play.

‘No, a poem,’ she answered. ‘I’m studying it for recitation, one I’m going to recite after my lecture at the Working Men’s Club; and the subject of my lecture is the inherent nobility of man, and the necessity of man worship. Women have turned from men and are occupied now with their own aspirations, losing sight thereby of the ideal that God gave them. My poem is a sort of abstract, an epitome, a compendium of the lecture itself.’

Dick did not understand, but the fact that a lady was going in for recitation argued that she was interested in theatricals, and with his ears pricked like a hound who has got wind of something, he said with a sweet smile that showed a whole row of white teeth:

‘Being an actor myself, I will take the liberty of asking you to allow me to look at your poem, and perhaps if you’re studying for recitation I may be of use to you.’

‘Of the very greatest use,’ the lady answered, and handed him her manuscript; ‘one of a set of classical cartoons,’ she added.

‘Humanity in large lines,’ he replied.

‘How quickly you understand,’ she rapped out; ‘removed altogether from the tea-table in subject and in metre. What have you got to say, my hero, to me about my rendering of these lines?

“The offspring of Neptune and Terra, daughters of earth and ocean,
Dowered with fair faces of woman, capping the bodies of vultures;
Armed with sharp, keen talons; crushing and rending and slaying,
Blackening and blasting, defiling, spoiling the meats of all banquets;
Plundering, perplexing, pursuing, cursing the lives of our heroes,
Ever the Harpyiae flourish—just as a triumph of evil.” ‘

‘Hardly anything; and yet if I may venture a criticism—would you mind passing your manuscript on to me for a moment? May I suggest an emendation that will render the recitation more easy and more effective?’

‘Certainly you may.’

‘Then,’ Dick continued, ‘I would drop the words - “just as a triumph of evil,” and run on - “flourish from childhood, ensnaring the noble, the brave, and the loyal, spreading their nets for destruction,”

“Harpyiae flourish in ball-rooms, breathing fierce breath that is poison
Over the promise of manhood, over the faith and the lovelight
That glows in the hearts of our bravest for all of their kind that is weaker –”

‘All that follows,’ Dick added, ‘will be recited without emphasis until you come to these two magnificent lines:

“Harpyiae stand by our altars, Harpyiae sit by our hearthstones,
Harpyiae suckle our children, Harpyiae ravish our nation,” etc.’

Dick finished with a grand gesture.

‘I think you’re right. Yes, I understand that a point can be given to these verses that I had not thought of before. I hope my poem touched a chord in your heart? Do you approve of my manner of writing the hexameters?’

‘I think the idea very fine, but— - ‘

‘But?’

‘If you will permit me?’

‘Certainly.’

‘Well, there are questions of elocution that I would like to speak to you about. I’ve to run away now, but we’re sure to meet again.’

‘I’m on the pier every day at noon, or you will find me in my hotel at five. I hope you’ll come, for I should like to avail myself of your instruction.’

‘Thank you; I hope to have the pleasure of calling upon you to-morrow afternoon. Good-bye.’

‘You don’t know my name,’ she cried after him. ‘Heroes are full of forgetfulness and naturally, but in this tea-table world we can’t get on without names and addresses. Will you take my card?’

Dick took the card, thanked her and turned suddenly away.

‘Like a man filled with disquiet,’ the lady said, and she watched the burly actor hurrying up the pier. ‘Is this woman coming to meet him?’ she asked herself as Dick hurried away still faster, for in the distance the woman coming down the pier seemed to him like his wife, and if Kate caught him talking to a woman on the pier all chance of doing any business with his new acquaintance would be at an end. But the woman who had just passed him by was not Kate, and the thought crossed his mind that he might return to his new acquaintance with safety. But on the whole it seemed to him better to wait until to-morrow. To-morrow he would find out all about her. ‘Her name,’ he said, and taking the card out of his pocket he read: ‘Mrs. Forest, Mother Superior of the Yarmouth Convent, Alexandra Hotel, Hastings.’ ‘Mother Superior of a Convent! I should never have thought it. But if she is a nun, why isn’t she in a habit? Classical cartoons and nunneries. I think this time I’ve hit upon a strange specimen, one of the strangest I’ve ever met, which is saying a great deal, for I’ve met with a good few in my time. It will be better to tear up her card, for if Kate should find it— - ‘

And then, dismissing Mrs. Forest from his mind, he wondered if he should find Kate drunk or sober. ‘Quite sober,’ he said to himself as soon as he crossed the threshold; and in the best of humours his wife greeted him, and taking his arm they went down to the pier and gave an entertainment that was appreciated by a fairly large audience.

‘Why didn’t she ask me to come to her at five to-day?’ he asked himself as he returned home with his wife. ‘She may fall through my fingers,’ and he would have gone straight away to Mrs. Forest, if he had been able to rid himself of Kate.

‘You’ll take me out to tea, Dick?’ she said, and to keep her sober he took her to tea. For the nonce Kate drunk would have suited him better than Kate sober, and he dared not go down to the pier next morning in search of Mrs. Forest, it being more than likely that Kate might take it into her head to sun herself on the pier, so he decided to wait; the pier was too dangerous. If he weren’t interrupted by Kate the directors might see them together, and they might know Mrs. Forest and tell her that he was a married man. No, he’d just keep his appointment with her at five. But to get rid of Kate required a deep plan. It was laid and succeeded, and at five he arrived at the Alexandra Hotel.

‘Is Mrs. Forest in?’

The hall porter told the page boy to take Mr. Lennox up to Mrs. Forest’s rooms.

‘All this smells money,’ Dick said to himself in the lift.

The page boy threw open the door, and after walking through a long corridor the boy knocked at a door, and Dick walked into a red twilight in which he caught sight of a green dress in a distant corner.

‘I hope you’re not one of those people who require the glare of the sun always. I like the sun in its proper place out of doors,’ and while thinking of an appropriate answer Dick strove to find his way through the numerous pieces of furniture littered over the carpet.

‘Come and sit on the sofa beside me.’

‘If you’ll allow me,’ he answered, ‘I will sit in this armchair. I shall be able to devote myself more completely to the hearing of your poem.’

It was not polite to refuse to sit beside the lady, but Dick contrived to convey that her presence would trouble his intellectual enjoyment, and the slight displeasure which the refusal had caused vanished out of the painted face. This first success almost succeeded in screwing up Dick’s courage to the point of asking her if he might remove the flower vase that stood on the cabinet behind him, but he did not dare, and at every moment he seemed to recognize a new scent. An odour of burning pastilles drifted from a distant corner into a zone of patchouli in which the lady seemed to have encircled herself and which her every movement seemed to spread in more and more violent flavours, till Dick began to think he would not be able to hold out till the end of the lady’s narrative. Patchouli always gave him a headache, but the word ‘opera’ restored him to himself, and with lips quivering like a cat watching a sparrow he heard that the subject of her opera was derived from her own life; and telling him that it could not be understood without a relation of the events that had given it birth, she drew her legs up on the sofa, and leaning her head against the back commenced in a low, cooing, but not disagreeable voice to tell of her first love adventure. ‘I might almost call my departure for Bulgaria, some ten years ago, a spiritual adventure,’ she said.

The departure for Bulgaria seemed full of interest, but from Dick’s point of view the leading up to the departure was unduly prolonged, and he found it difficult to listen with any show of interest to Mrs. Forest’s assurances that until she met the Bulgarian she had thought that babies were found in parsley-beds or under gooseberry-bushes, and this innocence of mind was so inherent in her that the Bulgarian had not succeeded altogether in robbing her of it. ‘Nor, indeed, did he ever attempt to do so,’ she continued. ‘Our friendship was founded purely on the intellect.’

This admission was a disappointment to Dick, who had looked forward to the story of a novel love adventure which might easily be worked into a comic opera, Bulgaria offering a suitable background. With many pretty smiles he tried to lead the lady into the real story of her past, but Mrs. Forest insisted so well that he was fain to believe that there had been no past in her life suitable to comic opera. Her Bulgarian adventure had been animated by love of liberty and a noble desire to free an oppressed race from the ignoble rule of the Turks; ‘massacres,’ she said, ‘full of nameless horrors.’

Dick would have liked her to name these horrors, but before he could ask her to do so she was telling him of the instinct in every woman to mother something. The Bulgarians had appealed to her sympathies, and she had helped to bring about their liberation by her poetry. In three years she had learnt the language and had composed two volumes of poems in it.

‘I’ve looked out copies of my Bulgarian poems for you,’ and she leaned over the edge of the sofa towards a small table. The movement disarranged her skirt, and Dick’s eyes were regaled by the show of a thick shapeless leg, ‘doubtless swarthy,’ he said to himself.

‘The title of the first volume,’ she said, handing him the books, ‘is, *Songs of a Stranger*. My friend the Bulgarian’ (and she mentioned an unpronounceable name) ‘contributed a preface. The second volume is entitled, *New Songs by the Stranger*. You will find a translation appended to each.’

Dick promised that he would read the poems as soon as he got home, and begged Mrs. Forest to proceed with her interesting story of the war in which she had lost her great friend, her spiritual adventure, as she called him.

From Bulgaria she had set forth on a long journey, visiting many parts of China, returning home full of love for Eastern civilization, and regret that Western influence would soon make an end of it. ‘But,’ she said, ‘when I think of my own life, my narrative seems but a faint echo of it all; only a fragment of it appears, whereas, if I could tell the whole of it— - ‘

But Dick inclined to the belief that her genius was dramatic rather than narrative, and to bring the autobiography to an end, he asked her how she had come to be the Mother Superior of the Yarmouth Convent. ‘If I can only get her to cut the cackle and get to the ‘osses,’ he said to himself, but this was not easy to do. Mrs. Forest had to relate her socialistic adventures, her engagement to Edgar Horsley.

‘For three years,’ she said, ‘I was engaged to him, and at the end of this time it seemed to me that we must come to an understanding. He was talking of going to Jamaica, and to go to Jamaica with him we would have to be married. So I went down to where he was staying in the country, a cottage in Somersetshire, at the end of a very pretty lane.’

‘Good God! if she’s going to describe the landscape to me,’ said Dick to himself. But Mrs. Forest had no eye for the appearance of trees showing against the sky, and she was quickly at the cottage door, which was opened to her, she said, by a suspicious-looking woman, who said, ‘I think I’ve heard of you. Mr. Horsley is out, but you can come in and wait,’ ‘and in about half an hour he came in and introduced me to the woman who had opened the door to me. “Isabel” is all that I can remember of her name. “Isabel,” he said, “has been living with me for the last ten years, but if you like to come with us to Jamaica you can join us.” This seemed to me to be an inacceptable proposition. “What you propose to me,” I said, “is unthinkable,” and I left the house, and have not seen or heard of Mr. Edgar Horsley since. I’ve looked at water, I’ve looked at poison, and I’ve looked at daggers.’

Dick asked her why she had meditated suicide and she answered:

‘Was not such an end to a three years’ engagement sufficient to inspire in any woman a thought of suicide? And I’m very exceptional.’

A great deal of Mrs. Forest’s life had been unfolded; the only thing that remained in obscurity was how she had come to be the Mother Superior of the Yarmouth Convent, and to make that plain, she said it would be necessary to tell the story of her conversion to the Catholic faith. ‘But that was after the convent; the convent was intended for the reformation of dipsomaniacs, female drunkards,’ she said; ‘but it was afterwards that I became a Roman Catholic.’

Dick had no wish to hear what dogma it was that had tempted her, but it amused him as he returned home to think of all the strange things that Mrs. Forest had told him; one thing especially amused him, that her real interest in Catholicism was the confessional. ‘How one does get back to oneself in all these things,’ he muttered as he panted up the hot steep road. ‘A convent for the reformation of female drunkards,’ he repeated. ‘It’s very strange: she can’t know anything about my wife. A strange woman,’ he continued, and fell to thinking if all that she had told him was the truth, or if it was one of those stories that people imagine about themselves, and imagine so vividly that after a few years they begin to believe that everything they have told has befallen them. He pulled the books from his pocket; they were evidently written in a strange language, but there were people who could learn languages and could do nothing else. Her Bulgarian poetry could not be better than her English, and he knew what that was like. ‘I suppose as soon as she hears I’m married, and she’s sure to find out sooner or later, she will be off on some other back. But is this altogether sure?’ He had not walked many steps before he remembered that the lecture she was giving at the Working Men’s Club was on the chastity of the marriage state; moreover, she had admitted to him that the

Bulgarian adventure was a spiritual one. ‘I should say she was a woman with a big temperament which must have been worth gratifying when she went away with that Bulgarian; I wouldn’t have minded being in his skin. She hasn’t forgotten that she was once a beautiful girl, that’s the worst of it, she hasn’t forgotten,’ and Dick remembered that at parting she was a little demonstrative, saying to him on the staircase: ‘But we aren’t parting for long. You will be here tomorrow at my door at the same hour.’

Chapter XXVI

The appointment was for five o'clock, and Kate would have liked to remain on the pier with Dick enjoying the summer evening, but he seemed so intent on returning to their lodging that she did not like to oppose his wishes, and she allowed herself to be led all the way up the dusty town to their close, hot rooms that she might try over Fredegonde's music. That he should wish to hear her voice again in this music flattered her, but she rose from the piano, her face aflame, when he began to mention an appointment.

'It's too bad of you, Dick, to bring me home and then remember an appointment.'

Dick overflowed with mellifluous excuses which did not seem to allay Kate's anger, and as he hurried down the street it occurred to him that he might have thought of a better reason than Fredegonde for bringing her home. However this might be, his thoughts were now with Montgomery and Mrs. Forest rather than with Kate, and it was not till he drew the latchkey from his pocket that Kate's singing of the waltz returned to him: he ascended the stairs singing it.

'I think it will work out all right.'

'What will work out all right? You're an hour later than you said you'd be.'

'Never mind about the hour,' he answered and began to weave a story about his meeting with a pal from London, as he was leaving the pier the other day: he hadn't spoken to her about it before, not caring to do so until something definite had happened.

'What has happened?' Kate asked, and Dick, his face aglow, related how the pal had spoken of a great revival of interest in comic opera, especially in French music, and that many city men with plenty of money were on the lookout for somebody who knew how to produce this class of work and was in sympathy with the Folies Dramatiques tradition.

Kate, who believed everything that Dick told her, listened with a heightened temperature. At Margate the admirer of Hervé's music became an American who wished to see *Chilpéric, Trône d'Écosse, Le Petit Faust, L'Oeil Crevé, Marguerite de Navarre*, reproduced as they had been produced under the composer's direction when Dick was stage-manager at that theatre. The American was interested in Hervé; for he not only wrote the music but also the words of his operas. Hervé was, therefore, the Wagner of light comic opera. And if the new venture received sufficient support from the public Dick would like to add other works by Hervé—*La Belle Poule* and *Le Hussard Persecuté*—and having puzzled Kate with many titles and an imaginary biography of this musical American he fell to telling her of Blanche D'Antigny, singing all the little tunes he could remember and branching off into an account of *Le Canard à Trois Becs*. This last opera was not by Hervé, but the American liked it and might be persuaded to produce it later on.

'It contained a part,' he said, 'in which Kate would succeed in establishing herself one of London's favourites;' but his praise of her singing and acting set her wondering if he were gulling her once more, or if he still believed in her. It might be that her continued sobriety had reawakened his old love for her, and she remembered suddenly that she had never really cared for drink, and never would have touched drink if Dick had not driven her mad with jealousy. And the fact that her voice had returned to her helped her to believe that Dick was sincere when he told her that she would be a better Fredegonde than Blanche D'Antigny, who created the part originally. Montgomery endorsed this view one evening; he refused to take

‘no’ for an answer: she must sing the score through with him, and several times he stopped playing; and looking up in her face told her he had never known a voice to improve so rapidly and so suddenly. Dick nodded his acquiescence in Montgomery’s opinion and hoped there would be no more need to tell Kate lies once she was settled in a lodging behind the Cattle Market. But in this he was mistaken, for in London the need to keep up the fiction of Hervé’s American admirer was more necessary than at Margate. Dick had to relate his different quests every evening. He had been after the Lyceum, but was unable to get an answer from the lessee; he hoped to get one next week; and when next week came he spoke about the Royalty and the Adelphi and the Haymarket, neglecting, however, to mention the theatre in which he hoped to produce Laura’s opera. ‘The large stage of the Lyceum would be excellently well suited,’ he said, ‘for a fine production of *Chilpéric*,’ and he besought Kate to apply herself to the study of the part of Fredegonde. His imagination led him into dreams of an English company going over to Paris with all Hervé’s works, and Kate obliterating the Blanche D’Antigny tradition. Kate listened delighted, discovering in Dick’s praise of her singing a hope that his love of her had survived the many tribulations it had been through; and while listening she vowed she would never touch drink again. Nor did her happiness vanish till morning, till she saw him struggling into his greatcoat, and foresaw the long dividing hours. But he had said so many kind things overnight that she was behoven to stifle complaint, and bore with her loneliness all day long refusing food, for without Dick’s presence food had no pleasure for her, however hungry she might be. She would wait contented hour after hour if she could have him to herself when he returned. But sometimes he would bring back a friend with him, and the pair would sit up talking of women and their aptitudes in different parts. As none of them were known personally to Kate, the names they mentioned suggested only new causes for jealousy, and the thought that Dick was living among all these women while she was hidden away in this lodging from night till morning, from morning till night, maddened her. It seemed to her that having been out all day Dick might at least reserve his evenings for her; and one night she showed the man he had brought back to supper plainly that his absence would, so far as she was concerned, have been preferable to his company. ‘I wouldn’t have come back,’ he said, ‘only Dick insisted;’ and interrupting his regrets that she did not like him, she said: ‘It isn’t that I don’t like you, but you’re used to women who aren’t in love with their husbands, and I’m in love with mine.’ The friend repeated Kate’s words to Dick, who said he hadn’t a moment till the cast of the new piece was settled, and a few nights later he brought back some music which he said he would like her to try over. ‘But it’s manuscript, Dick. Why don’t you bring home the printed score?’ The lie that came to his lips was that the score of *Trône d’Écosse* had never been printed, and this seeming to her very unlikely she said she didn’t care whether it had or hadn’t, but was tired of living in Islington, and would like to see something of the London of which she had heard so much.

