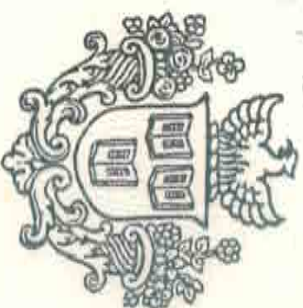


The  
**Fatal Gift of Beauty**  
and Other Stories

BY  
**C. E. Rainmond**

Author of  
"GEORGE MANDEVILLE'S REVENGE"



CHICAGO  
**HERBERT S. STONE & CO.**

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## Contents.

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THE FATAL GIFT OF BEAUTY	3
THE PORTMAN MEMOIRS	
ONLY MAN IS VILE	53
MY SECON' USBAN'	67
A TEMPERANCE STORY	99
BELOW THE SALT	123
CONFESSIONS OF A CRUEL MISTRESS	163
VRONI	207

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THE FAIR GIFT OF BEAUTY	3
THE PORTMAN MEMOIRS	
ONLY MAN IS VILE	53
MY SECON' USBAN'	67
A TEMPERANCE STORY	99
BELOW THE SALT	123
CONFESSIONS OF A CRUEL MISTRESS	163
VRONI	207

## “The Fatal Gift of Beauty”

### PART I

We all know people who get through life creditably enough in the strength of some preposterous illusion. It may be there is no one engaged in the business of living who succeeds on any other terms. Whether it be an undefined suspicion that the illusory is the essential, or a pardonable craving for a little amusement by the way, certain it is that many of us are constrained to minister to the favourite fancy of our brethren when once we have tracked the shy secret home.

In this wise is the miracle wrought, that the inmost desire of the heart, the airy nothing of a dream, becomes the most practical factor in existence, wearing without a blush or a misgiving the face of fact triumphant.

Who on first seeing Mrs. Julia Tours

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

could be expected to know that her blameless and toilsome existence was illuminated by the conviction that she was a disturber of men's souls—a new Helen of Troy?

Mrs. Tours is a lady of forty-six summers, of shy demeanour and uncertain aspirates. She wends her way proudly through the humbler walks of life, conscious of superiority, and bearing meekly the burden of her fatal fascination. She is considerably below average height, has a bright, rather veiny complexion, and a nice face in spite of a round and somewhat shapeless nose—small bright dark eyes, astonishingly little hair (one cannot quite get rid of the supposition that a bald-headed woman is as uncommon as one with two heads), her hands big and red—her feet of wandering and eccentric outlines, yet I would not suggest they were prone to stray. "Thro' all I have kept my h-honour" she will say, and one quite believes her.

To a comparatively slight acquaintance she is prone to speak with devotion and with tears of her dead husband.

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

You will hear that her heart is nailed down in his coffin.

Certainly Mr. Henry Tours was an excellent creature, who made much of his amiable wife, bought her pretty clothes, and called her his "Princess." What can a man do more? Verily, he has his reward.

"I can never forget my noble 'usband," says Mrs. Tours, with the ready tear. "The bare idea of marrying again would be a sacrifice," and the awe-struck tone betrays that she thinks she is saying "sacrilege."

She has views upon jealousy too, as the necessary concomitant of love.

"People use to say Mr. Tours was a perfect Othella. I never dared *look* at a man while he was alive. But I don't blame him for that. It's wot a woman must expect w'en a man worships'er like my 'usband did me. 'My darling Princess,' 'e used to say, 'I can't ave you walking out unless I go to look after you.'"

"'W'y, dear 'Emy? 'I'd say."

"'Don't you notice 'ow all the men turns round as you pass?'

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

"Do they?" I'd ask quite innocent. "Wait till I can come and protect you," e'd say. "There is wicked people in the world that you don't suspect, my Juliet," and that was 'ow 'e took care o' me. If anybody 'ad 'ave come between 'im and me, my 'usband" (a step forward and an abortive thrust of the red right hand), "my 'usband would 'ave stabbed 'im. Oh yes, 'Eny couldn't 'ave bore that."

"I suppose not."

"Not to 'ave anybody interlope. Oh never!"

At Mr. Tours' death, his Princess was flung from the lap of luxury to the low estate of lodging-house keeper.

