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Confessions of a Cruel Mistress.

By C. E. RAIMOND,

AUTHOR OF "GEORGE MANDEVILLE'S HUSBAND."

"I ASSURE you," Rose said to me, only the other day, "I never hear the 'servant question' mentioned, that my conscience doesn't prick me in the name of Jane Rodd. To think that I simply drove off and left that poor old creature standing on the pavement—growing dimmer and dimmer as I looked back, till she was swallowed up in the fog. I shall never be able to understand how I could be so cruel."

Rose Elwyn is married now, and has eight or ten servants, and might very well have other sins on her conscience ; but the Jane Rodd episode remains to this day her pet iniquity. She has returned again and again to the subject, until my own slight acquaintance with "Jane" seems to have grown into a vivid personal familiarity.

It was against my advice that Rose and her brother left their comfortable home in St. John's Wood, and took that suite of unfurnished apartments in Bloomsbury. But Tom Elwyn declared that a fellow who was reading law must live nearer the Temple, and Rose, that an actress must not be so far from the theatres. I knew that it was ridiculous for those two young simpletons to try such an experiment, for Tom Elwyn, near-sighted, visionary, absorbed in his studies, was no whit more unpractical than Rose herself, who knew as much about house-keeping and the management of servants, as I do about—well, the theatre, for instance. Although I sent them the most trustworthy and capable of charwomen "to start them" in their new home, I still feel somewhat harrowed when I recall Rose's early difficulties in securing the "one capable servant" of her dreams. She had already tried and dismissed three "impossible young

women," as she called them, when she fell ill of the influenza. Tom began to sigh openly for the comfort of the house in St. John's Wood, and for release from the intermittent attentions of the well-meaning charwoman.

The excellent Mrs. Johnson, poor soul, had a houseful of little children, two of whom most opportunely took the measles at this juncture. Rose has told me how she lay on the sofa one morning, miserable at being "out of the bill," and despondent about the domestic situation, when Mrs. Johnson came in to say Jane Rodd was in the kitchen.

"Who is Jane Rodd?" said Rose.

"A person from some agency, ma'am, to see about a place."

"Let her come in." Rose turned away her head with weary impatience. The last thing Tom had said as he went out that morning, was something uncomplimentary about the way women dealt with the servant question. He had not approved of his sister's instant dismissal of the last maid because she was a little untidy, and was found, one day, trying on her mistress's hats. Rose said Tom was selfish, and wanted the maid forgiven because she made such excellent *entrées*—it was just like a man; but Rose herself had more principle.

She lay on the sofa after Mrs. Johnson's exit, wondering if Jane Rodd would be merely one more weary failure—would she prove impossible at first sight, or would she wear a reassuring outside, masking a passion for the mistress's hats and the master's burgundy. Or would she fill the place with "followers," and make weird soup, and refuse to wear a cap. A knock. Rose turned suspicious eyes to the door as Mrs. Johnson appeared, ushering in Jane Rodd.

"'Ow d'ye do, 'm?" A woman of nearly sixty, with a cheerful countenance and a bright delicate complexion, dropped an old-fashioned curtsy as Rose sat up. Mrs. Johnson retired.

"Good-morning," said Rose, noticing the incongruity of the woman's bonnet with her otherwise suitable attire. She had on her head one of those fearsome French inventions appropriately called the "Eiffel Tower," evidently the cast-off finery of some lady bent on looking smart, even at the price of looking foolish. So damning may an ill-inspired bonnet be, that Rose felt at once, "This woman won't do." The black lace audacity leaned a trifle to one side, and gave the wearer a rakish, bank-holiday

aspect. Yet, aside from the bonnet, she looked like a highly respectable person who has fallen on evil days. Her clothes were fairly decent; her expression, though very genial, impressed Rose as pathetic.

"Who sent you to me?" she asked.

"A lady from Finchley Road, 'm." Her voice was a little tremulous. She held out a soiled visiting-card bearing my name, and the line I had hastily scribbled underneath, "*It occurs to me this person might do for you. Make inquiries.*"

"Yer friend called at the office this morning," Jane Rodd said, eagerly watching Rose's face; "*she* wanted an under-nurserymaid—but—she thought I might do—fur—fur——"

"I see," Rose said, and began the dreary catechism she had come to know by heart. "Can you cook? can you do this and that? will you wear a cap and apron?" and so on.

Jane Rodd answered all these questions with a cheerful alacrity, volunteering much more than she was asked, and discovering the fact that she was as voluble as she seemed "willing." She took the rosier view of everything. Rose candidly named certain "drawbacks" to the place, but she smiled away all objections with invincible optimism. Rose said she feared the work might prove too heavy, and that Mrs. Johnson was there only on certain days. The woman turned her head sideways with a little jerk, and eyed Rose suspiciously. "Work too 'eavy!" she said with an accent of reproach. "You think I'm too old."