‘I’ve been in London all my life,’ Dick said, ‘and I haven’t been to the Tower or to St. Paul’s. However, dear, if you’d like to see them we’ll visit all these places together as soon as *Chilpéric* is produced.’

With this promise he consoled her in a measure, and she watched Dick depart and then took up a novel and read it till she could read no longer. She then went out for a little walk, but soon returned, finding it wearisome to be always asking the way. So forlorn and lost did she seem that even the fat landlady, the mother of the ten children who clattered about the head of the kitchen staircase, took pity upon her and told her the number of the bus that would bring her to the British Museum, assuring her that she would find a great deal there to distract her attention.

It did not matter to her where she went if Dick wasn’t with her; without Dick all places were the same to her, and the British Museum would do as well as any other place. She must go

somewhere, and the British Museum would do as well as the Tower or St. Paul's. There were things to be seen, and she didn't mind what she saw as long as she saw something new. She couldn't look any longer at the two pictures on the walls - "With The Stream" and "Against The Stream," the wax fruit, the mahogany sideboard, the dingy furniture, the torn curtains; and of all she must get out of hearing of the children and the surly landlady, who a few minutes ago was less surly, and had told her of the British Museum, and all the wonderful things that were to be seen there. But she hadn't the bus fare, and didn't like to ask the landlady for a few pence. As long as she hadn't any money she was out of temptation, and it was by her own wish that Dick left her without money. As she walked to and fro she caught sight of his clothes thrown over the back of a chair in the bedroom; and he might have left a few pence in one of his pockets.

She searched the trousers; how careless Dick was: several shillings: one, two, three, four, five. Five and sixpence. She would take sixpence. As she walked out of the bedroom clinking the coppers the desire to read his letters fell upon her, and yielding to it she put her hand into the inside pocket of his coat and drew from it a packet of letters and some papers, manuscripts, poems.

'Now, who,' she asked, 'can have been sending him these *Classical Cartoons*, number four?'

She read of heroes, the glory of manhood collected along the shores of the terrible river that guards the dominions of Pluto. She knew nothing of Pluto, but recognized the handwriting as a woman's, and the lines:

'Zeus, the monarch of heaven, clothed in the form of a mortal,
Kneeling, caressed and caressing, drank from her lips joy and love-draughts,'

caused Kate to dash the manuscript from her. A letter accompanied the poem and read:

'My dear, nothing can be done without you, and if you don't come at once we shall miss getting a theatre this season, and without a theatre we are helpless.'

Kate did not need to read any more. The letter left no doubt that Dick was engaged in an intrigue with a woman who had written some play or opera which he was going to produce, and the envelope out of which she had taken the letter bore the direction: 'Richard Lennox, Esq., Post Restante, Margate.'

'So it was lies all the while at Margate,' she said to herself, walking about the room, stopping now and again to stare at some object which she did not see. 'There was no American, and no *Chilpéric*, no *Trône d'Écosse*, no *L'Oeil Crevé*, no *La Belle Poule*, no *Marguerite de Navarre*. Lies, lies! Nothing but lies! He never intended to produce one of them, or that I should play "Fredegonde." Lies! Lies! And the great part in *Le Canard à Trois Becs* which would establish my reputation in London. Lies! He never intended to produce one of these operas,' she cried. 'He shut me up here in this lodging so that I should be out of the way while he carried on with that What's-her-name.'

Her brain at that instant seemed to catch fire, and snatching up some money from the mantelpiece, she rushed out of the house tumbling over the children as she made her way to the front door without hat or jacket. The sunlight awoke her and she looked round puzzled, and only just escaped being run over by a passing cart. In front of her was a public-house. Drink! She went in and drank till she recovered her reason and began to lose it again.

A 'bottle of gin, please,' she said, and put the money on the counter and returned to her lodging almost mad with jealousy and rage and thirst for revenge. 'No, she wouldn't drink any more, for if she were to drink any more she'd not be able to have it out with Dick, and this time she would have it out with him and no mistake. If he were to kill her it didn't

matter; but she would have it out with him.' As she sat by the table waiting hour after hour for him to return, her whole mind was expressed by the words - 'I'll have it out with him'—and she didn't weary of repeating them, for it seemed to her that they kept her resolution from dying: what she feared most was that his presence might quell her resolution. To have it out with him as she was minded, she mustn't be drunk, nor yet too sober.

He might bring home a friend with him, but that wouldn't stay her hand. Montgomery too had deceived her. Dick was rehearsing his opera; he had written music for that Mrs. Forest, and this was the end of their friendship.

Many hours went by, but they didn't seem long, passion gave her patience. At last a sound of footsteps caused her to start to her feet. It was Dick.

'This is going to be an all-night affair,' he said to himself as soon as he crossed the threshold. 'I hope you didn't wait supper for me?' His manner was most conciliatory, and perhaps it was that conciliatory manner that inflamed her.

'Business, I suppose; I know damned well what your business was: I know all about it, you and your woman, Mrs. Forest; the theatre she's taken for you; where you are rehearsing Montgomery's opera. You cannot deny it,' she cried. 'Mrs. Forest is her name,' and reading in his face certain signs of his culpability her anger increased, her teeth were set and her eyes glared.

Dick feared she was going mad, and with an instinctive movement he put out his arms to restrain her.

'Don't touch me! don't touch me!' she screamed, and struck at him with clenched fists, and then feeling that her blows were but puny she went for him like a bird of prey, all her fingers distended.

'Take that, and that, and that, you beast! Oh, you beast! you beast! you beast!'

Her shrieks rang through the house as she pursued him round the furniture; he retreating like a lumbering bull striving to escape from her claws.

'How do you like that?' she cried, as she tore at him with her nails again. 'That will teach you to go messing about after other women. I'll settle you before I've done with you.'

Chairs were thrown down, the coal-scuttle was upset, and at last, as Dick tried to get out of the room, Kate stumbled against a rosewood cabinet, sending one of the green vases with its glass shade crashing to the ground, summoning the landlady.

Dick spoke about his wife having had a fit.

'Fit or no fit, I hope you'll leave my house to-morrow.'

'Meanwhile,' Dick answered, 'will you leave my room?' and he shut the door in the face of the indignant householder.

Kate, who had now recovered herself a little, poured out a large glass of raw gin, and to her surprise Dick made no attempt to prevent her drinking it.

'As soon as she drinks herself helpless the better,' he thought, as he went into the bedroom to attend to his wounds. The scratches she had given him before their marriage were nothing to these. One side of his nose was well-nigh ripped open, and there were two big, deep gashes running right across his face, from the cheek-bone to his ear. It was very lucky, he thought, she hadn't had his eye out, and it might be as well to go round to the apothecary's and get some vaseline, some antiseptic treatment, for nails are poisonous, he added, and his eyes going round the room caught sight of his clothes in disorder. 'Ah! she has been at my

clothes,' and he took up the classical cartoons and his letters and put them away into his pocket, and went into the sitting room, and tried to explain to his wife that he was going out to see if he could get something from the apothecary to heal the wounds she had given him.

Kate did not answer. 'She's dead drunk,' he said, and it seemed to him that he couldn't do better than to undress her and put her into bed, and when he had done this he lay down upon a sofa hoping that he would wake first, and be able to get out of the house without disturbing her, leaving word with the landlady that he would come back as soon as his rehearsal was over, and make arrangements to leave her house since she didn't wish them to stay any longer. He fell asleep thinking that he might find his landlady in a different mood, and might persuade her in the morning to allow them to stay on. The vase, of course, should be paid for. There was a kindly look in her pleasant country face when she wasn't angry; his torn face might win her pity, and not wishing to increase his troubles, she would probably allow them to stay on; if she didn't he would have to find another lodging that very afternoon, which would be unfortunate, for his engagements were many. As it was he'd have to hasten to keep an appointment which he had made with Mrs. Forest in the National Gallery. 'She really will have to make some alterations in her second act,' he said, going to the glass. Kate had clawed him with a vengeance, and he'd have to tell Laura how he came by his torn face; and after some consideration it seemed to him that it would be well to admit that he had received these wounds in a conflict with a wife who was, unfortunately, given to drink. It was on these thoughts he fell asleep, and overslept himself, he feared, but Kate was still asleep, and without awakening her he stole downstairs to visit the landlady in her parlour, but hearing his step she bounced out of the room with a view, no doubt, to repeating the warning she had given him overnight, but the sight of his torn face brought pity into hers, and she said:

'Oh, Mr. Lennox, I'm so sorry for you.'

A little sympathetic conversation followed; and Dick went off to meet Laura, whom he recognized in the woman who leaned over the railings between the pillars, seemingly attracted by the view across Trafalgar Square. She still wore her green silk dress, the one which he had first seen her in on the pier at Hastings, and the long draggled feather boa.

'She doesn't spend money on dress,' he thought as he lifted his hat with not quite the same ceremonious gesture as usual, for he didn't wish to exhibit his scars yet.

'So here you are, Dick, and I waiting for you on the steps of this gallery, glorious with all the imaginations of the heroes.'

'She hasn't seen the scratches yet,' he said to himself, and turned from the light instinctively, preferring that she should make the discovery indoors, rather than out of doors. His wounds would appear less in the gallery than in the open air. 'Why didn't she take a little more trouble with her make-up?' he asked himself, and then reproved himself for describing it as a make-up. 'She's not made up,' he said to himself, 'she's painted,' and he wondered how it was that she could plaster her dark skin so flagrantly with carmine, and put her eyebrows so high up in the forehead. 'Yet the face,' he said, 'is a finely moulded one, and compelling when she forgets her cosmetics,' and while Dick regretted that she didn't show more skill with these, he heard her telling him that she would prefer to stop and talk with him in the gallery devoted to the Italian pictures than elsewhere; 'the sublime conceptions of Raphael raise me above myself.' And then, as if afraid that her words would seem vainglorious to Dick, she said: 'You're always in the same mood, never rising above yourself or sinking below yourself, finding it difficult to understand the pain that those who live mostly in the spiritual plane experience lest they fall into a lower plane. Not that I regard you, Dick, as a lower plane, but your plane is not mine, and that is why you're so necessary to me, and why,

perhaps, I'm so necessary to you, or would be if I'm not. Come, let us sit here in front of the Raphael and talk, since we must, of comic opera. It's a pity we're not talking of the *Parcoe* who have been in my mind all the morning,' and she began to recite some verses that she had written. But, interrupting herself suddenly, she cried: 'Dick, who has been scratching you? How did your face get torn like that—who's been scratching you?' and Dick answered:

'My wife.'

'Your wife? But you never told me that you were married.'

'If I'd told you I was married I would have had to tell you that my wife is a drunkard and is rapidly drinking herself to death, a thing that no man likes to speak about.'

'My poor friend, I didn't mean to reprove you. How did all this come about?'

It wouldn't do to admit that Kate had discovered Laura's letters and poems in his pockets, and so he told the story of a former experience with his wife, and had barely finished it when Laura begged of him to tell her how he had met his wife. And when he had told her the story, to which she listened solemnly, she answered, and there was the same gravity in her voice as in her face: 'All this comes, my dear Dick, of lewdness.'

'But, Laura, I was faithful to my wife.'

'But she was the wife of another man,' Laura replied, 'not that that is an insuperable barrier, but you brought, I fear, lewdness into your conjugal life, and lewdness is fatal to happiness whether it be indulged within or outside the bonds of wedlock. I'm sorry,' she said, 'that you had to leave Yarmouth before my lecture on the chastity of the marriage state.'

'It wouldn't have mattered,' Dick replied, 'for my wife had taken to drink long before we met at Hastings.' An answer that darkened Laura's face despite all the paint she wore, and encouraged Dick to ask her if she had never felt the thorns of passion prick her when she ran away from her convent school.

She seemed uncertain what answer she should return, but only for a moment; and recovering herself quickly she maintained that it wasn't passion, which is but another name for lewdness, but imagination that had prompted this elopement, and that if she had gone to Bulgaria it was to seek there a nobler life than the one she had left behind.

'It was the immortal that drew me,' she said.

'Even so,' Dick answered, 'the mortal seems necessary for the immortal, and to provide him with a habitation a woman must give herself to a man.'

'That,' she replied, 'is one of the penalties entailed by our first parents upon women, but one that is entailed upon a condition that you have not respected, but which I have striven always to respect myself. It would be impossible for me to give myself to a man unless I thought I was going to bear him a child.'

It was on Dick's lips to remind Laura that a woman can always think she is going to bear a child, but he refrained, it seeming to him that his purpose would be better served by allowing Laura to justify herself as she pleased, and he waited for an opportunity to speak to her about the alteration which he deemed altogether necessary in the second act. But Laura was away on her favourite theme, and in the end he had recourse to his watch.

'My dear Laura, I'm due at rehearsal in ten minutes from now.'

'Well, let's go,' she cried.

‘But, my dear, this is what I’ve come to tell you. The second act,’—and he explained the difficulty which would have to be removed. ‘Now, like a dear, good girl, will you go home and do this and bring it down to the theatre to-morrow morning at eleven so that we may have an opportunity of going through it together before rehearsal?’

In the meantime, Kate lay on her bed, helpless as ever, just as Dick had left her; and it was not until he had given his preliminary instructions to the ballet-girls, and Montgomery had struck the first notes of his opening chorus, that a ray of consciousness pierced through the heavy, drunken stupor that pressed upon her brain. With vague movements of hands, she endeavoured to fasten the front of her dress, and with a groan rolled herself out of the light; but her efforts to fall back into insensibility were unavailing, and like the dawn that slips and swells through the veils of night, a pale waste of consciousness forced itself upon her. First came the curtains of the bed, then the bare blankness of the wall, and then the great throbbing pain that lay like a lump of lead just above her forehead. Her mouth was clammy as if it were filled with glue, her limbs weak as if they had been beaten to a pulp by violent blows. She was all pain, but, worse still, a black horror of her life crushed and terrified her, until she buried her face in the pillow and wept and moaned for mercy. But to remain in bed was impossible. The pallor of the place was intolerable, and sliding her legs over the side she stood, scarcely able to keep her feet. The room swam as if in a mist; she held her head with clasped hands; the top of it seemed to be lifting off, and it was with much difficulty that she staggered as far as the chest of drawers, where she remained for some minutes trying to recover herself, thinking of what had happened overnight. She had been drunk, she knew that, but where was Dick? Where had he gone? What had she said to him? All mental effort was agony; but she had to think, and straining at the threads of memory, she strove to follow one to the end. But it was no use, it soon became hopelessly entangled, and with a low cry she moaned, ‘Oh, my poor head! my poor head! I cannot, cannot remember.’ But the question: what has become of Dick? still continued to torture her, till, raising her face suddenly from her arm, she hitched up her falling skirts, and seeing at that moment the bottle on the table, she went into the sitting-room and poured herself out a little, which she mixed with water.

‘Just a drop,’ she murmured to herself, ‘to pull me together. It was his fault; until he put me in a passion I was all right.’

Spreading and definite thoughts began to emerge, and for a long time she sat moodily thinking over her wrongs, and as her thoughts wavered they grew softer and more argumentative. She considered the question from all sides, and, reasoning with herself, was disposed to conclude that it was not all her fault. If she did drink, it was jealousy that drove her to it. Why wasn’t he faithful to her who had given up everything for him? Why did he want to be always running after a lot of other women? Where was he now, she’d like to know? As this question appeared in the lens of her thought, she raised her head, and although boozed the memory of Mrs. Forest’s letters filled her mind.

‘Oh yes, that’s where he’s gone to, is it?’ she murmured to herself. ‘So he’s down with his poetess at the Opéra Comique, rehearsing Montgomery’s opera.’

A determination to follow him slowly formed itself in her mind, and she managed to map out the course that she would have to pursue. It seemed to her that she was beset with difficulties. To begin with, she did not know where the theatre was, and she could not conceal from herself the fact that she was scarcely in a fit state to take a long walk through the London streets. The spirit drunk on an empty stomach had gone to her head; she reeled a little when she walked; and her own incapacity to act maddened her. Oh, good heavens! how her head was splitting! What would she not give to be all right just for a couple of hours, just long enough to go and tell that beast of a husband of hers what a pig he was, and let the whole

theatre know how he was treating his wife. It was he who drove her to drink. Yes, she would go and do this. It was true her head seemed as if it were going to roll off her shoulders, but a good sponging would do it good, and then a bottle or two of soda would put her quite straight—so straight that nobody would know she had touched a drop.

It took Kate about half an hour to drench herself in a basin, and regardless of her dress, she let her hair lie dripping on her shoulders. The landlady brought her up the soda-water, and seeing what a state her lodger was in, she placed it on the table without a word, without even referring to the notice to quit she had given overnight; and steadying her voice as best she could, Kate asked her to call a cab.

'Hansom, or four-wheeler?'

'Fo-four wheel-er—if you please.'

'Yes, that'll suit you best,' said the woman, as she went downstairs. 'You'd perhaps fall out of a hansom. If I were your husband I'd break every bone in your body.'