"It was an awful change for me. My 'usband would never 'ave let me so demean myself if 'e'd been alive. But bein' dead, w'at was I to do? I moved into a most fashionable street and took a large splendid 'ouse—I should say a mansion, and I let rooms to single gentlemen. You see I 'ad no knowledge o' the world and no idea o' wickedness." She groaned gently. "W'en my friends remonstrated I said, 'Don't

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

be afraid. I 'ave engaged good servants and I myself shall never be visible." (This condition she pronounced not in the common way, but, with characteristic elegance, 'visibil').

"That's wot I promised, and I never was visibil. Old Victoria used to show the apartments and answer the bells. I did the cooking. I used to wear a black silk with a big apron over it and a w'ite Eton collar and cuffs. My 'usband used to say, 'Black looks so 'andsome on my darling.' Though I'd always a liking for colours myself."

"But if no one ever saw you?"

"No, never—that was my rule. Of course sometimes the gentlemen would ask w'ere the lady o' the 'ouse was, but old Victoria would say, 'My mistress isn't visibil, sir.' I'm not saying there wasn't people like Major Grelling. 'E come one evening after dinner an' 'e says very masterful to old Victoria, 'I don't make arrangements with nobody but the landlady. I must see 'er.'"

"So I 'ad to go up, just as I was, in my simpl black silk with my Eton collar and w'ite cuffs. W'en 'e seen me,

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

'e sits down straddle-legged on one o' my brocade chairs and 'e says, 'By God! your not the landlady o' this great 'andsome 'ouse?'

"'Yes, I says" (she crosses her hands and minces her words delicately). "Wot do you require?"

"'My,' 'e says with a big oath (it's the way with military gentleman, you know), 'W'y, by — you're a mere child."

"'I'm older than you think,' I says. "'I think you're devilish good-looking."

"'Don't insult me sir. I'm a widow.' "Well, 'e engaged the first floor front and back."

"That was satisfactory."

"'Ah! so I thought. You see, my 'usband always shielded me so, I didn't understand the craft of men."

"'Oh, the Major was crafty?"

"Well, now, wasn't 'e? 'E'd seen me out in my widow's weeds taking the air on the parade, and that was why 'e took the drawing-room suit. Oh, the wickedness of this world! I 'ad to turn 'im out the second day."

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

"A paying lodger like that?"

"You don't know what the military's like. 'E tried to kiss me in the 'all. So I 'ad to write 'im a dignified note, and I let the suit to Captain O'Bally. 'E was a blonde and a lovely fellow! Ah!!!" she smiles with a far-away look.

"And you never heard any more of poor Major Grelling?"

"Yes, oh yes. One night old Victoria came down into the kitchen and says, 'There's a lady, ma'am, wishes to see you most pertickeller.'"

"So I went up just as I was in my simpl black with my 'air dressed pompydore."

"'Are you Mrs. Tours?' says the lady."

"'I am,' says I."

"'Do you know Major Grelling?"

"'Yes,'"

"'Well, 'e's dead' and I caught 'old o one o' the 'andsome carved chairs I 'ad in the 'all."

"'Yes, dead,' says she, 'and the last word on 'is dyin' lips was yer name. 'E was delirious for two days—clean



## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

out of his 'ead about you—callin' for Mrs. Tours, Mrs. Tours.

"'Ush,' says I; 'the ouse is full of military; speak lower.'

"'I didn't know then woo Mrs. Tours was,' says she, 'so I couldn't come for you.'

"'It's as well you didn't,' I says.

"'Why,' says she, 'e worshipped you.'

"'That may be,' says I.

"'Do ye know woo I am?' says she.

"'No.

"'I'm 'is 'ousekeeper, and I've a son ten year old that 'e's the father of.'

"'I wouldn't mention it,' I says: 'I'm a respectable woman.'

"'Then to change the conversation I asked 'er wot Major Grelling died of.'

"'She looked at me quite terrible and said 'The doctors didn't name it.'"

"'What did she mean?'"

"'Can't you see? When I sent 'im off like that, 'e went away and took poison or something. Ah-h! they're so 'igh-spirited, the military. Captain O'Bally was nearly as bad, and the

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

vegetarians—well, the vegetarians was worse."

