

THE NEW J. L.
AND OTHER STORIES

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"AN ALABASTER BOX," "THE HIGHER COURT," ETC.

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TO
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“FOR THE POPE’S INTENTION”

IT was M. le Curé who, without meaning it, started the idea.

When one lives alone, one gets rusty, and old Cécile had lived alone for nearly thirty years. Her boy Michel took a wife whose mother was bedridden, so the young couple had no choice but to make their home with Mère Roux, on the other side of the mountain. Michel didn’t forget his own mother: a grandchild would be spared to her for a week, once in a way. Still, she lived alone. And when one lives alone, one gets rusty.

M. le Curé saw the rust spreading, and it made him sorry.

That was a big-hearted young Cécile who took the blow of her husband’s sudden death, and squared her shoulders to the task of holding the house up till her baby should grow to be a man; and it was a big-hearted woman still who bade the grown man ‘God-speed’ when his marriage took him out of her daily life. But, after that, year followed year in monotonous isolation, the large small family over the mountain growing larger and no richer, and Cécile toiling and saving and giving, and giving again. Circumstances changed once more, but the habit they had formed did not change; the large family was full-grown and

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earning its own keep; but Cécile, still toiling, was saving, now, for saving's sake.

So things went on till one Sunday morning, when, at the first word of the Asperges, Cécile gave a big jump, and her prayer-book fell on the floor, and Madame Cartau picked it up and gave it back to her.

Madame Cartau kept the inn at Busy-le-Mont, and was a friendly person with a word for any neighbour. But old Cécile, living down in the valley, under the crust of a growing silence, had daunted Madame Cartau's heart for talk.

The jump, and the dropped prayer-book, gave Madame an opening.

'So you did not know of M. le Curé's absence till you heard the stranger's voice?'

Thus Madame Cartau, picking her way down the steep stone-paved path. 'I suppose this,' she added, 'by the big jump you made.'

'He has a big voice, that one,' said Cécile. 'Reason enough for a big jump.'

Then she allowed her real interest to speak. 'Is he ill, M. le Curé?' she asked.

'*Ill!*'

Madame Cartau had found someone, then, who didn't know the news.

'*Ill!* No, indeed. But think only——' She paused.

'If M. le Curé is well . . . and does not say his Mass,' replied Cécile, 'I cannot think.—It appears to me impossible, what you are saying.'

'Not at all. On the contrary, it is simple.' Madame Cartau smiled. 'He makes a little journey. That is all.'

She was still smiling and nodding her head.

Cécile was not to be taken in by this air of mystery—of intimate acquaintance with M. le Curé’s affairs.

‘A little journey to visit his brother, at Busy-les-Forêts,’ she replied, calmly. ‘Without doubt. It is the second time. Seventeen years ago he made this same voyage. He was absent, equally, for one Sunday. You, madame, could not remember this. Your so charming little establishment was not then constructed.’

For as to Madame Cartau being in the confidence of her parish priest, everyone in Busy knew that she belonged to the place only by her marriage. And that a recent one—no more than fifteen years back.

‘The journey to Busy-les-Forêts,’ Cécile continued, ‘will do M. le Curé no harm. It is a bare twenty-five kilos, as those who know this country, madame, could have explained to you.’

‘Without doubt,’ assented Madame Cartau. She had waited for her great *coup*. ‘M. le Curé, however,’ she said, ‘is not now gone to Busy-les-Forêts. He is gone to Rome.’

She said it with a wonderful nonchalance.

Old Cécile stood stock-still. Madame Cartau, too, stopped. Her stroke had told.

‘Have you observed, madame,’ Cécile asked with cheerfulness, ‘these small green frogs? They abound this year.’ She stooped and touched with one finger the interesting little creature, who was surprised by the attention, and made off with a hop and a sprawl.

Madame Cartau, slightly flushed, had not observed the frogs.

‘I ask myself the reason of them,’ remarked Cécile.

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'These things interest me.—Not, however,' she added with politeness, 'so much as the conversation of madame.—It is to Rome that M. le Curé is gone?'

But Madame Cartau knew when she was beaten. She saw a friend some fifty yards ahead of them, and, excusing herself, hurried on to overtake her.

Old Cécile was left alone with her small green frog. And, as she stood, two slow tears rose, and dropped down the brown furrows of her cheeks. She had been, oh! how uncharitable—to that poor Madame Cartau. And after Mass! Poor good Madame Cartau, who only asked to tell the great news, as was natural. She herself was the unnatural one—was becoming a savage beast, as it appeared. She made an act of contrition, still standing looking at the still bewildered frog, who was not to blame in the matter, after all. To the act, she joined a little prayer that even yet—after such badness—even yet she might hear about this wonderful journey to Rome.

Another Sunday came, with again the big new voice at Mass. Then for two whole days grey rain filled the valley, surrounded her small house, drenched out all sight of hill or sky. It was ceaseless, phenomenal. It was probably, she told herself, the thing those small green frogs foreboded. It made a drowned rat of one between one's door and one's wood-shed,

Wednesday afternoon, and still no lifting.

She put a big block of wood into the stove: grudg-

ingly, but one must dry one’s *jupe*. A big block is an extravagance. *Soit!* So is rheumatic fever.—She was not yet quite money-mad.

She slammed the stove-door. Next moment a different sound stood out from the unchanging swish of the rain. It was—could it be?—it was—the splosh, splosh, of a slow approaching footstep. A footstep! Incredible! A footstep on the third of three such days. Old Cécile was at the door before the first thump. She opened, and behold!—M. le Curé.

Not the strange one, young and tall, with the big voice. The old one whom she knew, with the little voice that she knew, with nothing big about him but his umbrella, and the flood that was falling off its edge.

He came in, and in twenty seconds the stove-door was open again, and he sitting, steaming, before its crackling blaze.

And, first, there was the parcel from under his arm. Here were picture post-cards, views of Rome, bright-coloured, beautiful. And with them histories of the holy places visited. Then a medal of St. Cecilia, her patron, brought especially for herself. And then—

M. le Curé had seen the Holy Father, had heard him, had spoken to him.

‘With these eyes, yes—with these ears—this mouth—*moi qui vous parle.*’

‘And—and what is he like, *mon père?*’

The old priest paused in thought.

‘Like a father,’ he said at last. ‘Each child who comes to him he regards with a profound enquiry, that pierces. And that prays. “This soul, too,” he seems to say, “It also asks. And what, O my God?” Then

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he blesses : with a blessing which, since it is the blessing of Jesus Christ, bestows.'

'Like a father,' repeated old Cécile.

'But the father of *all* Christians,' said the Curé. 'One, that is to say, in whose family are many sad. And many sinners.'

He was silent, remembering the majesty and the simpleness of that Figure. Its solitude with its own unique cross—its society in the crosses of each one of God's family. He could not find words in which to explain to old Cécile what he had seen. He gave her a deed instead.

'The Holy Father has sent his blessing to you, my child,' he said.

'To me !' cried old Cécile.

She was amazed. But it was true, and, kneeling, she received it.

Then the old priest sat down again by the fire, and told her what kind chain of events had brought him to a private audience at the Vatican. And how the Holy Father had questioned him about his flock and had grieved for one who lived in much loneliness.

'I wish only,' M. le Curé ended, getting to his feet and reaching out for the wet umbrella—'I wish that you had heard his voice—the gentleness of his exclamation when I spoke of the matter.'

'I shall hear his voice,' old Cécile replied, quite calmly.

'Eh ? What ?' M. le Curé was pulled up short.

The old woman spoke again, this time with difficulty, confusion even.

'M. le Curé,' she said. 'I possess, I avow it to you, a certain sum of money put by.'

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It was impossible to the old priest to look surprised.

‘The larger part of this I must keep. I *must* keep it, indeed’—the old voice shook piteously—‘for Michel.’

‘You are perfectly right in doing so,’ said the Curé.

‘But, even so, my alms have been—I avow it—they have been below the level of my means. I have told myself that I would give to God at my death.—It would be easier at that moment, I thought.’

‘We are like that to Him, *nous autres*,’ said the priest.

‘But now, since the good God has been at the trouble of sending me a message—and since’—she gulped, but went on again—‘since I have the means—’

The Curé could not guess what was coming.

‘It appears to me,’ Cécile concluded, ‘that I ought myself to go to Rome, and to thank the Holy Father.’

The Curé positively jumped.

‘But this is not an idea!’ he cried. ‘It is an inspiration! My child, you will do a pleasure to God Himself. You will console the Sacred Heart!’

‘I!’ thought Cécile.

‘You will rejoice the Holy Father, whose joys are few. And you will bring home with you blessings—how many!—to your good neighbours in this place.’

‘I!’

The old woman was trembling. Because she knew it was the truth. And that thus instantly Almighty God was thanking her for her belated thanks.

That week of deluge was the breaking up of St. Martin's Summer. But the winter that set in seemed shorter than others.

There were so many plans to make for herself, so many commissions to receive from neighbours, who dropped in often when they knew what was afoot.

One evening it was Madame Cartau, who came and sat a long time beside the stove without a word.

At last: 'You will certainly mount the Sacred Stair?' she asked.

Cécile assented. She was now used to assenting to wonders.

'If at that holy spot you could give me one little prayer,'—Madame Cartau broke off and got up to go. Only when safe at the door she finished with a broad shy smile—'It might be,' she said, 'to ask the good God to give me the gift of silence.'

'Madame!—But, since you wish it!' Cécile's murmur had a world of courteous surprise.

When the door shut she had recourse, as often now, to Our Lady.

'You will remember for me, good Mother, *n'est-ce pas?* Since my poor head can never hold all they give me in charge.'

And besides all the business that made winter pleasant, there was the actually quick coming of spring in that year—that was to be like no other year. The sunshine came so early and so radiant, the rains fell so soft and timely, the brown earth showed itself so willing and responsive, that sick folk grew well, and poor folk

well-to-do and hopeful, with work plentiful, food already easy come-by, and with a bounteous harvest clearly on the way.

Three times during the long stretch of perfect weather, which warmed February into a sort of sunny April, and kept mid-June as fresh as May—three separate times Cécile was to start on her journey, and each time some small thing intervened.

‘This summer, however, definitely, I go,’ she announced.

She announced it to M. le Curé, on the eighteenth of July. He would look in on his rounds now and then, to add some detail to her programme.

‘You must not go before September,’ he advised. ‘The heat in Rome is very great. How the sun beats down upon that long smooth white road that leads from the Porta Pia to the church of Saint Agnes! Ah!’

—‘And on that bad old rough one, M. le Curé, which gave you such a jolting, going out to the Three Fountains, *n’est-ce pas?*’ The old woman was getting to know Rome through his talk.

‘And above all on the Piazza of St. Peter,’ said he.

‘With the “Little Cardinals” trooping up the steps in their scarlet *soutanes*. Yes.’ She folded her hands, contemplating the coloured post card that had adorned her wall ever since the great project had begun.—‘Yet the fountains in that Place,’ she observed, ‘must give great freshness to the air.’

‘It shall be for September, then,’ she conceded.

But it was sooner than September.

For, on Saturday, the first day of August, a word flashed through France to its farthest corner and brought every valid man to his feet.

It brought Michel and his two sons over the mountain, in the early dawn of Sunday, with their hardest farewells already made. Those were down at the farm, at the forge, and in the small village shop, which the wives and young boys must keep going as best they could. The grandmother, however, must not be left without good-bye. Also, Michel found in himself a liking to make his confession this once again to the old priest who had given him four of the Sacraments in their turn.

On their way to the five o'clock Mass, the three men stopped at old Cécile's door, to bid her expect them back for breakfast. It opened as they reached it.

'Come in, come in, *mes enfants!*' the old woman cried, gaily. 'I was looking for this visit.'

'You have heard the news, I see,' said Michel.

Did he see it in the brightness of the old eyes, or hear it in the gallant briskness of the old voice?

'Certainly I have heard the news. That poor Madame Cartau had it first!—And the fire, you see, is lit, and burning well. And—' she hesitated. 'The coffee? . . .'

Michel, short and thickset, looked at his two slim sons, and they at him. He shook his head.

'Not yet, *ma mère,*' he answered. 'After Mass.'

Old Cécile nodded. Her eyes shone brighter still.

'You are going to take the good God with you,' she said. 'Come then, children, we will make haste.'

It was no great Feast, that Sunday. The high altar had only its two candles ready for the Low Mass, and Our Lady’s image had neither mantle of state nor vases of fresh flowers—just the paper ones, a little dusty, and more than a little the worse for wear. But the August sunshine poured through the plainly glazed windows of the poor building upon a crowd such as no Feast of recent years had seen. In the body of the church, thickest before the altar, it was women, old and young. The left aisle was packed with men, kneeling, row by row, on the stones, waiting their turn for the Confessional.

Since yesterday’s mobilization order, the old priest had spent every free minute before the altar, adoring the Fountain of Grace, there present, and entreating of Him the grace of contrition for His children, going away to fight and die. Night fell and left the old man there in solitude, but morning had not dawned when the sound of footsteps broke in upon his prayer. The earliest of these slouched and hesitated on the stones outside, and stopped short in the doorway. The man was notorious—a scoffer—he had not been to his duties since his First Communion. All he thought of now was to take a good-bye look at this old place, among other places, before anyone was about.

He looked, and saw the altar, with its light, and lying on the pavement before it, something black.

—What? It moved. It stood on its feet. It showed the figure—darkness hid the face—but the meagre frail figure of his friend of old days, more recently his butt.

‘Antoine Richet? *C’est bien Antoine?*’

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The voice was so weak and small, it was marvellous that it could carry so much courtesy, such a welcome.

'*Comment!* You know me in the dark?' stammered the man.

'Since we are old friends,' said the priest. 'But I must not make you wait with talk. *Hein?* You have affairs on hand, you others. And you are come, I know, to give France a clean soldier.'

Antoine Richet, close to his God, and to the spot where (once only) he had received Him, found in his heart a sudden horror of the thing he had made of himself.

'I—I hardly know,' he stammered.

'Take time,' said the priest. 'I can wait.' And he went back to his prayer.

That confession was completed before daylight came, but Richet did not steal away in the dark.

When the priest offered to give him Holy Communion, now, alone, he answered: 'At Mass, if you please, M. le Curé.' He had the smile of an honest child.

'I ask myself, however,' he said, 'how you contrived to know me in the dark.'

M. le Curé, could not, in politeness, explain that he had been entreating the Divine Heart, in particular, for the blackest of his sheep, and had heard the answer in that furtive step.

And so the crowd went on growing, the Patient One welcoming all.

Michel and his boys ate and drank solidly when they came down from Mass. They had a walk of twelve kilos before them, to Le Floc, the place of entrainment. There were fine doings at Le Floc: flower-decked trains,

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singing troops, and shouting crowds. Some of the young boys, who tramped so far with the soldiers, brought back the story of it to the women and the old men. They told it sleepily, their voices dropping to silence. It was evening by that time, and oh! so still, in the streets and in the houses of the emptied town. That was the 2nd of August.

On the 9th, Cécile presented herself at the Presbytery.

‘You will make your pilgrimage *now?*’ M. le Curé was asking in amazement, three minutes later—it took him three minutes to persuade the old woman to sit down.

‘To-morrow, M. le Curé. I come therefore to ask for the letter, if you please.’

The letter was a recommendation to the French College at Rome.

‘But at such a moment! The difficulties of travel are now immense, my poor child. Insurmountable, even.’

‘Monsieur le Curé, I have made arrangements. That poor M. le Marquis, who had accomplished at last his great sale of timber in Switzerland! Madame was in despair how to make delivery of it, the railways being blocked with *nos braves*. But she found a great proprietor of *ces machines-là* whose objects have not yet been requisitioned. He transports the timber into Switzerland for her, on condition that he starts to-morrow at four in the morning. And Madame la

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Marquise promises me a seat upon one of the machines. Behold!—'

'On a timber lorry,' said the Curé.

'For seventy kilos only,'—persuasively—'after that, the Swiss railways, then the Italian—with a good *wagon* of the fourth class—and all the comforts that monsieur has had the goodness to indicate in my plan of travel.'

'And your return? How do you propose to make your return?'

'M'sieu, I do not know.'

The answer came calmly. The priest looked at his old parishioner, sitting on a chair against the wall, in her Sunday clothes, with her firm hands clasped on the top of a deeply purple sunshade. It was the gift of a granddaughter, looked upon as *pas pratique*, and till now barely tolerated, but well suited to an occasion of the present importance.

He took off his spectacles and laid them on the table before he spoke.

'*Allons*,' he said. 'Such a project, at such a moment, has very much the air of a folly. I think, however, that you have some motive which you have not stated.'

'Monsieur is perfectly right.'

'And which you do not wish to state?'

'But, on the contrary.'

The motive, by degrees, got itself partly stated, partly guessed.

Since the day on which Cécile had received the Holy Father's blessing, certain prayers for the Pope's Intention, which she had said from childhood, had been said with a new comprehension. She had begun, as she prayed, to look out over the whole world—the parish

of Christ’s Vicar : and if she thought of the world in the terms of her own village, she thought of facts. In the village there were workers, sufferers, and sinners : idlers, too, and sheer perversities, like Antoine Richet, *ce malheureux*. Quite enough load, she saw, for one pair of shoulders, was Busy-le-Mont upon M. le Curé’s. And the Holy Father had them all : all the parishes of all the world—those that remembered and obeyed, those that forgot, and those that denied. She began to perceive the large place in which her feet were set, and her prayer grew far-seeing, like the prayer of an enclosed nun. Praying so, through the winter and spring, for the Divine interests, in every kindred and nation and tongue, suddenly there fell upon her, day after day, the news that all these nations were breaking into war :—Germany, Russia, France, Austria, Belgium, and England—every day a new one.

‘It is too great, the sorrow.’ So she ended her broken, yet clear words. ‘All his children like that ! It appears to me that the Holy Father will die.’

The Curé caught his breath. He looked at her again.

‘You are going then, because——’

‘Because so many, now, must go *from* him. From the seminaries, even, they tell me.’

‘From the parishes, too. Here in France,’ said the Curé. ‘That tall young priest who took my place last summer is gone to fight. You remember him ?’

‘With the big voice,’ said Cécile. ‘Yes. But—that they should fight !—Priests !’

‘The Sacraments will in this way be very near to the dying,’ the old man said. ‘I do not say that was the intention of *ces messieurs* who enacted it that priests

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must fight or leave France. But God remains the Master.'

She assented. One private wish lingered.

'The Little Cardinals,' she said, 'will they too be gone from Rome?'

The priest shook his head, smiling. 'I do not think you will see many scarlet robes.'

—'On the steps of St. Peter's,' she whispered. She had looked at that post card so often! Then she said with decision:

'*Tant mieux!* At such a time as this, it is not a pleasure trip that one makes.'

She stood up.

'The letter, M. le Curé, if you please.'

August the Fifteenth. A vast marble-floored chamber in a new, bright white building on the Lungo Tevere Cenci, Rome.

A table set in the wide-open window to catch any cool breath that may drift across the Tiber. A short, firm-set Frenchwoman, all black (save for a purple sunshade), sitting at her morning coffee.

To this lodging of French Sisters of Charity her parish priest had commended old Cécile, and from it two of the Sisters had wended their way to the terminus last night, to meet a train that might bring in the wanderer.

Perhaps. For journeys had become incalculable things, and the timber lorry, that brought Cécile from the Jura over the Swiss frontier, was the easiest

of her experiences. From Lausanne onwards she was in the clutch of one continuous, shifting, changing, rushing throng, that shouted languages of which, *Dieu merci!*—she understood not one word.

But Cécile, bundle in hand, was pushed or carried through it all. Through the all-night-standing waits upon packed platforms—through the rushes that stormed the incoming trains—through the slow, dust-choking, thirsty, foodless days that followed—thrust sometimes into her proper fourth-class *wagon*, sometimes, helplessly, into other people’s first. Or upright in a corridor, or crouched, exhausted, on its floor. Through it all she was on her way to Rome, and when past thinking, or consciously praying, she grasped the crucifix in her pocket at the end of her beads.

She lost count of time—nor would time help those travellers to locate themselves—for trains had lost relations with time-tables.

But one afternoon, when her dizzy eyes—that had looked out, these past days, on huge mountains of snow and ice, on lonely valleys, and, later, on waters radiantly blue, in bowers of green, that entreated her ‘Look! Look at us!’—but she could not look—she hated to look—too tired—one afternoon her eyes stared stupidly at a strange-coloured, opaque streak of water, quite near to the clanking train.

‘The Yellow Tiber! My! If that isn’t the real genuine Macaulay article!’ a high-pitched voice cried over her head.

And her head nodded at last to a deep sleep.

The Sisters found her like that, asleep on her bundle, in a corner of the corridor. In Rome, and not knowing it.

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They took her home, in one of the little, wicked wiling taxi-carriages, and plied her with small, well-devised reviving meals from five till near midnight, when she fell into another profound sleep.

About five in the morning she woke up. What was this? Not her low-pitched garret-roof! Not the lower, closer, stifling roof of the nightmare train! Great spaces. A far-away ceiling. Right up in the air. With a picture painted upon it. A floor of stone, black and white, smooth like porcelain—a wonderful warm soft golden light stealing in through chinked shutters she had never seen the like of!

And bells!

Bells ringing the quarter, then repeating the hour after the quarter—more bells—one after another, and together—more bells than one knew the world held—a place full of bells!—She sat up in bed.—Of bells?—Of churches, then!—

Rome!

A beaming old Sister came in, bent on persuading her to whatever she liked best. Was it more sleep? Was it early Mass?

It was Mass. One can sleep at Busy. The Sister took her downstairs, and out, and along the Tiber's bank a little way.

'What is that?' she asked. It was a round building, very singular—nothing but pillars, and a roof.

'The temple of Vesta,' said Sœur Ste Claude. 'A building of the pagans.'

'And this?' asked Cécile. They were passing a pile as glaringly white as the block of flats they came from.

'A synagogue of the Jews,' said the Sister.

‘And this?’ They had stopped at a shabby house-door at the street corner. And on the wall beside the door was roughly painted a picture of Jesus Christ crucified, with words in strange letters and languages, of which Cécile could make nothing.

‘What is written there?’ she asked again.

‘The writing is: “All day long have I spread my hands to a people that believeth not and contradicteth me,”’ said the old Sister.

She was of the Order of Nevers. As a novice she had stood by the bed of Bernadette Soubirous, and had heard her dying witness to that Good Mother who called men to Lourdes to pray for sinners. In her old age, Pius X had set here here to combat atheism among the migratory poor of Rome.

‘And this,’ she said, lifting a sort of padded quilt of leather—‘this is the church.’

It did not look to Cécile like a church at all. It had a round dome over the middle of it, a stone floor, and no windows anywhere. It looked old and faded, so far as one could see it; it was dark, too, and the altars were exceedingly bare—no paper flowers. The floor space was bare, too—except for a few *prie-Dieu* in this corner and that. While Cécile wondered, the Sister picked up two of these and carried them before the high altar. Half a dozen other people did the same: a priest was coming in.

It was Mass. The same words (though naturally the Italian priest could not say them as well as M. le Curé), the same movements—the selfsame Holy Sacrifice. And Cécile came out into the daylight, which made her blink, at home in Rome.

It is true that a Roman woman next her had wept with little restraint. But Cécile choked down even her dislike of sentiment. We are not all born French, and composed.

Now she sat drinking her coffee, and looking down at a bridge that led to an island, and turning over in her mind something that the Sister had told her about that bridge.

It was there before St. Peter came to Rome. In that case, why, perhaps St. Peter had walked over it—walked over that same bridge on the two feet—at which Almighty God had knelt—which He had washed . . .

Her staggering faculties fled back,—they fled home, they hid themselves in the greater, the familiar, the daily condescension: in the Clean Oblation and the Bread of Angels.

'There will be, perhaps, difficulties.'

So said the priest at the French College.

'But I will give you the letter, very willingly.'

He added this in a hurry. The old face in front of him had changed, suddenly, piteously, like a child's.

'You will take this letter to Monsignor D., who is major-domo to His Holiness, and he will do all that is possible. Be assured of it.'

'Monsieur thinks, however?—' faltered Cécile.

'There may be difficulties,' repeated the priest, gently.

'The Holy Father is not altogether in his usual health. We will pray, will we not?'

Cécile bent her head.

An hour later, the old peasant woman was walking up to the Bronze Door of the Vatican. She looked with unseeing eyes at the vast Piazza to her left, stretched baking in the great heat; and at the fountains and the steps; and at the church beyond, in which she had spent so much of the last two days. She went in at the Bronze Door and up the steps, as the Swiss guard directed her, and soon she was passing from room to room, under fresh directions. In each of these *salons*, she, and those who had come at the same time, were invited to sit and wait a while. Then a further door would open and her group would pass on into a further room. Her methodical temper was noting with contentment the method of all this, and the ease. It was easier to pass all the Pope’s attendants at the Vatican, than M. le Curé’s one *bonne-à-tout-faire* at Busy.

Some part of her was noting these trifles, while the whole of her was differently employed. But the trifles dropped away when she reached the presence of Monsignor D. He was short and stout: he was in purple: afterwards she knew these things. For the time she was only aware of the grave, grieved tone of his voice when he said, looking at the letter she handed to him:

‘There are difficulties.’

‘Monsieur!’ said Cécile—no more.

Monsignor D. lifted his eyes from the letter and looked at her.

Three ladies, very splendid, had entered the room behind Cécile. They had refused to pass first when she stood aside for them, but they were close to her now.

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Monsignor D. looked from Cécile to them, and they drew back towards the door.

'My child,' he said—and although he was an Italian, his voice sounded just like M. le Curé's—'you have come a long way?'

'From the Jura, Monsieur,' said Cécile.

'And you have made some sacrifices, I think, out of your wish to thank the Holy Father.'

'I, Monsieur?—No!' said Cécile—truthfully, for she had forgotten them.

'Well, now, at least, I ask a sacrifice of you.'

'*Lequel, monsieur?*' She spoke steadily, though her lip trembled.

'You have a face that I trust. You will not talk.'

She was silent.

'Therefore I will tell you. My child, the Holy Father is very ill. Very ill.'

'Yes,' said Cécile, under her breath.

'You cannot see him. It is impossible. You will make this sacrifice for——' He paused.

'For his recovery,' implored Cécile.

'If you will,' said Monsignor D.—but he paused again. 'Or, if you will,' he said, 'you may make it for the Holy Father's own intention.'

'And that is——?'

'Peace,' said Monsignor D.

Old Cécile stayed out her week in Rome.

She did the commissions of her village, and she visited every place that M. le Curé had put down upon her list. She remembered these places, as she remembered the look of Monsignor D.—afterwards. At the time, her

life was in her prayer. Every evening—after the day's round was done, and when the shadows began to get long—on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, she came back into the Piazza di San Pietro, and stood looking up at a window. Others were there, in groups or in crowds, bigger or smaller, speaking low, most of them. And this especially on Wednesday.