But Kate was now much soberer, and weak and sick she leaned back upon the hard cushions of the clattering cab. Her mouth was full of water, and the shifting angles of the streets produced on her an effect similar to sea-sickness. London rang in her ears; she could hear a piano tinkling; she saw Dick directing the movements of a line of girls. Then her dream was brought to an end by a gulp. Oh! the fearful nausea; and she did not feel better until, flooding her dress and ruining the red velvet seat, all she had drunk came up. But the vomit brought her great relief, and had it not been for a little dizziness and weakness, she would have felt quite right when she arrived at the stage-door. In a terrible state of dirt and untidiness she was surely, but she noticed nothing, her mind being now fully occupied in thinking what she should say, first to the stage-door-keeper, and then to her husband.

At the corner of Wych Street she dismissed the cab, and this done she did not seem to have courage enough for anything. She felt as if she would like to sit down on a doorstep and cry. The menacing threats, the bitter upbraidings she had intended, all slipped from her like dreams, and she felt utterly wretched.

At that moment, in her little walk up the pavement she found herself opposite a public-house. Something whispered in her ear that after her sickness one little nip of brandy was necessary, and would put her straight in a moment. She hesitated, but someone pushed her from behind and she went in. A four of brandy freshened her up wonderfully, enabling her to think of what she had come to do, and to remember how badly she was being treated. A second drink put light into her eyes and wickedness into her head, and she felt she could, and would, face the devil. 'I'll give it to him; I'll teach him that I'm not to be trodden on,' she said to herself as she strutted manfully towards the stage-door, walking on her heels so as to avoid any unsteadiness of gait.

The man in the little box was old and feeble. He said he would send her name by the first person going down; but Kate was not in a mood to brook delays, and, profiting by his inability to stop her, she banged through the swinging door and commenced the descent of a long flight of steps. Below her was the stage, and between the wings she could see the girls arranged in a semicircle. Dick, with a big staff in hand, stood in front of the footlights directing the movements of a procession which was being formed; the piano tinkled merrily on the O.P. side.

'Mr. Chappel, will you be good enough to play the "Just put this in your pocket" chorus over again?' cried Dick, stamping his staff heavily upon the boards.

‘Now then, girls, I hear a good deal too much talking going on at the back there. I dare say it’s very amusing; but if you’d try to combine business with pleasure—-Now, who did I put in section one?’

Kate hesitated a moment, arrested by the tones of his voice, and she could not avoid thinking of the time when she used to play Clairette; besides, all the well-known faces were there. Our lives move as in circles; no matter what strange vicissitudes we pass through, we generally find ourselves gliding once more into the well-known grooves, and Dick, in forming the present company, had naturally fallen back upon the old hands, who had travelled with him in the country. They were nearly all there. Mortimer, with his ringlets and his long nasal drawl, stood, as usual, in the wings, making ill-natured remarks. Dubois strutted as before, and tilting his bishop’s hat, explained that he would take no further engagement as a singer; if people would not let him act they would have to do without him. With her dyed hair tucked neatly away under her bonnet Miss Leslie smiled as agreeably as ever. Beaumont alone seemed to be missing, and Montgomery, in all the importance of a going-to-be-produced author, strode along up and down the stage, apparently busied in thought, the tails of a Newmarket coat still flapping about his thin legs; and when he appeared in profile against the scenery he looked, as he always had done, like the flitting shadow thrown by an enormous magic-lantern.

Kate sullenly watched them, gripping the rail of the staircase tightly. The momentary softening of heart, occasioned by the remembrance of old times, died away in the bitterness of the thought that she who had counted for so much was now pushed into a corner to live forgotten or disdained. Why was she not rehearsing there with them? she asked herself. At once the answer came. Because your husband hates you—because he wants to make love to another woman. Then, like one crazed, she clattered down the iron spiral staircase to the stage. She did not even hear Mortimer and Dubois cry out as she pushed past, ‘There’s Mrs. Lennox!’

In the middle of the stage, however, she looked round, discountenanced by the silence and the crowd, and, hoping to calm her, Dick advised her, in whispers, to go upstairs to his room. But this was the signal for her to break forth.

‘Go up to your room?’ she screamed. ‘Never, never! Do you suppose it is to talk to you that I came here? No, I despise you too much. I hate you, and I want every one here to know how you treat me.’

With a dull stare she examined the circle of girls who stood whispering in groups, as if she were going to address one in particular, and several drew back, frightened. Dick attempted to say something, but it seemed that the very sound of his voice was enough.

‘Go away, go away!’ she exclaimed at the top of her voice. ‘Go away; don’t touch me! Go to that woman of yours—Mrs. Forest—go to her, and be damned, you beast! You know she’s paying for everything here. You know that you are— - ‘

‘For goodness’ sake remember what you’re saying,’ said Dick, interrupting, and trembling as if for his life. He cast an anxious glance around to see if the lady in question was within hearing. Fortunately she was not on the stage.

The chorus crowded timidly forward looking like a school in their walking-dresses. The carpenters had ceased to hammer, and were peeping down from the flies; Kate stood balancing herself and staring blindly at those who surrounded her. Leslie and Montgomery, in the position of old friends, were endeavouring to soothe her, whilst Mortimer and Dubois argued passionately as to when they had seen her drunk for the first time. The first insisted

that when she had joined them at Hanley she was a bit inebriated; the latter declared that it had begun with the champagne on her wedding day.

‘Don’t you remember, Dick was married with a scratched face?’

‘To judge from present appearances,’ said the comedian, forcing his words slowly through his nose, ‘he’s likely to die with one.’ At this sally three supers retired into the wings holding their sides, and Dubois, furious at being outdone in a joke, walked away in high dudgeon, calling Mortimer an unfeeling brute.

In the meantime the drunken row was waxing more furious every moment. Struggling frantically with her friends, Kate called attention to the sticking-plaster on Dick’s face, and declared that she would do for him.

‘You see what I gave him last night, and he deserved it. Oh! the beast! And I’ll give him more; and if you knew all you wouldn’t blame me. It was he who seduced me, who got me to run away from home, and he deserts me for other women. But he shan’t, he shan’t, he shan’t; I’ll kill him first; yes, I will, and nobody shall stop me.’

Dick listened quite broken with shame for himself and for her; as an excuse for the absence of his wife from the theatre he had told Mortimer and Hayes that London did not agree with her, and that she had to spend most of her time at the seaside. All had condoled with him, and when they were searching London for a second lady, all had agreed that Mrs. Lennox was just the person they wanted for the part. What a pity, they said, she was not in town. At the present moment Dick wished her the other side of Jordan. For all he knew, she might remain screaming at him the whole day, and if Mrs. Forest came back—well, he didn’t know what would happen; the whole game would then be up the spout. Perhaps the best thing to do would be to tell Montgomery of the danger his piece was in; he and Kate had always been friends; she might listen to him.

Such were Dick’s reflections as he stood bashfully trying to avoid the eyes of his ballet-girls. For the life of him he didn’t know which way to look. In front of him was a wall of people, whereon certain faces detached themselves. He saw Dubois’ mumming mug widening with delight until the grin formed a semi-circle round the Jew nose. Mortimer looked on with the mock earnestness of a tortured saint in a stained-glass window. Pity was written on all the girls’ faces; all were sorry for Dick, especially a tall woman who forgot herself so completely that she threw her arms about a super and sobbed on his shoulder.

But Kate still continued to advance, although held by Montgomery and Miss Leslie. The long black hair hung in disordered masses; her brown eyes were shot with golden lights; the green tints in her face became, in her excessive pallor, dirty and abominable in colour, and she seemed more like a demon than a woman as her screams echoed through the empty theatre.

‘By Jove! we ought to put up *Jane Eyre*,’ said Mortimer. ‘If she were to play the mad woman like that, we’d be sure to draw full houses.’

‘I believe you,’ said Dubois; but at that moment he was interrupted by a violent scream, and suddenly disengaging herself from those who held her, Kate rushed at Dick. With one hand she grappled him by the throat, and before anyone could interfere she succeeded in nearly tearing the shirt from his back.

When at length they were separated, she stood staring and panting, every fibre of her being strained with passion; but she did not again burst forth until someone, in a foolish attempt to pacify her, ventured to side with her in her denunciation of her husband.

‘How should such as you dare to say a word against him! I will not hear him abused! No, I will not; I say he’s a good man. Yes, yes! He is a good man, the best man that ever lived!’ she exclaimed, stamping her foot on the boards, ‘the best man that ever lived! I will not hear a word against him! No, I will not! He’s my husband; he married me! Yes he did; I can show my certificate, and that’s more than any one of you can.

‘I know you, a damned lot of hussies! I know you; I was one of you myself. You think I wasn’t. Well, I can prove it. You go and ask Montgomery if I didn’t play Serpolette all through the country, and Clairette too. I should like to see any of you do that, with the exception of Lucy, who was always a good friend to me; but the rest of you I despise as the dirt under my feet; so do you think that I would permit you—that I came here to listen to my husband being abused, and by such as you! If he has his faults he’s accountable to none but me.’

Here she had to pause for lack of breath; and Dick, who had been pursuing his shirt-stud, which had rolled into the foot-lights, now drew himself up, and in his stage-commanding voice declared the rehearsal to be over. A few of the girls lingered, but they were beckoned away by the others, who saw that the present time was not suitable for the discussion of boots, tights, and dressing-rooms. There was no one left but Leslie, Montgomery, Dick, Kate, and Harding, who, twisting his moustache, watched and listened apparently with the greatest interest.

‘Oh, you’ve no idea what a nice woman she used to be, and is, were it not for that cursed drink,’ said Montgomery, with the tears running down his nose. ‘You remember her, Leslie, don’t you? Isn’t what I say true? I never liked a woman so much in my life.’

‘You were a friend of hers, then?’ said Harding.

‘I should think I was.’

‘Then you never were—Yes, yes, I understand. A little friendship flavoured with love. Yes, yes. Wears better, perhaps, than the genuine article. What do you think, Leslie?’

‘Not bad,’ said the prima donna, ‘for people with poor appetites. A kind of diet suitable for Lent, I should think.’

‘Ah! a title for a short story, or better still for an operetta. What do you think, Montgomery? Shall I do you a book entitled *Lovers in Lent*, or *A Lover’s Lent*? and Leslie will - ‘

‘No, I won’t. None of your forty days for me.’

‘I can’t understand how you people can go on talking nonsense with a scene so terrible passing under your eyes,’ cried the musician, as he pointed to Kate, who was calling after Dick as she staggered in pursuit of him up the stairs towards the stage-door.

‘Well, what do you want me to do?’

‘She’ll disgrace him in the street.’

‘I can’t help that. I never interfere in a love affair; and this is evidently the great passion of a life.’

Montgomery cast an indignant glance at the novelist and rushed after his friends; but when he arrived at the stage-door he saw the uselessness of his interference.

It was in the narrow street; the heat sweltered between the old houses that leaned and lolled upon the huge black traversing beams like aged women on crutches; and Kate raved against Dick in language that was fearful to hear amid the stage carpenters, the chorus-girls, the idlers that a theatre collects standing with one foot in the gutter, where vegetable refuse of all

kinds rotted. Her beautiful black hair was now hanging over her shoulders like a mane; someone had trodden on her dress and nearly torn it from her waist, and, in avid curiosity, women with dyed hair peeped out of a suspicious-looking tobacco shop. Over the way, stuck under an overhanging window, was an orange-stall; the proprietress stood watching, whilst a crowd of vermin-like children ran forward, delighted at the prospect of seeing a woman beaten. Close by, in shirt-sleeves, the pot-boy flung open the public-house door, partly for the purpose of attracting custom, half with the intention of letting a little air into the bar-room.

'Oh, Kate! I beg of you not to go in there,' said Dick; 'you've had enough; do come home!'

'Come home!' she shrieked, 'and with you, you beast! It was you who seduced me, who got me away from my husband.'

This occasioned a good deal of amusement in the crowd, and several voices asked for information.

'And how did he manage to do that, marm?' said one.

'With a bottle of gin. What do you think?' cried another.

There were moments when Dick longed for the earth to open; but he nevertheless continued to try to prevent Kate from entering the public-house.

'I will drink! I will drink! I will drink! And not because I like it, but to spite you, because I hate you.'

When she came out she appeared to be a little quieted, and Dick tried very hard to persuade her to get into a cab and drive home. But the very sound of his voice, the very sight of him, seemed to excite her, and in a few moments she broke forth into the usual harangue. Several times the temptation to run away became almost irresistible, but with a noble effort of will he forced himself to remain with her. Hoping to avoid some part of the ridicule that was being so liberally showered upon him, he besought of her to keep up Drury Lane and not descend into the Strand.

'You don't want to be seen with me; I know, you'd prefer to walk there with Mrs. Forest. You think I shall disgrace you. Well, come along, then.

"Look at me here! look at me there!
Criticize me everywhere!
I am so sweet from head to feet,
And most perfect and complete."

'That's right, old woman, give us a song. She knows the game,' answered another.

Raising his big hat from his head, Dick wiped his face, and as if divining his extreme despair, Kate left off singing and dancing, and the procession proceeded in quiet past several different wine-shops. It was not until they came to Short's she declared she was dying of thirst and must have a drink. Dick forbade the barman to serve her, and brought upon himself the most shocking abuse. Knowing that he would be sure to meet a crowd of his 'pals' at the Gaiety bar, he used every endeavour to persuade her to cross the street and get out of the sun.

'Don't bother me with your sun,' she exclaimed surlily; and then, as if struck by the meaning of the word, she said, 'But it wasn't a son, it was a daughter; don't you remember?'

'Oh, Kate! how can you speak so?'

'Speak so? I say it was a daughter, and she died; and you said it was my fault, as you say everything is my fault, you beast! you venomous beast! Yes, she did die. It was a pity; I could have loved her.'

At this moment Dick felt a heavy hand clapped on his shoulder, and turning round he saw a pal of his.

‘What, Dick, my boy! A drunken chorus lady; trying to get her home? Always up to some charitable action.’

‘No; she’s my wife.’

‘I beg your pardon, old chap; you know I didn’t mean it;’ and the man disappeared into the bar-room.

‘Yes, I’m his wife,’ Kate shrieked after him. ‘I got that much right out of him at least; and I played the Serpolette in the *Cloches*.’

‘“Look at me here, look at me there,”‘

she sang, flirting with her abominable skirt, amused by the applause of the roughs. ‘But I’m going to have a drink here,’ she said, suddenly breaking off.

‘No, you can’t, my good woman,’ said the stout guardian at the door.

‘And why—why not?’

‘That don’t matter. You go on, or I’ll have to give you in charge.’

Kate was not yet so drunk that the words ‘in charge’ did not frighten her, and she answered humbly enough, ‘I’m here wi-th—my hu-s-band, and as you’re so im-impertinent I shall go-go elsewhere.’

At the next place they came to Dick did not protest against her being served, but waited, confident of the result, until she had had her four of gin, and came reeling out into his arms. Shaking herself free she stared at him, and when he was fully recognized, cursed him for his damned interference. She could now scarcely stand straight on her legs, and, after staggering a few yards further, fell helplessly on the pavement.

Calling a cab, he bundled her into it and drove away.

Chapter XXVII

‘Oh, Dick, dear, what did I do yesterday? Do tell me about yesterday. Was I very violent? And those wounds on your face, I didn’t do that; don’t tell me that I did. Dick, Dick, are you going to leave me?’

‘I have to attend to my business, Kate.’

‘Ah, your business! Your business! Mrs. Forest is your business; you’ve no other business but her now. And that is what is driving me to drink.’

‘Oh, Kate, don’t begin it again. I’ve a rehearsal— - ‘

‘Yes, the rehearsal of her opera and Montgomery’s music. I did think he was my friend; yet he is putting up her opera to music, and all the while he was setting it you were telling me lies about *Chilpéric*, saying that I was to play the Fredegonde, and all the principal parts in the great Hervé festival, that the American—but there was no American. It was cruel of you, Dick, to shut me up here with nobody to speak to; nothing to do but to wait for you hour after hour, and when you come home to hear nothing from you but lies, nothing but lies! *Chilpéric, Le Petit Faust, L’Oeil Créve, Trône d’Écosse, Marguerite de Navarre, La Belle Poule*. And all the music I’ve learnt hoping that I would be allowed to sing it; and yet you expect that a woman who is deceived like that can abstain from drink. Why, you drive me to it, Dick. An angel from heaven wouldn’t abstain from drink. Away you go in the morning to Mrs. Forest—to her opera.’

‘But, Kate, there’s nothing between me and Mrs. Forest. She is a very clever woman, and I am doing her opera for her. How are we to live if you come between me and my business?’

‘Womanizing is your business,’ Kate answered suddenly.

‘Well, don’t let us argue it,’ Dick answered. He tied his shoe-strings and sought for his hat.

‘So you’re going,’ she said; ‘and when shall I see you again?’

‘I shall try to get home for dinner.’

‘What time?’

‘Not before eight.’

‘I shall not see you before twelve,’ she replied, and she experienced a sad sinking of the heart when she heard the door close behind him, a sad sinking that she would have to endure till she heard his latchkey, and that would not be for many hours, perhaps not till midnight. She did not know how she would be able to endure all these hours; to sleep some of them away would be the best thing she could do, and with that intention she drew down the blind and threw herself on the bed, and lay between sleeping and waking till the afternoon. Then, feeling a little better, she rang and asked for a cup of tea. It tasted very insipid, but she gulped it down as best she could, making wry faces and feeling more miserable than ever she had felt before; afraid to look back on yesterday, afraid to look forward on the morrow, she bethought herself of the past, of the happy days when Montgomery used to come and teach her to sing, and her triumphs in the part of Clairette; she was quite as successful in Serpolette; people had liked her in Serpolette, and to recall those days more distinctly she opened a box in which she kept her souvenirs: a withered flower, a broken cigarette-holder, two or three old buttons that had fallen from his clothes, and a lock of hair, and it was under these that the prize of prizes lay—a string of false pearls. She liked to run them through her fingers and to see them upon

her neck. She still kept the dresses she wore in her two favourite parts, the stockings and the shoes, and having nothing to do, no way of passing the time away, she bethought herself of dressing herself in the apparel of her happy days, presenting, when the servant came up with her dinner, a spectacle that almost caused Emma to drop the dish of cold mutton.