"No, no," Rose said, hurriedly, "not at all." She noticed that the brightness in the woman's eyes was of a watery kind. It was this look of unshed tears above her steadfast smiling that had somehow touched the girl.

"Won't yer just *try* me, 'm?"

The door opened, and Tom came in. He looked at Jane Rodd with his near-sighted stare, nodded to Rose, and went over to the fireplace. Rose says he stood there opposite her, in that exasperating attitude of the male in a domestic crisis—warming his back, with wide-apart legs, and the air of reserving the right to condemn everybody and everything within his range of vision.

"You have brought your credentials?" Rose said to the woman in the pause.

"My—er——?"

"Your recommendation from your last mistress."

"Eh? My character! Oh, no, I ain't got it with me; but Mrs. Grey said she'd give it to 'oever asked her fur it. I can give yer 'er address." She began to fumble in the waterproof bag. Mrs. Johnson knocked and came in hurriedly.

"Excuse me, miss," she said, "my Nellie 'as been over to say Jimmy's worse, and I must go home. I'm afraid he's—he's——" She turned away with a choke in her voice.

"I'm so sorry," Rose said, "but I hope you'll find he's not so ill as they think."

"Thank you, 'm," said Mrs. Johnson nervously. "An' excuse me, miss, I can't wait a minute—the cutlets are nearly done; perhaps you'll let this person dish the luncheon up for you. If Jimmy isn't—— Good-bye, miss."

She went out quickly, with her apron to her eyes.

"Oh, yes, 'm, I'll dish up yer dinner," said Jane. "It don't matter if yer *don't* keep me in the end. I'll do that much fur ye and welcome."

She moved towards the door with amiable alacrity. Rose exchanged looks with her brother. "You may sit in the hall till I ring," she said.

"Thank ye, miss," she curtseyed with an air of delight, and knocked a little silver-framed picture off the cabinet by the door.

"Oh—oh,"—she gathered it up with agitation. "It ain't broke!" she said gaily, and set it down. She bumped against the door as she went out, and gave forth another, "Oh!" with a little nervous laugh. As the door closed behind her, Tom Elwyn grinned.

"Queer old party," he said.

"She seems respectable enough," Rose said, "and she was sent by Mrs. Alton."

"Oh, Mrs. Alton sent her, did she?" Tom spoke as if that materially altered the case. "Well, why don't you try her?"

"Perhaps I will," Rose said, "as soon as I see about her character."

"What d' you want with a character if Mrs. Alton sent her?"

"Oh, Mrs. Alton doesn't seem to know much about her. She says on her card 'make inquiries.'"

"She probably meant of the old party herself—to find out what she could do. Mrs. Alton wouldn't send her here unless

she was all right—honest and all that kind of thing. Besides," he went on with increasing emphasis, "we *must* have somebody, and we must have lunch." Tom began to sniff the air. "*Rose, those cutlets are burning.*"

When brother and sister arrived in the kitchen, Jane was rescuing the cutlets. This feat satisfactorily accomplished, she was told she might take off her things, and bring in the luncheon. She could come on trial for a week, if Miss Elwyn heard satisfactory accounts of her from her last place.

"Miss Elwyn will write this afternoon," said Tom.

"Thank ye, sir," said Jane, looking delighted. "I've got a change o' clo'es in my bag, and I'll send for my box by-an'-by. I'll git dinner now," she said, with a jerky but business-like air. She made for the range, with that kind of skating motion that served her instead of a walk. Tom and Rose adjourned to the study.

"Fancy the old girl coming with her bag and change of clothes, all ready to rescue our cutlets, and stay for ever and a day."

"Yes, I must write and find out about her," his sister said, thinking how prudent and cautious she was becoming. She went out to show Jane the cupboards.

Luncheon was served after a fashion; but even Tom noticed Jane's original methods of locomotion, and stared astonishment at her, as she swooped down upon him with the potato dish in her hand, and knocked over his wine-glass.

"Oh—oh,"—she stooped and picked up the stemless bowl—"them's so thin at the waist, it's like 's if they're made o' purpose to be broke," she said, with the serenity of one who accomplishes her mission. She laid down the fragment, and held out the potato dish to Tom. By nightfall she had added to her trophies, a broken pitcher and a disabled lamp.

"Poor thing, I suppose she's nervous," was Tom's sympathetic explanation of the havoc she seemed disposed to make in their little home. "Of course she'll never do," they both agreed, "but we'll put up with her for a few days, and then send her off, with a couple of weeks' wages."