A lift-boy, from the Palace Hotel, crossing the piazza that evening, had the curiosity to join himself to the crowds. He was a young Frenchman, of seventeen or so, with a bad expression. He stood staring, his poor little foolish face on the verge of a grin.

Someone beside him caught in her breath once, and then whispered, ‘Oh! Saint Père, Saint Père!’ and then was still.

He turned and saw an old woman's face, so wrung with sorrow, yet so strong, that it frightened him. It reminded him of things which he had elected to forget, but which had the impertinence, it seemed, to exist still.

Later that evening, a Sister called Cécile from her supper. A messenger from the Vatican asked for her.

Ce monsieur gave a letter into her astonished, shaking hands.

Monsignor D. had spoken of her to the Holy Father, who had willed to write with his own hand the words that followed :

DOMINUS TECUM. ORA PRO ME.

On Thursday morning Cécile went back to the Piazza, although she knew that the Holy Father had died in the night.

She must go home again now. Her pilgrimage was

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over. It had failed. And she wanted to offer it, once more, under that window, for peace.

'Praying again!' said a sharp French voice at her ear. 'What's the use? He's dead.'

'I am praying for peace,' said Cécile—and then asked herself why she had answered.

'Peace!' said the boy. 'The fine idea! With the Germans on the road to Paris! Are you a German, perhaps?'

It was as if he wanted to stab this person, who had stabbed his heart to life last night.

'It is not very intelligent what you say there, *mon ami*,' the old woman answered, tranquilly. "When it is of the good God that one asks peace, one does not wait to define to Him that one wishes the peace to be good.'

The boy looked at her sulkily.

She laughed a little solid laugh which he tried not to like.

'As for the Germans and the road to Paris,' she said, 'I have a son and two grandsons who will have their say in that.'

'Really, you amuse me, you and your grandsons,' said the insolent boy. 'They fight, I understand, and you pray for peace!'

'Precisely,' said Cécile, 'I pray, and you fight.'

Old Cécile took the train for the journey home next day; but her recruit had started overnight.

WHAT THE SOLDIER SAW

THROUGH the night went the Paris-Bordeaux train. Often it stood still in the open for quite a stay and gave itself to prolonged and hideous shrieking. Then it clanked on again, till it clanked into some wide, gaunt, reverberating iron shed, which called itself Poitiers, or Tours, or Orléans.

When it got into one of these, the passengers in Gunner P. J. Burton's carriage—English-speaking soldiers like himself—woke, and wondered if it was any good these days making a try for something to eat, and concluded it didn't look as if it was, and went to sleep again.

Gunner P. J. Burton, 1257631 C.F.A., didn't join in these discussions with any heartiness. When they said 'No good,' he said 'No good,' for company. When they shut their eyes and dropped into heavy-breathing sleep, he shut his bright blue childlike eyes, for company too. He didn't go to sleep though. Very soon the lids opened on the bright blue eyes. But P. J. Burton wasn't seeing the haggard-faced Sergeant of the Irish Guards who snored in the opposite corner.

He was seeing Widdington, Alberta.

Widdington is a very young thing in the way of towns. The only bit of sidewalk it has is in front of Joe Pantwise's big concrete dry-goods store. The general store and the post office and the three saloons are wooden shanties still,

and the town isn't even lighted. So that when you go ploughing through the deep dust of a dark night, and Pantwise's proud sidewalk gets you unawares upon the shin-bone, your opinion of that enterprising citizen suffers a change.

But Widdington couldn't be too young for P. J. Burton. Faith in young towns had made him what he was last June : in young towns and ladies' shirt-waists. He travelled in shirt-waists, to young towns, and he wasn't likely to leave a live man like Pantwise out of his round.

The sun can shine in Widdington : it fairly glares. The blue eyes, turned now towards Sergt. Brady in the dark, are remembering that white glare. They had come out into it from the shade of Pantwise's store, where they had been having a pretty good time looking at Miss Cullen, the shirt-waist buyer. She was mighty easy to look at. Coming out, and down off the slice of sidewalk into the dust, who's this comes along but John Shores, an old-time pal of Burton's (a man with more education though). Shores is wearing khaki, and he gets Burton by the button-hole, and starts talking. . . . That's how it all happened. If Burton had come out of the back entrance, instead of the front, he wouldn't have met Shores wearing khaki, and—who knows?—he'd have stayed behind, maybe, the way Miss Cullen would have had him do.

He was mighty glad he hadn't stayed behind.

—Three men got out at the next stop, and brought back bread and apples. They shared them with four others, and they looked at Burton in his corner, but his eyes were shut again, so they didn't wake him. They didn't quite know where to have this chap. He had been sitting there when they rattled up late on a ration-lorry,

and fell over him into the Soldiers' Pilgrimage-Train—and there he stayed, not to call surly, but kept himself to himself more than there was any need.—

He was seeing the lower deck of the transport that brought them from Halifax to the Scotch port of landing. He was on guard down there, and mortally sea-sick. The place was thick with a leaden stuffiness which tried to pass itself off under a bright smell of soap. Such a mixture. And cold! Talk of cold! His head was awful. It wasn't his head any more. Anybody might do what they liked with that head, for all he cared. He kept himself on the go for a while by watching out for the slap of the water, that came—now on this side of the boat—now on that. That told they kept changing their course: they were dodging a submarine. Well—if the fool submarine thought it worth its trouble—drowning a man with a head like that! He put his rifle down on the table—it came to that—and his head, and his two arms—all down together on the table. He couldn't stand up to it any longer.

But he was mighty glad he came.

And with that thought P. J. Burton, in his corner of the Paris-Bordeaux train, really did go off sound asleep.

—While he slept, the train passed out of the black night into the tenderest light of dawn that ever was. Everything was touched with pink—not the little clouds above only, but all the earth around was pink. Low-lying ponds, with trees that seemed just born—dreaming meadows, vine-patches, and again more fresh deep trees—everything was wet, everything pink.

The men stirred one by one, sat up, rubbed their eyes, and looked about them.—'Tis the sky-colour has got into the earth-colour,' says Sergeant Brady; and thinks

to himself—no wonder, when it's Our Lady's country they're travelling to. And, in fact, when this pink of dawn changes, it does *not* fade, it only changes, till all the green things now become softly blue as well as green, and in the sweet bewilderment of colour (which is which—or are all one ?), pink or blue whichever it may be, the sky-colours 'do be gettin' into ' the earth-colours, all the time.

The breeze of morning blowing in at the window had waked Gunner Burton too, but he didn't sit up like the rest. He heard their sleepy comments, and stayed in his corner, silent and still.—

He was seeing a stretch of open country in the Surrey hills. Behind him, just back of a sandy road, lay the whole of his life in England. He sat in the heather, looking away from all that, away, far, far away, across heather and sparsely dotted pines, to another line of hills that shut the horizon and were purple-black with coming storm. Behind him the parade-ground and the gunnery-school, the P.T. ground and the Y, and the office where they gave him his final look over, and dealt out his identity disc. Behind, too, the R.C. Church Hut where the priests, English or French, were ' in the box ' from 4 to 10 last night, with men of his draft : where this morning at the altar-rails he had united to God his solitary soul : where the medals of Our Lady, and rosaries, and scapulars, would lie heaped, still, on the soft-wood table, along with the matches and writing-paper and such. Behind him—all. From three o'clock he sat in the heather and waited for seven o'clock. John Shores was by him, talking. Shores was a great chap to talk, and when he was excited, he talked double. But he didn't care whether you listened or not—that's how they kept good pals. John

went off presently. An aunt of his was come to say good-bye. Shores had folks this side. When John was gone, P. J. Burton sat alone.

At seven he went and loaded up his miscellaneous hardware, and went on parade. They were fairly well worked up when they went on parade and they did a lot of cheering. There was another bunch going with them, at the end of the ground—looked like a wood of trees, they were so far off. The bunches cheered at each other, and cheered at the speeches—there were a lot of speeches. When the dusk began to fall they began to sing. They sang everything they knew and everything they didn't know, and when they had finished singing both they began again. It got mighty dark, not just ordinary night dark, but black clouds coming up and closing up all over. It looked like getting a soak before they entrained. Time went on, and the moon got up and they cheered the moon, but she didn't make much of a job of it—just pale gleams shooting through to show how black the black was. Soon the lights in the huts were the only spots you saw against the black. You couldn't see the man next you. P. J. Burton was disappointed. They were a big draft, and they were to be played to the railroad depôt by the band. Folks would be coming, sure, to see them march, and how were they going to see them march, this way? 'Lights Out' sounded, and then the hut lights were gone. The men were drowned in a sea of black. It was past ten, and they'd been standing loaded up since seven. John Shores had some poetry he was fond of that said there was such a number of things in the world, you ought to be as happy as a king. Burton wanted to ask him now if that was the way he felt about it, with all the things in the world hung from his shoulders—7 to 10. But he

couldn't see John Shores to ask him. He couldn't see anything.

Then two lights twinkled out in the dark. He hadn't noticed them coming but they were there, and in a second there was a cheer—a real cheer this time. And they were moving—they were moving—the light-bearers walking backwards at the head of them, warning them off the broken places, leading them down towards the road. How they yelled! You couldn't hardly hear the band for it. Now, that's the hard road—yes—hard under their feet!

But the folks to see them off?

Twenty, or maybe twenty-five, that hadn't got sick of waiting and gone home. You caught sight, as the lights touched them, first one face, then another, coming out and disappearing. Two or three men, some girls who smiled in a vague sort of way—not as if they knew you—one old woman who peered hard and ran a few steps as if she was looking for somebody. Burton thought it might be John Shores' aunt, and wished it was his. Imagine wishing you had an aunt!

The band played, though, and the Sergeant roared 'Left!—Left!—Left!'—and the men were flourishing their rifles over their heads and shouting 'Good-bye, Mother!' 'Good-bye, Sweetheart!'—as if there was anybody to hear them. And one of them,

'I'm coming back!'

Nobody answered him. They'd got past those few strange people in the road. They'd left the camp. They were on their way to France. To the Hindenburg Line.

—The train stopped at Bordeaux, and in about three seconds the men in Burton's carriage had rushed the buffet. He got up on his feet when the carriage was empty, and went to the door and stood hesitating, while

the crowd pressed past below. Hot coffee? Good. Yes, but not good enough. He sat down and pulled out a stalish paper parcel of bread and ham. They found him munching this when they came back and thought him more different sorts of an ass than they had up to date. But they left the word to Sergeant Brady, and the Sergeant wasn't after picking a quarrel with a man just now, on pilgrimage to Our Lady's town, and when Burton shut his eyes again they let him be.

Afternoon came and the Pyrenees. The friendly, spreading, various trees, and the fertile fields, at hand. The great hills closing round—hills only, nothing less gentle, although they were so great, and though on some of them, soon, there was snow. And the rushing stream of emerald water.—The Gave, was it? Then look out! They were getting near to Lourdes.

P. J. Burton didn't move.—

He was seeing mud: and more mud: and more mud. Miles of mud, under a mud-coloured sky. In the mud were jagged cracks. He stood in one; stiff, and cold, and fair fed up. The dirty damp rose from the ground and mixed with the clammy damp from the sky, and the thud, thud, of the devil's carpet-beating went on all the time. P. J. Burton hadn't fired a shot nor struck a blow, nor so much as seen another man struck. Nothing but stand, and hear the carpet-beating. He was fed up with that. He was going to say so to John Shores, but when he turned his head Shores had moved off a bit, round a corner of the trench, where he could cook himself some tea. Shores was always cooking tea. If Shores hadn't moved off, Burton would have made him hark to that new noise, coming now—a long sort of soft squeal, and then—

Nothing. Nothing, ever any more.

He was mighty glad Shores had moved off.

—The men in the carriage were singing. All the train was singing. Sergeant Brady had Burton by the shoulder, shaking him.

‘Wake up, man! ’Tis the Grotto we’re passing. No. Not there. *There!* Can’t you see?’

‘No, I can’t,’ says Burton, curtly.

‘Are you drunk or mad or sulky?’

‘I’m blind,’ says P. J. Burton.

P. J. Burton was at the Grotto.

He knew he was at the Grotto because Sergeant Brady said so. The Sergeant, once he had found himself out for a fool upon the train, was become father and mother both to Burton. So with the other men. And they let him alone. Sergeant Brady was gone off now with one of them and would just turn up to fetch him home.

So this was the Grotto.

Burton shivered.

Seven in the evening, mid-September, and the wind off the Gave at his back cool enough and a bit over. The good supper at the Heinz hadn’t seemed to fill up for the long empty time that came before. He was exhausted as well as cold.

But this was the Grotto.

The Sergeant had put him in the middle of the square of concrete, and had given him his bearings. Straight in front of where he knelt would be the altar. And ‘millions

o' big candles blazin' away behind it.' The statue of Our Lady was in her own niche, more to his right, and another big 'burnin' bunch, like a Christmas-tree o' flames' near by it. And on his left was the 'kind of trellis, as you might say, of all the crutches and things that they'd be leavin' behind 'em hangin' upon the rock, for thank-offerings.'

Well. All that was so, no doubt, as the Sergeant said so.

He shivered again.—And in a flash he was asking himself, why was he there? What had brought him to this cold, outlandish place? He was asking it coldly, roughly. If it was praying he wanted, couldn't he pray at home? Even the R.C. Hut at Witley was more like home than *this*. He'd know the way *that* was; he could find the wall of it and feel along the wall to where the softwood table was, with the rosaries, and from the table to the altar-rails. Wasn't that good enough, eh?

He was asking it violently, spitefully, a temper rising in him that was new—he hadn't been a nasty-tempered man. Something was turning him quarrelsome inside.—Whose fault was that then? What the devil had brought him out here? To the ends of the earth.—To a great big empty place where there was nothing he could do—nothing to tell him where he was—nothing he'd ever set eyes on, to remember by, or guess at—nothing he could get a feel of.—No!—He stretched out both arms wide to try—Nothing. Nothing he could reach or touch, barring the ground under him.

The ground?

The ground reminded him of something. There was something about 'the ground.' What was it?

“ You will pray for sinners. You will kiss the ground for sinners.”

Nothing here he could do? No, of course not!—What a liar the devil was. Nothing:—except just the one thing that the Blessed Mother of God wanted done.

Burton stooped and kissed the ground. It was muddy, from a shower, and from the tread of a thousand feet.

‘ For sinners,’ said Burton. He didn’t say ‘ of whom I am chief,’ not having the words by heart. The thought was in his heart. He said, ‘ Good old mud,’ and ‘ More fit for me than for her, I guess.’—‘ Her ’ was the child Bernadette. And then he thought, ‘ Funny thing, too. Mud’s the last thing I ever saw. And it’s the last I’m ever going to see in this world.’

‘ *Is it?* ’

He gasped, and knelt up suddenly quite straight. For another thought had come—tremendous and overwhelming. It had to do with wet earth on a blind man’s eyes. And now Burton knew, with absolute knowledge, where he was.

He was at the feet of that same Person who did *that*. This place was the same place where he did it. It was big—yes; roomy—room for everybody—but home-y—with that same Person going about in it seeing to things. ‘ Go ’ and ‘ Come ’ and ‘ Do this,’ just the same as—always. Ask-and-have, of *course*. All so easy and wonderful and natural. The Faith had been saying it all the time, too. But he never saw till now. It was all—just so.

He couldn’t think for the moment of anything he wanted to ask for, in a place like this, with God and his Blessed Mother waiting to hand it to him. He was

thinking how he'd been blind all his life, and now he saw. And then he was thinking of the ones that hadn't begun to see. John Shores.—Others.—Dozens of others. Why, he'd lived with them and *liked* them, and he'd never done a thing to help them see. Not a thing. He wanted to, now. He wanted to.

It was then that, through the blackness, lights began to glimmer. A row of lights straight ahead of him—a bunch of lights more to one side. He began turning his head where the bunch of lights was. It was getting clearer and clearer. And he was looking for Our Lady's statue; that was the first thing he was going to look at when he could see.

And then he stopped. He remembered Shores and the rest. He put up his two hands and shut down the lids on his two eyes, and he stretched out empty hands to God and his Blessed Mother waiting to give, and what he meant to say was, 'Lord, that *they* may see.'

When Sergeant Brady came and led him home, he was more helpless than before. Easier, though, the way they are when they've left off trying to bluff.

'And what did ye think o' the Grotto, boy?' asked the Sergeant.

'Some place,' said ex-Gunner P. J. Burton.

PEARLS

CHEPSTOW K. HALL trod softly. An unconsidered movement, he felt, would break this dream.

—He was at Great Peltham since yesterday, having walked there from Stroud. This was a pilgrimage to his mother's birthplace, which he had promised himself from across the wide Atlantic, ever since her death. She had been a Chepstow of Peltham Hall.

There was nothing like Alice Chepstow in the Western world to which Kemp Hall, the Cattle King, had swept her off. There were any number of delightful and absorbing things, altogether unlike her—things which her only child had grown up among and had enjoyed to the active, stimulating full—but none like her—none that could, when she left them, in the least recall, much less replace her. Her son, who for all his restless activity had the sensitive affectionateness ascribed to women, stayed near his father till, six months later, the old man, too, left him. And then he took the first boat to Liverpool, and the first train from Liverpool to London, and, after one morning spent there on his mother's business, the next train down to Stroud.

The twenty miles from Stroud he walked. An instinct told him that he wouldn't find his mother's memory by hurrying. He walked ten miles in the leisurely golden September forenoon, and lunched at the

'Three Trout,' and then he started on the second ten miles.

It brought him along through a glowing afternoon light to the west side of Peltham Crag, which stands up suddenly—a mountain, not a hill—out of the fertile plain.

It was an astonishing experience to a man used to miles of town, and then hundreds of miles of country and forested hills—with a thousand miles of prairie, and another thousand of naked mountain-range to follow. Here was every sort of thing, and the real thing too—he had read up Peltham Crag and its true mountainous formation—all brought together within a pebble's toss.

He rounded the Crag, and—behold!—on its black eastern flank, day was done. But he had only to look down, and a little east, and mellow light still bathed the smiling landscape. On his left rose a Priory Church of old forgotten monks, and finger-posts on his right pointed to St. Margaret's Holy Well.

He came to a towered gateway, leading nowhere, whose gatekeeper, hiding his friendly soul under a deference of manner which made Chepstow Hall ache, recommended for a night's lodging the house of one Mr. Bunting, a little way along to the left. It had no name or number, no—but you could know it by the garden, which was full of late-flowering roses. And Mr. Bunting had been a butler and Mrs. Bunting a cook in good families, and it was a house that knew how to make the gentry comfortable.

All the gardens in this charmed town were marvels to Chepstow, but Mr. Bunting's was undoubtedly an easy first. Every petal that must have fallen from the great globular standard rose trees had been taken up

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longed to, because Miss Chepstow would never have done such a thing at his age. As 'quite a little girl,' yes, with a basket of fruit and cakes for her refreshment at the top. But, when older, nothing less dignified than horse-exercise—and what a seat she had—and what hands! Or carriage-exercise. And how she must have become just such a landau as that one drawing up now at Bond and Bamfield's, drapers and silk mercers! Established 1754. By Appointment to her Majesty the Queen.

The pilgrim lingered, looking at that carriage. He could see his mother's courteous recognition of just such a respectful young person as was now bringing out silks—wasn't she? Heavens, yes, she was—bringing out silks to the carriage door: his mother's gentle dismissal of anything 'showy'—her mild persistence in a graceful dowdiness that had lasted all her life and had been the despair of the vivid leaders of fashion in Pueblo Springs—who first mocked at, then idolized and copied the 'sweet thing'—then caricatured and dropped her and forgot her—leaving Alice Chepstow Hall serenely unaware of all these proceedings.

Not an ounce of uncharity in her unawareness. Somehow she always understood that she didn't understand. And, in default of understanding, she had a secret: she loved. All her new world. The bewildering husband who had refused to take 'No' for an answer, the son who made so much too much of her, the surprising servants whose manners, though sometimes 'almost familiar,' didn't blind her to their hearts of gold, and the 'neighbourhood'—she made of Pueblo Springs just a new 'neighbourhood,' and one she always found 'so very kind.'

The big carriage rolled away, leaving an absurd pang of emptiness in the stranger across the road. He tried to laugh. It wasn't his mother's carriage, anyhow! But it was part of this whole slow, old adorable thing that had gone to the making of her.

Then he did laugh—successfully. He had remembered that dream wife his mother had always been wanting for him, 'a nice, good, well-brought-up girl.' And though he laughed, as he always had laughed, at that dove-coloured dream, to-day he was more than half in love with it; and he told himself that if any dark unfathomed cave of ocean held that pearl serene—surely, surely, it was here.

He dropped into the pearl simile, no doubt, because he had come to his next stand in front of a jeweller's window. Pemberton, on the Upper Walk, Jeweller and Watchmaker, looked out across two counties and told the far horizon that *he* was established 1735; also, By Appointment to Her Majesty the Queen.

Chepstow threw a pitying thought to the shock Great Peltham would get when news of the accession of Edward VII leaked through to it, and then he pushed open a door which told in gilt letters dimmed with age of Pemberton's willingness to purchase precious stones, and went into the shop. His watch wanted fixing, and he'd be interested to know how many æons old man Pemberton would propose to take fixing a watch.

He liked the broad, low-ceilinged, half-lit place he

came into much better than Grosch's shop in Conduit Street, where he was yesterday. There were very good things here, too—old table silver, and women's ornaments—when you could get to see them in the dark.

Pemberton, white-haired and white-bearded, came out of his working corner and went into the watch question. But before he fixed his magnifier, the old man took a quick second glance—and then a long third one, at his customer. He was going to speak, then changed his mind and didn't, till he had examined the watch. Then he only said :

'This is a little matter, sir, that I shall be happy to set right for you in ten minutes, if you can give me so long.'

'Well,' exclaimed the customer. 'If I couldn't give you that much! In Great Peltham!'

As if answering his intonation, the old craftsman murmured, 'Yes. The watch *is* American. Still——' he paused.

'So am I,' laughed Chepstow.

Pemberton bowed assent, but waited for more.

'Half-American, that is.'

'Ah,' said Pemberton. And nodding gently, and smiling, he set to work.

But more than once, when Chepstow Hall, wandering round the shop, turned to ask some question, the old man would seize the pretext to put down his magnifier and to steal another questioning, kindly look at him.

The job was nearly done, and Chepstow Hall, in the back of the shop, was looking at some pearls. They interested him to-day. His mother's pearls had been claimed by a far-away cousin as an heirloom; the cousin

was willing to take their price in cash, and it was to hand the pearls for valuation to Grosch that Chepstow had stopped off yesterday in London. Five minutes of the great expert's talk had made pearls fascinating, and Chepstow Hall was so busy applying his new knowledge that he didn't hear the shop-door open and somebody come in.

Then somebody said, 'You buy pearls, I see.' In such a voice!

Like clear, cold water! Like the taste of it, when the one thing you're wanting is a drink! Like the look of it, deep and transparent, flowing over the stones in the dark of a pine-wood, when the one thing you're wanting is cool shade. It held him still for a moment. Should he look round? Should he risk it? Breathed there the soul to match a voice like that? He didn't know. But he couldn't help it—he looked round.

And, simply—it was She.

This was what he was here for, he knew now. It was this that had called him over land and sea—that had whispered to him in the road outside of the dream coming true, and had wiled him into the blessed place where it should be given him to look at her.

Well. He was looking.

All the little shafts of light in the dim shop were looking at her. They let the silly gems and gold and silver be, and found out the lights in her hair, and in the depths of her grey eyes. He hardly caught one glimpse of her eyes, but he knew they were grey—they had to be. She was all dressed in soft grey too—the grey that is the gentler side of white; and she was so young and slight and simple.

He stood at the back of the shop, looking. Nobody marked him. He could stand and look, and think, and look again.

The girl in grey, meanwhile, was going on with her business.

At the first words the watchmaker had put down his glass and come behind the counter.

But he didn't speak. He was frowning a little. With embarrassment, was it? With constraint, with pain, almost.

'You do buy pearls?' she repeated.

Then, with a little natural impatience, 'Why, it says so. It's written up—on the door.'

'I am sorry, ma'am,' said the old man, hesitatingly. 'But I am afraid that I couldn't consider—'

'Do you mean that you don't buy them?' There was dismay as well as impatience now.

'It is true,' said Pemberton, more and more obviously uncomfortable, 'that, sometimes, in certain cases—'

The grey eyes laughed, and the girl said with a little nod, 'Then look at *this* case, please.'

She laid a blue leather box upon the counter, snapped it open, and said with quiet confidence:

'There!'

The beauty of the single string of pearls revealed took the old jeweller's breath away, and the girl in grey laughed again softly, and said:

'Aren't they lovely?'

At this point the young man at the back of the shop woke up to a world of conventions and to the fact that he was eavesdropping.

He threw down his stick and picked it up again with a

clatter, and the vision looked round once in his direction, annoyed.

He had annoyed her.

On the other hand—the quite negligible hand, he had pleased Pemberton very much indeed. He had found him a way out.

He shut the case down and handed it back to the young lady in grey, saying with finality :

‘You will excuse me, ma’am, I am sure. I must not keep this gentleman waiting. I have promised him his watch in ten minutes.’

But she only said : ‘I can wait ten minutes,’ and put the case down on the counter, and her chin upon her hand, and waited.

‘But I—I—’ stammered Chepstow Hall, wildly, ‘I couldn’t think of k—keeping this lady waiting.’ He wasn’t a stammerer—he had never stammered in his life. It was the headlong need of dissociating himself quickly enough from this impossible Pemberton.

The impossible Pemberton looked at him with sad and warning eyes.

Chepstow seized his hat.

‘I want to wander through the town a bit,’ he said. To leave her presence ! Hideous thought ! ‘I’ll come back for my watch when this lady has finished.’

He made for the door with the speed of a felon dragging a round shot.

But Pemberton, who stiffened under pressure, snapped out abruptly : ‘I am not able, ma’am, to make you any offer,’ and the girl in grey flushed suddenly, and stood up.

‘Don’t let me drive you away, pray,’ she said to Chepstow, with a curt but charming coldness.

He didn't take twice praying. He dropped the door-handle, swung round, and stood straight as a dart, his hat down by his side, waiting for orders. He'd have needed none, if the ruffianly Pemberton had only had the brute strength to match his offensive manner.

The girl in grey had taken on Pemberton, however, and though her eyes were bright with anger, they were laughing.

'I really believe,' she said, 'that you are afraid to buy these pearls because you imagine that I've stolen them.'

Chepstow's right hand quivered on his stick.