'Lord, Mrs. Lennox, I thought I see a ghost; you in that white dress, oh, what lovely clothes!'

'These were the clothes I used to wear when I was on the stage.'

'But law, mum, why aren't you on the stage now?'

Kate began to tell her story to the servant-girl, who listened till a bell rang, and she said:

'That's Mr. So-and-So ringing for his wife; I must run and see to it. You must excuse me, mum.'

The cold mutton and the damp potatoes did not tempt her appetite, and catching sight of herself in the glass, bitter thoughts of the wrongs done to her surged up in her mind. The tiny nostrils dilated and the upper lip contracted, and for ten minutes she stood, her hands grasping nervously at the back of her chair; the canine teeth showed, for the project of revenge was mounting to her head. 'He'll not be back till midnight; all this while he is with Leslie and Mrs. Forest, or some new girl perhaps. Yet when he returns to me, when he is wearied out, he expects to find me sober and pleased to see him. But he shall never see me sober or pleased to see him again.' On these words she walked across the room to the fire-place, and putting her hand up the chimney brought down a bottle of Old Tom, and sat moodily sipping gin and water till she heard his key in the lock.

'He's back earlier than I expected,' she said.

Dick entered in his usual deliberate, elephantine way. Kate made no sign till he was seated, then she asked what the news was.

It was clearly out of the question to tell her that he had been round to tea with one of the girls; to explain how he had wheedled Mrs. Forest into all sorts of theatrical follies was likewise not to be thought of as a subject of news, and as to making conversation out of the rest of the day's duties, he really didn't see how he was to do it. Miss Howard had put out the entire procession by not listening to his instructions; Miss Adair, although she was playing the Brigand of the Ultramarine Mountains, had threatened to throw up her part if she were not allowed to wear her diamond ear-rings. The day had gone in deciding such questions, had passed in drilling those infernal girls; and what interest could there be in going through it all over again? Besides, he never knew how or where he might betray himself, and Kate was so quick in picking up the slightest word and twisting it into extraordinary meanings, that he really would prefer to talk about something else.

'I can't understand how you can have been out all day without having heard something. It is because you want to keep me shut up here and not let me know anything of your going-on; but I shall go down to the theatre to-morrow and have it out of you.'

'My dear, I assure you that I was at the rehearsal all day. The girls don't know their music yet, and it puts me out in my stage arrangement. I give you my word that is all I heard or saw to-day. I've nothing to conceal from you.'

'You're a liar, and you know you are!'

Blows and shrieks followed.

'I shall pull that woman's nose off; I know I shall!'

‘I give you my word, my dear, that I’ve been the whole day with Montgomery and Harding cutting the piece.’

‘Cutting the piece! And I should like to know why I’m not in that piece. I suppose it was you who kept me out of it. Oh, you beast! Why did you ever have anything to do with me? It’s you who are ruining me. Were it not for you, do you think I should be drinking? Not I—it was all your fault.’

Dick made no attempt to answer. He was very tired. Kate continued her march up and down the room for some moments in silence, but he could see from the twitching of her face and the swinging of her arms that the storm was bound to burst soon. Presently she said:

‘You go and get me something to drink; I’ve had nothing all this evening.’

‘Oh, Kate dear! I beg of - ‘

‘Oh, you won’t, won’t you? We’ll see about that,’ she answered as she looked around the room for the heaviest object she could conveniently throw at him.

Seeing how useless it would be to attempt to contradict her in her present mood, Dick rose to his feet and said hurriedly:

‘Now there’s no use in getting into a passion, Kate. I’ll go, I’ll go.’

‘You’d better, I can tell you.’

‘What shall I get, then?’

‘Get me half a pint of gin, and be quick about it—I’m dying of thirst.’

Even Dick, accustomed as he was now to these scenes, could not repress a look in which there was at once mingled pity, astonishment and fear, so absolutely demoniacal did this little woman seem as she raved under the watery light of the lodging-house gas, her dark complexion gone to a dull greenish pallor. By force of contrast she called to his mind the mild-eyed workwoman he had known in the linen-draper’s shop in Hanley, and he asked himself if it were possible that she and this raging creature, more like a tiger in her passion than a human being, were one and the same person? He could not choose but wonder. But another scream came, bidding him make haste, or it would be worse for him, and he bent his head and went to fetch the gin.

In the meantime Kate’s fury leaped, crackled, and burnt with the fierceness of a house in the throes of conflagration, and in the smoke-cloud of hatred which enveloped her, only fragments of ideas and sensations flashed like falling sparks through her mind. Up and down the room she walked swinging her arms, only hesitating for some new object whereon to wreak new fury. Suddenly it struck her that Dick had been too long away—that he was keeping her waiting on purpose; and grinding her teeth, she muttered:

‘Oh, the beast! Would he—would he keep me waiting, and since nine this morning I’ve been alone!’

In an instant her resolve was taken. It came to her sullenly, obtusely, like the instinct of revenge to an animal. She did not stop to consider what she was doing, but, seizing a large stick, the handle of a brush that happened to have been broken, she stationed herself at the top of the landing. A feverish tremor agitated her as she waited in the semi-darkness of the stairs. But at last she heard the door open, and Dick came up slowly with his usual heavy tread. She made neither sign nor stir, but allowed him to get past her, and then, raising the brush-handle, she landed him one across the back. The poor man uttered a long cry, and the crash of broken glass was heard.

‘What did you hit me like that for?’ he cried, holding himself with both hands.

‘You beast, you! I’ll teach you to keep me waiting! You would, would you! Do you want another? Go into the sitting-room.’

Dick obeyed humbly and in silence. His only hope was that the landlady had not been awakened, and he felt uneasily at his pockets, through which he could feel the gin dripping down his legs.

‘Well, have you brought the drink I sent you for? Where is it?’

‘Well,’ replied Dick, desirous of conciliating at any price, ‘it was in my pocket, but when you hit me with that stick you broke it.’

‘I broke it?’ cried Kate, her eyes glistening with fire.

‘Yes, dear, you did; it wasn’t my fault.’

‘Wasn’t your fault! Oh, you horrid wretch! you put it there on purpose that I should break it.’

‘Oh, now really, Kate,’ he cried, shocked by the unfairness of the accusation, ‘how could I know that you were going to hit me there?’

‘I don’t know and I don’t care; what’s that to me? But what I’m sure of is that you always want to spite me, that you hate me, that you would wish to see me dead, so that you might marry Mrs. Forest.’

‘I can’t think how you can say such things. I’ve often told you that Mrs. Forest and I - ‘

‘Oh! don’t bother me. I’m not such a fool. I know she keeps you, and she will have to pay me a drink to-night. Go and get another bottle of gin; and mind you pay for it with the money she gave you to-day. Yes, she shall stand me a drink to-night!’

‘I give you my word I haven’t another penny-piece upon me; it’s just the accident - ‘

But Dick did not get time to finish the sentence; he was interrupted by a heavy blow across the face, and like a panther that has tasted blood, she rushed at him again, screaming all the while: ‘Oh, you’ve no money! You liar! you liar! So you would make me believe that she does not give you money, that you have no money of hers in your pocket. You would keep it all for yourself; but you shan’t, no, you shan’t, for I will tear it from you and throw it in your face! Oh, that filthy money! that filthy money!’

The patience with which he bore with her was truly angelic. He might easily have felled her to the ground with one stroke, but he contented himself with merely warding off the blows she aimed at him. From his great height and strength, he was easily able to do this, and she struck at him with her little womanish arms as she might against a door.

‘Take down your hands,’ she screamed, exasperated to a last degree. ‘You would strike me, would you? You beast! I know you would.’

Her rage had now reached its height. Showing her clenched teeth, she foamed at the mouth, the bloodshot eyes protruded from their sockets, and her voice grew more and more harsh and discordant. But, although the excited brain gave strength to the muscles and energy to the will, unarmed she could do nothing against Dick, and suddenly becoming conscious of this she rushed to the fireplace and seized the poker. With one sweep of the arm she cleared the mantel-board, and the mirror came in for a tremendous blow as she advanced round the table brandishing her weapon; but, heedless of the shattered glass, she followed in pursuit of Dick, who continued to defend himself dexterously with a chair. And it is difficult to say how long this combat might have lasted if Dick’s attention had not been interrupted by the view of the

landlady's face at the door; and so touched was he by the woman's dismay when she looked upon her broken furniture, that he forgot to guard himself from the poker. Kate took advantage of the occasion and whirled the weapon round her head. He saw it descending in time, and half warded off the blow; but it came down with awful force on the forearm, and glancing off, inflicted a severe scalp wound. The landlady screamed 'Murder!' and Dick, seeing that matters had come to a crisis, closed in upon his wife, and undeterred by yells and struggles, pinioned her and forced her into a chair.

'Oh, dear! Oh, dear! You're all bleeding, sir,' cried the landlady; 'she has nearly killed you.'

'Never mind me. But what are we to do? I think she has gone mad this time.'

'That's what I think,' said the landlady, trying to make herself heard above Kate's shrieks.

'Well, then, go and fetch a doctor, and let's hear what he has to say,' replied Dick, as he changed his grip on Kate's arm, for in a desperate struggle she had nearly succeeded in wrenching herself free. The landlady retreated precipitately towards the door.

'Well, will you go?'

'Yes, yes, I'll run at once.'

'You'd better,' yelled the mad woman after her. 'I'll give it to you! Let me go! Let me go, will you?'

But Dick never ceased his hold of her, and the blood, dripping upon her, trickled in large drops into her ears, and down into her neck and bosom.

'You're spitting on me, you beast! You filthy beast! I'll pay you out for this.' Then she perceived that it was blood; the intonation of her voice changed, and in terror she screamed, 'Murder! murder! He's murdering me! Is there no one here to save me?'

The minutes seemed like eternities. Dick felt himself growing faint, but should he lose his power over her before the doctor arrived, the consequences might be fatal to himself, so he struggled with her for very life.

At last the door was opened, and a man walked into the room, tripping in so doing over a piece of the broken mirror. It was the doctor, and accustomed as he was to betray surprise at nothing, he could not repress a look of horror on catching sight of the scene around him.

The apartment was almost dismantled; chairs lay backless about the floor amid china shepherdesses and toreadors; pictures were thrown over the sofa, and a huge pile of wax fruit—apples and purple grapes—was partially reflected in a large piece of mirror that had fallen across the hearthrug.

'Come, help me to hold her,' said Dick, raising his blood-stained face.

With a quick movement the doctor took possession of Kate's arms. 'Give me a sheet from the next room; I'll soon make her fast.'

The threat of being tied had its effect. Kate became quieter, and after some trouble they succeeded in carrying her into the next room and laying her on the bed. There she rolled convulsively, beating the pillows with her arms. The landlady stationed herself at the door to give notice of any further manifestation of fury, whilst Dick explained the circumstances of the case to the doctor.

After a short consultation, he agreed to sign an order declaring that in his opinion Mrs. Lennox was a dangerous lunatic.

'Will that be enough,' said Dick, 'to place her in an asylum?'

‘No, you’ll have to get the opinion of another doctor.’

The possibility of being able to rid himself of her was to him like the sudden dawning of a new life, and Dick rushed off, bleeding, haggard, wild-looking as he was, to seek for another doctor who would concur in the judgment of the first, asking himself if it were possible to see Kate in her present position, and say conscientiously that she was a person who could be safely trusted with her liberty? And to his great joy this view was taken by the second authority consulted, and having placed his wife under lock and key, Dick lay down to rest a happier man than he had been for many a day. The position in his mind was, of course, the means he should adopt to place her in the asylum. Force was not to be thought of; persuasion must be first tried. So far he was decided, but as to the arguments he should advance to induce her to give up her liberty he knew nothing, nor did he attempt to formulate any scheme, and when he entered the bedroom next morning he relied more on the hope of finding her repentant, and appealing to and working on her feelings of remorse than anything else. ‘The whole thing,’ as he put it, ‘depended upon the humour he should find her in.’

And he found her with stains of blood still upon her face, amid the broken furniture, and she asked calmly but with intense emotion:

‘Dick, did he say I was mad?’

‘Well, dear, I don’t know that he said you were mad except when you were the worse for drink, but he said - ‘

‘That I might become mad,’ she interposed, ‘if I don’t abstain from drink. Did he say that?’

‘Well, it was something like that, Kate. You know I only just escaped with my life.’

‘Only just escaped with your life, Dick! Oh, if I’d killed you, if I’d killed you! If I’d seen you lying dead at my feet!’ and unable to think further she fell on her knees and reached out her arms to him. But he did not take her to his bosom, and she sobbed till, touched to the heart, he strove to console her with kind words, never forgetting, however, to introduce a hint that she was not responsible for her actions.

‘Then I’m really downright mad?’ said Kate, raising her tear-stained face from her arms. ‘Did the doctor say so?’

This was by far too direct a question for Dick to answer; it were better to equivocate.

‘Well, my dear—mad? He didn’t say that you were always mad, but he said you were liable to fits, and that if you didn’t take care those fits would grow upon you, and you would become - ‘

Then he hesitated as he always did before a direct statement.

‘But what did he say I must do to get well?’

‘He advised that you should go to a home where you would not be able to get hold of any liquor and would be looked after’

‘You mean a madhouse. You wouldn’t put me in a madhouse, Dick?’

‘I wouldn’t put you anywhere where you didn’t like to go; but he said nothing about a madhouse.’

‘What did he say, then?’

‘He spoke merely of one of those houses which are under medical supervision, and where anyone can go and live for a time; a kind of hospital, you know.’

The argument was continued for an hour or more. Kate wept and protested against being locked up as a mad woman; while he, conscious of the strong hold he had over her, reminded her in a thousand ways of the danger she ran of awakening one morning to find herself a murderess. Yet it is difficult to persuade anyone voluntarily to enter a lunatic asylum, no matter how irrefutable the reasons advanced may be, and it was not until Dick on one side skilfully threatened her with separation, and tempted her on the other with the hope of being cured of her vice and living with him happily ever afterwards, that she consented to enter Dr. — - ‘s private asylum, Craven Street, Bloomsbury. But even then the battle was not won, for when he suggested going off there at once, he very nearly brought another fit of passion down on his head. It was only the extreme lassitude and debility produced from the excesses of last night that saved him.

‘Oh, Dick, dear! if you only knew how I love you! I would give my last drop of blood to save you from harm.’

‘I know you would, dear; it’s the fault of that confounded drink,’ he answered, his heart tense with the hope of being rid of her. Then the packing began. Kate sat disconsolate on the sofa, and watched Dick folding up her dresses and petticoats. It seemed to her that everything had ended, and wearily she collected the pearls which had been scattered in last night’s skirmishing. Some had been trodden on, others were lost, and only about half the original number could be found, and shaken with nervousness and lassitude, Kate cried and wrung her hands. Dick sat next her, kind, huge, and indifferent, even as the world itself.

‘But you’ll come and see me? You promise me that you’ll come—that you’ll come very often.’

‘Yes, dear, I’ll come two or three times a week; but I hope that you’ll be well soon—very soon.’

Chapter XXVIII

The hope Dick expressed that his wife would soon be well enough to return home was, of course, untrue, his hope being that she would never cross the doors of the house in Bloomsbury whither he was taking her. The empty bed awaiting him was so great a relief that he fell on his knees before it and prayed that the doctors might judge her to be insane, unsafe to be at large. To wake up in the morning alone in his bed, and to be free to go forth to his business without question seemed to him like Heaven. But the pleasures of Heaven last for eternity, and Dick's delight lasted but for two days. Two days after Kate had gone into the asylum a letter came from one of the doctors saying that Mrs. Lennox was not insane, and would have to be discharged.

Dick sank into a chair and lay there almost stunned, plunged in despair that was like a thick fog, and it did not lift until the door opened and Kate stood before him again.

He raised his head and looked at her stupidly, and interpreting his vacant face, she said:

'Dick, you're sorry to have me back again.'

'Sorry, Kate? Well, if things were different I shouldn't be sorry. But you see the blow you struck me with the poker very nearly did for me; I haven't been the same man since.'

'Well,' she said, 'I must go back to the asylum or the home, whatever you call it, and tell them that I am mad.'

'There's no use in doing that, Kate, they wouldn't believe you. Here is the letter I've just received; read it.'

'But, Dick, there must be some way out of this dreadful trouble, and yet there doesn't seem to be any. Try to think, dear, try to think. Can you think of anything, dear? I don't think I shall give way again. If I only had something to do; it's because I'm always alone; because I love you; because I'm jealous of that woman.'

'But, Kate, if I stop here with you all day we shall starve. I must go to business.'

'Ah, business! Business! If I could go to business too. The days when we used to rehearse went merrily enough.'

'You were the best Clairette I ever saw,' Dick answered; 'better than Paola Mariee, and I ought to know, for I rehearsed you both.'

'I shall never play Clairette again,' Kate said sadly. 'I've lost my figure and the part requires a waist.'

'You might get your waist again,' Dick said, and the words seemed to him extraordinarily silly, but he had to say something.

'If I could only get to work again,' she muttered to herself, and then turning to Dick—

'Dick, if I could get to work again; any part would do; it doesn't matter how small, just to give me something to think about, that's all, to keep my mind off it. If the baby had not died I should have had her to look after and that would have done just as well as a part. But I've disgraced you in company; I don't blame you, you couldn't have me in it, and I couldn't bring myself to sing in that opera.'