"'I never heard of a military vegetarian.'"

"'They wasn't military. They was only Indians—spoke a kind of English, but quite black, you know, and ate rice and slops. They'd come to the Vegetarian Conference. I only took them in as a special favour to Captain O'Bally—three of them. Mr. Gumbi was the best looking, and not so deep black as the rest. And his eyes! They went through you like a knife. Lovely great black startlers! And I *never* saw such beautiful teeth. They were so white they fairly took your breath away. Oh, the time I 'ad with them vegetarians!'"

"'Really? I thought vegetarians were such mild people.'"

"'Don't you make any mistake. If they say so, that's their craftiness. Being a vegetarian doesn't interfere with powers and passions.'"

"'You surprise me.'"

"'Oh, you should just 'ave seen Mr. Gumbi. The very first day 'e comes thro' the 'all towards me like a lean



## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

black. "E flew up and lays 'is thin brown and on mine, and says 'e, 'What a fine colour you 'ave, my dear."

"Go away, Mr. Gumbi," says I.

"Why, I've just come," says 'e, and 'e squeezes my 'ands something dreadful. Then I pull myself away and run upstairs as if the devil was after me. I only looked around once, and I see 'is teeth shining 'orrible. Ha! no more vegetarians for me!"

"Was that the last of Mr. Gumbi?"

"No; the next morning, w'en all the gentlemen 'ad gone out, I sent old Victoria to market, and I went upstairs to 'ave a look round. When I got to the second flight I 'ard footsteps, quiet and stealing. I looked up, and there was Mr. Gumbi comin' down very soft and 'olding something shining against 'is chest (like this). My legs shook so I couldn't run away. 'E came on down and took my 'ands."

"How could he do that when he was holding something?"

"Aven't you never 'ard o' the jugglery they 'ave out in India? Of course 'e 'd swallowed it or put it up 'is sleeve."

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

I don't know 'ow they do it. But I saw something shining when I first looked up—plain as day."

"Perhaps he was only smiling."

"No, no! you may depend upon it 'e was comin' downstairs wit' 'is dagger."

W'en 'e takes 'old o' my 'ands——

"You're warm," says 'e.

"Don't touch me with your cold 'ands, Mr. Gumbi," says I, and I try to withdraw.

"Ush!" says 'e, and 'is eyes makes me shake. 'Do you know what cold 'ands means?"

"He must have heard the English saying, 'Cold hands are a sign of a warm heart.'"

"No, no! not 'e; an' 'eathen like that, and a vegetarian too! 'Is eyes was like balls of fire, and 'e—'e tried to kiss me."

"Wait, Mr. Gumbi," says I. 'I 'ear my friend callin'. Wait jest a moment, Mr. Gumbi, and I got away and ran downstairs and out 'o the 'ouse, and didn't come back all day."

"Where did you go?"

"To my lady friend Miss Young—"

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

"husband. Perhaps you think 'er name's queer, but she was an old maid and very partickeller.

"What's 'appened?' says she.

"Oh, it's Mr. Gumby," says I. "It's them 'eathen vegetarians. After this I'll never believe in a man that can't eat a good honest plate of beef," and I fell down on the carpet and swooned. So Miss Young's husband 'ad to go in the evening and send Mr. Gumby away. She said *she* wasn't afraid of all the vegetarians in England and India. Ah! well, you see, she was fifty-eight!

"I came to see my friends were right. Such an 'ousful of single gentlemen was no place for me. I 'ad to give it up, as you know, and come to London to Mrs. Ellingam as under-'ouse-keeper. She's a New York lady, but she gets on very well with Mr. Ellingam. 'E seems rather fond of 'er, though to my taste she 'as a pale, faded kind o' face.

"It was very 'ard for me to be in a position like that after 'aving my own 'ouse. When I went back 'ome on a

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

visit, I used to put on my deep mourning again, though my dear 'Enry 'ad been gone seven years. I used to 'ave a thick veil over my face, and I 'd 'old my parasol low so no one could recognise me and ask wot I was doin' in London. One day I met my old clergyman. I tried to 'urry by, but 'e steps up an' says—

"Are you not Mrs. Tours?"

"Yes, sir," I says low under my veil so no one else should 'ear. 'E 'd always noticed me a great deal. 'E 'll think I'm changed," I said to myself.