'But it's all right,' she went on. 'They're my *very* own. I can give you my name and address if you like. I'm staying at——'

'I know—I know—I know!' The old man's voice broke in, agitated, imploring, talking her down.

'I have no doubt at all, madam, of the pearls being your own property. I am aware of'—his voice dropped—'of all the circumstances, ma'am—your name and— and your address. You will understand that in a quiet town like this, anything of—of the sort. In fact—*pray say no more!*'

It was extraordinary. The old lunatic was pleading with her—sending signals to her—eyes and voice both entreating 'say no more.'

And at last it seemed that she began to understand. She was silent a moment, gravely considering, her eyes cast down. Then she looked at him, and asked quietly :

'Are you objecting to having any dealings with me because I'm staying—*there?*'

His only answer was once more to hand her back her pearls.

This time she took them.

'I'm sorry,' she said. 'I really didn't suppose that anybody would be—like that, now.'

Still thinking, considering, and carrying the case of pearls, she went to the door, and Chepstow opened it for her.

But in the doorway she stopped and lifted her head. She looked across the two counties to the far horizon, and said with a sharp, surprised dismay :

'But how am I going to get the money, then?'

The hour was come, and the man—Kemp Hall's son was the man.

'Just two seconds,' he said firmly.

The girl turned. What was this cool, impersonal note of command?

'Allow me.'

The inevitable spoke. The chair indicated might have been the dentist's.

She took it.

The unknown man was writing on the back of a card.

'This is a London man who knows all about pearls,' he said. 'I've put it on the back of my card. My name's Hall—Chepstow Hall. Looks as if I travelled in jewellery——' He laughed joyously. 'But I saw this Grosch man yesterday about some pearls belonging to my mother.' It shot through him that he was talking to her—*her*—about his mother! 'If it isn't giving you too much trouble to send him a line about your business, enclosing this card, I think I can promise you that Grosch will know—how to behave.'

She took the card, as she had taken the chair, in mute obedience.

Chepstow Hall bowed. Splendidly. He had never bowed like that. He marched to the door, and held it open. He made no claim upon her. He asked nothing—nothing in the world, but to lay Grosch's thousands at her feet. Only, as she was passing out of his life for ever, he said, loud and clear :

' You won't think me impertinent, I hope.'

That stopped her. She looked up from the card, met his eyes, and said simply :

' I want this money dreadfully. And when I saw that on the door I thought I could get it. I went straight home and fetched my pearls. And *then*——'

She stopped, with emphasis.

' Yes,' said Chepstow, with equal emphasis.

Pemberton's old back, bent over his work again, must have creaked under the joint condemnation.

' I thank you very much,' the dream-lady went on. ' You don't know what you've done for me. Good-bye.'

That was all.

' Good-bye.'

She was gone.

Pemberton, coming forward slowly with the watch, said :

' It's a pity.'

' What is a pity ? ' asked Chepstow, with cold distinctness.

The old man rubbed his hand across his tired eyes.

' I heard your name, sir,' he said, smiling kindly into the stern visage that faced him. ' And if I'm not mistaken you are the son of the young lady that was the last Miss Chepstow of the Hall ? '

' Why, yes—— But——'

'You'll excuse me, sir,' the watchmaker persisted. 'I made sure you were Miss Alice's son as soon as you came into my shop. You have a great look of her. I've known little Miss Alice in and out of my shop, sir, since she was that high.'

Chepstow was touched; but he wasn't going to let the old fellow get away with his insolent innuendoes, all the same.

'And what is the "pity" about?' he asked again.

John Pemberton hesitated. He didn't like this job. But the story was common property in all the four Pelthams. Should Miss Alice's son alone go unwarned?

'It's a pity your helping the poor young lady to get hold of money, sir, if you'll excuse me.'

'What the devil are you talking about?'

The sudden violence made Pemberton jump. But it made him, for Miss Alice's sake, go on.

'A pity for the young lady's sake, herself, sir. The young lady is one of the—patients—that belong at the Retreat. The Retreat,' he said firmly, 'is the Home that's been opened here by the Roman Catholic nuns. It's a Home, sir, for the poor ladies that—a Home for Inebriates, sir.'

He paused.

'A sad pity,' he said again.

The silence was strangely hard to break.

He wound the watch and put it down in front of Miss Alice's son. He didn't like to look at him, somehow.

But after a moment he said:

'There's your watch, sir.'

A dried voice asked:

'How much?'

'It's been only a pleasure, sir, if you'll allow me.'

'*How much?*'

The voice was savage.

'Eighteenpence, if you please, sir.'

A shilling and a sixpence lay on the counter. The watch was gone. The door was shut.

'And I suppose that's all the thanks *I'll* ever get,' said Pemberton.

'A stranger. A stranger. No business of mine.'

'A damned lie. A lie is everybody's business.'

All the way up to the summit of Peltham Crag, and all the way down again, Chepstow Hall's brain rang those changes.

Near the top a cheerful couple of walkers coming down, a man and a girl, stopped and looked after him.

'A bit strung up, that young chap,' said the man. He was an artisan from Birmingham. 'See his jaw working?'

'He's an American,' said the girl, who was Bunting's housemaid having her day out. 'Americans are that way.'

'Portrait model of the original Mr. Excelsior he is, by the pace he's making.'

They sat down on a bank to eat their dinner. The Excelsior chap showed up on the sky-line of the Summit for about two seconds and then charged down again.

When he came near, he slackened speed, and looked at the man, and the man looked back and said, 'Pleasant morning.'

‘ Can you direct me to a house in this town called “ The Retreat ? ” ’ asked Excelsior.

‘ Sorry, I’m a stranger here. But I dessay this young lady—Lily, do you know The Retreat ? ’

‘ Down past the Priory, first turning on the right, house in a big garden with a high wall round, place where the nuns keep the ladies locked up that take too much, ’ said Lily in one breath.

‘ You hadn’t any call to say all that, Lily ’—Excelsior was speeding down the hill—‘ He’s got a friend in the place likely.’

‘ I never thought, ’ said Lily, ashamed. ‘ Might be his mother.’

‘ Or *his* young lady.’

‘ Poor chap.’

The day was clouded for the cheerful pair.

Chepstow Hall had no plan. When he found The Retreat he would demolish the lie. That was all.

He found it easily. Two nuns were passing out of the Priory grounds by one gate as he went in by another. He had only to follow them. They turned into a wide straight road, with gardens sloping steeply down to it on the right-hand side, and on the left a long high wall. A postman was clearing a pillar-box at the corner as he turned into the road.

Far off down the wall there was a door.

Suddenly this door was flung open, and a girl darted out. She wore a cotton dress and a big cap—but she hadn’t the look of a maid-servant—and instantly he knew the dress to be the uniform of the horrible place.

The blue and white figure stopped dead at sight of the nuns, and he slowed down to avoid overtaking them. But

they, too, stopped when they came up to the girl; all three stood together. They were reasoning with her—persuading her to go in again, he supposed. He had to go on walking past them, not to look marked, but he was going by without lifting his eyes. One of the nuns was speaking in a pleasant voice.

‘In that dress, child? What *would* your father say to us?’

Then the girl said.

‘Do let me go!’

He stood still. He didn’t know it. His heart—everything—stood still. He did worse than stand. He looked at her. And she, in her horrible uniform, looked at him. And if a look could kill! There was indignation—there was humiliation—and oh! worst—there was the keenest disappointment.

She had taken him for a gentleman, and she found him a spy.

He didn’t know how long he stood there. She gave no sign of recognition, unless you count blazing cheeks and averted eyes. He lifted his hat, and walked on. When the door in the wall shut behind him he looked back.

He saw an empty road.

When Vassar landed from his historic flight in the grass field near Farborough, three men jumped out of the car in which they had been following, and ran across to him. Two he expected to see here. They were the only pressmen in the secret of his great attempt. But

the third man, and the car, came as a pleasant surprise. Jim Vassar had struck up an acquaintance with this American coming down in the train last week, and had followed it up in the smoking-room of the Coast Hotel, taking a tremendous liking to the man.

'In at the death, eh?' was all Jim Vassar said. He was a bit out of breath, though. In May, 1908, a 16-mile flight in 20 minutes meant immense, prophetic things.

'Pleased to meet you,' laughed the American. But the grip of his hand said much more.

Then, for ten uncomfortable minutes, the reporters claimed Vassar for their own; after which, breaking from them, he went back to his machine.

'I must take her home,' he said, 'and give her a bransh and a rub-down.' But before he started he got in a word with his American.

'Lunch at the "Coast" at two?'

'Right,' said Chepstow Hall. 'Exceedingly right.'

He took the reporters in his car to the nearest up-train, which saved them an hour on the Farborough telegraph-service. And then whizzed on alone—grey sea and green corn scudding by him on either side in the bleak air—till he reached the windy barrack on a jutting cliff which was the Royal Coast Hotel.

There he stood waiting and warming himself in the hall and going through the letters that the second post had brought him.

Business letters all—he went through them—he went *for* them with a ferocious assiduity.

One afternoon in Great Peltham last autumn had done more to concentrate Kemp Hall's son upon his business than all the pleasant years that came before.

In fact, the continuous mental grind, unbroken even during three high-speed journeys between the States and Russia, had brought him to insomnia, to threatened breakdown, and to this deadly spell of holiday upon the Norfolk coast.

And he 'remembered yet.'

A letter in the present batch from Grosch of Conduit Street asking directions as to the Chepstow pearls, came like a whip-lash upon a still throbbing scar. He dropped the letter into the fire, and turned unseeing eyes on the big ugly plate-glass windows against which cold sheets of rain were beating now.

He saw the dark shop, with its lovely, heart-winning dream. He saw the staring sunlit road, with its heart-breaking—its heart-keeping—reality. He might (he sometimes thought) have been able to forget the dream: but the reality he couldn't forget. The calamity of this innocent creature—to him always innocent—darkly afflicted, without blame—held him—always remembering and always shut away—the unwanted, intrusive outsider. Her father—those gentle-spoken women—anyone but he—might serve her and care for her. He, in the nature of the thing, was sentenced to pass by on the other side: he could only insult and humiliate.

—He would never have any use for pearls, anyway.

With that he turned from the window, and sat down and wrote to Grosch to sell the Chepstow pearls.

Then Vassar came in, and he sprang up to give this fine young fellow the welcome he deserved.

They talked shop, of course, all lunch-time—Vassar's astonishing shop. It was extraordinarily exhilarating to the fagged business man—the difficulties that this boy—

he was only twenty-two—had overcome on the road to victory. Twenty-two, the son of the big South African Vassar, with lumps of money and loads of playfellows to spend it with on play. Yet the machine that had made to-day's great record was Jim Vassar's invention and his construction too, and space upon space along the way to achievement had been filled with dogged hopelessness.

The boy was restlessly excited in his happiness now, but when Chepstow offered to run him up to town in his car after lunch to work it off :

'I'm tied by the leg here till to-morrow,' he said. 'You see, I've a sort of a notion my father may look me up. May take a fresh fancy to me when he sees the evening papers.'

'Why, naturally,' said Chepstow.

'Not so jolly naturally. My father isn't taking any in my wild-cat schemes. Thinks I'm off my nut. Still, trying's one thing. And getting there's another. And if to-day's little game does bring the dear old boy round and bring him down—well, I want to be here. One hated riling him, you know.'

Some watery gleams of sunshine were looking in at the window. Vassar went and stood there drumming on it.

'The thing is, though, I want to go over to Sherringham. It's playing it pretty low down on Ann if she only gets this thing from the newspapers.'

Chepstow hesitated—the situation appeared to be delicate—then he hazarded :

'If you're wanting to talk with a lady at Sherringham——'

'Oh!' laughed Vassar, 'Ann's my sister.'

'Couldn't you get Miss Vassar on the telephone, then?'

'Isn't on it. Of course if she'd the slightest inkling that to-day's The Day she'd ring me up. But she hasn't an idea. One hated to put one's people in a stew.'

'Then why not let Bloggs take my car over to Sherringham with your invitation to Miss Vassar to come back in it here to tea?'

'Good business!' cried Vassar. He was at the writing-table in a flash. 'Those in the affirmative,' he babbled, scribbling hard, 'will signify their adhesion in the usual——'

Chepstow Hall left him at his note, and had the car and chauffeur waiting by the time he brought it out.

'Convent?' read Bloggs. 'Don't know it.' Manners were not Bloggs' strong point.

'Big red house in a pine plantation,' said Vassar. 'On your left before you get into the town.'

The car started.

'And now you've got to wait and meet my sister,' the boy told Chepstow. 'Yes,' he insisted, 'considering you're the founder of the feast.' Then he laughed. 'And so's she,' he said, 'if it comes to that.'

The rain stopped, and the two were sitting in the verandah, smoking and waiting for the car, when Chepstow Hall, who had fallen silent, remarked, casually, his eyes on the ash he was knocking off:

'Miss Vassar lives in a convent?'

'Good Lord, no. Stopping there a week-end, with a school-pal that's a nun.'

'You know something about nuns, then?'

'Ann does,' said Vassar. 'Why?'

He was surprised.

'I suppose——' said Chepstow, and stopped short. 'See here, Mr. Vassar,' he said abruptly, 'this isn't idle curiosity.'

'Go ahead.'

'I suppose nuns are people you can trust to—to be kind to a—helpless person?'

'Of course,' said Vassar.

But then he sat up and collected himself to be more definite. Somehow he saw that this was a matter that hit his new friend hard.

'You ask my sister,' he said. '*She* knows. Brought up in a convent, you know. And *she* thinks—— Well, you can judge what she thinks when I tell you—Ann can have about any sort of good time she likes, I suppose. But you give her a chance to bolt away down to her nuns' Retreat House in—— What's the matter with you?'

For his American friend had gasped :

'Retreat House?'

His voice didn't try to be normal.

'Yes. Retreat House. Oh! you don't know 'em. I'm not out to go into all that. Places where you go to make your soul. But what I'm saying is, give Ann the chance—any time her dear nuns get their hands too full with a retreat—and she'll bolt off from anything to help 'em out—go down and cook for 'em, and——'

'Cook for them?' Chepstow flung away his cigar.

Vassar laughed.

'Turn not so pale, my democratic friend. My sister's a simply gorgeous cook. Born, not made. That sort of thing. Get her into cap and apron——'

'Mr. Vassar.' The American was standing over him,

his hands thrust deep into his pockets and the most extraordinary waking-up look on his face. 'Is there one of these—these hermitage outfits you're speaking about at Great Peltham in Gloucestershire?'

'I should rather say there was. Great Peltham's how I came by my £9000 to play with that pulled it off to-day.'

'Go on!' Chepstow Hall was down again now in his chair, still, and staring, doing the listening of his life.

'I don't mind telling you I hadn't a cent. My father simply turned the tap off when I took to flying. It was my sister. She was down there on one of her cook sprees, and she got the magnificent idea to raise the wind for me by selling a string of pearls that she'd had from her god-mother last birthday—and loved a little better than her life, I should say, poor soul. The local man, by good luck had a down on her; I suppose he'd have offered her about a hundred! But he wouldn't touch 'em. Because she came from a convent, or so she understood. Queer old bird! Anyhow, there was a man in the shop who told her all about the exactly right man to write to in town. And Grosch—that's the exactly righter, jumped at the pearls to the tune of nine thousand, and—for results, see evening papers. Which makes two founders—as I observed—for our little tea-party to-day. You, who just invented the tea-party idea. And my sister, who originally started off the whole caboodle. Not to mention the worthy chap in the shop, by the way, who knows nothing about his great good deed.'

'Miss Vassar doesn't wish he should know,' said the American—in one final flash of gloom.

'She's dying he should,' said Vassar. 'You see, she

met him in the street afterwards—running out in her cook's dress to post the letter. And she thinks he must have thought her drunk or mad.'

'My name was on the card I gave Miss Vassar,' maintained Chepstow doggedly.

'Hal-lo!' Vassar jumped right up out of his chair. 'You?'

'Why, yes,' said Chepstow. 'Me, as you say.'

'Put it there!' cried Vassar. 'You! Good business! You!—Where the devil are you off to now?'

'Telegraph-office,' called Kemp Hall's son, over his shoulder. 'Back in five minutes.'

Jim Vassar looked after the tall figure swinging down the road, and considered several things.

First: '*That* man doesn't look like wanting any rest-cure.'

Then: 'Ann never told me she'd got the chap's name all the time. Why didn't she?'

His simple mind perceived that Ann had been shy about it. And—further—

'*Oh! Good business!*'

THE WIRE.

To

Grosch,

Conduit Street,

London, W.

Letter cancelled. Holding pearls.

CHEPSTOW HALL.

THE NEW J.L.

5^B PARK LANE was very small and very, very white. Its windows stood open to the light June breeze, and little lacy muslin things bléw in and out of them in a beckoning way between hanging baskets of pink roses. Just such a house James Langhorne had expected. He crossed to it—his bad hat and ill-cut clothes thrilling him with pride at every step—rang, and was admitted.

Jack Lewin was in his writing-room.

Not writing. Nobody ever knew, least of all himself, when 'J.L.' did write his winners. He was always doing something else. Just now he was having the time of his life. He was smoking. He was looking up—when he looked up—at the play of spring leaves against the sky. And he was reading something the like of which he had never read before.

He had the third act of the thing upon his knee, and every now and then he laughed for joy. The other acts, with the decayed old bit of brown paper they had come in, were strewn over the writing-table, and were the only slovenly things in the room. For Kate Lewin's daintiness overflowed into her husband's writing-room as much as did his untidiness into her drawing-room. It might have been by treaty between them; but the Lewins had no treaties, having no wars.

To one act of the scattered MSS. was pinned a piece of foolscap which said, 'It may interest you to read a play which your plays are keeping off the stage.'

Apparently it did.

When Langhorne was shown in, Lewin got up in his welcoming way and said it was most awfully good of him and various things of an ice-breaking character. But Langhorne refused to smoke; and when he consented to sit down, he sat down like the young man in the Assurance Company's picture, who has just been told he has only three days to live but doesn't mind because he knows his family's provided for.

So Jack Lewin came to the point at once.

'Well, I'm at it again, you see! It won't let me go.' 'It,' waved by Lewin, was "*Cynthia*," a comedy in three acts by James Langhorne.

'Of course you know,' said Lewin, 'it's absolutely great.'

'Yes,' said Langhorne. 'I know that.'

Lewin was feverishly turning the pages.

'This,' he said—'of *Cynthia* and Dick Bellasis.' He read a word or two, rejoicingly. 'But it's perfect,' he insisted. 'It's—it's absolutely It!'

'What,' asked Langhorne, 'do you intend to convey by the word "It"?''

Lewin looked across at his visitor and back at the radiant pages of the play. Then he spoke with more seriousness.

'What I was trying to get at is that it's—genius.'

He was shy of saying the word, because he meant it.

'Yes,' said Langhorne. 'I know that.'

He was like an unlifting Scotch mist. But Lewin

rallied his wits. He always could. That's what made him useful at rehearsal. His vitality never went under.

'You're not taking any in third-rate compliments,' he said. 'Though, mind you, they amount to something. I'm the ordinary man—the man in the street. It's the man in the street you've got to get. And you've got me. See?—'

Langhorne mutely, and with small apparent pleasure, regarded what he had got.

'But of course,' Lewin went on, 'the point is what are we going to *do* about it?'

'Do?' repeated Langhorne—surprised at last.

'Yes, *do*,' said Lewin. He got up eagerly and walked to the fireplace. He was as tall and active a man as Langhorne, and when he stood up with his back to a lot of foolish flowering plants, some dim subconscious region in Langhorne knew that Lewin's clothes were as simple as his own. He stood there smoking furiously and talking fast.

'Yes. *Doing's* the idea, isn't it? You didn't send me your play only to give me the very great pleasure of reading it?'

'No.'

'Nor yet merely to knock the stuffing out of me about my own?'

Silence.

'You sent it me, I'm glad to think, because you felt that something had simply got to be done about a play like that, and that I might be the man to do it.'

A slow joy developed in Langhorne. This man was going to offer him money. He had expected insult all

along—ever since he had received his fawning note. Insult was coming. Good.

Lewin tried again.

‘If you have any idea sketched out of what I *could* do——’ he paused.

‘Are you offering me money, Mr. Lewin?’ asked Langhorne, slowly beginning to rise.

‘Good Lord, no!’ cried Lewin, getting very red, and Langhorne sat down again.

‘I may take it then, Mr. Langhorne,’ said Lewin after a moment, ‘that you haven’t formulated any plan. Then perhaps,’ he came back to a chair, ‘perhaps I won’t bore you stiff if I elaborate mine.’

He proceeded to do so with the ease and flow that characterized J.L. at those times when he was shivering with inward excitement and knew himself up against a stone wall of opposition. And Langhorne listened, entrenched in scorn, to the man whose trivial comediettas were running, year in, year out, all up and down the world: and who sat in the gilded gimcrack cage his trash had brought him, and extended patronage—in his confounded, country-gentleman voice and manner—to James Langhorne.

Jack Lewin’s plan was broad, and complete in every detail.—‘Detail’s my one strong point, you know.’

‘I know that, Mr. Lewin.’

“*Cynthia*” ought, in Lewin’s opinion, to have the sort of launching given to a new J.L.

—‘You may have seen how they write ’em up.’

‘I have seen it.’

‘Because, you see, it’s no manner of use my going round to the Powers, telling them that “*Cynthia*”’s a good

play. First, they won't believe it's good unless it's mine. And, secondly, they don't want a good play—they want a winner.—Naturally, I think.'

'Naturally you do,' said Langhorne, and Lewin laughed.

'Well, you know, they've got their living to make. Where I part company with them is—I'm convinced a good play is a winner.—*If* the acting's good.'

'You lean on the acting,' remarked Langhorne coldly.

'My dear chap,' exploded Lewin. 'What do you suppose makes my plays go?'

He then explained that he didn't propose to do anybody over this—or at least, if he did do 'em, he'd do 'em honest. He wasn't going round to Hartfield to sell Langhorne's play as his own: and Langhorne said:

'I am glad that you see that course to be dishonest.'

Lewin assented meekly, took hold of himself and went on:

'No. My idea is to do a little flutter in management myself. Take a theatre—get hold of Black—he produces for me—nobody can touch him—and Iris Brooke for the girl.—What?—Announce an anonymous play. Swear everybody concerned to dead secrecy. The papers'll sit up and write their heads off over my rum new start. "*Cynthia*" 'll get J.L. advance notices, ditto First-Night and press to follow—and when once they've seen her—*seen her with Iris Brooke.*—*See?*' He was literally breathless with excitement.

A wooden countenance confronted him. 'I'm afraid, though, you don't fancy my idea,' he ended ruefully.

'I cannot at all understand it,' said Langhorne.

‘Of course you can’t,’ said Lewin. ‘You can’t see why work like yours should take boosting from work like mine. It’s preposterous, I know. But there’s the fact. They won’t believe in your play till they see it. And they can’t see it—alive—walking—talking—till they do believe in it. It’s the Circle. God knows how I broke in! It took me years and years—collar-work.’

‘You?’ Langhorne was a second time surprised.

‘Ask my wife! And *my* things are the little handy marketable things. Yours will take a bit of doing. But when it’s done!—’ The lambent enthusiasm known to all co-workers in a J.L. was playing about Lewin as he paced the room.

Langhorne stood up. Jack Lewin stopped his pacing, and the men were looking straight at each other, as Langhorne asked searchingly:

‘What are you doing this *for*, Mr. Lewin?’

Jack Lewin was frightfully sorry for this guarded chap.

‘Don’t you *like* your own play?’ he asked.

‘I like it,’ said Langhorne, in a non-committal way. But his colour suddenly rose.

‘Well, so do I! I like it like—like the devil! I *want* to have a hand in it.’

‘That, I can understand,’ said the author of “*Cynthia*.” After a pause he added, ‘I will consider your proposal, Mr. Lewin. Good morning.’

And he turned to the door.

‘But you’ll stay to lunch? My wife expects you.’

Langhorne wheeled in dismayed question.

‘Yes. She’s in it,’ said Lewin calmly. ‘We hammered it out together.’ (‘Anvil, Kitty, hammer, me,’ he thought.) ‘It’ll be just we three in the secret.’

Nobody else—not even Black—till after the production!—The triumph!—My word!’

In the hall they were met by ‘Kitty.’ She looked that, thought Langhorne, as he stood in stiff silence while Lewin explained.

‘Yes, we’ve had our talk, Kitty.—Let me introduce you to my wife.—No. Mr. Langhorne won’t stay now. He’d rather not. He wants time to consider my proposal.’

‘Oh,’ said Kate Lewin.

The O of her mouth was small and gentle; but the o’s of her two eyes were as big as saucers.

Langhorne wrote:

DEAR MR. LEWIN,—

On reflection I am willing to consent to your proposal for the production of my three-act comedy “*Cynthia*.” I confess myself somewhat dismayed by your action in admitting a lady to the (otherwise) confidential project. I realize, however, that your plan may put you to some initial expense and that justice may therefore have required the consent of the Hausfrau; and I have no doubt that Mrs. Lewin’s discretion will justify the confidence you have placed in it.

Yours faithfully,

JAMES LANGHORNE.

P.S.—On the production of “*Cynthia*” you will, of course, be refunded any sums you may advance.’

Lewin whistled a gentle air as he read.

'Well?' said Kate. They were at breakfast.

He hesitated. Then he said, 'Count twenty. Or think about his gorgeous dialogue'—and tossed the note across.

She read it.

'Well?' said Lewin.

'I've counted sixty,' said Kate. And said no more.

'I'm going round to talk to Finch about the "Crown,"' her husband told her after breakfast. 'I hear he'll go to America if he can get an offer for the "Crown" that he likes—really likes. He's afraid of letting the place down, you know. It's never had a failure.'

'The "Crown"?' murmured Kate. He stood smiling at her, and rummaging for his favourite stick.

'Some initial expense,' she quoted softly.

'It's worth it.'

'I wonder.'

'You'll see. I'll wire Langhorne it's all right.'

'Why wire?'

'I will wire, Mrs. Ha'porth o' Tar—I will expend the full sum of one shilling—because that poor old boy is sitting at this moment shivering and sweating for fear lest his special blend of sportive dignity should miss fire, or kick, and knock poor "*Cynthia*" silly.'

Which is just what Langhorne was doing, when a wire from South Audley Street Post Office reached him with the one word 'Right.'

There followed a week of tense excitement. Langhorne spending hours daily in the tiny lace-and-rose-hung Park Lane house, shut up with Lewin, and talking as he had never talked before. Or was it listening? Some-

times at night he thought with a stir of dull resentment that it was Lewin who told him, not he Lewin, the things that were in "*Cynthia*"—things struck visible by the writer in a flashing word—to be lived out by the actor—how?—Langhorne didn't know: Lewin didn't say. When Lewin had talked him dizzy, Lewin's wife would come and carry them both away to eat and drink such food and drinks as Langhorne had sometimes read of with contempt, and which he absorbed now in deep unconsciousness of the good his poor digestion was getting done to it.