‘Yes, you would only break out again, Kate. Those jealous fits are terrible. You think you could restrain yourself, but you couldn’t; and all that would come of a row between you and Mrs. Forest would be that I should lose my job.’

‘I know, Dick, I know,’ Kate cried painfully, ‘but I promise you that I never will again. You may go where you please and do what you please. I will never say a word to you again.’

‘I’m sure you believe all that you say, Kate, but I cannot get you a job. I may hear of something. Meanwhile— - ‘

‘Meanwhile I shall have to stay here and alone and no way of escaping from the hours, those long dreary hours, no way but one. Dick, I’m sorry they did not keep me in the asylum, it would have been better for both of us if they had; and if I could go back there again, if you will take me back, I will try to deceive the doctors.’

‘You mean, Kate, that you would play the mad woman? I doubt if any woman could do it sufficiently well to deceive the doctors. There was an Italian woman,’ and they talked of the great Italian actress for some time and then Dick said: ‘Well, Kate, I must be about my business. I’m sorry to leave you.’

‘No, Dick, you’re not.’

‘I am, dear, in a way. But if I hear of anything— - ‘ and he left the house knowing that there was no further hope for himself. He was tied to her and might be killed by her in his sleep, but that would not matter. What did matter was the thought that was always at the back of his mind, that she was alone in that Islington lodging-house craving for drink, striving to resist it, falling back into drink and might be coming down raving to the theatre to insult him before the company. Insult him before the company! That had been done, she had done her worst, and he was indifferent whether she came again, only she must not meet Mrs. Forest. On the whole he felt that his sorrow was with Kate herself rather than himself or with Mrs. Forest. ‘God only knows,’ he said as he rushed down the stairs, ‘what will become of her.’

Kate was asking herself the same question—what was to become of her? Would it be possible for her to find work to do that would keep her mind away from the drink? She seemed for the moment free from all craving, but she knew what the craving is, how overpowering in the throat it is, and how when one has got one mouthful one must go on and on, so intense is the delight of alcohol in the throat of the drunkard. But there was no craving upon her, and it might never come again. Every morning she awoke in great fear, but was glad to find that there was no craving in her throat, and when she went out she rejoiced that the public-houses offered no attraction to her. She became brave; and fear turned to contempt, and at the bottom of her heart she began to jeer at the demon which had conquered and brought her to ruin and which she had in turn conquered. But there was a last mockery she did not dare, for she knew that the demon was but biding his time. He seemed, however, to go on biding it, and Dick, finding Kate reasonable every evening, came home to dinner earlier so that the day should not appear to her intolerably long. But his business often detained him, and one night coming home late he noticed that she looked more sullen than usual, that her eyes drooped as if she had been drinking. A month of scenes of violence followed; ‘not a single day as far as I can remember for a fortnight’ he said one day on leaving the house and running to catch his bus to the Strand, ‘have we had a quiet evening.’ When he returned that night she ran at him with a knife, and he had only just time to ward off the blow. The house rang with shrieks and cries of all sorts, and the Lennoxes were driven from one lodging-house to another. Trousers, dresses, hats, boots and shoes, were all pawned. The comic and the pitiful are but two sides of the same thing, and it was at once comic and pitiful to see Dick, with one of the tails of his coat lost in the scrimmage, talking at one o’clock in the morning to

a dispassionate policeman, while from the top windows the high treble voice of a woman disturbed the sullen tranquillity of the London night.

And yet Dick continued with her—continued to allow himself to be beaten, scratched, torn to pieces almost as he would be by a wild beast. Human nature can habituate itself even to pain, and it was so with him. He knew that his present life was as a Nessus shirt on his back, and yet he couldn't make up his mind to have done with it. In the first place, he pitied his wife; in the second, he did not know how to leave her; and it was not until after another row with Kate for having been down to the theatre that he summoned up courage to walk out of the house with a fixed determination never to return again. Kate was too tipsy at the time to pay much attention to the announcement he made to her as he left the room. Besides, 'Wolf!' had been cried so often that it had now lost its terror in her ears, and it was not until next day that she began to experience any very certain fear that Dick and she had at last parted for ever. But when, with a clammy, thirsty mouth, she sat rocking herself wearily, and the long idleness of the morning hours became haunted with irritating remembrances of her shameful conduct, of the cruel life she led the man she loved, the black gulf of eternal separation became, as it were, etched upon her mind; and she heard the cold depths reverberating with vain words and foolish prayers. Then her thin hands trembled on her black dress, and waves of shivering passed over her. She thought involuntarily that a little brandy might give her strength, and as soon hated herself for the thought. It was brandy that had brought her to this. She would never touch it again. But Dick had not left her for ever; he would come back to her; she could not live without him. It was terrible! She would go to him, and on her knees beg his pardon for all she had done. He would forgive her. He must forgive her. Such were the fugitive thoughts that flashed through Kate's mind as she hurried to and fro, seeking for her bonnet and shawl. She would go down to the theatre and find him; she would be sure to hear news of him there, she said, as she strove to brush away the mist that obscured her eyes. She could see nothing; things seemed to change their places, and so terrible were the palpitations of her heart that she was forced to cling to any piece of furniture within reach. But by walking very slowly she contrived to reach the stage-door of the Opéra Comique, feeling very weak and ill.

'Is Mr. Lennox in?' she asked, at the same time trying to look conciliatingly at the hard-faced hall-keeper.

'No, ma'am, he ain't,' was the reply.

'Who attended the rehearsal to-day, then?'

'There was no rehearsal to-day, ma'am—leastways Mr. Lennox dismissed the rehearsal at half-past twelve.'

'And why?'

'Ah! that I cannot tell you.'

'Could you tell me where Mr. Lennox would be likely to be found?'

'Indeed I couldn't, ma'am; I believe he's gone into the country.'

'Gone into the country!' echoed Kate.

'But may I ask, ma'am, if you be Mrs. Lennox? Because if you be, Mr. Lennox left a letter to be given to you in case you called.'

Her eyes brightened at the idea of a letter. To know the worst would be better than a horrible uncertainty, and she said eagerly:

'Yes, I'm Mrs. Lennox; give me the letter.'

The hall-keeper handed it to her, and she walked out of the narrow passage into the street, so as to be free from observation. With anxious fingers she tore open the envelope, and read,

'MY DEAR KATE,

'It must be now as clear to you as it is to me that it is quite impossible for us to go on living together. There is no use in our again discussing the whys and the wherefores; we had much better accept the facts of the case in silence, and mutually save each other the pain of trying to alter what cannot be altered.

'I have arranged to allow you two pounds a week. This sum will be paid to you every Saturday, by applying to Messrs. Jackson and Co., Solicitors, Arundel Street, Strand.

'Yours very affectionately,
'RICHARD LENNOX.'

Kate mechanically repeated the last words as she walked gloomily through the glare of the day. 'Two pounds a week.' she said, and with nothing else; not a friend, and the thought passed through her mind that she could not have a friend, she had fallen too low, yet from no fault of her own nor Dick's, and it was that that frightened her. A terrible sense of loneliness, of desolation, was created in her heart. For her the world seemed to have ended, and she saw the streets and passers-by with the same vague, irresponsible gaze as a solitary figure would the universal ruin caused by an earthquake. She had no friends, no occupation, no interest of any kind in life; everything had slipped from her, and she shivered with a sense of nakedness, of moral destitution. Nothing was left to her, and yet she felt, she lived, she was conscious. Oh yes, horribly conscious. And that was the worst; and she asked herself why she could not pass out of sight, out of hearing and feeling of all the crying misery with which she was surrounded, and in a state of emotive somnambulism she walked through the crowds till she was startled from her dreams by hearing a voice calling after her, 'Kate! Kate!—Mrs. Lennox!'

It was Montgomery.

'I'm so glad to have met you—so glad, indeed, for we have not seen much of each other. I don't know how it was, but somehow it seemed to me that Dick did not want me to go and see you. I never could make out why, for he couldn't have been jealous of me,' he added a little bitterly. 'But perhaps you've not heard that it's all up as regards my piece at the Opéra Comique,' he continued, not noticing Kate's dejection in his excitement.

'No, I haven't heard,' she answered mechanically.

'It doesn't matter much, though, for I've just been down to the Gaiety, and pretty well settled that it's to be done in Manchester, at the Prince's; so you see I don't let the grass grow under my feet, for my row with Mrs. Forest only occurred this morning. But what's the matter, Kate? What has happened?'

'Oh, nothing, nothing. Tell me about Mrs. Forest first; I want to know.'

'Well, it's the funniest thing you ever heard in your life; but you won't tell Dick, because he forbade me ever to speak to you about Mrs. Forest—not that there is anything but business between them; that I swear to you. But do tell me, Kate, what is the matter? I never saw you look so sad in my life. Have you had any bad news?'

'No, no. Tell me about Mrs. Forest and your piece; I want to hear,' she exclaimed excitedly.

'Well, this is it,' said Montgomery, who saw in a glance that she was not to be contradicted, and that he had better get on with his story. 'In the first place, you know that the old creature

has gone in for writing librettos herself, and has finished one about Buddhism, an absurdity; the opening chorus is fifty lines long, but she won't cut one; but I'll tell you about that after. I was to get one hundred for setting this blessed production to music, and it was to follow my own piece, which was in rehearsal. Well, like a great fool, I was explaining to Dubois the bosh I was writing by the yard for this infernal opera of hers. I couldn't help it; she wouldn't take advice on any point. She has written the song of the Sun-god in hexameters. I don't know what hexameters are, but I would as soon set Bradshaw—leaving St. Pancras nine twenty-five, arriving at—ha! ha! ha!—with a puff, puff accompaniment on the trombone.'

'Go on with the story,' cried Kate.

'Well, I was explaining all this,' said Montgomery, suddenly growing serious, 'when out she darted from behind the other wing—I never knew she was there. She called me a thief, and said she wouldn't have me another five minutes in her theatre. Monti, the Italian composer, was sent for. I was shoved out, bag and baggage, and there will be no more rehearsals till the new music is ready. That's all.'

'I'm very sorry for you—very sorry,' said Kate very quietly, and she raised her hand to brush away a tear.

'Oh, I don't care; I'd sooner have the piece done in Manchester. Of course it's a bore, losing a hundred pounds. But, oh, Kate! do tell me what's the matter; you know you can confide in me; you know I'm your friend.'

At these kind words the cold deadly grief that encircled Kate's heart like a band of steel melted, and she wept profusely. Montgomery drew her arm into his and pleaded and begged to be told the reason of these tears; but she could make no answer, and pressed Dick's letter into his hand with a passionate gesture. He read it at a glance, and then hesitated, unable to make up his mind as to what he should do. No words seemed to him adequate wherewith to console her, and she was sobbing so bitterly that it was beginning to attract attention in the streets. They walked on without speaking for a few yards, Kate leaning upon Montgomery, until a hackney coachman, guessing that something was wrong signed to them with his whip.

'Where are you living, dear?'

Kate told him with some difficulty, and having directed the driver, he lapsed again into considering what course he should adopt. To put off the journey was impossible; Dick had promised to meet him there. It was now three o'clock. He had therefore three hours to spend with Kate—with the woman whom he had loved steadfastly throughout a loveless life. He had no word of blame for Dick; he had heard stories that had made his blood run cold; and yet, knowing her faults as he did, he would have opened his arms had it been possible, and crying through the fervour of years of waiting, said to her, 'Yes, I will believe in you; believe in me and you shall be happy.' There had never been a secret between them; their souls had been for ever as if in communication; and the love, unacknowledged in words, had long been as sunlight and moonlight, lighting the spaces of their dream-life. To the woman it had been as a distant star whose pale light was a presage of quietude in hours of vexation; to the man it seemed as a far Elysium radiant with sweet longing, large hopes that waxed but never waned, and where the sweet breezes of eternal felicity blew in musical cadence.

And yet he was deceived in nothing. He knew now as he had known before, that although this dream might haunt him for ever, he should never hold it in his arms nor press it to his lips; and in the midst of this surging tide of misery there arose a desire that, glad in its own anguish, bade him increase the bitterness of these last hours by making a confession of his suffering; and, exulting savagely in the martyrdom he was preparing for himself, he said:

‘You know, Kate—I know you must know—you must have guessed that I care for you. I may as well tell you the truth now—you are the only woman I ever loved.’

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘I always thought you cared for me. You have been very kind—oh! very kind, and I often think of it. Ah! everybody has, all my life long, been very good to me; it is I alone who am to blame, who am in fault. I have, I know I have, been very wicked, and I don’t know why. I did not mean it; I know I didn’t, for I’m not at heart a wicked woman. I suppose things must have gone against me; that’s about all.’

Montgomery pushed his glasses higher on his nose, and after a long silence he said:

‘I’ve often thought that had you met me before you knew Dick, things might have been different. We should have got on better, although you might never have loved me so well.’

Kate raised her eyes, and she said:

‘No one will ever know how I have loved, how I still love that man. Oftentimes I think that had I loved him less I should have been a better wife. I think he loved me, but it was not the love I dreamed of. Like you, I was always sentimental, and Dick never cared for that sort of thing.’

‘I think I should have understood you better,’ said Montgomery; and the conversation came to a pause. A vision of the life of devotion spent at the feet of an ideal lover, that life of sacrifice and tenderness which had been her dream, and which she had so utterly failed to attain, again rose up to tantalize her like a glittering mirage: and she could not help wondering whether she would have realized this beautiful, this wonderful might-have-been if she had chosen this other man.

‘But I suppose you’ll make it up with Dick,’ said Montgomery somewhat harshly.

Kate awoke from her reverie with a start, and answered sorrowfully that she did not know, that she was afraid Dick would never forgive her again.

‘I don’t remember if I told you that I’m going to see him in Manchester; he promised to go up there to make some arrangements about my piece.’

‘No, you didn’t tell me.’

‘Well, I’ll speak to him. I’ll tell him I’ve seen you. I fancy I shall be able to make it all right,’ he added, with a feeble smile.

‘Oh! how good you are—how good you are,’ cried Kate, clasping her hands. ‘If he will only forgive me once again, I’ll promise, I’ll swear to him never to-to - ‘

Here Kate stopped abashed, and burying her face in her hands, she wept bitterly. The tenderness, the melancholy serenity of their interview, had somehow suddenly come to an end. Each was too much occupied with his or her thoughts to talk much, and the effort to find phrases grew more and more irritating. Both were very sad, and although they sighed when the clock struck the hour of farewell, they felt that to pass from one pain to another was in itself an assuagement. Kate accompanied Montgomery to the station. He seemed to her to be out of temper; she to him to be further away than ever. The explanation that had taken place between them had, if not broken, at least altered the old bonds of sympathy, without creating new ones; and they were discontented, even like children who remember for the first time that to-day is not yesterday.

They felt lonely watching the parallel lines of platforms; and when Montgomery waved his hand for the last time, and the train rolled into the luminous arch of sky that lay beyond the glass roofing, Kate turned away overpowered by grief and cruel recollections. When she got

home, the solitude of her room became unbearable; she wanted someone to see, someone to console her. She had a few shillings in her pocket, but she remembered her resolutions and for some time resented the impervious clutch of the temptation. But the sorrow that hung about her, that penetrated like a corrosive acid into the very marrow of her bones, grew momentarily more burning, more unendurable. Twenty times she tried to wrench it out of her heart. The landlady brought her up some tea; she could not drink it; it tasted like soapsuds in her mouth. Then, knowing well what the results would be, she resolved to go out for a walk.

Next day she was ill, and to pull herself together it was necessary to have a drink. It would not do to look too great a sight in the Solicitor's office where Dick had told her in his letter to go to get her money. There she found not two, but five pounds awaiting her, and this enabled her to keep up a stage of semi intoxication until the end of the week.

She at last woke up speechless, suffering terrible palpitations of the heart, but she had strength enough to ring her bell, and when the landlady came to her she nearly lost her balance and fell to the ground, so strenuously did Kate lean and cling to her for support. After gasping painfully for some moments Kate muttered: 'I'm dying. These palpitations and the pain in my side.'

The landlady asked if she would like to see the doctor, and with difficulty obtained her consent that the doctor should be sent for.

'I'll send at once,' she said.

'No, not at once,' Kate cried. 'Pour me out a little brandy and water, and I'll see how I am in the course of the day.'

The woman did as was desired, and Kate told her that she felt better, and that if it wasn't for the pains in her side she'd be all right.

The landlady looked a little incredulous; but her lodger had only been with her a fortnight, and so carefully had the brandy been hidden, and the inebriety concealed, that although she had her doubts, she was not yet satisfied that Kate was an habitual drunkard. Certainly appearances were against Mrs. Lennox; but as regards the brandy-bottle, she had watched it very carefully, and was convinced that scarcely more than six pennyworth of liquor went out of it daily. The good woman did not know how it was replenished from another bottle that came sometimes from under the mattress, sometimes out of the chimney. And the disappearance of the husband was satisfactorily accounted for by the announcement that he had gone to Manchester to produce a new piece. Besides, Mrs. Lennox was a very nice person; it was a pleasure to attend to her, and during the course of the afternoon Mrs. White called several times at the second floor to inquire after her lodger's health.

But there was no change for the better. Looking the picture of wretchedness, Kate lay back in her chair, declaring in low moans that she never felt so ill in her life—that the pain in her side was killing her. At first, Mrs. White seemed inclined to make light of all this complaining, but towards evening she began to grow alarmed, and urged that the doctor should be sent for.

'I assure you, ma'am,' she said, 'it's always better to see a doctor. The money is never thrown away; for even if there's nothing serious the matter, it eases one's mind to be told so.'