That very evening Tom Elwyn was called to the North of England on family business.

For the next two months Rose was for the most part alone

with Jane Rodd. I had my hands full with illness in my own family, and knew if there were any real trouble at my young friend's door, she would send me word. It was not till Jane had been two weeks in her new home, that I found a spare moment to run in one evening at tea-time, and learn the true state of affairs.

Rose was getting better, and expected to take up her work at the theatre the following Saturday night. She said, of course, she wasn't going to keep Jane, and had told her to look out for an easier place. "Oh, thank ye," Jane had answered, "I ain't complainin' ; I kin stand a lot."

Rose is a goose. She had never written to the woman's former mistress. "It wasn't worth while," she said, with the weary indolence of the influenza victim. "I'm not dreaming of keeping Jane. I know by instinct that she's honest, and by experience that she won't do—so why should I bother?" In the low state the girl had been in, unable to work, unable to visit or entertain, I could see that Jane Rodd's queernesses had been a source of infinite amusement.

"I wish I could remember half the amazing things she's been saying and doing," Rose said, handing me a cup of tea, "I should like to preserve some of her reminiscences, and views of life. I can't make her out, but I've been made to understand her rooted objection to making haste, no matter what the emergency, and her firm conviction that whoever else has faults, at least *her* withers are unwrung. You never saw anything funnier than her condescending little ways of placating me, when she has done something I am perverse enough to imagine unpardonably stupid. Her rare fits of sulkiness and disdain too—"—Rose threw back her head and laughed softly—"when she skates about, with her nose in the air, and her watery eyes fixed in a stony glare. Afterwards she softens towards me a little, and is often obliging enough to dissect my character, and tell me plain truths. She never disguised from me the fact that she approved heartily of Tom, but was on the whole doubtful about me. Not to leave me quite without hope," Rose proceeded, curling herself up on the sofa *à la Turque*, with her teacup in her hand, "Jane has more than once said:—'Yer can *talk* wonderful, miss—yer can' make a body think black's wite⁴ and wite's black. But yer expect such a lot, I ain't up to

ye.' Jane thinks everything would be all right if every one were as nice and pleasant-spoken as Mr. Tom ; but considering that her acquaintance with my brother is of about six hours' duration, I don't think Tom need be unduly inflated by her approval."

I soon gathered from Rose that Jane Rodd was quite the stupidest human being in the universe—that she could cook nothing, make nothing, keep nothing in order. I could see she was tidy in her appearance ; Rose said she was "willing" enough to madden you—and diabolically cheerful.

"*And drinks,*" I added.

"Oh no!" Rose was a little indignant.

"Certain of it," I replied ; "she walks like it, and her eyes show it."

"Other people have said that," admitted Rose, "but it can't be true. I should have noticed——"

"Nonsense, you'd notice nothing, so long as she could shuffle about, except that her movements were singularly amusing. Why don't you get some one else at once?"

"I must wait till Mrs. Johnson can come back to me. That will be next week, and I *have* told Jane I can't keep her."

"Much good that will do."

"Oh, I've said it more than once. I ask her every few days if she's heard of a place."

"Well?"

Rose smiled as at some diverting recollection.

"Jane repeats: 'A place, 'm?' and there's always a pause. Her face wears a look of genial abstraction. 'Yes,' I say, 'you know I told you to look out for a place.' 'O' course,' she says, 'o' course, 'm, I'm lookin' out'—and that's as far as we get."

I don't know whether Rose Elwyn would know whether she were being robbed or not—I have my doubts ; but she was vehemently certain that Jane was honest as the sun. Trinkets and money had been left about from the hour she came (of that I had no doubt) and nothing had ever been taken (but of that I know less). Rose said her household bills were absurdly small, and on inquiring into this, found that Jane seemed to live on bread and cheese and beer.

"I remonstrated," Rose went on, "but to no purpose. 'I

can't do with much meat,' Jane said; 'my drop o' stout 's meat and drink too. Wonderful nourishin' is stout.'"

"Of course," I broke in, "she makes herself sillier than nature intended, by constant tippling." But Rose was sure I was mistaken; as I said, Rose is a goose.

"Jane has the best heart in the world," my young friend would insist, "she's always overdrawing her wages, to buy foolish little things for the kitchen, or to send money to one of two good-for-nothing sons, who have never helped her, though they've both been in good positions for years. They won't come and see her, or allow her to go to them. Isn't it hard?" said Rose; "and yet she has never complained of them, she merely states the fact."

"There's something wrong," I said. Rose turned to me with a little flash of anger in her face.

"Something wrong? Yes, *with those sons.*"

"Do you let her go out much?" I asked.