At the end of the week, after dinner one night, when the servants were gone, and 'we three' were eating strawberries in a soft shaded light, Lewin said:

'It's good-bye for a couple of months, to-night, Langhorne. We're off to the Tyrol.'

'What!'

'Sixteenth of June to-day—July—August—I get back in the middle of August and we produce end of September. It's the picked date. And now it's all in swing. We've got the theatre and the right people—my word, that was luck about Iris Brooke—nobody else could touch the part.—Now's the time for a holiday.'

'Holiday,' echoed Langhorne. His desolate voice touched Kate Lewin's heart.

'Jack *must* take a holiday if he's to be any good in August,' she said. 'You see he—gets stale.'

—'Missus's orders,' grinned Jack.—

'—But if I were *you*, Mr. Langhorne, I'd write another play. Yes,' she persisted, as Langhorne gasped and stared. 'You'll wish you had another on the stocks, when October comes.' She smiled in a very nice way.

'And nothing will take your mind off the waiting-time like writing another—will it?'

She was his enemy, Langhorne knew. Still, he took her advice. But often in those slow two months, getting up from a long day's work in his Kilburn boarding-house, and walking out into the stuffy street, he thought of his rival, Lewin, faring sumptuously in some palatial mountain hotel, and despised while he envied him, and told himself this wrong was not for long.

Lewin, meanwhile, in a little hid-away chalet in the Tyrol, was doing his 'collar-work' on "*Cynthia*." The manuscript he brought home to Black in August before the first rehearsal, was cobwebbed with the minute exquisitely legible notes that went to the making of a J.L.

To Langhorne that first rehearsal was passed in a golden haze, through which he watched the essential essence of each of his characters touched in a look—a tone—by Lewin, megaphoned by his familiar, Black, and caught up and reproduced by every member of a perfectly responsive company. Not much done—just enough to show that they all understood each other. Iris Brooke—*Cynthia*—did less than anyone—only sat or stood where she was told, attended to her job with all her astonishing intelligence, and her more astonishing docility, and in her silence promised untold things. All were keen to justify the choice that had brought them into 'the new J.L.,' nobody wasting thought on the transparent fiction of an anonymous author. And the second rehearsal went even better than the first.

That night Langhorne observed—they were eating

peaches instead of strawberries—that the difficulties of play-rehearsing had been grossly exaggerated.

Kate Lewin peeled her peach and counted two hundred.

Jack, who was tired, smiled wanly, and said nothing for a bit. Then : ‘To-morrow,’ he said, ‘we begin the Thirty Years’ War.’

‘I don’t follow you,’ said Langhorne.

‘Don’t,’ said Jack. ‘I mean’—he was horribly tired—‘don’t come to-morrow. You’ll hate it.’

‘If I am not mistaken,’ said Langhorne, ‘it was part of our original understanding, that, so long as I kept in the background, and made no suggestion, I was to be permitted to attend each rehearsal of my own play.’

It was a long speech for him to make, and when he had made it Kate said with ferocity :

‘Let him go, Jack.’ And he went.

After two hours he crept out into the street, a broken man.

What had come to them all ? What hideous trick was being played on him ? What had that scoundrel Lewin done to these people overnight ?

They knew nothing. They remembered nothing. They understood nothing. They could learn nothing. The lovely shadow that the coming of “*Cynthia*” had cast before was gone, and in its place this hideous incoherent jumble of distorted, disjointed caricatures.—

And—the miserable company—they, at least, had some knowledge of their misery ! They blundered, but they knew they blundered—they were raw with their knowledge of it ! But Lewin—the *banal* Lewin—seated at his ease with his back to the safety-curtain, leaning

carelessly on his table, exchanging a cheerful word with Black—with smiles for them all—with a compliment for the worst flounderer—with a round of gay applause when the hopeless, shapeless, senseless act flopped finally to its close! Lewin, exulting in this wreck!

—‘There’s a point comes when we all go mad,’ said Lewin. ‘Only Black and I pretend we haven’t. I wouldn’t come again just yet, if I were you.’

On his first night James Langhorne sat in the middle seat of the last row of stalls. ‘You’d rather not be with us,’ the Lewins had seen—and, when he said No, and that he wanted to be in the pit—‘But you won’t want to stand for hours,’ said Jack.

Sure enough, when he arrived, pit and gallery queues stretched ‘miles’ down the slummy passages by the side of the ‘Crown.’ For Langhorne, walking from Kilburn all the way, on principle, and horribly afraid of some fatal delay, arrived before the doors opened, and was shown to his seat in half-darkness by a wholly resentful attendant. It was a five-minutes of awful hollowness and hush. Then the lights went up—there was a far-off rasping sound: and a sudden scuffling, uproar, hubbub, clatter, over his head and behind his back, stopped his breath as if a cold sea, rising on him, were forcing back the blood upon his heart. It was only the pit and gallery coming in. But how they came! Racing, stumbling, vaulting benches—laughing, shouting to each other. And it was to this—this heedless, reckless,

untamed wild beast—that his play was going to be thrown!

It was a record crush—dead secrecy had shouted such hints of the beloved J.L.'s new departure. The impossible hundredth extra man was still seeking standing-room in the pit behind Langhorne, when the stalls people began to trickle in. Soon Langhorne was hopelessly marooned—cut off from the stage by a sea of shoulders, necklaces, exquisitely dressed heads, picked out by the vivid black and white of the men—an undulating sea all colour, glitter, social movement, nods, and becks. Some of these people, who were celebrities, known to the pit, were greeted with brief bursts of clapping. At one burst, louder than the rest, Langhorne turned and asked the man behind him who was coming in.

'Mrs. Lewin,' said the man in the pit. 'In that box. It's her husband wrote the play, you know. Though they call it anonymous. That's to work up the interest. We all know *that*. He's not with her, though. He never shows.'

The man in the pit was pleased to let his knowledge appear, but the splendid softly-rustling beings on each side of Langhorne rustled softly away from their odd-looking neighbour in blue serge, when he started talking to the pit. Or he thought they did. And then he thought that these fine ladies, too, "*Cynthia*" had to please.

To please! That was it.—The dismaying thought came now—too late—that above—behind—before, around him—everybody here was out for pleasure! Nothing more! Spending their guineas or their shillings for the fun of it, and going to think of his work whatever they chose.

—But he could *make* them choose ?

Not he—he was right outside of it. Lewin and Black—and the people getting into their dresses and paint behind the curtain—and the honest sons of toil in shirt-sleeves, the scene-shifters, who could kill everything with a too-long wait—it was the people *behind the curtain* who could make the people in front choose.

—And then the orchestra struck up, and of a sudden Langhorne knew that the people behind the curtain couldn't do it either. For he was the violinist, and the people behind the curtain were the bow—but the instrument, the untried violin, was here. Upon this unknown, quick, captious, incalculable, composite heart he had to play—and——

The orchestra stopped. Black, waiting to ring up, with his finger on the house's pulse, cursed a high cackling laugh that broke the silence.

It was Langhorne that laughed, idiotically, to think—that 'he didn't know if he could play the violin—he had never tried.'

And the curtain went up.

When it came down the last time, Langhorne was in the wings. He couldn't face *that* among the pleasure-seekers. Although he knew—*he knew!*

It wasn't the softly-spoken 'Oh, good—*very* good!' nor the sudden glory of the astonished laughs. It wasn't the round upon round at the curtains, nor the mere sharply flavourous comments of, 'He's never touched this yet.'—'Didn't know J.L. had it in him.' It was

their silences—the happy silences he shared with them—that had made him sure—*sure*—and it was more than he could bear. He got up and ploughed his well-hated way over everybody's feet, and went round to the stage. He came upon an intense watching Lewin in the wings—who put out a hand behind him and gripped his, and pumped it up and down in mute acclaim—but who never took his eyes off the stage till—soft thud—the curtain fell.

And the house with it, to judge from the noise! Which came—slap—like a hurricane from falling bricks—upon the curtain.

Then Lewin breathed something inaudible, and turned to Langhorne with a light breathless laugh and '*Done it— What ?*'

His eyes shone strangely.

Langhorne's moment had come. Yet he could have found it in his heart to pity the beaten rival, who turned that ghastly face on him.

. . . The curtain was going up and down, steadily, unceasingly—of its own sweet will, it seemed. Miss Brooke was gracefully presenting everybody in turn, except herself, as the real star of the night—everybody down to Black. Or up to Black. . . . Then the noise in front steadied into a kind of beat or chant, and Iris Brooke came to Lewin saying, '*Won't you ?*'

'You know I won't,' said Lewin.

And she went back to the middle of the stage and went through the motions of saying 'I'm so sorry. But you know he *never* will.'

Just then Langhorne made out the words of the chant, and he took two strides towards the stage.

Lewin seized his arm.

'They're calling me,' said Langhorne, imperiously. 'It's "*Author*." Can't you hear?'

'You're not taking the call,' Lewin panted. 'We fixed—my letter to the papers—remember! Don't muddle 'em now, for God's sake! No shocks—They've got all that they can carry—Let 'em go home and talk. And write. *And write*. When they've fixed their feeling—*fixed it*. Then my letter!'

'They're calling *me*!' growled Langhorne, and shook off Lewin's hold.

'You promised,' gasped Lewin.

Langhorne stood. He looked this white-faced man in the eyes and asked incredulously:

'You hold me to that *now*?'

'Yes,' said Lewin, 'I do.'

Langhorne looked at him a moment longer. Then he turned and walked out of the theatre.

At nine next morning Langhorne turned down the passage past the 'Crown' and Paget's Theatre. He was going to read his notices. He was going to read them in the S. George's Lane Free Library—in the thick of the fight—because he told himself that no man should call James Langhorne coward. And he hadn't dared to look up once since he opened the Kilburn front door, for fear of what might be upon the posters.

In the passage he did look up. And the thing rushed upon him—huge—unescapable—a *Times* poster:

'Crown Theatre.'

'*The Tragic Comedy.*'

It struck him numb—then sick and giddy. Lewin had said it. You never knew the papers until you got 'em safe in print.

But Lewin was a liar! The blood rushed to his head. They were all liars! He leapt forward—past some staring people—and down the street, and down the steps leading to the News Room. He was going to annihilate them all. But the *Times* first. He went straight to the *Times* stand. He was going to annihilate the *Times*.

A man was reading it, however.

'I beg your pardon,' said Langhorne, sternly.

The man said, 'What for?' and grinned and went on reading.

Langhorne turned with clenched fists. He must begin with another then. Any one of them would do, he knew. They would be all in the same song. His cold shaking fingers found a column headed 'The New J.L.' and he began to read his notices.

And behold!—birds sang in that basement room, trees waved, and waters ran, while Langhorne went on reading.

From stand to stand he passed—he read every notice from end to end. Beautiful, each apart, they were yet more beautiful in their deep harmony. For they were 'all in the same song!'

When he had finished he stood quite still—thinking for a little while of "*Cynthia*"—thinking of the play with the impersonal delight with which he had seen it first—when the poor thing he had been trying to make bloomed out into the lovely thing he could never have guessed at.

. . . Everybody saw her now: and for just a while that was enough. . . .

But soon his thoughts came back to "*Cynthia*"'s author, and he turned again to the papers to see how Lewin's letter read.

. . . But there was no letter from Lewin.

He thought his head was going—that was it. He had passed too many sleepless, foodless hours. He couldn't trust his head. And he began again, working through the pages, running his finger down the lines, hunting for his own name in Lewin's promised letter. Lewin's name was in every paper—praise of his splendid best—seen at last—playful reproach for the second best he had given them till now—then praise again.

But there was no letter at all from Lewin. *No letter.*

Lewin had stolen the play—that was it.

That was all.

Stolen it. And Langhorne had no witness to the theft. His head cleared horribly as he saw the whole thing. He had made it very easy for them—for the two against one who made up the intimate 'us three.' He had no witness. He had made himself Lewin's witness. He had set silent while Lewin dealt with the play as with his own.

So easy—and the thing was done. Done. Something in his too clear head was laughing now and repeating '*Done! Done! Done!*' He took his head in his two hands, trembling.

Then a voice spoke outside. 'I've done with the *Times*,' and then, 'Are you ill?'

Langhorne shook his head. The man said 'Pardon'

and walked off, and Langhorne was left staring at the *Times* heading.

'*The Tragic Comedy.*'

He tried to understand the words this *Times* man had written. He couldn't. It was driving him mad. Not the praise—not the misery—just trying to get some sense out of it all. Had this man any meaning at all—praising a comedy to the skies—then calling it Tragic? . . . At the end came a sort of postscript. Langhorne read it three times. The third time he found it was saying:

'Immeasurable regret—Tragedy—News as they went to press—John Lewin dead.'

Escaped! Lewin had escaped! Gone out of life with his stolen honours. And left his wife—his accomplice—guarding them.

.

Next thing he knew, he was in St. James's Park walking furiously. He didn't know how he came there, but he knew where he was going now. He was going to wrest his rights from Lewin's wife.

Constitution Hill . . . Hyde Park . . . He would soon be there. The small sunk garden on the left. . . . Now one bend more of the path and he would be face to face with the house—the smiling, lying house.

The bend was passed—he looked.

He looked again.

What was this?

The house was dead.

The eyes of it—the windows where welcome waved its flags—all blank—its glimpses of grace and friendliness

wiped out. Flat blankness. All the house's face was blank.

His scared eyes searched it. Nothing looked back. There was nothing there to look. The house was dead. He had rushed to it to hurt it. Nothing could hurt it. Or help it. It was dead.

. . . When it was alive . . . he began to remember . . .

People who passed that way in the next two hours saw a house across the road with blinds drawn down 'for a death' and by the path a heavy-looking man alone upon a bench. They didn't connect the two. They didn't know that this was the man they had been reading about, with 'the great human touch,' and that he was sitting there, getting his first lesson in humanity. An A B C. lesson. He had no say in it—did nothing but follow the pointing finger, while a record of untiring gentleness was turned, page by page, before his dim eyes.

He wondered that he had never noticed what Lewin was like to him. He never had.

He must be—stupid.

So one by one strange visitors came to him as the hours passed. Gratitude, regret, and, at last, humility.

It was raining when Gleeson, Lewin's man, came out to him. Mrs. Lewin's maid had seen him when she went out on a message for her mistress, and again when she came back. And would he please, Mrs. Lewin said, to come in at once and take his lunch.

Langhorne couldn't understand the man at first. He had forgotten Lewin's wife was still alive. Then he asked him, 'What do you think, Gleeson? Do you think I had better come?'

—‘Like a poor great baby,’ Gleeson said afterwards, downstairs, where nobody had liked the man.

Gleeson told him his mistress made a point of it, and Langhorne went in with him.

He sat in his old place, and he looked about him at this and that—things that Lewin had tried to interest him in.

‘This is a very good lunch you are giving me, Gleeson,’ he said.

‘Nothing special, I’m afraid, sir, but you’ll make allowances.’

‘It’s very good indeed. I should be glad if Mrs. Lewin could know—her kind thought—I was hungry,’ he ended helplessly.

‘That’s my mistress coming down, sir,’ said Gleeson.

Kate Lewin came in and shook hands with him. She hadn’t thought she could until she did.

‘I wanted to thank you,’ she said, ‘for sitting out there like that. It was *exactly* right of you.’

He didn’t answer. He looked at her, waiting; like a big dog that knows he’s not intelligent.

She was not in black yet, and she spoke just as usual. The only thing was that her face was all over the finest lines, as if she had withered in the night.

‘He had no pain at all,’ said Kate. ‘And he was so happy about the play—he had just written the letter. We both knew it would come like that, some day. You mustn’t think——’

She stopped. She could see that Langhorne wasn’t thinking that her husband had worked himself to death for him. Probably he never would think it. He was stupid. But he had sat out there. He cared.

'It's all right about the play, isn't it?' she said.

He didn't answer.

'I've seen two notices,' said Kate. 'His letter will be in all the evening papers. I sent my maid round with it just now. I—couldn't before.'

He seemed to wake up gradually, from a great distance.

'Oh,' he said, 'the play—— Yes. I'd forgotten.'

But he began to remember everything, and the infamous thoughts that had brought him to this place. And when Lewin's wife said, '*Forgotten your play?* How kind!' it was more than he could bear.

He must tell her—he must unload his miseries.

But the new James Langhorne said, 'What? *Tell her that?*' And he only said good-bye and went away.

Kate went back to the room where Lewin lay, with two tall yellow candles burning at his head, and two at his feet, and his hardworking hands closed on the crucifix.

And her heart, that had never hindered him, said:

'Quite right. It was worth while.'

Their one difference was at an end.

DINNER-TIME

IT was Mr. Binns who called out to the Tebbutt lad to come along and eat his dinner with them—Mr. Binns, with the two fingers off his left hand and the bit of magenta ribbon on his coat. Joe Tebbutt knew the story that belonged to both those tokens, and he adored in them a vestige of his own lost dreams.

For Joe was what the neighbours called One of the Lucky Ones. He was just seventeen, and dead sure that the age would be down to seventeen any day now—and the height down, too, to—what we needn't mention—when bang! came the Armistice. Joe's father, who used to spend his leaves cramming the boy with glittering tales of war, in the expectation that the little chap would be sent out soon to fill dead men's shoes in France—this gay romancer came home, and settled down to discourse to the family circle, at large and at leisure, of war as it really was. And Joe's illusions and his hopes went by the board together.

He had spent the unparalleled years in one slow, dull climb from errand-boy to junior clerk, in the accountant's checking-room at Mearke's, in the Borough, and he now saw before him an unchanging life of junior clerkery.

But on February 11, 1920 ('Somebody's been praying,' said Mrs. Tebbutt), there came a rift in the grey sky.

A bit of smart work in finding errors in invoices caught

the eye of the Chief Accountant, who looked in next day on the head of Joe's room, gave that astonished dignitary a week in which to find a substitute for the boy, and told Joe he was to report for duty in the C. A.'s office on February 20.

To the family and neighbours this meant an immediate rise of pay for Joe, and prospects 'fit to take your breath away!' Still, they went on breathing much as usual. Joe didn't. Life was one gasp to him till the morning of the 20th dawned. For, more than pay, better than prospects, there shone before the boy the bright and beckoning thought of Binns. Mr.—once Sergeant—Binns, V.C., had come back to his old place at Mearke's. His place was in the Chief Accountant's Room, and some day it must happen that Mr. Binns, V.C., would speak to Joe.

It must? It did. It had happened. On this first day, at this earliest moment, Joe was sitting down to dine with Binns, V.C. Not to mention Green and Baker.

The Old-Rolled-Ribs House in the Borough gives you a first-rate feed at a fair price. So, of course, at dinner-time it's jammed with custom. All's for use here and nothing for show. No dainty and disdainful damsels elude your appealing glance. Hardworking serving-maids run to and fro. Steam of hot food, clatter of hurried feeding—Mr. Binns stowing it away like an old campaigner—Mr. Baker and Mr. Green following suit—little Tebbutt turning rather grey and sick with it all—with the past excitement, with the present noise and heat, and with the hope deferred of hearing Binns, V.C., begin to talk.

Baker started the talk. Mr. Binns was still executing

an enveloping movement upon fig-pudding and custard (3d.), when Baker nodded to a tall thin man two tables off, whose face Joe seemed to know.

'Who's your friend?' asked Green.

'Name of Gattock,' said Baker. 'Buyer at Holdwich's, he used to be. But they combed him out of that in 1917, and now they've sent him back stone-deaf of one ear.'

'Lost his job, has he?'

'Holdwich is keeping him on temporary. But if he don't improve very soon, out he goes.'

'Rough,' said Binns.

It was the hero's first word since his order, and Joe noted that it was a word of kindness.

'It's driving poor old Gattock fair dotty,' Baker went on. 'Last thing I heard is—he's saving up his screw to go and buy himself a miracle.'

'A *what*?' gasped Green.

'Miracle. Don't you know what a miracle is? Where's your pious education, Green?'

'You mean to say that fellow *over there*—man called Gattock—man that's been buyer at Holdwich's—thinks he's going to—'

'Going to just pop over to France—place called Lourdes—that's where it's done. Put a penny in the slot and—but Binns'll tell you. Binns has been there himself and seen it, I'll bet.'

Joe breathed again. He had been starting to speak—well, anyway, he'd been wondering where his voice was gone to. But if Mr. Binns had been at Lourdes, all was well.

'Been there?' said Binns.

He had polished off the fig-pudding, and was feeling about his person for his money.

'Not me. But I've heard all about the place. And I've seen the imitation ones on sale. The dolls, you know.'

Mr. Green, who took in an American weekly, and was a wolf for the saleable forms of General Knowledge, wanted to know what Dolls had to do with the thing.

'Everything,' Binns explained. 'From what I've heard, it's this way. A lot of men (R.C.'s, of course) carry a big doll about. And a lot of girls get hysterics. And everybody goes home again as pleased as Punch. And it's all a pretty penny in the priests' pockets, I needn't say. Steady, there, young Tebbutt'—the boy had made a sudden move, and the waitress was collecting payments—'the feed is *my* show. The Bantam's bill to me, Miss, and look nippy, if you please. It's five to two.'

'Too late to speak now, anyhow,' thought Joe.

At six o'clock Joe Tebbutt started to walk home. The morning had been endless to him, clogged with shy, slow blundering. But after that exhilarating dinner (which he hadn't eaten) his head had cleared like magic. The work flowed through it, as through some flawless machine; and a final approving nod from Mr. Binns sent him out into the street treading the air.

As he raced home through the cold darkness, his brain raced faster still.

What a start he had made! Some impression.
And in a new job the start's everything.

What right good sorts those men were !

Jolly good thing he hadn't shoved in his oar that time in their dinner-time talk. Cheeky little beast they'd have thought him. Whereas *now*, look how they'd taken to him. First-rate chaps !

Here, the tone of Mr. Binns's voice when he said 'R.C.'s, of course,' came back to Joe with a nasty jar.

But Mr. Binns didn't know *he* was an R.C. He would tell him. Some day.

Visions flashed of Joe Tebbutt, Chief Accountant, divulging interesting details to impressed subordinates.

As to that tosh about hysterics and dolls—well, they didn't know any better. And, by the way, don't they carry dolls in some places ? Yes, of course, in Spain.

Joe's mind was spreading, and spreading—wider—more well-informed, more tolerant every minute.

Those good chaps didn't know any better. How could they ? It wasn't their fault.

'Hullo, Joey !' a cheerful voice hailed him. 'Too big to-night to know your own mother ?'

'Mum ! Where you off to, this hour ?'

'Just here.'

Joe took his bearings. 'Here' was Southwark Cathedral, looming through the mist on his right.

'There's Exposition,' his mother said.

'Oh !' A pause. 'All right. So long !'

'Come in a minute, boy.'

'I'm tired. You don't seem to remember, mother. But it's been rather a special sort of day for me.'

'*Don't* I ! All the same—just a minute, dear. For reparation.'

'Reparation !' A sudden temper flared into the boy's

face. 'What are you talking about? *Reparation!* What for?'

'For the sacrilege.'

'*What?*' The pleasant chatter in Joe's brain stood still.

'You *didn't* hear me read it out? There! I might have known. You were took up with this new job. Very natural, I'm sure. It was on Tuesday.'

'*What was on Tuesday?*'

'Thieves, Joey. They got into the church and—let's pray they didn't know what they were doing. But they broke open the Tabernacle, God forgive them, and they——'

She didn't finish. Joe was pelting down the path to the church door.

.

He had been there a little while, and his hot fire of indignation had died down. It wasn't extinct. It was quiet.

Waiting.

'God forgive them. They didn't know what they were doing—let's pray.'

That was all he had to do with the thieves. No doubt of that, in the Presence where he knelt.

But that wasn't *all*. He waited.

The quiet got deeper and deeper. Now and then one of the people came out of the shadows, and added one little flame more to the rows and banks of flames that were trying to speak for them.

Joe didn't know what he was waiting for, and he was very tired. But he waited.

He sat back, and his attention wandered. He began looking at the votive candles. Stand upon stand had been brought before the Blessed Sacrament, and his eyes followed them from left to right of the Sanctuary. They didn't end with the Sanctuary; there was a big blaze of them in front of Our Lady of Lourdes.

Well there might be! The millions and millions *she* had brought to adore him and receive him beside the river out there! 'Wanted people to come there,' she said to Bernadette. They *came*, all right.

His thoughts had slipped back six years. He'd had some eye-trouble, and Father Dunn scraped together the cash somehow to send him to Lourdes along with his cousin Dan.

And Dan died.

Joe sat up suddenly. It wasn't a vision that came, it was a clear remembrance—clear, cool, and matter-of-fact.

Dinner-time in the Asile de Notre-Dame at Lourdes.

Long tables covered with American cloth. Rows of pilgrims sitting—men and boys at one table, women at another. Odd time for dinner, eleven o'clock. Rather odd food. Sort of stew, and big rounds of bread—all holes. Big bottles of wine down the middle, and big bottles of water from the Grotto. Nuns—Bernadette's sort—waiting on them all. Bare walls, bare floors, and—pouring in at the great windows—floods of sunshine and cold crisp air.

Dan was dead. And everybody there had prayed for the little chap who was so holy, and so desperately ill. All the people of all the nations in Lourdes had prayed for him yesterday, when he was carried out to the Place,

and got a blessing all to himself from the Blessed Sacrament, and was carried back again with a face as if he'd got to Heaven already, though he didn't really go till next morning. Naturally, at dinner-time, they were thinking about it, but the only one that said so was a great big chap, seventeen or so, coming clumping down the room on his crutches.

He stopped half-way and looked at them. He wasn't healed. None of them was healed—they were all sick pilgrims still.

He said in the heartiest voice you ever heard :

' *What a place to die in ! What a way to die ! Who wouldn't be him ?* '

The strength and the calm, and the sensibleness of that time and place—that Threshold, where the Mother prays for God's 'Yes,' or gets her children grace to love His 'No'—all Lourdes came back to Joe, as he lifted his eyes in the Divine Presence, and looked at Our Lady's image.

And the fire of indignation that had sunk down and waited shot up into a flame.

The thieves didn't know Who it was they had to do with. Maybe not. And God knows whose fault that was.

The men at dinner with their toshy talk of miracles didn't know Who it was they had to do with. And that was nobody's fault, maybe, when they started.

But whose fault now ?

He knew Who it was they had to do with.

He let their chance to know go by.

He had been meanly glad to let their chance go by.

Mr. Binns kept his eyes on his desk. It was a way he had with desperate cases. Nothing knocks the sawdust out of a bit of cheek like making the fellow say it twice over.

'If you *would* take your dinner with me, sir, to-day.'

Yes. Young Tebbutt had the nerve to say it twice.