Kate was generally easy to persuade, but fearing that her secret drinking would be discovered, she declined for a long time to take medical advice. At last she was obliged to give way, and the die having been cast, she commenced to think how she might conceal part of the truth. Something of the coquetry of the actress returned to her, and, getting up from her chair, she went over to the glass to examine herself, and brushing back her hair, she said sorrowfully:

‘I’m a complete wreck. I can’t think what’s the matter with me, and I’ve lost all my hair. You’ve no idea, Mrs. White, of the beautiful hair I used to have; it used to fall in armfuls over my shoulders; now, it’s no more than a wisp.’

‘I think you’ve a great deal yet,’ replied Mrs. White, not wishing to discourage her.

‘And how yellow I am too!’

To this Mrs. White mumbled something that was inaudible, and Kate thought suddenly of her rouge-pot and hare’s-foot. Her ‘make-up,’ and all her little souvenirs of Dick, lay securely packed away in an old band-box.

‘Mrs. White,’ she said, ‘might I ask you to get me a jug of hot water?’

When the woman left the room, everything was spread hurriedly over the toilet-table. To see her, one would have thought that the call-boy had knocked at the door for the second time. A thin coating of cold cream was passed over the face and neck; then the powder-puff changed what was yellow into white, and the hare’s-foot gave a bloom to the cheeks. The pencil was not necessary, her eyebrows being by nature dark and well-defined. Then all disappeared again into the band-box, a drain was taken out of the bottle whilst she listened to steps on the stairs, and she had just time to get back to her chair when the doctor entered. She felt quite prepared to receive him. Mrs. White, who had come up at the same time, locked uneasily around; and, after hesitating about the confines of the room, she put the water-jug on the rosewood cabinet, and said:

‘I think I’ll leave you alone with the doctor, ma’am; if you want me you’ll ring.’

Mr. Hooper was a short, stout man, with a large bald forehead, and long black hair; his small eyes were watchful as a ferret’s, and his fat chubby hands were constantly laid on his knee-caps.

‘I met Mrs. White’s servant in the street,’ he said, looking at Kate as if he were trying to read through the rouge on her face, ‘so I came at once. Mrs. White, with whom I was speaking downstairs, tells me that you’re suffering from a pain in your side.’

‘Yes, doctor, on the right side; and I’ve not been feeling very well lately.’

‘Is your appetite good? Will you let me feel your pulse?’

‘No, I’ve scarcely any appetite at all—particularly in the morning. I can’t touch anything for breakfast.’

‘Don’t you care to drink anything? Aren’t you thirsty?’

Kate would have liked to have told a lie, but fearing that she might endanger her life by doing so, she answered:

‘Oh yes! I’m constantly very thirsty.’

‘Especially at night-time?’

It was irritating to have your life read thus; and Kate felt angry when she saw this dispassionate man watching the brandy-bottle, which she had forgotten to put away.

‘Do you ever find it necessary to take any stimulant?’

Grasping at the word ‘necessary,’ she replied:

‘Yes, doctor; my life isn’t a very happy one, and I often feel so low, so depressed as it were, that if I didn’t take a little something to keep me up I think I should do away with myself.’

‘Your husband is an actor, I believe?’

‘Yes; but he’s at present up in Manchester, producing a new piece. I’m on the stage, too. I’ve been playing a round of leading parts in the provinces, but since I’ve been in London I’ve been out of an engagement.’

‘I just asked you because I noticed you used a little powder, you know, on the face. Of course, I can’t judge at present what your complexion is; but have you noticed any yellowness about the skin lately?’

The first instinct of a woman who drinks is to conceal her vice, and although she was talking to a doctor, Kate was again conscious of a feeling of resentment against the merciless eyes which saw through all the secrets of her life. But, cowed, as it were, by the certitude expressed by the doctor’s looks and words, she strove to equivocate, and answered humbly that she noticed her skin was not looking as clear as it used to. Dr. Hooper then questioned her further. He asked if she suffered from a sense of uncomfortable tension, fullness, weight, especially after meals; if she felt any pain in her right shoulder? and she confessed that he was right in all his surmises.

‘Do tell me, doctor, what is the matter with me. I assure you I’d really much sooner know the worst.’

But the doctor did not seem inclined to be communicative, and in reply to her question he merely mumbled something to the effect that the liver was out of order.

‘I will send you over some medicine this evening,’ he said, ‘and if you don’t feel better to-morrow send round for me, and don’t attempt to get up. I think,’ he added, as he took up his hat to go, ‘I shall be able to put you all right. But you must follow my instructions; you mustn’t frighten yourself, and take as little of that stimulant as possible.’

Kate answered that it was not her custom to take too much, and she tried to look surprised at the warning. She nevertheless derived a good deal of comfort from the doctor’s visit, and during the course of the evening succeeded in persuading herself that her fears of the morning were ill-founded and, putting the medicine that was sent her away for the present, she helped herself from a bottle that was hidden in the upholstery. The fact of having a long letter to write to Dick explaining her conduct, made it quite necessary that she should take something to keep her up; and sitting in her lonely room, she drank on steadily until midnight, when she could only just drag her clothes from her back and throw herself stupidly into bed. There she passed a night full of livid-hued nightmares, from which she awoke shivering, and suffering from terrible palpitations of the heart. The silence of the house filled her with terrors, cold and obtuse as the dreams from which she awakened. Strength to scream for help she had none; and thinking she was going to die, she sought for relief and consolation in the bottle that lay hidden under the carpet. When the drink took effect upon her she broke out into a profuse perspiration, and she managed to get a little sleep; but when her breakfast was brought up about eleven o’clock in the morning, so ill did she seem that the servant, fearing she was going to drop down dead, begged to be allowed to fetch the doctor. But rejecting all offers of assistance, Kate lay moaning in an armchair, unable even to taste the cup of tea that the maid pressed upon her. She consented to take some of the medicines that were ordered her, but whatever good they might have produced was discounted by the constant nip-drinking she kept up during the afternoon. The next day she was very ill indeed, and Mrs. White, greatly alarmed, insisted on sending for Dr. Hooper.

He did not seem astonished at the change in his patient. Calmly and quietly he watched for some moments in silence.

The bed had curtains of a red and antiquated material, and these contrasted with the paleness of the sheets wherein Kate lay, tossing feverishly. Most of the ‘make-up’ had been rubbed away from her face; and through patches of red and white the yellow skin started like blisters. She was slightly delirious, and when the doctor took her hand to feel her pulse she gazed at him with her big staring eyes and spoke volubly and excitedly.

‘Oh! I’m so glad you’ve come, for I wanted to speak to you about my husband. I think I told you that he’d gone to Manchester to produce a new piece. I don’t know if I led you to suppose that he’d deserted me, but if I did I was wrong to do so, for he has done nothing of the kind. It’s true that we aren’t very happy together, but I dare say that is my fault. I never was, I know, as good a wife to him as I intended to be; but then, he made me jealous and sometimes I was mad. Yes, I think I must have been mad to have spoken to him in the way I did. Anyhow, it doesn’t matter now, does it, doctor? But I don’t know what I’m saying. Still, you won’t mention that I’ve told you anything. It’s as likely as not that he’ll forgive me, just as he did before; and we may yet be as happy as we were at Blackpool. You won’t tell him, will you, doctor?’

‘No, no, I won’t,’ said Dr. Hooper, quietly and firmly. ‘But you mustn’t talk as much as you do; if you want to see your husband, you must get well first.’

‘Oh yes! I must get well; but tell me, doctor, how long will that take?’

‘Not very long, if you will keep quiet and do what I tell you. I want you to tell me how the pain in your side is?’

‘Very bad; far worse than when I saw you last. I feel it now in my right shoulder as well.’

‘But your side—is it sore when you touch it? Will you let me feel?’

Without waiting for a reply, he passed his hand under the sheet. ‘Is it there that it pains you?’

‘Yes, yes. Oh! You’re hurting me.’

Then the doctor walked aside with the landlady, who had been watching the examination of the patient with anxious eyes. She said:

‘Do you think it’s anything very dangerous? Is it contagious? Had I better send her to the hospital?’

‘No, I should scarcely think it worth while doing that; she will be well in a week, that is to say if she is properly looked after. She’s suffering from acute congestion of the liver, brought on by - ‘

‘By drink,’ said Mrs. White. ‘I suspected as much.’

‘You’ve too much to do, Mrs. White, with all your children, to give up your time to nursing her; I shall send someone round as soon as possible, but, in the meantime, will you see that her diet is regulated to half a cup of beef-tea, every hour or so. If she complains of thirst, let her have some milk to drink, and you may mix a little brandy with it. To-night I shall send round a sleeping-draught.’

‘You’re sure, doctor, there is nothing catching, for you know that, with all my children in the house— - ‘

‘You need not be alarmed, Mrs. White.’

‘But do you think, doctor, it will be an expensive illness? for I know very little about her circumstances.’

‘I expect she’ll be all right in a week or ten days, but what I fear for is her future. I’ve had a good deal of experience in such matters, and I’ve never known a case of a woman who cured herself of the vice of intemperance. A man sometimes, a woman never.’

The landlady sighed and referred to all she had gone through during poor Mr. White’s lifetime; the doctor spoke confidingly of a lady who was at present under his charge; and, apparently overcome with pity for suffering humanity, they descended the staircase together. On the doorstep the conversation was continued.

‘Very well, then, doctor, I will take your advice; but at the end of a week or so, when she is quite recovered, I shall tell her that I’ve let her rooms. For, as you say, a woman rarely cures herself, and before the children the example would be dreadful.’

‘I expect to see her on her feet in about that time, then you can do as you please. I shall call tomorrow.’

Next day the professional nurse took her place by the bedside. The sinapism which the doctor ordered was applied to the hepatic region, and a small dose of calomel was administered.

Under this treatment she improved rapidly; but unfortunately, as her health returned her taste for drink increased in a like proportion. Indeed, it was almost impossible to keep her from it, and on one occasion she tried very cunningly to outwit the nurse, who had fallen asleep in her chair. Waiting patiently until the woman’s snoring had become sufficiently regular to warrant the possibility of a successful attempt being made on the brandy-bottle, Kate slipped noiselessly out of bed. The unseen night-light cast a rosy glow over the convex side of the basin, without, however, disturbing the bare darkness of the wall, Kate knew that all the bottles stood in a line upon the chest of drawers, but it was difficult to distinguish one from the other, and the jingling she made as she fumbled amid them awoke the nurse, who divining at once what was happening, arose quickly from her chair and advancing rapidly towards her, said:

‘No, ma’am, I really can’t allow it; it’s against the doctor’s orders.’

‘I’m not going to die of thirst to please any doctor. I was only going to take a little milk, I suppose there’s no harm in that?’

‘Not the least, ma’am, and if you’d called me you should have had it.’

It was owing to this fortuitous intervention that when Dr. Hooper called a couple of days after to see his patient he was able to certify to a remarkable change for the better in her. All the distressing symptoms had disappeared; the pain in her side had died away; the complexion was clearer. He therefore thought himself justified in ordering for her lunch a little fish and some weak brandy and water; and to Kate, who had not eaten any solid food for several days, this first meal took the importance of a very exceptional event. Sitting by her bedside Dr. Hooper spoke to her.

‘Now, Mrs. Lennox,’ he said, ‘I want to give you a word of warning. I’ve seen you through what I must specify as a serious illness; dangerous I will not call it, although I might do so if I were to look into the future and anticipate the development the disease will most certainly take, unless, indeed, you will be guided by me, and make a vow against all intoxicating liquors.’

At this direct allusion to her vice Kate stopped eating, and putting down the fork looked at the doctor.

‘Now, Mrs. Lennox, you mustn’t be angry,’ he continued in his kind way. ‘I’m speaking to you in my capacity as a medical man, and I must warn you against the continuous nip-

drinking which, of course, I can see you're in the habit of indulging in, and which was the cause of the illness from which you are recovering. I will not harrow your feelings by referring to all the cases that have come under my notice where shame, disgrace, ruin, and death were the result of that one melancholy failing—drink.'

'Oh, sir!' cried Kate, broken-hearted, 'if you only knew how unhappy I've been, how miserable I am, you would not speak to me so. I've my failing, it is true, but I'm driven to it. I love my husband better than anything in the world, and I see him mixed up always with a lot of girls at the theatre, and it sends me mad, and then I go to drink so as to forget.'

'We've all got our troubles; but it doesn't relieve us of the burden; it only makes us forget it for a short time, and then, when consciousness returns to us, we only remember it all the more bitterly. No, Mrs. Lennox, take my advice. In a few days, when you're well, go to your husband, demand his forgiveness, and resolve then never to touch spirits again.'

'It's very good of you to speak to me in this way,' said Kate, tearfully, 'and I will take your advice, The very first day that I am strong enough to walk down to the Strand I will go and see my husband, and if he will give me another trial, he will not, I swear to you, have cause to repent it. Oh!' she continued, 'you don't know how good he's been to me, how he has borne with me. If it hadn't been that he tried my temper by flirting with other women we might have been happy now.'

Then, as Kate proceeded to speak of her trials and temptations, she grew more and more excited and hysterical, until the doctor, fearing that she would bring on a relapse, was forced to plead an engagement and wish her good-bye.

As he left the room she cried after him, 'The first day I'm well enough to go out I'll go and see my husband.'

Chapter XXIX

The next few days passed like dreams. Kate's soul, tense with the longing for reconciliation, floated at ease over the sordid miseries that lay within and without her, and enraptured with expectation, she lived in a beautiful paradise of hope.

So certain did she feel of being able to cross out the last few years of her life, that her mind was scarcely clouded by a doubt of the possibility of his declining to forgive her—that he might even refuse to see her. The old days seemed charming to her, and looking back, even she seemed to have been perfect then. There her life appeared to have begun. She never thought of Hanley now. Ralph and Mrs. Ede were like dim shadows that had no concern in her existence. The potteries and the hills were as the recollections of childhood, dim and unimportant. The footlights and the applause of audiences were also dying echoes in her ears. Her life for the moment was concentrated in a loving memory of a Lancashire seashore and a rose-coloured room, where she used to sit on the knees of the man she adored. The languors and the mental weakness of convalescence were conducive to this state of mental exaltation. She loved him better than anyone else could love him; she would never touch brandy again. He would take her back, and they would live as the lovers did in all the novels she had ever read. These illusions filled Kate's mind like a scarf of white mist hanging around the face of a radiant morning, and as she lay back amid the pillows, or sat dreaming by the fireside in the long evenings that were no longer lonely to her, she formed plans, and considered how she should plead to Dick in this much-desired interview. During this period dozens of letters were written and destroyed, and it was not until the time arrived for her to go to the theatre to see him that she could decide upon what she could write. Then hastily she scribbled a note, but her hand trembled so much that before she had said half what she intended the paper was covered with blotched and blurred lines.

'It won't do to let him think I'm drunk again,' she said to herself, as she threw aside what she had written and read over one of her previous efforts. It ran as follows:

'MY DARLING DICK,—

'You will, I am sure, be sorry to hear that I have been very ill. I am now, however, much better; indeed, I may say quite recovered. During my illness I have been thinking over our quarrels, and I now see how badly, how wickedly, I have behaved to you on many occasions. I do not know, and I scarcely dared to hope, that you will ever forgive me, but I trust that you will not refuse to see me for a few minutes. I have not, I assure you, tasted spirits for some weeks, so you need not fear I will kick up a row. I will promise to be very quiet. I will not reproach you, nor get excited, nor raise my voice. I shall be very good, and will not detain you but for a very short time. You will not, you cannot, oh, my darling! deny me this one little request—to see you again, although only for a few minutes.

'Your affectionate wife,
'KATE'

Compared with the fervid thoughts of her brain, these words appeared to her weak and poor, but feeling that for the moment, at least, she could not add to their intensity, she set out on her walk, hoping to find her husband at the theatre.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening. A light, grey fog hung over the background of the streets, and the line of the housetops was almost lost in the morose shadows that fell from a soot-coloured sky. Here and there a chimney-stack or the sharp spire of a church tore the

muslin-like curtains of descending mist; and vague as the mist were her thoughts. The streets twisted, wriggling their luminous way through slime and gloom, whilst at every turning the broad, flaring windows of the public-houses marked the English highway. But Kate paid no attention to the red-lettered temptations. Docile and hopeful as a tired animal thinking of its stable, she walked through the dark crowd that pressed upon her, nor did she even notice when she was jostled, but went on, a heedless nondescript—a something in a black shawl and a quasi-respectable bonnet, a slippery stepping-stone between the low women who whispered and the workwoman who hurried home with the tin of evening beer in her hand. Like one held and guided by the power of a dream, she lost consciousness of all that was not of it. Thoughts of how Dick would receive her and forgive her were folded, entangled and broken within narrow limits of time; half an hour passed like a minute, and she found herself at the stage-door of the theatre. Drawing the letter from her pocket, she said to the hall-keeper:

‘Will you kindly give Mr. Lennox this letter? Has he arrived yet?’

‘Yes, but he’s busy for the moment. But,’ the man added, as he examined Kate’s features narrowly, ‘you’ll excuse me, I made a mistake; Mr. Lennox isn’t in the theatre.’

At that moment the swinging door was thrust open, and the call-boy screamed:

‘Mr. Lennox says you’re not to let Miss Thomas pass to-night, and if there are any letters for him I’m to take them in.’

‘Here’s one; will you give it to Mr. Lennox?’ said Kate, eagerly thrusting forward her note. ‘Say that I’m waiting for an answer.’

The stage-door keeper tried to interpose, but before he could explain himself the boy had rushed away.

‘All letters should be given to me,’ he growled as he turned away to argue with Miss Thomas, who had just arrived. In a few minutes the call-boy came back.

‘Will you please step this way,’ he said to Kate.