"Excuse me," I says, and I try to pass.

"But 'e wouldn't let me. 'We're going the same way," says 'e, and I 'ad to walk beside 'im. 'E did nothing but ask me questions. I could see 'e 'd never lost interest. But it was painful—very painful. You can't avoid a clergyman.

"At my brother's gate he stopped. "'There's nothing to be ashamed of in h-'onest work,'" 'e says. "I only 'ope you're living with a good Christian lady."

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

"I didn't quite know what to answer to that, so I say—

"Well, sir, she's an American."

"E said 'e'd pray for me."

"Mrs. Elling am 'as treated me very considerate. She knows I've seen better days. Still I don't think she liked it when Mr. Elling am remarked on my colour. She asked me 'ow I'd like to go next winter and look after her bachelor brother's 'ouse in New York."

"I don't see why I shouldn't," I says. "I've got nothing to keep me in England except a grave, that I've spent £200 on. People said I oughtn't 'ave; but there! I'm like that."

### PART II

Mrs. Tours' friends may have pardoned their surprise if, after the seven years mourning for 'Fanny, they are suddenly confronted with the true story of Mr. Freddie Cooper.

"Wot would you think," Mrs. Tours burst out one day with shy suddenness, "wot would you say if, instead of me going to America next winter, I was to

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

get married 'ere?" The "'ere" flashed an uncommon light.

"Married! to whom?"

"You see this photo in my broach?"

"Your husband, isn't it?"

"Not yet," she said, casting down her little dark eyes shyly with the maid-of-sixteen air.

"He's nice looking!" said the interlocutor encouragingly.

"Ah! the photo's faded—but the man! No woman can resist 'im."

"Except you, I suppose?"

"The way I stood out against 'im was something h'unnatural, 'e used to say. I says, 'No, it's my mother's prayers.'"

"Where is he now? What's his name?"

"I can't tell you. I promised faithfully I'd never divulge."

"But if you marry him, won't you have to divulge?"

"Not w'ile 'is mother's alive. It's only that as keeps us apart. 'E's got a big 'ouse in Berwick Terrace, w'ere they live—at least they used to."

"How long since you've seen him?"

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

"Four years. But if it was forty it wouldn't change 'im nor me. I've 'ad it in my 'ead lately 'e must be dying or something. I dream about 'im every night. I think I must go to Berwick Terrace and ask 'ow 'e is, in spite of 'is mother."

"Does he write to you?"

"Not just lately. It's four years since I 'ad the last. Oh, 'e was right—I treated 'im very 'ard. 'E was my first lodger. 'E was with me over two years, and led me such a life."

"How was that?"

"Well, you see, I was new at letting. 'Enry 'adn't been gone but a few months, and I didn't know a thing about wickedness."

"Was the first lodger wicked?"

"Im? Oh, no! 'e was a perfect gentleman."

"Ah!"

"And very rich and generous. Well, 'e used to 'ave 'is money lying around 'is room in 'caps. When I'd send up my bill, 'e used to call me in and point to the money on the table and say,

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

"'Elp yourself!' (jest like that), and then 'e'd turn his back."

"That was a little odd. Why didn't he pay his bill?"

"That was 'is craft, you see. 'E wanted to get me in 'is power."

"I thought you said he wasn't wicked."

"'E wasn't wicked! 'e was in love."

"Oh!"

"Something terrible! 'Aven't I told you? Besides this 'andsome private gentleman, my 'ouse was full of young officers, lovely fellows! and well—they were all like that."

"All in love and all crafty?"

"Yes, different ways. Some 'ad more power to conceal. There was Colonel Chalk. 'E wasn't young, but 'eaven forgive 'im the life 'e led me. 'E——"

"But about the man in the broach?"

"Ah! 'e used to say 'e couldn't live without me. 'E got so 'e'd ring 'is bell a dozen times a day."

"What for?"

"Oh, for me! 'e didn't want nothing else."



## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

"I thought you said you were never visible."