Binns had liked the young chap on his first morning. Fish out of water, of course, but knew his place. That's why he'd been kind to him at dinner-time. But all the afternoon after, the boy'd been swanking more and more.

And to-day! An invite, if you please, to the senior clerk from the last-joined kid!

Well, if the floor had got to be wiped with this young feller-my-lad—it had got to be.

Binns laid down his pen deliberately, and lifted his head and looked the swanker in the face.

But such a face! Flushed, quivering, imploring, and a pair of eyes like Binns' baby's when the pavement jumped up and hit him on the back of his head.

Mr. Binns, staring, softly alluded to himself as blessed—instead of describing Joe as otherwise.

'If you *would*, sir? I can't tell you why just here. But if you only *would*?'

'There's Mr. Green and Mr. Baker dine with me,' said the baffled Binns, slowly.

'I meant all three, sir, if you only would.'

One o'clock struck.

'Hi! Green! Baker! Here's this young Bolshy's

got the Russian Crown Jewels in his pocket. Wants to stand treat all round. What you think ?'

The puzzled pair agreed. 'Well, Mr. Binns, what goes with you, goes.'

That third and awful dinner-time Joe never will forget.

No sooner were they at table than he realized the complete impossibility of ever getting the talk back to where it was yesterday. The whole atmosphere of the crowded, steamy place rose up and drowned his soul. Not even any far-off glimpse of a supporting Gattock reached him. The men, immensely curious, and led by the mystified but kindly Binns, ate and drank and talked and kept things going. But as for what he'd meant to do—nothing of it could possibly be done. Nothing.

Having reached which conclusion he said a Hail Mary and did it.

'Regarding R.C.'s,' He started in a sudden cracky voice that cut into Mr. Green's dirge on Homes for Heroes. 'Regarding R.C.'s that you were talking about—'

Were they ? They stared. He gasped for breath.

'—and Lourdes. And that. What I want to say is just—I mean—I— Yesterday I—funked.'

He was holding a table leg. He looked across at Mr. Binns.

Binns, V.C., winked solemnly. 'We've all done that,' he said. 'Yesterday. As to to-day, now ?'

'I'm a Catholic,' said Joe. 'And I've *been* to Lourdes.'

'Have you now ?'

'And it isn't like they told you it was, sir,' Joe's drowning look still sought Binns. 'It isn't really. Not a bit.'

'Very interesting—— No, Miss. The bill to the Young Labour Party to-day. He's brought off a bit of Direct Action, and he's standing treat. But look nippy, Tebbutt, now! It's five to two.'

'*Concerning Lourdes*,' Mr. Binns added, in the street, 'you can tell me about it some day. I'll never learn younger.'

“BY COMMAND”

IT wasn't often that Lottie Lavallo looked in at the smart office of 'Actors-at-Home.'

She subscribed regularly to this novel and alarmingly refined institution. That was one of her staunch little loyalties to an ideal dimly present to her imagination under the name of 'The Profession.' But she didn't like the smart new thing.

She liked better the rickety uncarpeted stairways that led to shabby Dramatic Agencies in small streets at the back of the Strand. She might have to hang about those stairs, first on one foot, then on another, then on both, till the cock of her neat hat declined, and the glow of complexion, induced by perennial hope (with the aid of alternate applications of cold and scalding water), had faded to a disappointed pallor. But whenever the wished-for door at the end of one of those passages did open—when the long untidy man lounged out, with the cigar between his teeth, and the dejected crowd rallied, under his slighting glance, to its last desperate glitter of high spirits, youth, and charm—then it would happen to that Agent's glance to waver, to change, to brighten to some faint degree of kindness and laughter, as it met the bright, straight, brown eyes of Miss Lottie Lavallo.

For he knew her, as all of the real Old Stage knew her. Not that Lottie is old. But she began so very young

and when you have begun very young and have never stopped, never gone back or made a mistake, the facts of you are known to the stage—to the Old Stage—whatever fictions may be spoken.

This day, as for many days past, the Old Stage had had nothing to offer Lottie more tangible than good feeling—nothing more directly bearing upon the immediate questions of board and lodging. And these questions were very immediate. When she pushed open the door of the office of ‘Actors-at-Home’—the door of the New Stage—Miss Lottie Lavallo had been nine months out of an engagement. And what that feels like to an actress who was never out of work before, you must ask Miss Lavallo. Who won’t tell you.

The very civil Secretary behind the very well-appointed desk nearly knocked Lottie speechless in reply to her purely formal enquiry after an engagement.

First, he was delighted—genuinely, unmistakably delighted—to see her. Next he said that Mr. Gray from the Crown Theatre had just come in and was waiting upstairs, wanting a lady in a hurry, a capable lady, to take up a good comedy part (Miss Mavis Perk’s, down with flu) for the Command Performance to-morrow at Windsor . . .

The Secretary was clearly drunk or mad. But it was Lottie’s trade—her Profession—to keep her head and to gag, though all material adjuncts—scenes, scene-shifters, trapdoormen, mutinous band, and drunken ‘Lights’—should reel in chaos round her. She kept her head and gagged accordingly.

‘That’s why she had looked in. Had a wire from the Foreign Crowned Head, that he wouldn’t cross the front

parlour to see the Windsor show if she wasn't in it. Lady of the company taken ill? Oh! that's how His Majesty had worked it for her! 'Poison, no doubt. These foreigners stick at nothing to oblige a friend.' Which brought Lottie with a thumping heart to Mr. Gray's door.

She knew it was all over from the minute she set eyes on his faultlessly turned-out figure. She could tell she was never his sort. But she stuck to her guns, fired off her brisk little round of accomplishments, and then sat tight and waited for it.

It came instantly—the familiar fatal formula:

'Very excellent, to be sure, *I will write to you*, Miss Lavallo. I congratulate you, really. You would be just what we want, I am sure. But I will write. Oh! I'll be sure to write . . . In any case . . . Oh! no. I wouldn't keep you uncertain. Good morning! *I will write.*'

Lottie had sometimes amused herself with wondering how these men would look if she said '*Liar!*' very loud and firm to their faces, instead of very soft and fierce to herself as she went downstairs. It would be rather a lark. But it was hardly worth while now. It was so long since she had ever expected that they *would* write.

When she got into the open air she stood still for ten seconds. Then she turned briskly into Maiden Lane and went down the stone stairs into the little crypt-like church of Corpus Christi to pay her daily visit. She looked at the Pietà a good deal while she was there—she had to—it was right in front of her, between her and the Tabernacle; and coming away she knelt for a moment before the picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour.

‘*Something!*’ she said. ‘Anything! But something. *Please.*’ Then she went straight home, not attempting any more business calls, because she knew her looks were gone. Disappointment does drag the face. You can get up your looks again with a glass of port (a really bad port is required), but Lottie held port to be death to the digestion, and that you must always keep your digestion, because you never know when you may get hold of something to digest.

She lost a little time in the Strand, dodging away from an old acquaintance to whom she had stood a dinner in better days, and who might think she looked hungry instead of just tired, but she got back before three to the little room in Gladstone Grove, Balham, with her own sticks of furniture in it, which she’d have to be giving up next week.

It’s no good looking at a thing of that sort ; and if you sell your things you don’t need to move them. So that’s that, and Lottie sat down to her dressmaking.

There was a piece of tweed she had bought in Belfast last year, wanting half of it for a friend, and now she had nothing better to do with her time she was making the other half into one of her ‘Harvey-Nicholoses.’ Her claim that she made her own frocks was looked on in professional circles (quite kindly) as ‘Lottie’s lie.’ Because ‘it’s one thing, dear, to run up a little something dressy, but no woman alive could turn out those pleats and strappings.’ Lottie, who could turn out a dozen ‘Harvey-Nicholoses’ easier than one lie, took the tribute to her tailoring and didn’t trouble about her truth. Tailoring was solid satisfactory work when one felt hollow ; and if her dog hadn’t been dead, and her

landlady out of temper, it would have been sociable work, too.

She stitched, and stitched, while the November light lasted, and when it failed she was badly tempted to light her lamp. But, remembering that she had more time than oil at her disposal just now, she resisted, and began folding up her work.

It was just then that the telegraph boy started knocking the house door down, or it wouldn't have given her such a scare. As it was, between the dark and the racket the boy was making, and terror of the landlady's temper, and the throbbing in her throat of something that sang, 'I am hope—hope—hope!' (though she knew better than to listen to it), Lottie Lavalle, for once, lost her head and her feet too, took the steep stair in a rush, and reached the brown oil-cloth below in a little muddled heap, with her left foot wrenched double under her.

The landlady was crosser than ever at having to go to the door instead of Lottie, and crosser of all when, having read by the light of a match :

'All right. Fifteen pounds. Rehearse Crown ten to-morrow. Special leaves Paddington 5.30—'

Lottie fainted dead away.

.

'—So you lost it, old dear! Did you then? All through a brute of a sprained ankle?'

'Lost it? What do you take me for? I limped a bit at the station, and I had to stand on one leg to make up. But they were real good sorts in the company. Miss

Vayne had her dresser in the wings every time I came off to look after me—buck me up and tell me if the tears were messing my make-up. But they didn't know anything about the tears in front. Not much. You should have heard that Crowned Head roar.'

'Done you any good in the Profession?'

'All the good in the world. Got me an engagement at the Crown, to understudy a girl out of Mr. Gray's Dramatic School.'

'That's something.'

'*Something!*'

Lottie Lavallo was looking past her visitor at a new little picture post card of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour which was pinned up on the wall.

'I'm keeping on my room,' she said.

CARTON'S TRIP HOME

'A dismal failure,' he pronounced it.

Year upon year out there John Carton had been adding a little to his modest pile. For the last ten years, that is, since the luck turned after the awful uphill pull of his start in the Rockies. Rightly named Rockies! Those first eight years took him a laughing boy, and turned him out a silent man, who smiled once in a while, if he saw you wanted him to, for he was not embittered—but who was aged, more tired, and more busy than it is good for man to be; and alone.

He was not a rich man, even when the luck had turned and the modest pile had begun to grow. But he was rich in anticipations. There was a home, over in an English Midland town, with an old father and mother in it, to whom he now sent small regular remittances, and to whom he was going back, when once the lumber business which he had got upon its legs should be strong enough to run alone. There was a far-away cousin, too, in that Midland home, a tall, black-eyed laughing girl, whom he had more than once contrasted favourably with the few women he met out West. You couldn't say he built castles in the air. It took all a man's time to build a business, especially a straight man, who made no queer short cuts to success. But behind the business building,

anticipations were growing all the time—of the 'trip home,' and of various new things that it was going to bring.

And then a letter came from Helen Baxter, the far-away cousin, to say that his mother had died of pneumonia, after five days' illness, and that his father had caught cold, sitting beside her all the night, and was very ill, too, and this was followed the same day by a cable announcing his father's death.

It was extraordinary, unthinkable, to John Carton that they should die like that. Just when he was getting ready to go to them, and be all happy together. He was a loyal Catholic. He took what God sent, from the hand of God. In the supernatural plane it was all right. It was all right for his father and mother, who were *there*. But, as something slow and salt trickled past the corner of his mouth, he was wondering in a stupid way what in the world there was for him to do now.

Somebody hammered on the door with a stick. It was Breitkopf, from Del Norte, about that lumber.

There was the business, of course.

He got up and attended to the business.

He attended to it all day long. In the evening he cabled to know the day fixed for his father's funeral. When the answer came, he went round to Father Flint and asked for a Requiem Mass: he went to the Mass. He prayed night and morning, and at times in the day, for his parents' souls. Always he understood about them. It was natural for them to be supernatural.

But this place, without the idea of the trip home, or—worse—with the idea of the trip home without them. No, this was not natural. Only the lumber business

went on being as natural as ever. And for three weeks he worked at it, longer, and later.

Not till the first of the month came—the day on which he was accustomed to send a remittance—did he remember Helen Baxter. He remembered that he had forgotten her. He remembered it with an actual violent jump of shame. He hadn't quite cruelly forgotten her. But his imagination had been stunned. He had been sticking to business because there was no home. Now, suddenly, he saw the little home in High Street, Malcombe, Bucks—not wiped out of existence, as it had felt to him, but standing, furnished as usual, and not empty. Worse. In one of the furnished rooms one girl sitting—alone, with her hands folded, with nothing to do.

Nothing to do!

John Carton went hot and cold.

He knew what these blows had been to him, a man, with work. And that girl——

He went out, and crossed over, bareheaded in the blazing sun, to the little wooden shanty of a post-office over the road. He cabled to Miss Baxter, 119 High Street, Malcombe, Bucks:

'Coming home.'

And he took the cars that night.

It was just three weeks later that he sat in front of a dull lunch in a dark and dear and dingy hotel near Charing Cross, and looked this mad journey of his full in the face, and called it a dismal failure.

All the way across the continent to New York on the cars—across the ocean on the liner to Liverpool—it was extraordinary how the thought of Helen Baxter had been strengthening its hold on him. Nothing had been said between them at their boy-and-girl good-bye, or written in the intervening years. The vague, far-off notion of a possible future together had become so vague with him that, in the shock of grief and in its reaction, he had not thought of her at all. Now, however, that very period of forgetfulness was giving her a stronger claim on him. He kept telling himself that, at the moment of this girl's life when she most needed a friend—if nothing more—at the moment when she stood orphaned of those to whom she had given a daughter's love—at that moment a big hulking brute out in Colorado had been thinking of nobody but himself.

The State Express was too slow for the rush of his repentance, and for the crowd of unused, stored-up, boyish chivalries that awoke in him. The *Mauretania* seemed slower still. And as for the Liverpool, Durnsley, and Malcombe branch-line train—it simply didn't move at all.

All the same it got to Malcombe somehow, in the course of a drowsy summer afternoon. Before it reached the platform, he had the door open, and was scanning the neighbourhood for a taxi. Nothing in sight but one monumental open fly, that dozed, with its old driver and older horse, across the line. He tossed his bag into the booking-office, and was speeding down the High Street on his own legs before the indignant clerk could so much as say 'Twopence.'

Panting, almost running, he came to 119.

It was shut. Locked. Shuttered.

He wouldn't accept these things for what they told. He knocked. He rang. He knocked louder. The picture in his brain held its own against the denying silence. The girl, sitting alone in the familiar room, would hear him. She would come—directly.

Two people came, presently, each to a window—at 120, and at 118. They satisfied themselves that the tiresome noise had nothing to do with them, and went back, one to her kitchen, and the other to a Prize Competition for *Sketchy Bits*—Malcombe had begun to move with the times.

At 119 nothing happened, except the tiresome noise.

In the course of time that stopped, too. John Carton left off knocking, and stood still. He looked about him, and up and down the wide, silent, familiar old street, and he began to understand that it had no use for him.

He took some telling, even yet. He crossed over to a little shop, where boots and shoes were repaired still.

'What may I have the pleasure of doing for you, sir? Young lady, sir? At 119? I think you must be misinformed as to the number. It was an old lady and gentleman, Mr. and Mrs. Carton, lived at 119, so long as I've known it, sir, and that's thirty years. Died within a week of each other, only six weeks ago. Very sad, sir, wasn't it? Miss Baxter, that lived with them—a relative, sir—is gone away to London, to find a situation.'

'*To find*—!' gasped John Carton.

'A situation, sir. A sad thing at that age. It was felt that something different should have been done. There was a son in America—a millionaire, people tell me. But I don't like to believe it of him. The family was respected, although Romanists. Oh, good-day, sir.'

For John Carton had bolted so suddenly that the old man had no time to ask the name of the young lady that he was looking for.

The word Romanists had flung open a door in the high blank wall across his path, and in three minutes he was ringing the Presbytery doorbell.

The story that the priest had to tell him was short and to the point.

Miss Baxter had expected a letter of instructions from her cousin, Mr. J. Carton. Not receiving one, she had posted to his Colorado address her brief statement of accounts, with the balance of funds left in her hands.

Fortunately, the agreement on which the house was held was voided by the death of the occupier.

'So Miss Baxter,' Father Robinson concluded, 'was able to go to London the week before last, to take up a post she had heard of—as companion to an elderly lady.'

'Where, please?' said John Carton.

His voice sounded so strange that Father Robinson looked at him with a sympathy that he had not felt till now.

'I don't think there can be any objection to my giving you the address,' he said, after a moment. 'It is 16 Palace Place, Kensington. A Mrs. Romford.'

John Carton was in town that night. At twelve next

day he called at 16 Palace Place. A disapproving parlour-maid informed him that Miss Baxter had left ten days ago, 'had left immediate,' and that her present address was not known. And, no, she could *not* ask Mrs. Romford to see the gentleman. Mrs. Romford was 'unequal to' seeing anyone with regard to Miss Baxter. Mrs. Romford had been much upset. She had given orders.

Orders which left John Carton on the outside of another shut door.

Then it was that he came back to Black's Hotel, and told an overdone chop and a tepid potato-salad what he thought of things in general.

He turned a corner in Victoria Street, and there was the Cathedral.

When he left England, there was some talk of building it. And here it stood. Clearly, he had been long away.

His first thought of it was that it looked queer. He had never seen a building in that style.

Then he began to read the words over the great door, dedicating it to the Most Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. And it struck him like a blow that someone had been working at That, all the time he had been working at a lumber-business. And that the someone was his Church. No—not *his* Church—the Church of

our Lord Jesus Christ, which, yet, consented to own him, John Carton.

He looked at the tower that sprang straight towards the sky. Then he pushed a door open and went in.

How vast it was inside. . . . How bare. . . . Only one or two people crossed the floor of the great space where he stood looking about him. Several, he saw, were going away to the left. He followed these, and found the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament.

The silence here was not like the silence of the street in Malcombe that had no use for him.

How stupid—stupefied—he had been getting to be, out there in the West.

. . . He prayed for his father and mother, and asked them to pray . . .

Building, and building, he had been, at a house which was left to him in solitude.

. . . Here, it was not lonely. It was the first welcome home he had had. He thanked God for it, and then he prayed with all his might for that girl he had so wounded with his neglect. He felt sure he had hurt her—and had driven her to the Romford woman, who, in her turn, had driven her—where? She was alone, and helpless, through his fault. He prayed, might and main, for a chance to make up to her for all that.

There were, perhaps, a dozen or twenty people at their prayers in that part of the Cathedral. One, a little in front of him, to his left, caught his eye—a middle-aged woman, in mourning. She looked thin and wasted with sorrow. She had lost someone, he supposed, and was praying for resignation. As a matter of fact, she was praying for bread.

If Carton—if any of the others kneeling there—had known that Hunger knelt beside them! But it was the hunger that cannot speak, except to God.

He crossed over to the Lady Chapel, and lit a candle, commending his search to her who sought sorrowingly for three days before she found.

While he knelt there, people were passing behind him to and from a confessional. Presently the priest came out of it, shutting the door briskly and going towards the sacristy. He dropped one of the books he was carrying. John Carton picked it up and gave it him.

‘Carton!’

‘Father Ford!’

Here was luck, indeed. Ford and Carton were old schoolfellows to start with. And when, in later years, Father Ford had begun to develop lung trouble in a Liverpool slum, his people had found funds to ship him off for a year in Colorado with his old chum. He was a friend of both lives—of both hemispheres. ‘The only man in London that knows me by sight,’ Carton reflected later.

Father Ford was running to the next job of a crowded day. But they fixed up a meeting for to-morrow, and Carton made his way down the length of the Cathedral to the west door with a heart warmed and softened and ashamed, too. He had been so undeservedly made at home.

Another person came up to the wide holy-water stoup just when he did, and, acting under an impulse of the home-feeling, he did not draw back for the stranger, but went forward and gave her holy water.

He recognized then the lady in mourning whom he had noticed before. Poor thing! She looked slighter than ever—thinner, to put it plainly—standing, feebly erect, in her black clothing. There was a meekness, dignity, and also an entire remoteness in the way she accepted his small service which touched and interested him. He didn't explain it to himself. He only felt glad she had taken it as it was meant.

He felt, too, as he came out, a comfortable, filial gladness at having put his business into his Mother's hands.

The lady in black liked the fresh air and sunshine that she came out into in Ashley Place. It was quiet there, too. But when she came to the corner of Victoria Street and Vauxhall Bridge Road, the deafening noise, the clang-clanging traffic, terrified her. It brought back that giddiness which had made her get up from her knees and come out of the Cathedral. As she stood on an island in the middle of it, the noise in front seemed to beat her back into the traffic behind her, and the noise behind her to knock her forward under the traffic in front. She had actually to hold on by a post and steady herself before crossing further.

Then she went two steps. Someone shouted. She hesitated. She was roughly seized and thrown to one side—and knew no more.

She was unaware of a second shout, a simultaneous groan, and—stillness.

When she woke up in the hospital, a nurse told her on no account to move.

'You were knocked down, my dear, that's all. Not much harm done. You shall give me your name when you feel up to it, and we will tell your friends.'

'I have no friends,' said the patient.

'No——? There. Never mind. You'll be better by and by. Now, go to sleep.'

'Is that—a priest?' asked the patient. She thought she saw one at the other end of the long ward.

'A Roman,' said the nurse. 'Oh! you *want* a Roman.' She was annoyed, yet relieved. Theoretically, she objected to Roman priests. Practically, she had found that they 'knew their job.' And that, somehow, it helped the patient.

When this priest had heard this patient's confession, the nurse stopped him on his way out.

'Slight concussion,' she said. 'Victoria Street, yesterday. Says she has no friends. You'll come again?'

'To-morrow,' said the priest. And he went down to the men's accident ward to see George Webb.

George Webb had fallen off a scaffolding five weeks ago. He could hardly speak, he was so full of news this morning.

It was about the man next to the door. Had Father Ford noticed him? Brought in yesterday, smashed up in Victoria Street. Saved a woman's life, he had, from under a motor-bus. Got it himself over his right leg. Matron told Webb so. They were trying to save the leg. Matron said so.

'And he *did* save the woman?' asked the priest.

'Yes. She's upstairs. Concussion. But she'll do. Matron says she will.'

The way George Webb had took to talking Matron, Matron, Matron, was fair silly in Mrs. Webb's opinion. To her, Matron was an abstract implacable Eye, that detected surreptitious currant cake through six folds of *Lloyd's Weekly*.

After hearing so much about Webb's 'ero,' Father Ford had to take a look at him in passing.

'Carton!' he cried. 'Old chap!'

They saved the leg, though there were anxious hours in the first week. After that, recovery went straight ahead. Carton was in such first-rate condition.

It was just the opposite with the patient upstairs. No rallying-power, nurse found. And small wonder from all she could hear.

'All she could hear' was from patient's landlady. Patient had given address of lodging, and nurse sent a message, and the landlady, Mrs. Jorgan, arrived with patient's things (all good things, quite the lady), and the two women managed to get a little talk.

The lady had arrived at Mrs. Jorgan's late one evening, it appeared, only ten days ago, with the boxes on a cab, quite the lady, quiet, but a good deal upset. Been crying, in fact, Mrs. Jorgan could see.

She'd paid up her rent in advance, twice, in the ten days, most satisfactory. But eat—no, she wouldn't eat. Just pick a bit, and have it put by for to-morrow.

Seemed scared—if you asked Mrs. Jorgan—scared past eating. Nurse agreed that patient was badly run down.

And the patient, meanwhile, lay still.

She looked at two long rows of beds, at four high grey walls, at a far-off white ceiling, and she waited till she should be able to think again.

Pictures drifted before her, and away again.

Some pictures were of home—thirty-five years of home. Others of homelessness. Ten days of that.

No. She couldn't think of the ten days. Not yet.

Two kind old people in the home, making so much of her—as if she mattered. Never a rough word in thirty-five years. Spoiling her. Yes; that was it. They turned her head. Or how did she ever come to think—to expect—to imagine?

She wouldn't think of *that*, either.

. . . No one knew the foolishness that had come into her mind . . . when?—Ever since he first left home? She didn't know. She didn't know when it came. She didn't even know it was there, not till the silence stung her so. That told her.

And the minute she did know she came away. One thing was impossible, after such foolishness, ever to meet or to depend upon—the person.

Yes. She *had* been a spoilt child in that home. So busy, so safe, so settled—so stupid. Oh! so stupid. As if nothing was ever going to change or to break.

Then the ten days in London—she didn't want them . . . but here they were, coming back.

The pleasant, smiling, well-mannered woman—old,

like her own two dear old people—who changed in a moment and stormed violently and drove her out of the house for a cheat—for having called herself ‘Catholic’ when she should have called herself ‘Roman Catholic,’ a crime she didn’t yet understand.

But she understood that employers could be—like that—and that henceforth her life depended on employers—and she was frightened. Frightened of finding another employer—frightened lest all her little money should go before she could find another—frightened of everything—till—

Ah! *Now* she remembered. . . . The Cathedral.

She was praying for shelter and for daily bread. And then—she stopped that prayer. She held up the arms of her consent to embrace hunger and fear, and she prayed for the intention of the Sacred Heart of Jesus towards—all. It was better than gladness that came to her then—it was peace. And the peace was with her again now.

The frightening pictures of those last ten days dissolved before it. They frightened her no longer. They were phantoms. It was fact.

‘Doesn’t pick up,’ said the nurse, ‘and yet doesn’t seem to fret. Just lies there. I don’t make her out, sir.’

This was a week later. She had intercepted Father Ford in the passage.

‘Needs rest, most likely,’ said the priest. He had not forgotten the sick woman who ‘had no friends.’ He had

thought of this or that kind Christian who would willingly come to her bedside, but each time he saw the patient he thought that neither This nor That was the person wanted.

‘Will you take a look at her, sir?’

The patient received the priest's visit gratefully, as usual. She was too unobservant to notice, as the nurse did, that he broke off in his greeting, and looked in a moment's startled silence at the card over her bed. It was only a moment before he went on in a delighted sort of voice which, again, she did not notice :

‘What a lot of trouble it would save if we all had our names ticketed up like that, wouldn't it, Miss—Baxter?’

The patient smiled politely.

‘My name is *Ford*,’ said the priest.

‘Oh!’ cried the patient. It was actually a cry of pleasure. ‘Not Father Richard Ford—who went to school——’

‘At Malcombe Grammar School, Miss Baxter. And to tea—so often—at 119 High Street.’

‘Oh,’ said the patient.

The tears began to run so fast down her face, she couldn't stop them by shutting her eyes. She heard the priest tell the nurse he would come in to-morrow, and go away. She heard the nurse go with him to the door, and come back. She couldn't stop the tears.

‘Knows your friends, Miss Baxter, so he says.’

‘Yes,’ breathed the patient.

‘There's luck! As pleased as Punch, the Father is. And you saying you hadn't any friends.’

The patient didn't answer. She didn't say that the friends in question were dead.

'Now, you must get better quick before they come to see you,' said the nurse.