"She's never gone long. If I've been scolding her for some delinquency, she'll come scuffling in after a while, and ask me if I can spare her ten minutes, to do 'a little shoppin'.' Then she goes out and brings me in two or three jaded chrysanthemums, for a peace-offering."

"I wonder what she gets to pacify Jane Rodd," I said. If Rose heard, she ignored my base suspicions.

"She dusted my watch off the mantelpiece yesterday on to the hearth," the girl went on, "broke the face and the enamel, and hurt its poor little inside. I raged mightily. I thought I had about annihilated Jane this time, but she lurched in just before tea as lively as ever. She had 'been shoppin',' and with nods and becks and wreathed smiles, she presented me with a draggled red feather, done up in tissue paper. 'I bought it off a Jew lady I know,' she said, beaming with enthusiasm and good will. 'Yer needn't mind acceptin' it—only cost eleven-pence ha'penny—*ain't* it a beauty?'"

But I gathered that, in spite of making rare bargains and certain kitchen economies, Jane had proved an expensive luxury in the long run. She seemed to touch nothing she didn't break. If she put on Rose's sandals, she wrenched off the ribbons; she spilt whatever she handed her; whatever she stewed, boiled over; whatever she roasted, burnt.

"But," said Rose, "my temper is the only one ever ruffled. 'Yer the most impatientest lady I ever come across,' Jane has said more than once. 'Yer oughtn't to let yerself git so excitable; it's bad for the brain, gittin' excitable.' Then she sniffs with an air of gloomy foreboding, and flounders out of the room, charging against the furniture on the way."

On another occasion Rose said: "Jane's opinion of my charms is certainly complex. She often condoles with me upon my pallor. 'Pity ye ain't got a speck o' colour,' she said one morning lately, as she was helping me to dress. 'My 'pinion is ye *would* 'ave, if ye didn't live in the bath tub. Stands to reason ye must wash the red out goin' on like that.' She never puts on my shoes," Rose said that same day—"never, without observing that she didn't in the least wonder that I couldn't walk much. 'Yer feet's too small to be much good to ye,' she said sympathetically." (Rose hastened to add this effect was obtained only by contrast with Jane's own, which were phenomenal for size rather than for utility.) "'D'ye do something to yer feet, miss, in your part o' the country,' she asked one day, 'somethin' to keep 'em from growin'?' She was a little disconcerted at Rose's laughter. 'Well, ye mayn't 'ave 'eard they does it in China. I b'lieve yer mother did somethin' to ye w'en ye was little; fur—yer may laugh as much as ye like—but yer feet ain't in proper keepin' with the rest o' yer body.'"

Rose could never get any definite information about her experiences just prior to my meeting her that morning at the agency; when, by dint of sitting tight and looking very neat and respectable, she had won my suffrage. Rose, it seems, did not ask for the last mistress's address until Jane had been several weeks with her.

"My lady 'as moved to the country, 'm," the old woman said, and Rose felt she had committed an indiscretion.

All Jane's reminiscences were of the long ago. "When I was young, 'm." Of sad or bitter memories she scorned to acknowledge one. To be sure there were vague hints of bygone splendour, of a certain suburban villa "w'ere they kep' four servants *an'* a boy. There wuz jes' *nothin'* they didn't 'ave!' A garden, miss, and *every* comfort, besides a cockatoo!" Jane would roll her eyes ecstatically at the recollection of this acme of mortal magnificence.

She once lived in a doctor's family. "Oh, they wus fond o' nic," she told Rose, "and they wus good to me. Dr. h'Ellis 'e says to me one day, 'e says, 'Jane, go and open that there box.' *Sich* a nice gentleman 'e wus and *so* fond o' 'aving 'is joke. Well, miss, I went and unfastened the lid o' the box; and wot d'ye think, miss, up jumped a skillington and shook all 'is bones at me! I *wus* skeered—most out o' my wits. Dr. h'Ellis 'e laughed till Mrs. h'Ellis come a runnin' in to see wot 'ailed im. *Sich* a nice gentleman 'e wus, and *so* fond of 'is joke!" Then lowering her voice, "'E 'ad a reel skull, miss, and ribs all across." It was only her look of reminiscent horror that assured Rose she had left the "nice gentleman" and returned to his genial little joke. "'E was on wires, miss, and w'en ye see 'em like that all at once and suddint, they're awful skeery things them skillingtons."

She spoke to Rose one day with a too significant approval of some solicitous young gentleman, who had come more than once, to inquire how Miss Elwyn was. Upon Rose's reproving the old woman's familiarity, Jane had laughed indulgently.