‘No, you shan’t,’ cried the hall-keeper; ‘if you try any nonsense with me I shall send round for a policeman.’

Kate started back frightened, thinking these words were addressed to her, but a glance showed her that she was mistaken.

‘Oh! how dare you talk to me like that? You’re an unsophisticated beast!’ cried Miss Thomas.

‘Pass under my arm, ma’am,’ said the hall-keeper; ‘I don’t want this one to get through.’ And amid a storm of violent words and the strains of distant music Kate went up a narrow staircase that creaked under the weight of a group of girls in strange dresses. When she got past them she saw Dick at the door of his room waiting for her. The table was covered with letters, the walls with bills announcing, ‘a great success.’

He took her hand and placed her in a chair, and at first it seemed doubtful who would break an awkward and irritating silence. At last Dick said:

‘I’m sorry to hear, Kate, that you’ve been ill; you’re looking well now.’

‘Yes, I’m better now,’ she replied drearily; ‘but perhaps if I’d died it would have been as well, for you can never love me again.’

‘You know, my dear,’ he said, equivocating, ‘that we didn’t get on well together.’

‘Oh, Dick! I know it. You were very good to me, and I made your life wretched on account of my jealousy; but I couldn’t help it, for I loved you better than a woman ever loved a man. I cannot tell you, I cannot find words to express how much I love you; you’re everything to me. I lived for your love; I’m dying of it. Yes, Dick, I’m dying for love of you; I feel it here; it devours me like a fire, and what is so strange is, that nothing seems real to me except you. I never think of anything but of things that concern you. Anything that ever belonged to you I treasure up as a relic. You know the chaplet of pearls I used to wear when we played *The Lovers Knot*. Well, I have them still, although all else has gone from me. The string was broken once or twice, and some of the pearls were lost, but I threaded them again, and it still goes round my neck. I was looking at them the other day, and it made me very sad, for it made me think of the happy days—ah, the very happy days!—we have had together before I took to ——. But I won’t speak of that. I’ve cured myself. Yes, I assure you, Dick, I’ve cured myself; and it is for that I’ve come to talk to you. Were I not sure that I would never touch brandy again I would not ask you to take me back, but I’d sooner die than do what I have done, for I know that I never will. Can you—will you—my own darling Dick, give me another trial?’

The victory hung in the balance, but at that moment a superb girl, in all the splendour of long green tights, and resplendent with breastplate and spear, flung open the door.

‘Look here, Dick,’ she began, but seeing Kate, she stopped short, and stammered out an apology.

‘I shall be down on the stage in a minute, dear,’ he said, rising from his chair. The door was shut, and they were again alone; but Kate felt that chance had gone against her. The interruption had, with a sudden shock, killed the emotions she had succeeded in awakening, and had supplied Dick with an answer that would lead him, by a way after his own heart, straight out of his difficulty.

‘My dear,’ he said, rising from his chair, ‘I’m glad you’ve given up the—you know what—for, between you and me, that was the cause of all our trouble; but, candidly speaking, I don’t think it would be advisable for us to live together, at least for the present, and I’ll tell you why. I know that you love me very much, but, as you said yourself just now, it’s your jealousy and the drink together that excites you, and leads up to those terrible rows. Now, the best plan would be for us to live apart, let us say for six months or so, until you’ve entirely got over your little weakness, you know; and then—why, then we’ll be as happy as we used to be at Blackpool in the dear old times long ago.’

‘Oh, Dick! don’t say that I must wait six months; I might be dead before then. But you’re not speaking the truth to me. You were just going to say that I might come back to you when the horrid girl came in. I know. Yes, I believe there’s something between you.’

‘Now, Kate, remember your promise not to kick up a row. I consented to see you because you said you wouldn’t be violent. Here’s your letter.’

‘I’m not going to be violent, Dick; but six months seems such a long time.’

‘It won’t be as long passing as you think. And now I must run away; they’re waiting for me on the stage. Have you seen the piece? Would you like to go in front?’

‘No, not to-night, Dick; I feel too sad. But won’t you kiss me before I go?’

Dick bent his face and kissed her; but there was a chill in the kiss that went to her heart, and she felt that his lips would never touch hers again. But she had no protest to make, and almost in silence she allowed herself to be shown out of the theatre. When she got into the mist she shivered a little, and drew her thin shawl tighter about her thin shoulders, and, with one of the

choruses still ringing in her ears, she walked in the direction of the Strand. Somehow her sorrow did not seem too great for her to bear. The interview had passed neither as badly nor as well as had been expected, and thinking of the six months of probation that lay before her, but without being in the least able to realize their meaning, she walked dreaming through the sloppy, fog-smelling streets. The lamps were now but like furred patches of yellow laid on a dead grey background, and a mud-bespattered crowd rolled in and out of the darkness. The roofs overhead were engulfed in the soot-coloured sky that seemed to be descending on the heads of the passengers. Men passed carrying parcels; the white necktie of a theatre-goer was caught sight of. From Lambeth, from Islington, from Pimlico, from all the dark corners where it had been lurking in the daytime, prostitution at the fading of the light, had descended on the town—portly matrons, very respectable in brown silk dresses and veils, stood in the corners of alleys and dingy courts, scorned by the younger generation; young girls of fifteen and sixteen going by in couples with wisps of dyed hair hanging about their shoulders, advertisements of their age; the elder taking the responsibility of choosing; Germans in long ulsters trafficked in guttural intonations; policemen on their beats could have looked less concerned. The English hung round the public-houses, enviously watching the arched insteps of the Frenchwomen tripping by. Smiles there were plenty, but the fog was so thick that even the Parisians lost their native levity and wished themselves back in Paris.

At the crossing of Wellington Street she stumbled against a small man who leaned against a doorway coughing violently. They stared at each other in profound astonishment, and then Kate said in a pained and broken voice:

‘Oh, Ralph! is it you?’

‘Yes, indeed it is. But to think of meeting you here in London!’

They had, for the second, in a sort of way, forgotten that they had once been man and wife, and after a pause Kate said:

‘But that’s just what I was thinking. What are you doing in London?’

Ralph was about to answer when he was cut short by a fit of coughing. His head sank into his chest, and his little body was shaken until it seemed as if it were going to break to pieces like a bundle of sticks. Kate looked at him pityingly, and passing unconsciously over the dividing years just as she might have done when they kept shop together in Hanley, she said:

‘Oh! you know you shouldn’t stop out in such weather as this: you’ll be breathless to-morrow.’

‘Oh no, I shan’t; I’ve got a new remedy. But I’ve lost my way; that’s the reason why I’m so late.’

‘Perhaps I can tell you. Where are you staying?’

‘In an hotel in Bedford Street, near Covent Garden.’

‘Well, then, this is your way; you’ve come too far.’

And passing again into the jostling crowd they walked on in silence side by side. A slanting cloud of fog had drifted from the river down into the street, creating a shivering and terrifying darkness. The cabs moved at walking pace, the huge omnibuses stopped belated, and their advertisements could not be read even when a block occurred close under a gas-lamp. The jewellers’ windows emitted the most light; but even gold and silver wares seemed to have become tarnished in the sickening atmosphere. Then the smell from fishmongers’ shops grew more sour as the assistant piled up the lobsters and flooded the marbles preparatory to

closing; and, just within the circle of vision, inhaling the greasy fragrance of soup, a woman in a blue bonnet loitered near a grating.

‘This is Bedford Street, I think,’ said Kate, ‘but it’s so dark that it’s impossible to see.’

‘I suppose you know London well?’ replied Ralph somewhat pointedly.

‘Pretty well, I’ve been here now for some time.’

For the last three or four minutes not a word had been spoken. Kate was surprised that Ralph was not angry with her; she wanted to speak to him of old times, but it was hard to break the ice of intervening years. At last, as they stopped before the door of a small family hotel, he said:

‘It’s now something like four years since we parted, ain’t it?’

The question startled her, and she answered nervously and hurriedly:

‘I suppose it is, but I’d better wish you good-bye now—you’re safe at home.’

‘Oh no! come in; you look so very tired, a glass of wine will do you good. Besides, what harm? Wasn’t I your husband once?’

‘Oh, Ralph! how can you?’

‘Why, there’s no reason why I shouldn’t hear how you’ve been getting on. We’re just like strangers, so many things have occurred; I’ve married since—but perhaps you didn’t hear of it?’

‘Married! Who did you marry?’

‘Well! I married your assistant, Hender.’

‘What, Hender your wife?’ said Kate, with an intonation of voice that was full of pain. A dagger thrust suddenly through her side as she went up the staircase could not have wounded her more cruelly than the news that the woman who had been her assistant now owned the house that once was hers. The story of the dog in the manger is as old as the world.

Through the windows of the little public sitting-room nothing was visible; everything was shrouded in the yellow curtain of fog. A commercial traveller had drawn off his boots, and was warming his slippered feet by the fire.

‘Dreadful weather, sir,’ said the man. ‘I’m afraid it won’t do your cough much good. Will you come near the fire?’

‘Thank you,’ said Ralph.

Kate mechanically drew forward a chair. It would be impossible for them to say a word, for the traveller was evidently inclined to be garrulous, and both wondered what they should do; but at that moment the chambermaid came to announce that the gentleman’s room was ready. He took up his boots and retired, leaving the two, who had once been husband and wife, alone; and yet it seemed as difficult as ever to speak of what was uppermost in their minds. Kate helped Ralph off with his great-coat, and she noticed that he looked thinner and paler. The servant brought up two glasses of grog, and when Kate had taken off her bonnet, she said: ‘Do you think I’m much altered?’

‘Well, since you ask me, Kate, I must say I don’t think you’re looking very well. You’re thinner than you used to be, and you’ve lost a good deal of your hair.’

‘I’ve only just recovered from a bad illness,’ she said, sighing, and as she raised the glass to her lips the gaslight defined the whole contour of her head. The thick hair that used to

encircle her pale prominent temples like rich velvet, looked now like a black silk band frayed and whitened at the seam.

‘But what have you been doing? Have things gone pretty well with you?’ said Ralph, whose breath came from him in a thin but continuous whistle. ‘What happened when I got my decree of divorce?’

‘Nothing particular for a while, but afterwards we were married.’

‘Oh!’ said Ralph, ‘so he married you, did he? Well, I shouldn’t have expected it of him. So we’re both married. Isn’t it odd? And meeting, too, in this way.’

‘Yes, many things have happened since then. I’ve been on the stage—travelling all over England.’

‘What! you on the stage, Kate?’ said Ralph, lifting his head from his hand. ‘Oh lord! oh lord! how—Ha! ha! oh! but I mustn’t la-ugh; I won’t be able to breathe.’

Kate turned to him almost angrily, and the ghost of the prima donna awakening in her, she said:

‘I don’t see what there is to laugh at. I’ve played all the leading parts, and in all the principal towns in England—Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds. The Newcastle Chronicle said my Serpolette was the best they’d seen.’

Ralph looked bewildered, like a man blinded for a moment by a sudden flash of lightning. He could not at once realize that this woman, who had been his wife, who had washed and scrubbed in his little home in Hanley, was now one of those luminous women who, in clear skirts and pink stockings, wander singing beautiful songs, amid illimitable forests and unscalable mountains. For a moment he regretted he had married Miss Hender.

‘But I don’t think I shall ever act again.’

‘How’s that?’ he said with an intonation of disappointment in his voice.

‘I don’t know,’ said Kate. ‘I’m not living with my husband now, and I haven’t the courage to look out for an engagement myself.’

Ralph stared at her vaguely. ‘Look out for an engagement?’ he repeated to himself; it seemed to him that he must be dreaming.

‘Aren’t you happy with him? Doesn’t he treat you well?’ said Ralph, dropping perforce from his dream back into reality,

‘Oh yes, he has always been very good to me. I can’t say how it was, but somehow after a time we didn’t get on. I dare say it was my fault. But how do you get on with Miss Hender?’ said Kate, partly from curiosity, half from a wish to change the conversation.

‘Oh, pretty well,’ said Ralph, with something that sounded, in spite of his wheezing, like a sigh.

‘How does she manage the dressmaking? She was always a good workwoman, but she never had much taste, and I should fancy wouldn’t be able to do much if left entirely to herself.’

‘That’s just what occurred. It’s curious you should have guessed so correctly. The business has all gone to the dogs, and since mother’s death we’ve turned the house into a lodging-house.’

‘And is mother dead?’ cried Kate, clasping her hands. ‘What must she have thought of me.’

Ralph did not answer, but after a long silence he said:

‘It’s a pity, ain’t it, that we didn’t pull it off better together?’

Kate raised her head and looked at him quickly. Her look was full of gratitude.

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘I behaved very badly towards you, but I believe I’ve been punished for it.’

‘You told me that he married you and treated you very well.’

‘Oh!’ she said, bursting into tears, ‘don’t ask me, it’s too long a story; I’ll tell you another time, but not now.’

It appeared to Kate that her heart was on fire and that she must die of grief. ‘Was this life?’ she asked herself. Oh, to be at rest and out of the way for ever! Ralph, too, seemed deeply affected; after a pause he said:

‘I don’t know how it was, or why, but now I come to think of it I remember that I used to be cross with you.’

‘It was the asthma that made you cross, and well it might;’ and she asked him if he still suffered from asthma, and he answered:

‘At times, yes.’

‘But the cigarettes,’ she said, ‘used to relieve you; do you still smoke them?’

‘Yes, and sometimes they relieve me and sometimes they don’t.’ A long silence separated them, and breaking it suddenly he said:

‘There were faults on both sides. On every side,’ he added, ‘for I don’t exempt mother from blame either. She was always too hard upon you. Now, I should never have minded your going to the theatre and amusing yourself. I shouldn’t have minded your being an actress, and I should have gone to fetch you home every evening.’

Kate smiled through her misery, and he continued, following his idea to the end:

‘It wouldn’t have interfered with the business if you had been; on the contrary, it would have brought us a connection, and I might have had up those plate-glass windows, and taken in the fruiterer’s shop.’

Ralph stopped. The roar of London had sunk out of hearing in the yellow depths of the fog, and for some minutes nothing was heard but the short ticking of the clock. It was a melancholy pleasure to dream what might have been had things only taken a different turn, and like children making mud-pies it amused them to rebuild the little fabric of their lives; whilst one reconstructed his vision of broken glass, the other lamented over the ruins of penny journal sentiment. Then awakening by fits and starts, each confided in the other. Ralph told Kate how Mrs. Ede had spoken of her when her flight had been discovered; Kate tried to explain that she was not as much to blame as might be imagined. Ralph’s curiosity constantly got the better of him, and he couldn’t but ask her to tell him something about her stage experience. One thing led to another, and before twelve o’clock it surprised her to think she had told him so much.

The conversation was carried on in brief and broken phrases. The man and the woman sat close together shivering over the fire. There were no curtains to the windows, and the fog had crept through the sashes into the room. Kate coughed from time to time—a sharp, hacking cough—and Ralph’s wheezing grew thicker in sound.

‘I’m a-fraid I shall have a b-bad night, this dre-ad-ful weather.’

‘I should like to stop to nurse you; but I must be getting home.’

‘You surely won’t think of going out such a night as this; you’ll never find your way home.’

‘Yes, yes, I shall; it wouldn’t do for me to remain here.’

They who had once been husband and wife looked at each other, and both smiled painfully.

‘Ve-ry well, I’ll see you do-wnstairs.’

‘Oh no! you mustn’t, you’ll kill yourself!’

Ralph, however, insisted. They stood on the doorstep for a moment together, suffocating in a sulphur-hued atmosphere.

‘You’ll come a-nd and see me again to-to-morrow, won’t you?’

‘Yes, yes!’ cried Kate; ‘to-morrow! to-morrow!’ and she disappeared in the darkness.

Chapter XXX

But on the morrow she could not leave her room, and at the end of the week the news at the Bedford Hotel was that Mr. Ede had gone away the day before without leaving any message.

The porter who informed her of his departure looked her over curiously, setting her thinking that he thought Mr. Ede had done well to get clear of the likes of her. She had tried to make herself look tidy and thought she had succeeded, but tidy or untidy, it was all the same, nothing mattered now; she was done for. No doubt the porter was right; Ralph had gone away to escape from her, which was just as well, for what more had they to say to each other: hadn't he married Hender? And passing in front of a shop-window she caught sight of herself in a looking-glass. 'Not up to much,' she said, and passed on into the Strand mumbling her misfortunes and causing the passers-by to look after her. She had not pinned up her skirt safely, a foot of it dragged over the pavement, and hearing jeering voices behind her she went into a public-house to ask for a pin. The barmaid obliged her with one, and while arranging her skirt she heard a man say: 'Well, they that talk of the evil of drinking know very little of what they are talking about. Drink has saved as many men as it has killed.' Kate's heart warmed to the man, for she knew a glass had often saved her from making away with herself, but never had she felt more like the river in her life than she did that morning. Three pennyworth would be enough, she could not afford more; Dick was only allowing her two pounds a week, and a woman had to look after the thirty-nine shillings very strictly to find the fortieth in her pocket before her next week's money was due. She felt better after having her glass; her thoughts were no longer on the river lying at the end of Wellington Street, but on the passengers in the Strand, the swaggering mummers, male and female; the men with lordly airs and billycock hats; the women with yellow hair and unholy looks upon their faces. There were groups of men and women round a theatrical agent's place of business, all sorts of people coming and going; lawyers from the Temple, journalists on their way to Fleet Street; prostitutes of all kinds and all sorts, young and old, fat and thin, of all nationalities, French, Belgian, and German, went by in couples, in rows, their eyes flaming invitations. Children with orange coloured hair sold matches and were followed down suspicious alleys; a strange hurried life, full of complexity, had begun in the twilight before the lamplighters went by. Girls and boys scrambled after each other quarrelling and selling newspapers. The spectacle helped the time away between four o'clock and seven. At seven she turned into some eating-house and dined for a shilling, and afterwards there was nothing to do than wander in the Strand. Some of the women who preferred to pick up a living by the sale of their lips rather than by standing for hours over a stinking wash-tub were very often kindly human beings, and there was nobody else except these street-walkers with whom she could exchange a few words and invite into a drinking shop for a glass. Over the counter she related her successes as Clairette in *Madame Angot* and Serpolette in *Les Cloches de Corneville*, and if an incredulous look came into the faces of her guests she sang to them the little ditties, proving by her knowledge of them that all she told them was true. From the drinking-shop they passed out in groups, and these women took Kate to their eating-houses, and she listened to their stories, and when at the end of the week she had spent all her money sometimes these women lent her shillings and half-crowns, and when she could not return the money she had borrowed they asked her: 'Why don't you do as we do?'