She didn't say they couldn't come. She wasn't thinking that they couldn't come. Or that they were dead. She was thanking the Heart that had sent someone to remind her that they were living.

Father Ford found Carton violently rebellious. They had just told him that he wouldn't be allowed to move for five weeks.

'How can I lie here, Father, and lose all chance of finding my cousin? You say the priest at Malcombe has heard nothing of her, and that infamous old woman has heard nothing of her, and here I lie, like a log, an eating and sleeping log, while that girl——'

'Stop a bit, Carton. There's a thing I've wanted to say to you before——'

'But, Father, my cousin——'

'It's *about* your cousin. How long is it since you've seen her?'

'Let's see—eight—three—seven.' (It was by the stages in the lumber business he counted.) 'Why—why—it must be—*eighteen years*.'

He stopped. . . . He began to conjecture. . . .

'Yes,' said the priest. 'And you call her a girl.'

He didn't say any more, but he prayed a good deal in the silence that ensued.

It was broken presently by Carton.

'I don't see that that makes any difference,' he said.

'No,' said the priest, with a heart singing *Glorias*.

Then he told Carton about the patient upstairs.

.

'You have never asked after the man who saved your life, Miss Baxter,' said Father Ford on his next visit to the patient upstairs.

'Did someone save my life?' asked the astonished patient.

'A man threw you out from under the motor-bus.'

'Was he hurt?' she asked, quickly.

'He got it over his right leg. But all right, now, all right. Don't be alarmed. They've saved the leg.'

'Thank God,' said the patient.

'But it's a bad business for an active man of forty, all the same. Tied by the leg, for five or six weeks to come. Mayn't move an inch, poor chap.'

'I hope he has friends,' said Helen Baxter.

'Not one,' said Father Ford, with cheerful promptitude, 'barring me. And yourself—if you'll be good enough to make yourself one.'

'I,' gasped the patient.

'Well, here's a man alone in England, come over from—the United States—post-haste on most urgent business. He's come to look for a—a friend—in fact, it's for a lady whom he has lost sight of by some strange blunder. He has reason to think she is in London—but he doesn't know where, or—or—whether she's provided for.'

'Oh, poor, *poor* man,' said Helen, 'not to know—and poor girl, too.'

'She's not a girl,' said the priest, crudely. 'She must be—well, past thirty, so he says. But he can't think of anything more distressing, so he told me, than for a—lady—of that age, sheltered all her life—suddenly adrift

—quite unfriended—no preparation for it—no experience—I can't tell you how he's suffering under it.'

'He must have a good heart,' said Helen Baxter.

'Well, whatever sort of heart he's got, there he lies, eating it out, at present,' said Father Ford, stubbornly.

'And as it's partly your fault——'

'I *wish* I could help to find her,' said the patient.

She looked quite fiercely energetic.

'My experience of London is—is not very great—but such as it is—and if you would give me instructions. Or if this poor man would——' She paused. 'Did you say *man* or *gentleman*?' she asked.

At Malcombe these distinctions still exist.

'Both,' said the priest.

Miss Baxter was a little sorry it was a gentleman. But in this enterprise she was ready to tackle anybody.

'Nurse thought I might get up for a few hours soon,' she said. 'If your friend wished me to go down and see him—to get his instructions?—I am accustomed,' she said eagerly—'to business correspondence—perhaps to-morrow?——'

'You are very kind,' said Father Ford. 'And it is just what my friend wants.' He stood up. 'I feel, though, that I must first tell you, as it is from his mention of your name that I recognized it written up there——'

'From *his—whose* mention?' She was quite at sea.

'I ought to tell you,' Father Ford persisted, 'that my friend's name is John Carton.'

Then he waited. And if he prayed this time, perhaps he asked for this poor proud soul to be given a great gift of understanding.

'This is very kind of—*both* of you,' she said, presently, in a controlled voice. 'And, perhaps, since it is—John Carton—I might go down—to-day.'

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'All the same, my dear,' John Carton used to say in later years, 'I should never have caught you—I know that—if I hadn't been tied by the leg.'

COFFEE AT PONTARCHON

PEOPLE took a lot of trouble about Muriel Blake.

It was such extraordinary bad luck that a girl with her looks and her pots of money should have hung on hand from eighteen to twenty-two, and be still unmarried when Blake and Blake smashed.

She was alone as well as penniless, for the colossal failure that set all London talking killed old Blake outright; and to her face, people called that 'extra awful.' But they generally agreed, when she wasn't there, that poor old Muriel would have been in a worse hole still if her father had survived the smash, or if that invalidish mother of hers hadn't died four years before it. A home to keep up for the Blake family would have bothered people more than a bit. As it was, they found poor dear old Muriel a first-rate place right away.

They called it a 'place,' not rudely, but because any kind of self-supportingness was so far off their lines that they didn't know the right words, and so forth. It was a simply topping place. In Florence—with that old terror, Mrs. Stansby-Wetton. A good screw and nothing to do for it but look your best and keep the old girl in a good temper.

People were so simply awfully pleased and satisfied about it all that Muriel was ashamed to feel so dumpy.

Her last visitor the night before she started was Alice

Cheyne, who had married Reggie Cheyne just three months after Muriel turned him down. Reggie was partner now in an A1 banking firm, *absolutely* unconnected—thank Heavens!—with Blake and Blake. Reggie's pots of money were the real unbreakable article, not to mention that old Reg himself was distinctly inclined to be a darling: everybody knew that. But for all him and his pots, Muriel had turned him down—like all the others!

As Alice got out of her car and climbed to the top floor of a house in West Kensington Crescent, and knocked on the door of an attic bed-sitting-room, these facts of poor old Muriel's past were floating in her mind. So that she said:

'Gracious!'

And then:

'These sort of things, you know, they make you think.'

But she didn't go on thinking, because Muriel said, 'Come in,' and she went in. And really then the whole thing made her feel rather sick. The utterly loathsome room. And the heavy luggage strapped, and the remains of Muriel's things standing about in little bunches, ready for her to shove into her suit-case herself at the last. *Muriel*, you know! Looking fagged out already and fairly ghastly—and used to being waited on hand and foot the way she was.

So instead of thinking, Alice said in her bucking-uppest:

'Such a lark to be going abroad all by oneself! I always yearned to go by myself. Didn't you?'

'Yes, I did,' said Muriel. Then she winced and shut

her eyes queerly. It was true; but in owning that it was true she thought she had struck her dead father across the eyes—those kind, not clever, eyes, under whose guard and in whose pervading atmosphere of affluence she had made a dozen easy progresses through Europe.

‘All the same, Reggie’s taken it into his poor little head that you won’t find it so extra delightful. He says you’ll be in a bit of a squash on the Paris-Lausanne.’

‘Not this month,’ said Muriel.

‘Well, Reggie says you will. Going Second, you know.’

‘Yes,’ said Muriel, ‘I forgot about going Second.’

‘But he’s written to Tripps’, and their Paris man’s going to keep a corner seat for you. You’ll look him up?’

Muriel promised to look him up.

Next night, at the Gare de Lyon, she spent most of her time looking up Tripps’ man. Not that she wanted him, nor that she had any idea what a night-journey second class without a corner seat was going to be like. But simply to please Reggie. Reggie, as unimportant in himself as any other of the nice boys who had once made the mistake of proposing to her, had taken on a new value to-night. He was that inestimable thing, a link with home.

For Muriel’s drive across Paris had been a very bad half-hour. All the numbing attention to detail which had wrapped her round, and had drugged her, through the succeeding shock upon shock of the last four months, fell away suddenly, and she sat, stripped of everything, staring at a stripped world—a world that held no father, no family, no home.

She didn't give in to this. Outwardly she was at work again as soon as the Gare de Lyon was reached—paying the taxi, hunting up a porter. But when it came to dining—No.

She could eat her dinner any time. First of all she would look up Tripps' man. And the eyes that looked for Tripps' man were wet with unshed affectionate tears (surely an unusual tribute) because 'it was so sweet of Reggie,' with a bit of the old, unnoticed, all-impregnating sweetness of Home, 'to have bothered to write to Tripps.'

She looked, and looked. The platforms were immensely long, and the trains very clanking—the Gare was a wilderness (where it wasn't very crowded), dull and ugly and reverberating. The railway people weren't as civil as she used to think them. The Blake family *en voyage* had, in fact, touched different chords from this English Miss in pursuit of Tripps' man.

She got so tired that she didn't care at last to go up the stair to the dining-room, but turned off into a *salle d'attente*. It was a hideous place—at first quite empty. Then two young women came in—more tired than she was. They tossed off their hats and flung themselves full-length down on a couple of benches, and went straight off to sleep. It frightened Muriel that anybody should be so tired as that. And suppose she were to fall asleep and to miss the train and put Mrs. Stansby-Wetton into one of her celebrated rages!

She got up and went out again to look for Tripps' man.

She found him as the Lausanne train was starting, when she had just secured the ninth and middle seat in a carriage for six. He resented her enquiry after the

corner-seat, pointing out that the train was crowded, and only acknowledged her official acquaintance to the extent of waiting on the step till he got a tip.

By that time the train was clanking out of the station.

And Muriel remembered that she had meant to buy food at the buffet.

The airless, dark, hot night crawled past.

There were two Italian women in the carriage, five Frenchmen, and an Alpine-looking sort of English-woman, built in with poles and hatchets—in a corner seat. In her new helplessness, Muriel was glad of the Englishwoman, and tried to enter into conversation, asking if the train stopped anywhere where one could buy food. The Blakes had been too well maided always to know about train-stops.

But if there was one thing Miss Strachey, the Alpine lady, couldn't stand, it was travelling acquaintance. She looked hard at the young woman before she answered at all. Then she opened her mouth and said :

'Coffee at Pontarchon.'

And then she shut it, unmistakably for good.

Pontarchon was seven hours off, on the Swiss frontier, so Muriel gave up hope of food and was free to devote her mind to the more urgent task of keeping her head erect, that it might not sink to rest upon some neighbouring shoulder, as other heads were doing.

Not Miss Strachey's. When sleep and heat threatened to overcome *her*, she got up and went out into the

corridor, and sat down flat upon the floor. There she stayed till morning, always with a firm notification upon her non-speaking countenance that if there was one thing she couldn't stand it was travelling acquaintance.

Muriel admired the Alpine method without needing to imitate it.

What kept her from the danger or relief of sleep was a thought she had—that now everything would always be as wretched as this. The heat, the constraint, the crowding strangers, the repelling countrywoman—all were drumming—with the motion of the train—the same thought: 'Always—everything—like this.' To the irrational two-in-the-morning mind, since it was always going to be wretched as this, she must keep wide awake, holding on to every wretched minute of it.

She kept wide awake, asking herself what was left.

Her past was too new and sore to touch.

She had no present. That had been battered, blow on blow into the wounded, wounding past.

Her future? That was worst of all.

Four years ago her future had flowed away through her fingers. She never looked at any of the nice boys—like Reggie—who came and begged to make the future with her. She was looking always at the one absurd, fantastic, detestable person who was too proud to come. He would come some day, of course. He must. Some day he would wake up and see that it wasn't a poor girl's fault that she was rich.

He wouldn't see. He didn't come. Instead, he went off with his regiment to the ends of the earth, out of sight and hearing. She was very angry with him.

Nothing but angry. Still—she didn't want any of the nice boys.

Now he, and they, and all, were gone into the wounding past. And she alone, with no present and no future, was——

Oh—so tired and hungry!

Then the sun began to rise.

Muriel looked at it incredulously.

Could the sun rise? Could daylight come?

Such daylight! Such a sun! The clear cool air—the fresh, deep green—the grass—the woods—the upland fields—the breezes—of the Jura!

Her tired soul opened its eyes on freshness. Once more the heavenly power made all things new. And her tired body sang a humble harmless song of—

'Coffee at Pontarchon!'

People in the carriage began to move. On those heights, somehow, there was even room to move!

People were rummaging among their small luggage—getting out their money for coffee, of course, thought Muriel.

One of the Italian women, who had slipped into Miss Strachey's corner, looked pityingly at the helplessness of the English Miss, and she gave her the Italian for a wink, indicating to her that it was time she, too, began to rummage. But Muriel carried a purse on her wrist and had no need to wrestle with the suit-case stowed under her seat. Though small, it was very heavy: a

solid-leather one of her father's which, for love of him, she had preferred to her own.

The train was slowing down. Miss Strachey had picked herself up from the floor. The Italian woman dived, hauled out Muriel's case, laid it across her own good broad knees and patted it.

How could Muriel not respond to such kindness? She touched the case's cunning spring, took out a clean pocket-handkerchief, and then snapped the case shut, saying '*Grazie!*' with a pretty shy smile she had.

And behold—as she turned—Pontarchon!

And a table set at the far end of the platform! White cloth, white cups, heaped baskets of bread, and mounds of butter—tall, glistening cups of coffee—jugs of milk—a white-capped woman knitting by the table—the waving woods behind it all, and the morning sun above!

Muriel was out of the carriage, and running—simply pelting—down the platform, and the Italian woman, with a gesture that called heaven and earth to witness that whom the gods will ruin they first make mad, was plumping down the suit-case upon Muriel's empty seat.

For one moment Muriel, at the buffet, was proudly calling herself an easy first. The next she saw that she was alone, and that the knitting woman stared in surprise and made no move to serve her?

What was wrong? Was the train going on—without her?

No. On the contrary, its vans were disgorging heavy luggage, while a steady stream of passengers was climbing down from it and pressing towards a doorway marked '*Douane.*' The woman, too, pointed her short, bright needle and said several times, '*Douane! Douane!*'

Muriel hadn't forgotten the frontier examination of heavy luggage; she had simply never thought of it. When the Blakes had travelled their servants had the keys.

Her keys!

She had left them in the suit-case. They were what the wise Italian woman had wanted her to take out. The nice, wise woman! And that Alpine being, who could have told her everything, in words, and who wouldn't speak!

Muriel turned and ran again. Not hunger gave her wings this time, but fierce resolve. That Alpine being should *not* cheat her of her coffee!

What a long train! And all the empty carriages alike! All dirty black! She ran down its length and back again, looking for her suit-case—she would know that when she saw it, anywhere.

At last! And the Italian woman had left it out for her, ready, on the seat. She sprang in, touched the spring, threw the case open, and dived for the keys. She knew just where she had put them—the right-hand corner.

But they weren't there!

The left, then.

No.

She was rummaging now, if you like it—tossing out, wildly, everything that wasn't keys! . . . She heard a crash. No matter! She could pack all that back later. . . . Her keys first! But her keys were not in any of the four corners.

Her keys were not anywhere.

She lifted her bewildered head and for the first time looked round upon the wreckage she had made.

Appalled, she stumbled to her feet.

For she was in a first-class smoking carriage. And its seats and floor were strewn—with socks, shirts, shaving-brushes, and packets of tobacco!

What had she done? What could she do? How explain? How escape?—A train thief! That's what they'd take her for—what they'd take her *up* for. A train thief!

She moved to fly, and her foot struck the thing she had smashed.

Mechanically she stooped and picked it up.

One glance at it—one choked, astonished cry—and Muriel Blake had sprung from the carriage and, clasping a small round object to her heart, was slinking—slinking like the thief she was—down the long length of the empty train, to the shelter of her own still empty carriage.

When the passengers came back from their coffee in varying forms of cheerfulness, but all cheerful, they found the English Miss sitting bolt upright in her place, wholly engrossed in the study of a large, heavy, square book.

First came the Frenchmen, then the two Italians, and last of all Miss Strachey—fresh from her three cups of coffee, two rolls, and extra butter. But so engrossed was the English Miss that she never looked up at any of them: she never even moved to let them pass.

The Frenchmen were indifferent.

The Italians, who had liked her, were surprised.

Miss Strachey, at one glance, was coldly furious. She settled herself comfortably among her axes, however, before remarking icily:

'May I trouble you for my book?'

Muriel, thus made aware that it was a work on Climbing that she was studying, relinquished it with a start and 'I beg your pardon.'

But the young woman who had been detected in possession of another person's property wasn't really begging pardon—Miss Strachey saw that. She bore a look that was more than queer—it was shameless. True, her cheeks, that had been so unbecomingly pale, were now red—as red as rouge. But that was not with shame. Her lips smiled. Her eyes were bright—sparkling—defiant!

What did this mean? Clearly a creature with no sense of property! A kleptomaniac! Miss Strachey became gravely disturbed. She would have liked to change her carriage, but the train's starting-time was already past. She wished this disagreeable journey were over. Why didn't the train go on?

By this time several people were asking why the train didn't go on.

There was a noise of people getting out again and talking.

One of the Italians leaned far out of the window, *pericoloso* though it might be.

She turned round and proclaimed to her carriage-mates by vivid action that a melodrama of precipitous interest was being performed upon the platform.

Everybody pushed for the window, except the English Miss, who had found another book to wrap herself up in.

Everybody was scrambling for a glimpse of the crowd, far up the train, from the centre of which bits of bad broken British-French burst—through a steady chorus

of sympathetic indignation. And then suddenly everybody's view was blocked by a hot, square *conducteur*, red with rage, who demanded that this carriage should occupy itself with its own affairs, and should disgorge a certain depraved character named Blake, found guilty of leaving two large trunks unclaimed at the *Douane*.

Everybody protested innocence, except a young lady who was reading, and an elder lady who was glaring at her, with a certainty that her name was Blake, and her motive for concealing it criminal.

The guard explained that the luggage of this abandoned Blake would have been left to its fate long ago, had not the train's departure been delayed by the discovery of a yet greater crime.

'What crime?' asked Miss Strachey—with a hopeful eye on the young woman opposite.

'The effects of an English officer travelling in a first-class smoking carriage had been ransacked at the moment when this brave man (unlike Blake) was loyally doing his duty to his heavy luggage at the *Douane*. An object of the most precious had been stolen! But wait! The search even now was being made from carriage to carriage.' (The walking, talking tumult was now more distinctly heard, making its way towards them down the train.) 'It was forbidden,' concluded the guard, 'to any passenger to leave his place.'

'I am getting out,' said Miss Strachey.

She was. And she did. The guard went down before her like a ninepin. Vainly he tried to cover his discomfiture, running behind her down the platform, calling to all to behold this reclaimed person, Miss Blake, who was coming to unlock, at last, her trunks.

'Miss Blake!'

The astonished audience of the melodrama made way as its star performer charged through it, crying out that name.

He was a tall, sun-browned British officer. He had been in a cold white rage. But now he was scarlet.

Confronted by Miss Strachey, he drew rein and cooled suddenly.

'I am not Miss Blake,' said Miss Strachey.

'No,' said Captain Milford, blank disappointment melting into relief.

'It is unnecessary for me to introduce myself,' said the Disappointment. *'I am merely come to inform you, in the interests of justice, that the person who robbed your luggage is now in my carriage. A young woman,'* she added, *'with the clearest signs of kleptomania.'*

'A woman!'

Captain Milford's wrath weakened to dismay. He didn't like hunting down a woman.

Miss Strachey did.

'Follow me,' she said.

And the hero of a hundred fights followed her like her little lamb.

When he came to the door of Miss Strachey's carriage five Frenchmen and two Italians looked at him, breathless.

They might look.

All he saw was a slight girl in black sitting reading a book.

She never looked up when the crowd stopped and the carriage door opened. She went on reading her book.

She was the only beautiful woman Tom Milford had

ever seen. The only woman! Hadn't he known it all these four years? But how much more beautiful now for the soft shadows that sorrow had set beneath the lovely eyes!

Still she didn't lift the lovely eyes, and he didn't dare to speak.

Four years! He had thrown away four years! How could he dare now?

Then the corners of the lovely mouth lifted—just an atom—he thought—he was almost sure of it—and in a rush he spoke.

'I've caught you up at last,' he said. 'I've been trying to, ever since March.'

It was in March that Blake and Blake had failed.

'Rather late to begin trying, don't you think?' said the lady in black. Her eyes were still on her book, and her voice was very firm.

'Yes,' said the soldier humbly. 'Four years too late for me. You've got the chance now to pay me back in my own—if—if you've got the heart to.'

He spoke so very humbly that everybody in the carriage except Miss Strachey understood and wished him luck.

And the lady looked up from her book. She didn't like to see a soldier look so humble. She stood up suddenly, her finger in her book. And she said in a most careless voice:

'Could you find a less crowded carriage, do you think?'

'Oh, I think so,' said he, just as carelessly.

These English!

Without another word that English officer helped the

lady out of the carriage and took her right along the platform to an empty first-class smoker, and helped her in. And when the train began to move, and the *agent de police* jumped upon the step and put his head in at the window and asked what about the thief, the English officer said, 'Hang the thief,' and the train went on, and the agent dropped off, and there was an end of *him*.

But Muriel Blake said :

'Don't hang the thief, please,' and opened her hands, and showed him something.

It was a little picture of a laughing girl, without the ghost of a shadow under her eyes and with two words—'Ever yours'—scribbled in pencil across the foot, and it was in a small round frame with a smashed glass.

'How on earth?' gasped Tom Milford. 'When? Why?'

'I don't know why I took the silly thing,' said Muriel. 'When I saw it I went mad.'

'But—when you saw it?' said Tom helplessly.

'I was just looking in your suit-case,' she explained.

'Just—looking—in—my—'

'For my *keys*,' she said.

'For your keys. . . . I see,' said Tom. He didn't want to haggle over a simple statement like that. If a man has been a pig-headed fool for four years, he can't afford to haggle over trifles. Yet so strong is the thirst for exact knowledge in the mind of the British Army, that once more he suggested diffidently :

'You were looking—for your keys—in my suit-case?'

'Oh! What *does* it matter?' cried Muriel. 'It's my own picture, isn't it?'

Tom Milford seized his chance.

'All that's yours is mine,' he said firmly.

She turned on him.

'You say that *now* because I have nothing.'

'Don't be deceiving me,' said Tom. '*You have two trunks at the Douane.*'

What's the good of trying to talk sense to a person like that? She didn't try.

They were married at Florence, to the speechless rage of Mrs. Stansby-Wetton, and it was on their wedding journey home that they got their coffee at Pontarchon.

THE LADY OF THE UPPER PART

'NOTHING but the Midnight Mass here at St. Joseph's.' John Mills drew in his chair to the supper-table. 'That's how the Father read it out on Sunday. Midnight here. Second Mass, Hedge-End Schoolroom, seven. Third out at Blake's Green, nine.'

'Well, I never did!' Annie paused in dishing up the sausages. 'Looks like me not getting Mass at all this Christmas! *His* first Christmas, too!'

'He,' John Dominic Mills, red, rolled in flannels and further embedded in a brown plaid shawl, occupied the deep seat of the one arm-chair before the kitchen fire.

His parents were more draughtily provided. Their table was dragged across the window, leaving a clear gangway from the passage door to the cupboard under the stairs, wherein stood the two slot-meters. For one of these belonged to the lady of the Upper Part, and they were penny meters, and, though the lady (a perfect lady) would put in as much as nine pennies at a time rather than intrude, her gas *would* give out at meal-times and the supper-table was best set out of her way.

'There's a burst one for you, like you fancy.'

Annie was back at the table. But John couldn't yet give his whole mind even to a burst one.

'Seems hard,' he ruminated. 'You not getting Christmas Mass. You that never would miss. But—'

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here! Look here, Annie!' He laid down knife and fork, beaming on her with the brightness of an idea.

'What price me going to the nine at Blake's Green? I could do the six miles easy. And then——'

'What then?' demanded Annie.

He weakened under her stern gaze.

'Then I could take the young 'un off your hands for the night time—was my *idea*.'

'You take John Dominic!'

'Eleven-thirty to one, that's all. So's you get out to the Midnight—like you like to—was my *idea*.'

'There, eat up your supper like a good man,' Annie said with a pitying smile. 'And have sense. Take Johnny off my hands? Yes. For good an' all *you'd* take him! Why, you didn't know enough not to sit down on him just now if I hadn't pulled the chair away quick!'

The incident was recent and raw in three memories, John Dominic having punctuated his share in it with loud, indignant cries. The guilty party murmured, 'All right, all right,' and was concentrating on his supper, when a knock came on the passage door.

'Come in, Miss Gray,' called Annie, brightly.

'I'm most *frightfully* sorry, Mrs. Mills,' from outside.

'Come right in, Miss Gray,' said John, moving in his chair.

The door opened.

'Not if you stand up, Mr. Mills. No. I really won't. *It's the gas!*' (in surprised despair).

This was the unvarying ritual. The next movement was to get well in at the door, and to make the double back into the stair cupboard, where the slot-meters lived,

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without allowing the eyes to stray in the direction of the supper-table. This never had been easy, but now a hideous difficulty was added by the presence of John Dominic. If Miss Gray mustn't look at the Mills' supper, still less must she look at their child. For she was an Inspector of Infant Welfare, and, without her having once directly inspected John Dominic, every fibre of her tabulated disapproval was alive to the unhygienic conditions of this infant. The muffings, the plaid, the roasting fire, these things haunted her inward vision. And if once the Inspector of Infant Welfare looked right *at* the child: if once his mother caught that look, charged as it must be with outraged physical science, with incipient, hardly repressible reform: then the lady of the Upper Part knew full well that her tenancy wouldn't be worth a fortnight's purchase.

And rooms are so hard to get—rooms like these, near a good station, with absolutely decent people to do one's chores, so almost unattainable!

Winifred Gray often asked herself if she did right to stifle her health-consciousness for the sake of her convenience. She was asking herself about it now, in the stair cupboard, while she joggled at the slot handle, which had stuck. It was always sticking, and she couldn't be always calling that worthy Mills to her help.

That worthy Mills had forgotten her existence. He was starting on his second sausage, and on his former subject.

'Well, Hedge-End's beyond your beat, my dear, and so's Blake's Green, so if you can't get out to the Midnight you're done. As you say, no Mass for you this Christmas.'

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Annie said nothing for a moment. She had meant to make such a big thanksgiving—John Dominic's first Christmas, and all!

After a bit—'Comes of moving out to this strange place,' she said. 'No woman of one's own near by to lend a hand—all strangers.'

'That's right,' John agreed. 'Got to move, though, when the work moves.'

'Oh, I know it, I'm not grumbling. Not much, that is. Must get a little grumble when I can, John, living with you. You don't give me many chances.'

They had both forgotten Miss Gray. The surrendering scrunch of the slot-meter, followed by the lady's sudden re-entrance from the cupboard was in itself a surprise.

And what a re-entrance!

She didn't slink to the passage door. She advanced straight on them, bright-eyed, transformed.

'Do forgive me,' she said. 'I couldn't help hearing what you were talking about. Such a charming idea, I always think! And *true*, of course to *you*.'

They stared at her.

'You all *do* like going out in the middle of the night that day, always, don't you?'

'Midnight Mass!' Annie had guessed it. 'That's what Miss Gray means, John.'