"Law, miss, I been young myself—y' needn't mind me. I only wonder yer don't let me ax 'im in—'es got such a nice cheerful face—'e'd perk ye up a bit?"

I remember asking Rose what Jane's own romance was. The girl put her arms akimbo, and took off the old woman to the life.

"'I wus in love once myself, miss. Yes, yes. Reelly in love. 'E wus a young gentleman as kep' a fust-class shop, I met 'im at Brighton, w'ere I was nurse to a lady—*sich* a nice lady! I wus nineteen year old. I 'ad a nice colour then, and 'e said I was pretty—'" Rose narrowed her eyes in a way Jane had, when she grew meditative. "'More'n 'im said I wus pretty them days,'" she laughed a little nervous apologetic laugh.

"Well, did you marry him?" Rose had asked.

"'No, miss! Ain't I told yer 'e was the one I liked best? y' never marries that one! Yer see there's only *one* as you reelly kin love, but no one never marries 'im.'"

Rose was shocked at this complacent pessimism. "Why, Jane!" she said, "didn't you——"

"'Oh, my 'usband wus a good man, miss, and I got to like 'im very well. *But I ain't never forgot that other one!*'"

The morning that Rose complained of a sore-throat, Jane was greatly exercised, because her mistress wouldn't let her make a wonderful herb tea that would cure her in half an hour.

"Yer don't trust me, miss, like yer ought. Yer don't understand wot a lot I knows 'bout sickness and medicine. I've been a nurse ye see, and talked with doctors. I know all about w'at's inside of us humans." She leaned on the foot of the bed, and nodded at Rose sagely, while her old eyes gleamed through their chronic mist. "Ye see, yer're got two swallers, miss. My swaller is small—*very* small, 'specially the one for food. I can't git down things like meat 'n potatoes—not even pills—that shows how small that swaller is." Noting Rose's look of mystification, she smiled with good-humoured superiority. "Yer know them two little things in the throat," she explained—"they 'angs down a bit, and if ye open yer mouth wide ye see 'em plain—well, *they're* swallers, one's fur food, one's fur drink. Oh, I've talked with the doctors! They've told me a lot o' things most folks don't know."

In spite of Jane's ministries, and "gittin' so excitable," Rose was able to return to her work in the theatre, on the day she had mentioned. This move roused Jane's keenest interest.

"I didn't know ye were a theatre lady," she had said to Rose one day, about a week after her arrival. She beamed at her mistress with a new interest. "The girl downstairs told me ye wus, but ye don't look a bit like it." Rose says she felt instantly she was no credit to her craft. She was wondering what mental vision of the actress was stored away in that old poor head, when Jane suddenly stopped skating about, and flourishing her duster like an oriflamme. She eyed her mistress meditatively.

"Then I s'pose ye know Bina Devereaux, since yer a theatre lady?"

"No, who's she?"

"Oh, she's *splendid*. She's a theatre lady, too. Do ye know Nancy Lifton?"

"No," said Rose, "what does she do?"

"Oh, she dances—dances fit to make yer 'ead w'irl. I've knowed several theatre ladies. I like 'em. Some folks don't, but I could always get on with 'em."

Rose used to tell me with glee, how she had sent Jane to the

play, and how she looked forward to having the old woman in afterwards, to hear her impressions.

"Some of the shining ones in my profession would have opened their eyes," my young friend said wickedly—"if they knew what Jane thought of them."

She naturally took a lively interest in Rose's work, and came home with her mistress on the first night of Rose's return to the theatre in a state of effervescent excitement.

"Yer wus all beautiful, miss; but I liked the good-natured gentleman best. Oh, I *loved* the good-natured gentleman! I liked you, too, miss—but I never knowed ye till ye spoke. Lord, 'ow different ye do look in them theatre clo'es."

Rose had a business appointment after the *matinée*, in the following week. She rushed home late for tea, letting herself in with her latch-key. She found the study fire low, and no lamps lit. She went out into the kitchen. Jane was sitting by a roaring fire, with her great splay feet propped up in front, and a look of beautiful content on her nice old face.

"Oh, that you, miss?" she turned her head and smiled Rose a welcome.

"Yes. I don't see any signs of tea, and I'm in a hurry—a very great hurry."

"Tea? Oh, yes, 'm, I'll git it."

"But make haste, please."

"Yes, 'm." She got up, and shuffled over to the dresser. She regarded the row of pendent cups with an air of scrutiny, but her manner was so vague, Rose said sharply:

"Don't stand there staring. I must have tea at once, or I'll be late for the evening performance."