Her pretty face of former days was almost gone by this time, but traces of it still remained. 'If you would only dress yourself a little more becomingly and come along with us, you would be able to make two ends meet. With what you get from your husband you would be better

off than any of us.' But she could not be persuaded, and as time moved on, and drunkenness became more inveterate, the belief that she was not utterly lost unless she was unfaithful to Dick took possession of her, and she clung to it with an almost desperate insistency, saying to her friends, 'If I were to do that I should go down to the river and drown myself.' She used to hear laughter when she said these words, and the replies were that every woman had said the same thing: 'But we all come to it sooner or later.' 'Not me, not me!' she replied, tottering out of the public-house. But one night, awakening in the dusk between daylight and dark, she remembered that something had befallen her that had never befallen her before. She was not sure, it may have been that she had dreamed it. All the same, she could not rid herself of the idea that last night in the public-house near Charing Cross a man had come in and said he would pay for the drinks, and that afterwards she had gone to one of the hotels in Villiers Street. If she hadn't why did she think of Villiers Street? She rarely went down that street. Yet she was haunted by a memory, a hateful memory that had kept her awake, and had caused her to moan and to cry for hours, till at last sleep fell upon her. On waking her first thought was to inquire from the women, and she walked up and down the Strand seeking them till nightfall. But they could tell her nothing of what had happened after she left them, 'Dry your eyes, Kate,' they said. 'What matter? Your husband deserted you; aren't you free to live with whom you please?'

Kate felt that all they said was true enough, but she prayed that the memory of the hotel bedroom that had risen up in her mind was the memory of a dream, and not of something that had befallen her in her waking senses. It were bad enough that she should have dreamed such a thing, and on returning home she fell on her knees and prayed that what she feared had been, had not been; and she rose from her knees, her eyes full of tears, and a sort of leaden despair in her heart that she felt would never pass away.

As the days went by her mind became denser, she fell into obtusities out of which she found it difficult to rouse herself. Even her violent temper seemed to leave her, and miserable and hopeless she rolled from one lodging to another, drinking heavily, bringing the drink back with her and drinking in her bed until her hand was too unsteady to pour out another glass of whisky. She drank whisky, brandy, gin, and if she couldn't get these, any other spirit would serve her purpose, even methylated spirit.

Her bed-curtains were taken away by the landlady lest Kate should set them on fire. The landlady lit the gas at nightfall and turned it out before she went to bed - 'Only in that way,' she said to herself, 'can we be sure that that woman won't burn us all to death in our beds. Once a room is let,' she continued, 'it's hard to turn a sick woman out, especially if there's no excuse, and in this case there's none. For you see, Mrs. Lennox is getting two pounds a week from her husband,' Mr. Locker, Mrs. Rawson's evening friend, agreed with her; and he spoke of the recompense she would be entitled to from Mr. Lennox in the event of Mrs. Lennox's death; 'for, of course, every trouble and annoyance should be recompensed.' She agreed with him; but her eyes suddenly softening, she said: 'I haven't seen her since this morning when I took her up a cup of tea. She may like a bit of dinner. We're having some rabbit for supper, I'll ask her if she'd like a piece.'

A few minutes later she returned saying she was afraid Mrs. Lennox was dying, and that it might be as well to send to the hospital. Locker answered that perhaps it would be just as well, but on second thoughts he suggested that the husband should be communicated with.

'It isn't far to the Opéra Comique,' Mrs. Rawson answered, 'I'll just put on my hat and jacket and go round there.'

‘It’ll be the best way to escape responsibility,’ Locker said on the doorstep; but without answering she went up the Strand, passing over to the other side when she came in sight of the Globe Theatre.

‘Where’s the stage entrance of the Opéra Comique?’ she asked at the bookstall at the corner of Holliwell Street, and was told that she would find the stage entrance in Wytch Street, about half-way down the street. ‘The stage-doors of the Globe and the Opéra Comique are side by side,’ was cried after her. ‘What does he mean by half-way down the street,’ she muttered; ‘he meant a quarter down,’ and she addressed herself to the door-keeper, who answered surlily that Mr. Lennox was particularly engaged at that moment, but at Mrs. Rawson’s words - ‘I believe his wife is dying’—he agreed to send up a message as soon as he could get hold of somebody to take it. At last somebody’s dresser was stopped as he was about to pass through the swing-door; he agreed to take the message, and a few minutes after Mrs. Rawson was conducted up several little staircases and down some passages to find herself eventually in a small room in which there were three people, one a pleasant-faced man, so affable and kind that Mrs. Rawson thought she could have got on with him very well if she had had a chance. By him stood a tall imperious lady who rustled a voluminous skirt—a person of importance, Mrs. Rawson judged her to be from the deference with which a little thread-paper-man listened to her—the costumier, she learnt from scraps of conversation.

‘I’m sorry,’ Mr. Lennox said. ‘All you tell me is very sad. But I’m afraid I can do nothing.’

‘That’s what I think myself,’ Mrs. Rawson answered. ‘I’m afraid there’s nothing to be done, but I thought I’d better come and tell you. You see, when I went up with some beef-tea she looked to me like one that hadn’t many days to live. I may be mistaken, of course.’

‘She should have a nurse,’ Mrs. Forest said.

‘I do all I can for her,’ Mrs. Rawson murmured, ‘but you see with three children to look after and only one maid,’—the two women began to talk together and the thread-paper man took advantage of the opportunity to whisper to Dick that he thought he could manage to do the flower-girls’ dresses at five shillings less.

‘That will be all right,’ Dick replied. ‘I will call round in the morning, Mr. Shaffle.’

Mrs. Forest held out her jacket to Dick, who helped her into it.

‘Where are you going … shall you be coming back again?’ he asked.

‘I’m going to nurse your wife, Dick,’ she said, picking up her long feather boa, ‘and isn’t all that is happening now a vindication that we did well not to yield ourselves to ourselves?—for had we done so our regrets would be now unanimous, and I shouldn’t be able to go to her with clear conscience…. She’s been drinking heavily again, no doubt,’ Mrs. Forest said, turning to Mrs. Rawson. ‘But we mustn’t judge or condemn anyone, so Jesus hath said. I’ll go with you now, Mrs. Rawson, and you’ll perhaps come to-morrow, Dick, to see her?’

‘If I could help my wife I’d go, Laura, but as I’ve often told you, my will to help her was spent long ago; it would be of no use.’ Laura’s eyes lit up for a moment. ‘But if she asks to see me I’ll go.’ At these words Mrs. Forest’s eyes softened, and he began to ask himself how much truth there was in Laura’s resolve to go and attend upon his wife in what was no doubt a last agony. Seeing and hearing her put into his head remembrances of an actress, he could not remember which. Her demeanour was as lofty as any and her speech almost rose into blank verse at times; and he began to think that she had missed her vocation in life. It might have been that she was destined by nature for the stage. ‘She’s more mummer than myself or Kate,’ he said to himself, and giving an ear to her outpourings, he recognized in them the rudiments of the grand style: and he admired her transitions—her voice would drop and she

seemed to find her way back into homely speech. Her soul seemed to pass back and forwards easily, and Dick did not feel sure which was the real woman and which the fictitious. ‘She doesn’t know herself,’ he said, for at that moment she had left the tripod and was sitting in imagination at the bedside in attendance, looking from the patient to the clock, administering the medicine on the exact time.

When Mrs. Rawson spoke about the length of the day and night she answered that she would take her work with her, and bade Dick not to be anxious about the changes he had asked her to make in the second act. ‘They shall be made,’ she said, ‘and without laying myself open to any claim for demurrage.’

‘Demurrage’ Dick exclaimed.

‘She shall have attendance, but a soul ready to depart shouldn’t be detained in port longer than is necessary. And Mrs. Rawson would like to let her room to one who has not received her sailing orders, as is the case with your poor wife, Dick,—that is to say, if I understand Mrs. Rawson’s account of her illness.’

‘She’s not here for long,’ Mrs. Rawson answered; ‘but you mustn’t think, ma’am, that I’d lay any under claim for the trouble she’s been to me, only what is fair. “Fair is fair all the world over,” has been my maxim ever since I started letting apartments. But perhaps, ma’am, you’ll be wanting a room in my house. If you do there’s the drawing-room floor, which would suit you nicely. But you can’t be day nurse and night nurse yourself.’ Laura answered that that was true, and talking of a nurse from Charing Cross Hospital they went out of the house together. At the end of the street Laura stopped suddenly. ‘But she must have a doctor,’ she said, and waited for Mrs. Rawson to recommend one, and Mrs. Rawson replied that the doctor that attended her and her children was out of town.

‘We will ask here,’ Laura said, and called to the cabby to stop at the apothecary’s, and the questions she put to the man behind the counter were so pertinent that Mrs. Rawson began to think that perhaps she had misjudged Mrs. Forest, who now seemed to her a sensible and practical woman. They jumped again into a cab, and after a short drive returned with a doctor, Laura relating to him in the cab all they knew about his patient.

‘From what you tell me it seems a bad case,’ he said, and turning from Laura to Mrs. Rawson he asked her to describe the patient.

‘When I took up the beef-tea I found her that bad that I felt that I’d always have it on my conscience if I didn’t let her husband know how bad his wife was— - ‘

‘I’m afraid, doctor, that she’s been drinking for years,’ Laura interjected.

‘Well, as soon as I see Mrs. Lennox I shall be able to tell you if there is in my opinion any reasonable hope of saving her. I believe you’re going to nurse Mrs. Lennox through this illness?’ he asked Laura, and she began to tell him how she had always known of this duty: years before she had ever met Mr. Lennox it had been revealed to her—not the exact time, but the fact that she would have to attend upon the wife of some man who would be engaged in the publication of some of her works. ‘You see, her husband is producing my play *Incarnation* at the Opéra Comique, and I’ve brought some of my work with me.’ She opened her bag and laid on the table the manuscript entitled *Sayings of the Sybil*, and the doctor listened at first not satisfied that she was altogether the nurse into whose charge he would have liked to have given Mrs. Lennox; but feeling that, if he were to press the necessity of a nurse on Mrs. Forest, she might leave, he refrained, thinking that very often people who talked eccentrically were very practical. He had known extravagant speech go

with practical nursing, and hoping that Mrs. Forest would prove another such one, he laid down the manuscript on the table.

‘But if you believe that we live hereafter, why should you deny pre-existence?’ and without waiting for the doctor to answer, Laura averred that she had lived at least eight times already; witnessing the dread contest of death, and dying for the cause of Pan, and the Light-King, and Eros the immortal, ‘whose I am,’ she said; ‘and once again, for the ninth time, I live and watch the contest—watch with joy which overcomes fear, with love that conquers death.’

‘Well, I hope we shall be able to conquer death in this instance,’ the doctor answered, ‘and with care we may save her for some time, and if - ‘

‘Ah, if,’ Laura interjected, and curtseying to him she led the doctor to the door. ‘Nothing,’ she began, ‘can be worse than the present state of earth-life, and in all its phases; if the human race is to be evolved into a higher degree of perfection, no weak half-measures will avail to effect the change; there must, on the contrary, be a radical change in hereditary environment.’

The doctor listened a moment and, as if enchanted with the impression she had produced, Laura went back to the writing-table, and settling the folds of her brown silk widely over the floor, she began to write:

“Ye gods, they fail, they falter,
Thy hand hath struck them down.
Their woof the Parcae alter,
Beware thy mother’s frown!
What such as I in glory
Compared with such as thee?
Would, in the conflict gory,
That I had died for thee!”

At this point the inspiration seemed to desert her, and raising her pen from the paper, she bit its end thoughtfully, seeking for a transitional phrase whereby she might be able to allude to the Light-god.

They were in a six-shilling-a-week bedroom in the neighbourhood of the Strand. The window looked on to a bit of red-tiled roofing, a cistern, and a clothes-line on which a petticoat flapped, and in a small iron bedstead, facing the light, Kate lay delirious, her stomach enormously distended by dropsy. From time to time she waved her arms, now wasted to mere bones. She had been insensible for three whole days, speaking in broken phrases of her past life—of Mrs. Ede, the potteries, the two little girls, Annie and Lizzie. Dick, she declared, had been very good to her. Ralph, too, had been kind, and she was determined that the two men should not quarrel over her. They must not kill each other; she would not allow it; they should be friends. They would all be friends yet; that is to say, if Mrs. Ede would permit of it; and why should she stand between people and make enemies of them? She fell back into stupor; and next day her ideas were still more confused. In the belief that it was for the part of the Baillie that Dick and Ralph were quarrelling she began to express her regret that there was nothing in the piece for her. Nor were memories of the baby girl who had died in Manchester lacking. She prayed Ralph to believe that the child was not his but Dick’s child. She prayed and supplicated in Laura’s arms till Laura laid her back on the pillow exhausted.

‘Give me something to drink; I’m dying of thirst,’ the sick woman murmured faintly.

Laura started from her reveries, and going over to the fireplace, where the beef-tea was standing, poured out half a cup; but, owing to great difficulty in breathing, it was some time before the patient could drink it.

After a long silence Kate said:

‘I’ve been very ill, haven’t I? I think I must be dying.’

‘Death is not death,’ Laura answered, ‘when we die for Pan, the undying representative of the universe cognizable to the senses.’

Over Kate’s mind lay a vague dream, through whose gloom two things were just perceptible—an idea of death and a desire to see Dick. But she was almost too weak to seek for words, and it was with great effort that she said:

‘I don’t remember who you are; I can think of nothing now, but I should like to see my husband once more. Could you fetch him? Is he here?’

‘You’ve not been happy with him, I know, my sister; but I don’t blame you. Your marriage was not a psychological union; and when marriage isn’t that, woman cannot set her foot on the lowest temple of Eros.’

‘I’m too ill to talk with you,’ Kate replied, ‘but I loved my husband well, too well. I keep all my little remembrances of him in that box; they aren’t much—not much—but I should like him to have them when I’m gone, so that he may know that I loved him to the last. Perhaps then he may forgive me. Will you let me see them?’

She looked at the packet of letters, kissed the crumpled calico rose, the button she had pulled off his coat in a drunken fit and preserved for love, and she even slipped on her wrist the last few pearls that remained of the chaplet she wore when they played at sweethearts in *The Lovers’ Knot*. But after the love-tokens had been put back in the box, and Kate again asked Mrs. Forest to bring Dick to her, she began to ramble in her speech, and to fancy herself in Hanley. The most diverse scenes were heaped together in the complex confusion of Kate’s nightmare; the most opposed ideas were intermingled. At one moment she told the little girls, Annie and Lizzie, of the immorality of the conversations in the dressing-rooms of theatres; at another she stopped the Rehearsal of an *opéra bouffe* to preach to the mummers—in phrases that were remembrances of the extemporaneous prayers in the Wesleyan Church—of the advantages of an earnest, working religious life. It was like a costume ball, where chastity grinned from behind a mask that vice was looking for, while vice hid his nakedness in some of the robes that chastity had let fall. Thus up and down, like dice thrown by demon players, were rattled the two lives, the double life that this weak woman had lived, and a point was reached where the two became one, when she began to sing her famous song:

‘Look at me here, look at me there,’

alternately with the Wesleyan hymns. Sometimes in her delirium she even fitted the words of one on to the tune of the other.

Still, Laura took no notice, and her pen continued to scratch, scratch, till it occurred to her that although Dick’s marriage had not been a psychological one, it might be as well that he should see his wife before she died; and having come to this conclusion suddenly, she put on her bonnet and left the house.

The landlady brought in the lamp, placing it on the table, out of sight of the dying woman’s eyes.

A dreadful paleness had changed even the yellow of her face to an ashen tint; her lips had disappeared, her eyes were dilated, and she tried to raise herself up in bed. Her withered arms were waved to and, fro, and in the red gloom shed from the ill-smelling paraffin lamp the large, dimly seen folds of the bedclothes were tossed to and fro by the convulsions that agitated the whole body. Another hour passed away, marked by the cavernous breathing of

the woman as she crept to the edge of death. At last there came a sigh, deeper and more prolonged; and with it she died.

Soon after, before the corpse had grown cold, heavy steps were heard on the staircase, and Dick and Laura entered, one with a quantity of cockatoo-like flutterings, the other steadily, like a big and ponderous animal. At a glance they saw that all was over, and in silence they sat down, their hands resting on the table. The man spoke hesitatingly in awkward phrases of a happy release; the woman listened with a calm serenity that caused Dick to wonder. She would have liked to have said something concerning psychological marriages, but the appearance of the huge body beneath the bed-clothes restrained her: he wished to say something nice and kind, but Laura's presence put everything out of his head, and so his ideas became more than ever broken and disjointed, his thoughts wandered, until at last, lifting his eyes from the manuscript on the table, he said:

'Have you finished the second act, dear?'

THE END

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