'Yes, we like it,' said Mills. He was looking curiously at the perfect lady, who never darkened a church door. 'Naturally, we like it. Night-time being the time He was born.'

'Yes, that's your idea, I know. And so delightful. But *won't* you trust me with the baby then, Mrs. Mills? And you go out with your husband to your little service?'

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'Why, of *course*——' began Mills, in pleased astonishment.

'*Of course not*,' said Annie.

She stood up as she spoke, confronting Miss Gray with awful dignity. 'Though very kind of you, Miss Gray, I'm sure, to think of such a thing. And please to accept my best thanks,' she concluded.

.

Promptly and proudly withdrawn within her own fastness, the Lady of the Upper Part sat marvelling at herself! That she should have exposed herself to such a snub from such a person!

In the exquisite bareness of her own small parlour, with its one shaded light, its one tall vase, and its one really beautiful old print, Winifred Gray reposed her soul from the hot glare of the crowded kitchen, and devoutly thanked her stars to be well out of that.

With her eyes on that dear old print, she called to mind the gaudy instances of sacred art downstairs. And she smiled, for the picture she was looking at now was also a Virgin and Child.

Her father and mother had been resolved—she had heard—that the first word lisped by their only child should be 'Botticelli.'

And it had been so.

Poor mother and father! What did they think of their joy and pride being 'set down' by an Annie Mills?

What would they have thought, that is, if they had been—anywhere?

She shivered.

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Yes, she was cold. The fire was low. Who cared ?

She certainly wasn't going to ask the Mills man to bring her up coals, after that scene.

Her mistake, she concluded, was not having kept herself to herself. One must always——

—Even at Christmas ?

She laughed.

What *is* Christmas ?

.

The Mills man, meanwhile, was having it out with his wife.

'Right down unneighbourly, I call it, Annie.'

Annie was walking her baby—'her own baby'—up and down, up and down, with much vigour ; humming to him with more energy, patting him with more decision, than John Dominic had any sort of use for.

John Mills sat down with deliberation in the vacant arm-chair.

'Can't you take a thing as it's meant ?' he asked. 'Here's a poor creature has neither chick nor child, and all she asks is to have a game with the baby, and give you your outing, and——'

'*Outing!*' threw in Annie, fiercely.

'Well, that's all she knows about it,' said John. 'And you turn her down with barely a "thank you." It's not *like* you, Annie.'

'Well, it *is* me.' She snapped at him. 'So that's that.'

John Mills spoke slowly, he was filling his pipe and looking into the fire.

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'And with regard to the "outing" idea,' he said, 'which you don't take to, nor me neither—what about the Mass Obligation, though?'

'Obligation!' Annie stood still.

She looked at her husband over her shoulder.

'Obligation?' she repeated.

'It's for you to say.'

He didn't look back at her. He was feeling for his matches.

'*Obligation!* To leave my little baby in the charge of a stuck-up young woman that——'

'Young woman that's trained for the job, so you've told me.'

'Trained?'

'Trained's the very sort you'll have to trust the fam'ly to, *one* of these days, my girl.' He grinned cheerfully. 'When you're the fine lady I mean to make you. With your Upper Nurse and Under Nurse, and——'

'Stop talking foolish.'

She was wild with him—with herself—with the interloping lodger—with all the world, except John Dominic, and all she wanted was to go on with her drama of irreplaceable motherhood. But she still stood frowning, and looking at him, and——

'What's all this about *obligation*? ' she repeated.

'You know better than me. There isn't any obligation, you know well, if it's a danger to the child to leave it with *her*'—he jerked his head—'for an hour or so.'

He started poking the fire then, and went on ever so long. He had raked out all the ashes and half the coals before a hand came over his shoulder, and a choky voice said:

'Give me that poker! All right. I'll go to Mass.'

'I'll take her up her coals, and tell her so,' said Mills.

So on Christmas Eve Annie walked up under the stars with her husband to St. Joseph's.

She was glad to get out of the house, which wasn't like her own house, with Miss Gray established in the kitchen. This was Christmas and Annie had been to confession, and she had done what she could to make up for her nasty temper to the lodger—set her out a nice little supper, carried down for her her own pretty easy chair, and left all spick and span. And she did hope she'd given her enough directions about John Dominic, and that there'd be no new-fangled games played on the child. 'The child,' was what he seemed to poor Annie, when she gave a last forlorn look from the door, going out, and saw Miss Gray sit down beside him. Not her very own Johnny, hers! 'The child'—anybody's!

And this—was Christmas!

Well, it would be all right when she got up to St. Joseph's. And when John said, 'weren't the stars bright' and 'did she remember this time last year,' it was all right now.

But it *wasn't* all right when she got up to St. Joseph's—not by any means. The minute she got inside the church, everything she wanted to think about went away, and everything she didn't want to think about came back. Something fierce it was.

And nothing helped her. She looked at Our Lady's dear image with the Holy Child, and it wasn't like either

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of them; it was just paint and plaster. Even when she looked at the altar, all she noticed was the heaps and heaps of flowers. . . . Hateful and spiteful thoughts kept spitting up. What brought her here to-night? Not love! The way her Christmas Mass always *had* been. Obligation—John had forced her to see it was Obligation. And it wouldn't have *been* obligation without that woman's interfering. Spoiling everything for her, coming between her and her husband, and her and her child, and now between her and her religion. On this night—this lovely night that she had loved ever since she could remember, and that she had wanted—yes—she *had* wanted to make into *such* a thanksgiving for her own baby.

All the time she knew it was horrible lies that kept filling her mind. But what could she do? How could she stop it? She had never, never felt anything like it. The Mass began, and she tried hard to follow in her missal what they sang . . . 'Quare fremuerunt gentes.' Yes, that meant 'Why have the gentiles raged'—'*raged* . . .' Oh, it *was* hard trying to follow.

At the last words of the Gospel, 'men of goodwill,' she saw what it was that was trying to get her. A bad will—an evil will. She remembered 'All the devils in hell can't make you consent against your own will.' But it *was* hard. . . . The Creed went by, and the 'Adeste Fideles' sounded like nothing at all. When the warning bell rang before the Elevation, she said, 'I did mean to thank You. I do. What can I do?'

She looked at Our Lord lifted up, and she adored Him.

'My Lord and my God.'

And she thought then—'*Not mine only—anybody's.*'

And then—'I can give Miss Gray my Communion.'

She did that. She did it going up to the rails. And when she came back, still she couldn't pray. She had nothing to offer, even then. Nothing but Our Lord. She offered Him.

Coming out of church—'You're tired,' said her husband.

'I am a bit, I don't know—what for. I'm glad I didn't miss, though. That's thanks to you, John.' She half stopped, but went on sturdily, 'and to Miss Gray. And to the Obligation——'

She quite stopped then. The *Obligation*, she thought. Why—that is Love. Him setting it. Us keeping it.

'Yes, the stars *are* bright, John, aren't they? Wonderful!'

But she was thinking of something more shining and more strong.

.

John Dominic's parents had started for Mass, shutting the back door gently, not to wake the child, and passing by the kitchen window and out of the front garden. The gate swung to behind them with a sharp click: Miss Gray looked up at the sound: and she was caught by a sudden supervening hush and emptiness in the busy little swarming place she knew. It was startling, this sense of solitude. She glanced quickly to right and left of her. And there, of course, to her left, slumbered the Mills baby.

She wasn't alone.

Though, really, tied hand and foot as she was by extorted promises—not to move him from the fire, please, more than that—not to draw back the thick window

curtains, no, not a bit—not to open the window more than ‘just that little’—robbed as she had been of all fruitful initiative in the handling of the poor child, the Mills baby might as well be non-existent.

There it was, however, and there *she* was, and there they both had to be, till the Mills couple should return from the celebration of their romantic rites.

Curious to find a sensible man like Mills addicted to that sort of thing! His wife, one understood—an emotional little person, no doubt. Who kept her place neat, however, and had made ready quite an attractive little supper tray, which would help to pass the time.

As Miss Gray sat down to the table, her eyes made a tour of the kitchen, its utensils, and its ornaments.

She smiled at a crude oleograph of a Pope, all in white against a red curtain, and in the act of blessing anybody and everybody—‘me too,’ she thought with amusement. And she frowned at one described as of ‘the Sacred Heart,’ which was hung up conspicuously for everyone to see.

‘Ostentation’ was her first judgment, and this took on a heightened glow of contempt, when she learned, from the words under it, that further special blessings were attached to this display.

A smaller picture, no more than a post card really, was pinned under the chimney shelf, to preside, she supposed, over the cooking, and she got up to see what it was.

A Virgin and Child, rather stiff, on a gold background, with the title, ‘Our Lady of Perpetual Succour.’ Succour for the Christmas plum-pudding— How absolutely sweet!

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But when she looked closer, her smile went out in a flare of anger.

Hovering angels were displaying to the child a cross and other instruments of torture; and it seemed to her that his little hands had caught his mother's hands in fear.

Fear!

Good Heavens! Couldn't these morbid people leave even to childhood its one unclouded day!

Here was Christmas.—Here and now, for the clock struck half-past twelve.—Christmas, the children's day, if it was anything. And fathers and mothers—kneeling in raptures before a wax baby doll in a brown-paper cave—had set up before a living baby that ghastly threat of pain and fear!

She had turned from the picture in disgust. She looked back at it with contempt.

The folly of the thing!

For, if that child were just a child, cross and nails meant nothing to him. And if he were God——

Silence touched her.

If he were God?

Her babbling mind was still.

I cannot say what was done for her in that stillness. She waited. Everything waited. Millions of stars, millions of worlds, that had waited millions of years.

John Dominic sighed in his sleep. She looked at him: she looked at the poor room; and from all its little humble windows into God the curtains were drawn back.

If He were God, Who rent His heavens and came down, to lift His crazed and broken children?

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If He were God, and blessed, through all ages, all people, always, by His Shepherd's lifted hand ?

If He cast fire from His Heart, on fire with love, into hearts that die of cold ? And, being God, would have no seeming in His one-ness with their poverty, but their real pain, their own poor pain—their fear ?

At last, in that silence, she knelt.

TWO MASTERS

'I've seen Miss Longstaffe, Tom!'

Molly Pritchard, picking up her husband at Cheselton Station, hardly left him time to get into the car.

'And, oh, Tom! She's absolutely *It!* And the School—the whole place—too lovely for words! White. Spotless. All light and space and air. And simple! Simple's no word for it. No crowding. None of those unhappy attempts at ornament, or—or anything. Just one good print or something, here and there, to catch the eye. Rheims Cathedral was one of them. Miss Longstaffe pointed that out to me, and some rather special picture of Our Lady—not one I know. And she said wouldn't those pictures make Sylvie feel quite at home? Wasn't it nice of her? And then—a vast Reception Hall with just one statue in it. From Athens, that was.'

'Greeks *and* Romans taken in,' grunted Tom.

'She didn't call us Romans,' said his wife. 'She's much too cultivated.'

'Us!' Tom Pritchard interrupted. 'I'm not a Roman.'

'I mean Sylvie and me, of course. And she called us just Catholics. Wasn't it nice of her? And fancy, Tom! She's changing the name of the school, It's not to be

called Broome Hall after this term. It's to be called "St. Joan's."

'New-Broom Hall.'

'You know quite well St. Joan isn't new.'

'I'll bet Miss Longstaffe's one is. Compounded by Shaw, produced by——'

'Do stop talking one minute, dear,' said Molly patiently. 'I've got such heaps and heaps to tell you, and I want you to have it all at your fingers' ends before Sylvie gets in from the Convent to-night. So that you can back me up—hard—if she should——' She paused.

'Yes,' said Tom. 'I imagine there'll be ructions.'

'I must tell her to-night, I suppose.'

'To-morrow's her last day of term, isn't it?'

'Yes,' said Molly, with a sigh. 'And she'll have to say good-bye, I suppose. I thought perhaps the nuns might have let it leak out. But they said they wouldn't. And—a deeper sigh—they haven't.'

'Stupid of them.'

'Oh! Of course, *you* think nuns are everything. All I know is, I wish I'd never sent the child there. She's so ridiculously fond of the place.'

'It was a bit of a mistake, if you meant to take her away again.'

'But I didn't. You know I never did. You *must* see how it has all happened. How could I tell how the land lay before we settled in here? Convent schools are the absolute top shelf in lots of places. I'm sure at Plymley all the really good people simply besieged the nuns to take their girls—Protestants and all!—But this'—she said—'is Cheselton.'

'My rent cries out it is.'

'And you can't blame me for not getting the whole hang of Cheselton before we moved over. The Good Counsel school here *looked* all right. And it's the same Order, so we knew they *taught* all right. And so handy for Heatherbrae—only five minutes off. And how was I to know that all the really good people in Cheselton send their girls to Broome Hall?'

'Catholics and all?' asked Tom, with a grin.

'Oh!' said his wife. 'Cheselton Catholics! I ask you!'

'Come now,' said Tom Pritchard. 'I call that little school pal of Sylvie's quite a decent little specimen—Josie—what's her name?'

'Josie Strahan? Yes. There's nothing wrong with the Strahans. But the bulk of the school is hopelessly middle-class. It beats me what can have persuaded Mrs. Strahan to send Josie into a *milieu* like that.'

'Perhaps,' her husband hazarded, 'she promised to bring up the child a Catholic.'

'Mrs. Strahan? Of course she didn't! Why should she? Her husband's as good a Catholic as she is. Why should the Strahans have to promise things? *You* had to, you poor dear, because——'

'Because, being an outsider,' said Tom drily, 'I'd be apt to hamper your pious zeal.'

'As if you ever would!'

'I haven't, anyhow. We've both kept the bargain.'

'What do you mean by "both"?''

'I mean both. I've left you a free hand with Sylvie as per contract. And you—you were to try to convert me, you know.'

'As if I could!'

'Oh! but you tried. Yes, you did. You gave me a good book for a wedding present.'

'Nonsense!—Did I? Whatever was it?'

'Book written by—some stout old Johnnie—I forget his name. Rather a striking old chap. Went charging up and down England in the year One. And finally succumbed to some No-Popery row.'

'You mean Challoner. Heavens! *That* old book! How funny of me. And how funny of you to remember it.'

'Oh! I remember it. Forcible old chap. There was a bit—something about not expecting to get to God by going in the opposite direction.'

Molly turned and looked at her husband.

She had often thought when first they were married, suppose Tom were to be suddenly and miraculously converted, how nice it would be!

If he were to be converted *now*? How—how queer!

'You liked that book?' she said, uncertainly.

'I liked that remark. Seemed to mean something—at the moment. But the Catholics I was coming across looked to me very much like their neighbours—trying, I mean, to get somewhere by going in the opposite direction. So——'

'Which Catholics?' asked Molly frowning.

'Lots,' said Tom. 'One in particular.'

'Horrid,' said Molly. 'Who was he?'

They were taking the sharp bend in at Heatherbrae, and Tom Pritchard stopped the car at the door before he answered indifferently.

'He?—He *wasn't* he.'

'What *are* you talking about?'

Molly was diving into all the corners of the car.

'Don't tell me,' she wailed, 'that that flower-shop fiend has forgotten to put in the box of violets?'

Dinner was over, and, in the drawing-room of Heatherbrae, Sylvia Mary, eight years old, in a rose-petal pink frock, sat before the fire in her own small chair, her small head bowed, her small damp pocket handkerchief rubbing and grinding the tip of her small red nose, and sobbed and sniffed, and sobbed, and sobbed again.

Her father, in his easy chair on one side of the fire, her mother in hers on the other, held each a cigarette; but neither lighted up. They were waiting with uneasiness for what Sylvia was going to say about it.

'I *never* . . .' she said at last. 'I *never* . . .' and could say no more.

'Never's a long day!' remarked her father with forced heartiness.

'You would say that,' murmured his wife.

'I did,' said he: and, being goaded, lit his cigarette.

'Of course, you know, Sylvie,'—Molly struck the easy, common-sensible note that worked well in so many emergencies,—'you know you'll go on *playing* with Josie Strahan all the same.'

The sobbing was held up for a breath, and the mother followed up her success.

'You can have her here to tea every day if you want to.' (Reckless statements of this sort are always subject to revision.)

‘And to spend the whole day on Saturdays.’ Tom went one better.

‘*And Feast-Days?*’ Small but clear came the challenge from behind the pocket handkerchief.

‘Well, there won’t be holidays on Feast-Days, I fancy, but——’ At a frenzied gesture from his wife Tom tried to cover his false move——

‘But there’ll be heaps and heaps of holidays. Lashings of ‘em.’

‘*There won’t be holidays on Feast Days,*’ repeated the child, slowly.

She put down her hands and handkerchief upon her lap.

‘*In all my life,*’ she said, ‘*I never heard of such a thing.*’

She sat still, and trembling, looking at the dreadful newness. Once she turned her little head towards her mother: but it was her mother who was doing this to her.

She jumped up suddenly and ran to her father.

‘Must I?’ she said. ‘Must I?’

‘Must you do what your mother says?’ Tom always played the game. ‘What d’you think, Midge?’

The child stood where she was for a moment. Then she said, ‘I know,’ and went silently to Molly’s chair.

‘That’s all right, Mousie,’ said Molly lightly. ‘You didn’t mean it.’

‘Yes. I did mean it. Because, you see, it is such a very *dreadful* thing.’

‘Goosie!’ Molly drew the child upon her knee. ‘What a fuss about nothing! It’s only for lessons.’

‘Only for lessons,’ Sylvia assured herself in a whisper.

'You'll live here with us just the same.

'Yes,' she whispered.

'Everything just the same.'

'Yes.'

'You'll just get up comfortably in time for breakfast.'

'For *breakfast*?' She looked round in her mother's face, surprised.

'Yes. You'll be having breakfast at home with us, now. Instead of racing off to——'

'Not go to Mass?'

'You'll go to Mass on Sundays, of course, and on Saturdays, too, I daresay.'

'Not all the whole week?'

'Have sense, Sylvie! Do *I* go all the whole week?'

'No.' This mystery was as yet unexplored.

'It would be much too much for you now, with the long walk after breakfast to St. Joan's.'

'What is "St. Joan's"?' asked Sylvia.

'Your new school is going to be called "St. Joan's,"' said her mother.

'Next term,' broke in her father, jovially—'in honour of *your* going there. Because you're going to be such a valiant young person.'

Sylvie listened politely. She loved her father with all her heart; but she knew St. Joan would be one of those things that he didn't know about: so, when he had finished, she turned to her mother.

'Why is it called "St. Joan's" if it's Protestant?'

'It isn't Protestant.'

Sylvia was puzzled. 'You said . . .'

'I said it wasn't Catholic.'

'I don't understand.'

'It is a thing called non-sectarian,' said Molly.

'And that's the Latin for no divisions,' said Tom.

'Oh!' said Sylvia, relieved. 'Then I'll go to Mass *there.*'

'No.'

'Why?'

'They don't have Mass there.'

'Why?'

'They don't want to—some of them.'

'But you said . . . no divisions.'

'Heavens above!' Molly put the child off her knee with the ghost of a shake (she heard Tom's chuckle). 'Don't be tiresome, Sylvia! . . . I should think you'd be glad to have your lazy little sleep out in the mornings.'

Sylvia turned a startled look upon her mother. 'It's been trouble enough, I'm sure,' went on Molly, 'for poor Mathilde, to get you up and out to the convent in time.'

'I know,' said Sylvia.

'And now you get the chance to lie in bed an hour longer—Lazy-bones!—are you going to pretend you don't like it?'

'I do like it,' said Sylvia, all at sea. 'But I—I didn't mean—I don't want—'

She stopped—and her father put in his genial word.

““The spirit is willing,”” he said, ““but the flesh is weak””—as the saying goes.'

Molly raised her eyebrows at him.

The child began sobbing again in a subdued, hopeless way.

‘What’s the matter now?’ asked her father.

‘I’m frightened.’

‘What of?’

‘Everything.’

When Molly Pritchard came back from handing the child over to the ministrations of Mathilde, her husband looked up from the report of Amalgamated Electrics, and idly watched her progress down the long length of her charming drawing-room.

It all keyed well together: the soft bright lighting, the bright well-chosen colours of the room, the graceful, bright, well-chosen wife.

He thought of asking her, just to get a rise out of her, what Father Smith had to say about this new educational stunt. And then he thought he wouldn’t. Why strike any more jarring notes? He was a busy man, and he liked a quiet evening.

And he knew her answer in advance, anyhow. ‘Father Smith disliked it, of course, but he didn’t forbid it—absolutely.’—‘Yes; of course the Church disliked it—but it didn’t forbid it—absolutely.’

Tom Pritchard reflected sleepily that if Molly were to start in to serve her husband in the way she served her God, he would pretty soon pack up his traps and go.

And then he left off thinking about it. Another line of Challoner’s, that had lashed Tom Pritchard once, had long since been forgotten; and the ‘affected ignorance of what we have no wish to know’ was become his habitual mood.

So silence reigned, and Molly sat down to her writing-table and gave her mind to garden-party lists. They

took a bit of doing, for she had a heart, and was nearly as anxious not to wound old Plymley friends as she was determined not to antagonize new Cheselton ones.

Suddenly, with an exclamation, she touched the bell, and a parlour-maid came in.

'Tell Cook, please, that I quite forgot that the Crusade van will call to-morrow afternoon. I want her to have two good sacksful ready. She can ask Mathilde for any old things of Miss Sylvie's to fill up with, if necessary.'

'The Crusade?' queried Tom as the door shut.

'Oh! don't you know? The most splendred thing! They give a home to any Catholic child whose faith is in danger. I send *all* my rubbish there. . . . What is the matter with you?'

For Tom had thrown back his head with a shout of laughter.

He sat up. '*All* your rubbish,' he said solemnly, 'to the Crusade. And your child to Newbroom Hall.'

Molly was, for once, exasperated. She turned and faced her husband, and challenged him.

'Do you want your child to grow up in that set, and end by marrying out of her class?' she demanded.

'Do you want her to grow up a convert to Newbroomery?' asked Tom.

'Convert! Stuff and nonsense! They've got nothing to convert her to.'

'I'm not sure that I want Sylvie converted to Nothing,' said Tom, with a dash of sentiment. 'But it's your job. Have it your own way.'

He returned to Amalgamated Electrics. His wife gave him an undecided glance or two and then applied herself seriously to her lists.

Upstairs, Sylvia Mary drifted from bewilderment into sleep.

And Mathilde, who had been engaged for the absolute purity of her accent (with just one passing mention of her religion), was pronouncing these English parents '*drôle d'espèce.*'

Sweet, late-flowering hawthorns, golden dropping laburnums—all the sunflecked wonders of the first June days—bloomed over and through the railings of St. Joan's School, and scented the air of the highroad. The highroad was a country road still, for all the rapid growth of Cheselton, but it didn't look like a country road to-day.

Ranks of cars were lined up on each side of it, and before, and in, and upon the cars, swarmed crowds of sightseers.

The gates of St. Joan's School stood wide open. Three hundred schoolgirls, trim and businesslike in gym tunics of fawn and green, were drawn up at attention in its courtyard. While over the way eighty white-frocked children of all ages were massed behind the garden parapet of a hospitable Cheselton Catholic.

One of them, Josie Strahan, kept craning over the wall, trying to catch a glimpse of Sylvie Pritchard in the Joanite ranks. They met so seldom now—except at Mass. And even now she couldn't make her out. Joanites looked all so like each other. Perhaps she wasn't there? No. Of course, she wasn't. She was ill. That's why she wasn't at Mass this morning: nor here, although the King was coming.

The King was coming to St. Joan's!

In the five years that had passed since the school was renamed, St. Joan's had fought its way into the van of woman's education. And to-day the King was to recognize the great Girls' School by stopping his car at its gates on his way from opening a Public Playing-field, and by receiving an address from its Headmistress.

And was Sylvia Pritchard not assisting at this national event?—Sylvia, who had shot up from the funny little frightened newcomer—the 'Unknown Quantity,' the 'Sylvia-What-is-She?' of five years back—into the leader of Lower School work and games—into the very incarnation of that Public Spirit which was St. Joan's very life?

Sylvia was there.

But not peering across the road in a wistful search, like Josie. Alert, efficient, self-reliant, and as studiously self-effacing as the best brand of Public Spirit demands, playing hub to the Lower School wheel, tightening the slackers, and holding all in place, Sylvia Pritchard was fanning to flame a flickering hope in the heart of Elizabeth Longstaffe.

How often had that devoted woman—breathless from dancing high and disposedly among denominational eggs—wan from her midnight ransacking, for Assembly Hall quotation, of the less assertive parts of the Sacred Scriptures and of the works of Walter de la Mare—how often had she thanked what non-sectarian gods there be that Public Spirit still exists to be adored and served.

To-day she told herself that Sylvia Pritchard would live to be Its Prophet. And she flung a pitying thought

to the girl's silly mother, away amusing herself in Paris when she might have been seeing Sylvia on her job.

Miss Longstaffe had time to tell herself this or any number of things, in an unexpected, horrible, age-long, wait.

'That's Mr. Minns,' said everybody—and the King had, in fact, to leave Mr. Minns speaking. But almost everybody was rattled. Only Sylvia Pritchard, posted before the Lower School as transmitter of signals, maintained her perfect poise.

When, behold! A stir and a swaying in the house-servants' group.

'Old Kate, I bet!' thought Sylvia.

And old Kate it was.

Old Kate was small, and she was crooked, and only a half-day help—a vegetable maid—at that. But the King was coming, and old Kate was going to see him. She would stand in front of the tall ones, and the King could look over her head at the straight ones. And—after one long running ripple of remonstrance and push—there old Kate was—in the front line of the Domestic Staff, and nearly touching Miss Sylvie, the light of her eyes. For Kate belonged to the old days of Sylvia's home-life, and it was to Mrs. Pritchard's good word that she owed her job at the school.

She burst into joyful friendliness.

'Oh! Miss Sylvie, dear!' she whispered loudly. 'It's there across the road you would be if you had your rights! With them dears in their sweet white frocks.'

Sylvia had noted with distinct annoyance the white frocks of the Good Counsel girls.

Why couldn't nuns do things like other people? Their school had quite a decent uniform. Why this Child-of-Mary get-up for a really important, national occasion? It was hard enough anyhow for a girl to carry off being an R.C. in a great school like St. Joan's, without Catholic schoolgirls making an exhibition of themselves like that. White party frocks at twelve in the day! She wondered bitterly that they hadn't got on blue mantles?

'——And their Blue Mantles!——'

Sylvia jumped, as old Kate's words picked up her thought.

'Weren't they a lovely sight this morning in their blue mantles? The grandest procession ever I saw;'

'Procession!'

Sylvia's heart stopped.