"Yes, miss, I'm comin'." She rattled the cups and clattered the saucers, and Rose returned to the study. Five minutes passed—ten minutes passed. The girl went to the kitchen again, feeling excessively out of patience, and dangerously hungry. It is not only the superior sex who feel the inroads upon temper made by those peculiar pangs preceding a belated meal.

Jane was skating gaily about in the fireglow, between the dresser and the red-hot range, but the tea was not made.

"Come, come, Jane, why aren't you ready? I could have got ten teas by this time."

: Jane smiled and nodded.

"Comin', miss." She floundered over to the table and took up a jug of milk.

"But you *don't* come, and I'll have to go back to the theatre in eleven minutes;" then remembering the news she had heard at the *matinée*, Rose aided in a moment of inspiration, "The Maharajah of Z—— is coming to see the play to-night, so I mustn't be late."

"Wot, miss, *the Maharajah*? 'E a comin' ter see yer play?" She still had the milk-jug in her hand, and was pouring a steady white stream down her big clean apron.

"Look! You're spilling the milk!" Rose screamed. But Jane was looking at her mistress with a fixed and glittering eye, and a mind concentrated on higher things. The milk streamed away, till Rose caught the jug out of her hand, and said sharply:

"If you don't bring the tray in, in three minutes, I'll go without tea."

"No, no! Comin', miss." Jane said, with singular perturbation. "Yer'il *need* yer tea! The Maharajah, the Maharajah! Well, well!" She sighed heavily, and lurched over to the steaming kettle. As Rose left the kitchen, she heard her muttering again, "The Maharajah. Dear, dear! *The Maharajah!*"

After Jane had blundered in with the tray, she kneeled down and mended the fire. Rose sat sipping her tea, noticing how the old woman hung about, and how constantly her misty old eyes were furtively regarding her mistress. Finally she started for the door in that wild hobbling fashion of hers—seemed to miss the mark, and brought up short opposite the tea-table. Rose had never seen the old face so troubled.

"Miss," Jane began tremulously, "I 'ope 'e won't take a fancy to ye, miss."

"What do you m——?"

"The Maharajah, 'm," she interrupted, "'e's very fond o' theatre ladies."

"Is he?" Rose said, trying to keep her countenance.

"Oh yes, miss, *very*. An'—an'—I just wish 'e wusn't a comin' to see yer."

"Oh, don't you be frightened; the Maharajah doesn't care for serious actresses."

Jane wagged her head, with mingled shrewdness and agitation, as she answered:

"*You ain't too serious, miss.*" She started nervously at her mistress's peal of laughter. Rose could see she had jarred on her sensibilities.

"Never mind, Jane. It's all right, for I'm serious enough in the play, and the Maharajah won't suspect what an agreeable person I am off the stage."

Jane seemed reassured, but still doubtful.

"Yer see, miss, yer got *langwidge*."

"Got what?"

"Langwidge, miss. *That's* wot them Maharajahs likes. Yer got sich a way o' talkin'—sich a way o' sayin' things; it's the *langwidge* o' these theatre ladies that takes them Maharajahs. Ye see, yer don't talk like everyday folk; I don't know 'ow yer does it. Now 'ere's me, *I* can't do it. But ye see, *you* got langwidge, an' w'en the Maharajah 'ears yer, 'e'll never let yer come back."

Rose did her best, between her fits of laughter, to pacify the old woman, but Jane followed her to the door, scuttling and floundering down the passage behind her, breathing heavily from all this unwonted agitation of mind and body.

"I 'ope ye'll git back safe, miss."

"Don't be silly, Jane."

"I'll sit up fur ye, miss."

"Nonsense; go to bed as you always do."

"Deed, 'm, I won't. I couldn't sleep thinkin' of you and the Maharajah. Oh, miss, I 'ope 'e'll let yer come back."

She opened the door reluctantly, and Rose ran downstairs splitting with laughter.

When she got home, Jane was waiting for her at the top of the stairs, peering into the gloom over the banister.

"That you, miss?" Jane said, with a shake in her voice.

"Yes," Rose called up the staircase. "Here I am."

"Well, well," Jane said, looking at Rose incredulously, as she came up under the gas jet at the top of the stairs, "didn't 'e come?"

"Oh yes; but I'm obliged to tell you that he seemed unmoved by my 'langwidge,' and expressed no desire to delay my return."

Jane drew a long breath as she turned to open the door.

"I'm very glad, miss. I didn't look ter 'ave ye back; but ye

see"—she nodded with a look of explanatory shrewdness—"fact is, the Maharajah, yer see, 'e's a gittin' old."

It was just after Tom Elwyn came home that Rose succumbed to a return of influenza. Her brother and I agreed that we really must insist upon her getting rid of Jane, and finding some suitable and competent person to supplement Mrs. Johnson's services. I could see Rose had a foolish dread of the moment when she must say definitely, "Jane, you are to pack up your things and go." Indeed, she still persists in referring to it as an ugly and not at all creditable episode.