'But you didn't see the procession! No, of course. You wouldn't have had time to change your frock, no more than they had. That's too bad. Poor Miss Sylvie! To miss the procession on Corpus Christi! But never mind, my dear. What's the procession even, so long as we've got the first Mass? That's the best of all on this holy Feast.—Why!—Miss Sylvie, dear!—What ails you?'

'He's coming!'

The running roar in the road told it: and the signalling began.

The Royal car stopped. The Upper School cheered.

Politely, methodically, flatly—as the Upper School would.

But the Lower School—the vigorous—the vital—the backbone of St. Joan's?

Not a sound came from the Lower School.

Miss Blaine was signalling. Miss Draycott was signalling. Miss Longstaffe, advancing to address her Sovereign, could scarce forbear to turn and bid them cheer.

Ragged sounds came droppingly—from the Domestic Staff—from here and there a scared uncertain child.

But the one stiffening to Miss Longstaffe's progress, the volume of supporting sound, was coming from in front of her, from somewhere over the road.

The address was presented. The King, with a kind word, accepted it; Miss Longstaffe curtsied; retired: the car started.

And the King turned right round in his car. Yes, he did!—and laughed, and waved his hand, to that indistinguishable hubbub and muddle of white, that was hanging over the opposite wall, fluttering its pocket-handkerchiefs and shouting 'God Save the King,' and making every joyful noise it knew.

The King was gone. The crowd was going. Miss Blaine and Miss Draycott had reported the cause of the fiasco, and Sylvia Mary Pritchard was on her way to Miss Longstaffe's room.

That evening Molly Pritchard arrived from Paris, and her husband brought her out from Victoria. Dusty and fagged and late for dinner, she was making for her room, when she stopped to tear open a note marked 'Urgent' that lay on the hall table.

'What does this woman mean?' she cried.

'Nothing,' said Tom. 'Which woman?' And he went on taking off his coat.

'Miss Longstaffe! She says I'm to call in Dr. Hill at once to Sylvie——'

'An accident?' Tom turned quickly.

'No, of course not. There'd be sense in that. Look!' She tossed him the note. 'She must be mad. Sylvie's just been naughty, and careless, and——'

'Sh!—Sh!' Tom was concentrating on the letter.

"'Lapse of memory!'" he murmured. "'Secretiveness" . . . "Lack of normal response to mental or moral stimulus" . . . "Torpor." Oh—— This is clear as daylight, my dear Molly.' He turned to his wife. 'This letter is the French for—"I've been giving your daughter my best Pi-jaw. And it has merely bored her stiff."'

'Not Pi,' corrected Molly, wearily.

'No. Beg pardon. Psy. But where is the poor Analysed one—what they've left of her? Why doesn't she show up? Sylvie—Syl-vie!' he shouted.

'Oh! for goodness' sake,' groaned Sylvia's mother, 'bath and dinner first.'

But when Tom's call was answered by Hanoverian Minna—successor to Mathilde—with the information that the *Fräulein* was not even yet from school returned, Molly began to share her husband's uneasiness.

Dinner was half over when the child came in. She looked quiet but not miserable, kissed her mother, and sat down, and ate her dinner quickly because she was late: while her mother told her father all about Paris,

with various pleasant digressions to a parcel which Sylvie would find upstairs.

When the servants were gone, Molly shot three successive looks at her husband. He countered them with three flashes of unconsciousness, and she was reduced to opening up on Sylvia herself.

'You were very late in,' she remarked.

'Yes,' said Sylvia. 'I went to Confession. And I stayed for Benediction. Do you mind?'

A breath from somewhere stirred the dust that lay on Molly Pritchard's soul—the dust from endless superficial chat with uninterested chatterers. . . .

'So natural, of course, for a girl to drop her convent pieties when launched upon the life of a great school. . . . Yes, of course! . . . Why, not to speak of all the work—look at the games!—And the sports!—And the dances!—And the *matinée* parties!—And those splendid lectures from the very latest people.—Yes! Archæologists, you know. And actors. And airmen. Every waking minute was taken up! Yes, of course! Her home was really just the place where she slept. Her Church was, *of course*, for her *obligations*. But beyond that, what could you ask?—Such a brilliant girl!—Yes, of course! And shooting up through such a brilliant school!'

So the dust flew. So it dropped. So it settled.

Yet suddenly, how very glad Molly was at this moment to hear where the child had been.

Her father, too. He showed his good feeling and knowledge of the ropes by observing 'Some big Feast to-morrow—what?'

It was her mother who answered placidly :

'No. The Feast is to-day. I told you, Tom. That's why I couldn't take the 9.30. Had to wait to get a Mass at a decent hour. My early-rising days are over.—Why, Sylvie!' She broke off in dismay.

'What is the matter, darling?'

Without looking at her mother, Sylvia said in a low voice:

'I forgot it. I missed Mass.'

'Missed Mass on Corpus Christi! A Holyday of Obligation! *Sylvie! In all my life,*' said Molly Pritchard, '*I never heard of such a thing.*'

'Didn't you!' The sight of the child's distress struck Tom Pritchard into a sudden rage of championship. 'Didn't you!' he stormed on. 'Then it's high time you did hear a thing or two! 'Come here, Sylvie!' For he saw her eyes filling. 'Poor little beggar! Here's a how-de-do about nothing at all! A mere forget! Come here, I say!'

Sylvia looked very gratefully at him from where she sat, but she shook her head.

'You don't know,' she said.

'I'm going to know!' said her father violently. He pushed back his chair and got up, and marched off to the mantelpiece, and took up his stand with his back to it. His pleasant indulgent face was red with the unusual discomfort of not seeing everybody about him comfortable. He talked his wife down.

'No, Molly, I won't be quiet. I'm going to put this through. Sylvie's my child as well as yours, and I'm hanged if I'll have her jumped upon for nothing.—Do you mean to tell me'—he turned magisterially to Sylvia—'that it was *that*—this not-going-to-church-on-a-week-

day—that the Longstaffe woman made all the rumpus about ?’

‘ Oh, Tom, how silly ! ’ said Molly.

‘ It’s you I’m asking, Sylvie, ’ he persisted.

‘ Of course not, father, ’ said Sylvia. ‘ Miss Longstaffe doesn’t care about Mass. She doesn’t *know* about it. ’

‘ Then what *was* her row about ? ’

Sylvia tried to keep her head. There was peace, now, in her heart, and she could.

‘ First of all, ’ she said, ‘ I forgot the King. ’

‘ You—what ? ’

‘ I forgot to give the signal for the Lower School to cheer the King, and everything fizzled. ’

‘ How awful of you ! ’ groaned Molly.

‘ Silence in Court ! ’ ordered Tom, with a grin.

He was beginning to feel solid ground under his feet. ‘ Go on, Sylvie ! I can well understand that *that* put your boss’s back up. ’

‘ Oh, father ! ’ Sylvia Mary’s face broke up into smiles. ‘ You’re not a bit near it ! Miss Longstaffe hasn’t *got* a back. She’s the most perfectly good sort. Frightfully fair and all that. Only . . . She’s always wanting to know. ’

‘ Nosey-Parkering ? ’

‘ No, ’ explained Sylvia. ‘ She can’t help doing it. You see—*she* thinks it’s her job. ’ The parents of the Headmistress’s Hope exchanged glances. ‘ If she asks you questions enough, then she’ll know what’s the matter with you. And then she’ll give you something to take for it. Like a doctor. ’

‘ Like Dr. Hill, ’ said Tom softly.

'So it wasn't any good my just being sorry.' She would keep asking what it was that *made* me forget the King.'

'When you didn't know yourself, poor little brute.'

'Yes, I did know,' said Sylvia.

'Oh! Indeed?' Her father was taken aback.

'I knew. But I didn't want to tell Miss Longstaffe.

Tom hesitated. 'Not being Miss Longstaffe,' he said, 'I don't insist upon your telling me. Or your mother.'

'Oh, I can tell *you*,' said Sylvia. But it was her mother she looked at. 'You see, we were all ready. And the King was late. That was Mr. Minns, of course.'

'Of course,' said Molly.

'And I was being a beast. I was turning up my nose at the Convent girls for having on their white frocks instead of their uniforms. And old Kate said: "Didn't they look lovely this morning in the procession." And all of a sudden I *knew*. It was Corpus Christi. And I'd forgotten Corpus Christi— And I'd missed Mass.' A tear fell. 'Everything went out of my head. And then— There was the King— Gone. And Miss Blaine and Miss Draycott giving me beans.'

She stopped, and in the silence her father blew his nose loudly and looked across the table for a lead.

'Well, as to missing Mass,' said Sylvia's mother, 'you've been to Confession.'

'Yes,' said Sylvia, and dried her eyes.

'So that crime is disposed of,' said her father, savagely.

'Yes,' said Sylvia.

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'The hideous crime,' he repeated, 'of forgetting an engagement.'

'Not an *engagement*,' said Sylvia Mary. '*Corpus Christi*.'

But he didn't know the difference.

'Forgetting wasn't all of it,' she said. 'There was——' She stopped. She had confessed her sins to God. All she could say now was: 'There was a lot of things.'

'The question is now,' said Molly Pritchard, 'how to get you right with Miss Longstaffe. She thinks you're cracked or something. What in the world did you do when she asked you why you forgot the signal? Did you just sit mum and say nothing?'

'No. I said that something had put it out of my head. So then she started—"Something very *important*? More important than the *King*? More important than the *SCHOOL*?" That's her *last* word! Oh! *Don't you see?*'—the child broke out. 'Oh! Mother, *don't you see?* How can I tell her *anything*? When she doesn't know *anything*?'

'Miss Longstaffe—your Headmistress! Sylvie!'

'Not *anything*,' Sylvie rushed on. 'Not the *first* thing! Not so much as old Kate knows!'

'Not any more than your own father—what?' Tom Pritchard threw his words in, between anger and chaff.

Neither chaff nor anger could stop Sylvia or turn her.

'I don't *want* to go on going to St. Joan's, *please*,' she implored. 'I *don't want to*.'

'How can you be so ungrateful, Sylvie!' cried her mother. 'That splendid school! And Miss Longstaffe, who's so kind to you!'

'I know she's kind,' said Sylvia, disconsolately.

'And who thinks so highly of you. She told me so.'

'I don't want people thinking highly,' said Sylvia

Mary—‘And all those sorts of things. And forgetting God.’

Tom Pritchard remarked upon Sylvia’s absence from dinner next evening.

‘Yes,’ said his wife. ‘She’s staying late at school. It’s a lecture about that man. Oh—— You know. He’s forever in the papers . . . Glozel.’

‘She’s gone back to St. Joan’s then, after all?’

‘Oh! yes, poor child. She was upset last night, naturally. So should I be. Missing Mass!—You don’t understand that, of course. But I got her to see reason to-day. I was exceedingly angry about it all with Minna, to start with. Such a mistake would never have happened with Mathilde. I told her so. But it turns out now that Minna is . . . something funny beginning with S. and not a Catholic at all. I was never more astonished in my life.’

‘Hadn’t you asked?’

‘Asked? Who would? A children’s maid from Lady Lucy Strange-Stretton! I’m amazed at Lady Lucy.’

‘I suppose *she* hadn’t asked,’ said Tom.

‘Anyhow, I told Sylvie it was more Minna’s fault than hers. She’s only a child. And we’ll see it doesn’t happen again. I’m getting her one of those big tear-off calendars with the Holydays of Obligation all done in red. And every night when she goes to bed she’ll tear off to-day and look at to-morrow. And then she can’t make such a mistake again.’

‘Well, I suppose—if everybody’s satisfied—Sylvie, and you—and—oh! by the way—Father Smith?’

'I've heard it said,' Molly replied after a moment's pause, 'that it is really more respectful *not* to ask a priest's advice if you feel you can't follow it. Father Smith has a prejudice, I think, about schools.'

Tom gave a short laugh. Then he suddenly leaned forward looking at his wife with bent brows.

'You understand,' he said forcibly. 'I won't have the child made to go on at that school if she doesn't want to.'

'Oh! but I expect she'll want to,' said Molly. 'She quite saw that anyhow she must go back to-day. It would be so weird to leave suddenly. And almost in disgrace you might say, after yesterday's muddle.—And once she's back . . . She's very keen and interested, you know. . . . The whole thing takes hold of her . . . You'll see.'

Five years later, on a cold afternoon, as dark fell, a little crooked charwoman was saying her Seven Dolours beads before Our Lady's image, in the church of the Servite Fathers in Fulham Road.

She was about at the end of things. If help didn't come, it would be the 'Institution' for her to-morrow. She beat feebly still at Mercy's door, with the one selfish prayer of her life.

'Not the workhouse, Blessed Mother, please.'

Perhaps help would come. Or perhaps she might be let die in the night.

Someone touched her shoulder, and her heart bounded. Was it help?

She looked round. A lady was by her . . . Then, in the flicker of the votive candles, she made out that it was Mrs. Pritchard who was standing by her side.

'Come outside,' said Mrs. Pritchard. 'I want to speak to you.'

'It's help,' thought old Kate, as she followed her former mistress down the length of the church. Mrs. Pritchard had gone up in the world all these years; up and up, far away out of Kate's sight. But now, in the hour of need, here she was. How beautiful her clothes were, and her thick warm furs.

When they were out in the pillared entrance of the church Mrs. Pritchard stopped and caught hold of Kate's wrist.

'*Help me!*' she said. And at sight of her face, old Kate forgot everything else.

'God help you, poor soul!' she said, and laid her trembling old hand gently on the other's. 'Is it the master?'

Mrs. Pritchard shook her head dumbly.

'Never Miss Sylvie? . . . Dead?'

'Marrying. To-morrow. Out of the Church.'

'Ah! ma'am!' sighed Kate. Then, consolingly—
'But there's good folks out of the Church. He'll give her the conditions.'

'He'll give her nothing. He believes nothing. She wants nothing, either. *She* believes nothing. She says—'

'Ma'am! Ma'am! Miss Sylvie say that! *Miss Sylvie!*'

'She says that I—— Never mind that. Help *her*.'

'God help her!'

'Yes. *You* ask him. He'll hear *you*. You go back now and——'

'Come you back in here with me,' said old Kate firmly.

She took her mistress by the arm and brought her back into the church. Before the tabernacle they knelt down on both knees, both of them. Then Kate took her on into the Seven Dolours Chapel on the left, and they knelt together there, Mrs. Pritchard looking straight before her at that Holy Mother.

When Kate said, 'Yes,' 'Yes,' very strongly, Mrs. Pritchard turned and urged her: '*Pray!* You're not *praying.*'

'I'm praying,' said Kate. It was the workhouse she was saying 'Yes' to.—'And She's praying. And you must pray.'

'I daren't.'

'You *must. Always.* He says you must . . . Him that died . . . And her that saw him die . . . And the angels, wondering at it yet. And poor folks. You and me. All praying.'

The mother prayed, then. And she prays. In agony, and in uncertainty.

THE TRAMP

THE tramp came slouching up the hill, past the last little white houses of the straggling town. There had been a sudden burst of rain and the air smelt clean and fresh. Another consequence of the rain was mud, and this one was more to the tramp's liking. If there was one bit of the rough cart-track dirtier than the other, that was the bit he walked in. He breathed the clean air because he couldn't help it, but he walked in the mud because he chose. The discerning people in the town below had given him the go-by for a dirty rascal. This was unusual in that clime and time—remote alike from ours—and the tramp detected in it too marked a tribute to his really unusual demerits. And so he was revenging himself upon the discerning people by coming out of their town a dirtier rascal than he had gone in.

The houses came at longer intervals, and then stopped. The track climbed a little and rounded the hill, and the last house came in sight.

The tramp looked at this house with a special individualized disgust. One woman in the town, kinder or more cowardly than her neighbours, had refrained from giving him her opinion of his looks and character, had let him pass in silence, and had then called after him to 'try the good folks at the other end—the last house—on the hill!'

So this, thought the tramp, was the good folks' house.

It looked like it. The mere sight of the garden was enough to make him sick. Cut, combed, and curled. Not a weed. Not a wasted inch. He knew that sort of good folks. Thrifty and frugal folks, poor but honest folks. Nothing for nothing folks, in fact, and precious little for anything! He knew that sort, and he experienced a wish to spit into that particular garden—a wish so active and energetic that it carried him over to the drier side of the road to gratify it.

He looked over the loose stone wall to direct his aim.

And then he stopped.

And then he laughed.

He laughed a laugh that you wouldn't have thought was in the man a minute ago. Not a savage laugh, nor a laugh that goes with spitting. Just a straight laugh at a bit of fun. He put his two arms upon his stick, and leaned there, looking and laughing.

It was a child's nook in the garden that he was looking into, and the object in the middle of it that had tickled his fancy was clearly the work of a child. A sort of toy house, or temple, it was, built up out of the queerest collection of odds and ends: bits of broken pottery, pebbles, bright or dull, big or little, rough or smooth: fitted close one into the other here—helped out there by lumps of common clay. The queerest building for the rubbish it was made out of; and more than queer, because, made out of nothing, as you might say, it yet was something. The tramp had played at that same building game himself at some dim distant date. That was the thing about it that first held him up. Here was

a little beggar playing the same game he had played himself. What kept him looking was the fact, which he had to admit, that this little beggar played the game uncommonly well. The tramp had never made a job of it like that ; a thing that *was* something. Something in himself woke in response to it. If you had told him it was respect he would have walked away. He took it for curiosity, and he walked in.

The garden gate banged to behind him, and a curtain at an upper window dropped. There followed a tumbling run of feet across the upper room to the stairhead, a scramble on the stair, a slip, a rush, and a thud on the floor below. Such a hard little thud that the tramp, who got up to the door in time to hear it, lowered the stick that he was giving to knock with, and stood by for the howl that should follow. His smile, now, was of his usual pattern, carefully sardonic, suited to the expected howl.

But no howl came. Instead, another run across the room, a falling upon the door, a pulling—a breathless, tiptoe, pulling at the much too high-up latch : a pause in the onslaught (but that was only to take breath), and a pulling again with fresh vigour. And just as the tramp got tired of his fancy, changed his mind and was turning away, if the door didn't get pulled open, and—well—there he was !

That was all the tramp could say about it. It might be got out of him by questioning that the child was three years or thereabouts ; also that he was wearing some sort of a little red shirt or smock ; but as to what he looked like—Glad : that's all the tramp could say. He looked glad. He did that. In fact, you might say you'd

never seen anybody look glad before in all your life. Glad? It was in him—shining out of him—the way he swung that door back, the way he ran out of it—as if you'd been his own twin-brother—the way he laid hold of you, with his little hands, and fair dragged you inside of the house! Dragged? Oh, of course you could have hung back if you wanted to—a great big hulking brute! But you didn't want to; you didn't want anything, being so taken up with the ways of him and with wondering what in all the world there was to be so delighted over.

The sum of it all was, that before the tramp knew where he was he was inside the house, and the child pushing the door to, and setting his back against it, and his arms across it, and singing out:

'Mother! Mother! Mother! Here's such a lovely party!'

The whiteness of the house! And the filth of the tramp! And the child calling his mother, in the cleanest voice that ever you heard, to come and go shares in the wonderful thing he had found.

The tramp had barely time to think of it and go hot and cold under his rags—and then the back door was open, and the woman had come in,

She came in from the garden, holding up her apron with the vegetables in it that she had been pulling, green and fresh after the rain. And her eyes went straight to the little one, standing up with his arms stretched wide against the door, and that unconquerable look on his face that had brought the tramp into the house and meant to keep him. Straight as a bird to its nest the mother's eyes went to the child, and from him passed

on to the tramp, in a way she had—quite easy—as if he'd been the child's own blood-relation. It was a comfortable way. What came into the tramp's head was 'How the woman takes after her child.' Upside down? well, it's what struck him.

'You're more than welcome, sir,' the woman said, 'if you will take us as we are.'

The tramp mumbled something, he didn't know what. He had any number of things always ready to say to people who wanted him to go. But these people wanted him to stay. And all he could do was to stand and stare like a stock, while the woman went and laid down the green things on the stones in a cool corner, and then took hold of a bench to drag it forward. The child left his guard at the door and ran over to help her, and that put it into the tramp's wooden head to lend a hand too. He took three steps or so forward. Then he stood, rooted.

There was the white floor in front of him—and behind? He didn't need to look behind. He knew the horrible track his feet had made. With that there came as strong a pull as ever he'd felt. He wanted to go back upon that track.

But someone spoke. He looked down. The child had come back, and was sitting on the floor at his feet, considering them.

'Sore,' he said, 'so sore!'

The tramp gasped. It was true that his feet were sore, but 'dirty' was so obviously the thing to say about them. And when the child bent over to stroke those feet, he went back from him with a sort of frightened roar.

'Take him away, mother,' he bellowed.

The woman didn't so much as look round. She was busy over the fire of sticks. When she did turn, she had a bowl of water in her hands.

'Tis nice and warm, sir,' she said, speaking with a gentle deference. 'If you'll allow us, it will ease the aching.'

And there was the tramp, next thing, sitting on the bench with a bowl at his foot, the woman waiting by with a clean towel, and the child with a fine bit of wet rag in his hands, dabbing this place and that, as soft and as clever as if he could see just where the sores lay, under the dirt—which was more than the tramp could himself. And what's more he couldn't keep up even feeling awkward, for the way those two were taking it. As if he was giving them the time of their lives.

There came an interruption, though, after a bit. It was once when the little one stooped his head lower over his work, and the curls fell apart. You could see a bruise on his little head; a great big bruise it was—almost a wound.

The tramp started singing out 'Hallo!' But he had to stop, for he got a sight of the mother's face. The child turned round, and looked in her face, too. Kept on looking, the tramp couldn't see how. He could only see the mother. He saw her fix her eyes on the child in a humble, begging way and then the look went deeper-like, as if it said 'yes,' and deeper than that, till it was as quiet as quiet. The quiet had got into her voice when she spoke. She only said:

'No; I mustn't spoil the party.'

And then her colour came back, too.

The tramp supposed the little one had been saying, 'Don't cry, mother'—but he didn't hear him. She tore off a fresh piece of linen, and set to work bathing the bruise.

'That's *me*, that bruise is!' The tramp burst out with it. He had to. 'He got that running down the stairs to open the door for——'

'For the party,' the child said, quite contented.

'You were going away, perhaps,' said the mother. 'He wouldn't for the world have had you go away.'

'Party! Pretty party!' the tramp muttered.

The child said 'Pretty' too. He was looking at the tramp's feet, which had got to a colour that their owner couldn't remember on them.

But he only grumbled:

'Skin-deep.'

And that sounded so fault-finding that he got the horrid thought again, that he'd never have the manners for this place.

The child looked round at his mother again, and she smiled at him this time, in a way that was different from anything the tramp could say to you. It took up all his mind with the wonder of it, and he forgot to trouble about his manners.

'What's he saying, mother?'

He asked it as easy as if he'd had a right to ask. It wasn't just inquisitiveness either, nor yet that he supposed he should be able to understand. But you had to take some notice of a thing like that when you saw it.

'It's about what you said, sir. About the bathing being——'

'Oh! Skin-deep!' the tramp said, rather sheepishly.

‘That was it,’ said the mother. ‘He was saying—
When he grows to be a man——’

The tramp smiled at that and said ‘Great doings
there’ll be when *he’s* a man.’

‘Great doings,’ said the mother. She was putting
some ointment on the bruise, and it struck the tramp
from her way, that this was maybe the first time that her
child had taken any hurt.

It was after that the back door opened again, and a
man came in. He had been working in an open shed
that ran along the back of the house. He was a middle-
aged man, a little bowed in carriage, and stiff of move-
ment from the long day’s work. He stood in the door-
way (and the sun, that was setting, threw his long
shadow before him) and he looked at the three by the
bench in a kindly way—not asking questions, just
waiting.

He hadn’t long to wait, before the child was at his
knee and then up in his arms, and pouring out all the
happy news—about the party, and about how nice and
comfortable it was, picked up in the kind, strong arms.
When breath failed, the story was eked out with a
pressing of the little hands together, or a clasping of
them round the good man’s neck.

The tramp was not surprised when this decent working
man joined in with his welcome :

‘I call it neighbourly, now, to drop in in this way and
take us as we are.’

The tramp had left off being surprised. His whole
notion of the hang of things had given out by now.
Two things only were clear to him. First, that these
three persons had a real respect, not for each other only

but for him. Second, that if that was their way of taking it, that was the way it had got to be taken, and his job was to hold his tongue, to keep his eyes open and to do as he was bid.

Acting on this simple plan, the 'party' was soon sitting down to table. There was bread, curd cheese, and a good soup of herbs—none too plain a supper for a two-days' old hunger. In fact, when he saw the child get down off his mother's knee and go round and whisper with the workman at the head of the table, it didn't so much as cross the tramp's mind that they were planning to improve his entertainment.

But so it was. On a low shelf below the window there was hidden a most enormous orange—a great big golden globe, so big and juicy, so sweet-smelling and cool, it was just the thing for a party. And it was the child's very own. It had been put by for his next day's breakfast, when the neighbour brought it in at noon in thanks for a bit of carpentry done gratis. It was the very thing and, as soon as he had begged leave, away the little one ran to fetch it.

But it was such a great round thing, it took quite a long time to get a firm hold upon it; and in that time, while the child's back was turned, a horrible thing began to happen.

In this last strange half-hour of the tramp's life perhaps the strangest point had been, not that he was being well treated, merely, but that he *knew* he was being well treated—that he couldn't deny it—didn't want to deny it—that he wanted even, in some groping way, to make acknowledgement of it. But when the child's back was turned, there rose and swirled and rushed on

the poor brain, a horrible returning tide—thick with the self-chosen mud of a lifetime.

‘Good folks, these!’ it dinned in his ears. ‘Pretty sort of good. Good! Eh? And taking up with *you*.’

He heard the vile thing. Heard it? He was listening—listening hard. Or was he saying it?

He moved on his stool. He was getting up.

And the child turned and looked at him. . . .

‘I’m a beast,’ said the tramp. He sat down again. He put his head down upon the table. He hadn’t forgotten that the table was white, or that he was filthy. He hadn’t forgotten anything, but he put his head down because he couldn’t hold it up. ‘That’s what I am,’ he said, ‘a beast.’

The child set down the great globe out of his hands, and came on tiptoe to his friend’s elbow. He didn’t ask him not to cry, or seem afraid about the party being spoilt. He stood there while the dirty tears ran down on the clean board. And the tramp went on crying. But after a while he began to feel a succession of firm little pulls at his grubby sleeve.

‘What’s he wanting?’ the tramp asked, at last.

It was awkward, looking up. But the workman opposite was cutting away at the loaf, for all the world as if he hadn’t noticed anything.

‘What’s he wanting, mother?’ asked the workman, comfortably.

At that the tramp turned to her, too.

‘What’s he wanting, mother?’ he asked.

‘He’s wanting to climb up and kiss you, sir; if he may,’ said the Mother of God.

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