Early one foggy morning, while we were at breakfast, Tom came to consult me as to how the "getting rid" was to be accomplished.

"Jane grows more and more intolerable," he said. "Rose isn't having proper nursing, and when I complain, she says, 'Don't I tell you I *have* dismissed her—*fifty times*; she's only waiting till she finds a place. I can't turn her into the street."

"We must take them by surprise," I said. "How is Rose to-day?"

"Not so well."

"She must come here. You must go home, dismiss that old woman, put Rose in a cab, and bring her to me."

Tom Elwyn stared dumbfounded through his spectacles.

"It's the only way; don't temporise. Say I'm waiting for her, and be as quick as you can."

When Rose came into my morning-room a little after twelve o'clock on her brother's arm, she was crying behind a thick veil. The moisture glistened through the silk tissue, and made it cling to her cheek in places.

"You shall go up to your room at once, my dearie," I said, kissing her. "It's all ready, and there's a beautiful fire——"

"No, no. Let me sit here a moment," she said, "I'm tired. I'm miserable. Go away, Tom. You've done nothing but hector and bother me all the morning."

Rose sat down in the red leather armchair and leaned her head back. I motioned Tom to go. I untied her veil and took off her hat.

"She's no more fitted to take care of herself than a little child," Rose burst out, as I slipped off her jacket, "and she's getting old—and—and—useless." With a sob the girl dropped

her head forward between her hands. "Poor old thing!" she said half audibly. I poked the fire and bustled about.

"Are your feet warm?" I said in a pause. Rose lifted her wet face, and threw herself back wearily in the big chair.

"It was cruel of me," she said, pushing back her hair; "and strange too, if you look at it apart from custom. Here is a woman, who walked in—a stranger out of the street—and asked us to let her come and do us services. She came when we were in need of help."

"When your cutlets were burning," I interpolated, trying to give a less serious complexion to the affair.

"She has lived under our roof for months. She has cooked and cleaned, swept and waited on us."

"And broken your cups and saucers—" I said.

"Did *you* never break anything?" my guest turned on me with a fierce impatience. "I wish *I* had nothing worse than broken china on my conscience. Jane Rodd has served us faithfully and kindly for months, and now I'm supposed to be doing the right and natural thing, in showing her the door."

"My dear, don't exaggerate so. You paid her her wages."

"*Paid* her. Oh, yes, I've paid her. She has bent her back, and tired her poor old legs, borne with my temper; brought me little tokens of goodwill, *cared* about me, and I've '*paid*' her with a few coins, and sent her homeless into the street."

"Now, my dear!" I saw the girl was ill, and disposed to look at the matter through a distorted medium. "Come upstairs and lie down. You've got your old room, and after a good long sleep, you'll feel a different being."

"I wonder where Jane will sleep to-night?" Rose stared into the fire. "Tom's a coward, *he* couldn't tell her she had to go. He made me do that. She came in to do my hearth, after Tom had given me your messages. He had talked a lot of nonsense, and then told me, very crossly, I simply had to come away. When Jane came in, he went out. Like a man! 'I'm going to visit some friends, Jane,' I said, not looking at her; 'and I don't need you any more.' She got up off her stiff old knees, and looked at me. I just gave a glance in her direction, for I wanted to know why she didn't speak. Her nice complexion was flushed from the fire. 'Ye mean I must go, miss?' she said after a moment. 'Yes,' I answered, feeling horribly.

I know Tom wouldn't trust her to stay as caretaker, in our absence. 'I'm going as soon as I can get dressed,' I said. 'You may leave the hearth.' The polishing brush fell out of her hand, and rang against the fender. 'Yer want me to go *this very mornin'*?' she asked. 'We shall all go this morning,' I said. 'Very well, miss,' she answered with an awful kind of calmness. She gathered up her brushes, and went into the kitchen. She got her things together, and Tom says she drank some beer. I was sitting on the side of the bed, nearly dressed, when she came in again with my shoes. 'Everything's ready, miss,' she said with a wavering laugh. 'I never went out of a place before, on such short notice, but I think things is pretty right.' 'Short notice,' I said, with a miserable attempt at justification, 'why it's months since I told you to look about for a place.' 'Yes, 'm. Oh, I know that, I ain't complainin'!' She laughed again in that nervous feeble way. 'And I'm going to give you a month's wages besides,' I said. 'Thank ye, miss.' She had buttoned my shoes, and was getting out my hat and things. 'You've got two grown sons in good situations—you mustn't feel alone,' I said. 'No! no! miss.' She scorned to remind me of the mockery of such consolation. I put my head down among the tossed-about pillows, and began to cry. 'Ye ain't good for much yit,' Jane said; she thought I was only weak and tired. She got out my gaiters. 'I 'ave ter wrop ye up well,' she said, 'it's awful raw and foggy.' 'Where will you go, Jane?' I asked. 'I don't know, miss. I'll find some place.' 'But you know of comfortable lodgings near here, don't you, where you can stay a day or two?' 'I des say, miss.' 'And they're reasonable, too, aren't they?' I insisted. 'Oh, yes, 'm,' she said, 'they ain't so dear w'en the lodgers keeps theirselves.' 'Will you be able to carry some provisions with you?' I asked. 'Wot yer mean, 'm?' 'There's that big joint of cold beef, and the bread, and potatoes, and tea and things. Better take them all with you; we're going away, and they won't keep.' 'Tea 'll keep, 'm.' 'Do as I say, Jane,' I interrupted crossly, 'and don't—don't—' 'Don't wot, 'm?' 'Nothing——' I put my head down among the pillows again. 'We ain't partin' bad friends, are we, miss?' she said anxiously.

"No, no, of course not. If you need any help, come and tell me.'

" 'Thank ye, miss,' she said. She brought me in the silver box, to see that all was right. Then she went away, to put on her rusty mantle, and the painfully jaunty bonnet. I knew now she must have bought the Eifel Tower 'off' her friend, 'the Jew lady.' I paid her, said a few words to her, and sent her back into the kitchen to get a basket, and some sugar and butter to add to her provisions.

"Tom bolted windows and locked doors, and we were ready to go. The servant below had helped Jane down with her little rough deal box. The old woman stood there, with her black waterproof bag on her arm, just as she had that first day I saw her. The market-basket had been set at the top of the stairs.

" 'I kin come back fur that, miss,' she said, smiling, 'let me carry yer bag.' Tom's hands were full, so the old creature went down before us, hobbling, floundering, knocking her bag and my bag in turn, against banister and wall. I looked at the French bonnet, with its persistent dingy *chic*, and I began to cry. Tom squeezed my arm, and said something philosophic.

"At the bottom of the stairs, something prompted me to say, 'Jane, where did you put your money?' 'In my pocket, 'm.' she said, setting down the bags. 'Loose?' 'Yes, 'm.' She felt in her rusty black dress, and a blank look came over the cheerful old face. 'Mercy! I've gone and left it on the kitchen dresser,' she wound up with a laugh. I scolded her for her carelessness, and sent Tom up after the money. I lectured her a little more after he had gone. You'd suppose she had millions, the way she squanders and ignores money. Tom came down again and handed her her wages. She curtsied and thanked him, and laughed a little hysterically, as she wrapped the coins in a piece of brown paper, and stuck the packet deep down in the waterproof bag, which she had hung again on her arm.

" 'Shall I ever get that picture out of my head?' Rose said, throwing out her arms. "That poor stranded old woman on the doorstep, with a smile on her good English face, that was sadder than tears. I whispered to Tom, 'Let her come back and sleep here.' 'No, no!' he said brusquely under his breath. 'She'd set the place on fire.' He put our things into the cab, and gave directions to the driver. There above us on the steps, in the deepening fog, stood Jane. A woman who had lived, and worked many years; I knew she had had her hopes and day-

dreams ; she had suffered, and been kind ; she had borne children and had a home once, and now she stood there, looking out into the misty street, with all her worldly possessions by her side, in a waterproof bag and a soap box. *That* was what was left. Oh, it's a horrible world !

“‘Good-bye, Jane,’ I said. I shook the hard old hand. ‘Good-bye, miss, I ‘ope ye’ll git better,’ she said, smiling a little tremulously, ‘we ain’t partin’ bad friends, are we, miss?’ ‘No, indeed,’ I said, ‘no, indeed.’ Then suddenly I added, ‘Your bonnet’s crooked, Jane.’ I simply couldn’t resist pulling it straight, it looked so drearily comic, leaning over to one side. ‘Oh, it’s a wretched old bonnet,’ Jane said apologetically. ‘I’ll ‘ave a new one.’

“I remembered how many shillings stood between her and an empty pocket, and I turned away. ‘Get in,’ Tom said, and he followed me.

“‘Good-bye, Jane,’ I leaned across my brother, ‘this for luck.’ I dropped a little piece of money into her hand. ‘Oh ! Thank ye, miss. Good-bye.’

“We drove away, leaving the poor old creature standing on the kerbstone in the fog. She was smiling vaguely, and her bonnet was over one ear.”