"*Never*—as a rule. Only 'e'd say to the servant w'ile she'd be clearing away 'is dinner things, 'My compliments to Mrs. Tours, and say I didn't ring for you. It's the mistress 'o the 'ouse I want.' Of course, then I 'ad to go up and see 'im. 'E was very sensitive if I didn't come. I never used to go in farther than this" (illustrating how half a human body may be in a room and the other half left outside in the passage). "I would be in my simmil black silk and Eton collar. 'E said to me once w'en 'e was in one of 'is fits, 'You drive me out of my mind with your black silks and your white collars.' Well, they *are* becoming to one of my style, as poor dear 'Emy always said. 'E would look at me o' Sundays, 'Emy would, and say, 'My princess.'"

"But about the man in the broach."

"Oh, well, I'd stand like this, and 'e'd say—

"Come in and sit down and be sociabil'."

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

"No, I'd say, 'this is as far as I'd better adventure."

"Oh, don't say that! Come in and 'ave a glass of wine."

"I'll 'ave all the wine I want downstairs, I'd say, 'and I must go and 'elp with the other dinners."

"'Elp with the dinners! 'E was very angry always at my naming anything like that. Oh, 'e was a proud man! "'Elp with the dinners! Let the 'irelings get the other dinners. I can't stand you slaving away at menial work. A woman like you! W'y, if you was *my* wife, you shouldn't lift a finger. Do come in and 'ave a glass o' wine."

"You see 'e meant it all very kind. But you can't think the things I went thro' with that man. Others too, of course. But this one used to watch me like a cat watches a mouse. I couldn't stir a step, couldn't speak to a soul without 'is knowing and making the greatest alarm. Just to keep peace (with all those military in the 'ouse), I used to take off my shoes when I 'ad to go up and down stairs so 'e wouldn't 'ear me goin' by. Oh, the things that 'ave 'appened to

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

me ! I come in one night from church. I 'ad on a w'ite cashmere trimmed with crepe and a black butterfly bonnet. The minute I came in the door I seen 'im waitin' for me in the beautiful wide 'all with a carved table and two chairs fit for bishops !—the entrance was a noble entrance, as my sister, Mrs. Lynch, always said."

"Well, this man was waiting ?"

"Yes ; I was all of a shake, and I says—

" ' You 'll 'ave the goodness to let me pass.' With that 'e caught 'old o' me. I tried to get away, but 'e 'ad a man's strength, and a poor little creature like me, wot was I to do ? "

" ' I can't stand it,' 'e says. ' You go and get yourself up in w'ite just to tantalize me.' "

" ' Ush ! I 'ear the military listening over the banisters,' says I. "

" ' Wot do I care for the military ? It's *you* I care for, and 'ere you are in w'ite with a butterfly bonnet. You must take the consequences.' "

" ' Oh ! I says, ' don't pull me 'air down.' "

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

" ' It's more than flesh and blood can stand,' 'e says, and 'e throws my butterfly bonnet in the corner. "

" ' Don't, don't ! ' says I, ' it's only 'alf mourning ; ' but 'e was fair crazy, an' 'e tore that w'ite cashmere dress to bits. Ah ! love is a terrible thing. "

" ' Well, just after that 'is mother and an old aunt came to the 'ouse. I didn't take ladies—that was my rule. But I thought—with a mother and an old aunt, per'aps 'e 'll be 'ave. "

" ' But 'is mother insulted me the very first day. She rang the bell twice very 'ard, and sent for me. The servant, old Victoria, said, ' The mistress is not visibil.' ' Tell 'er to come this instant,' says the old lady. Well, bein' 'is mother, I thought I'd go. I 'ad on a black brocade with accordeon pleated skirt. I entered over the threshold and " (she folds her hands and tilts her head stiffly) " says I—

" ' You wish to see the mistress o' the 'ouse ? ' "

" ' I want the landlady,' says 'is mother, quite 'arsh and very loud. "

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

"'I'm the landlady' (she speaks with a mincing elegance).

"'You! don't talk nonsense.'

"'It's not nonsense,' I says, 'Perhaps you think I'm too young. I'm thirty-nine, but I can't expect you to believe it.'

"'Are you goin' to a party?' says she.

"'No,' says I—'I'm always like this.'

"'Well,' says she, 'it isn't what I was told' (you see 'is craft?'). And you oughtn't to look like that—keeping a lodging-'ouse for single gentlemen.

"'Can I 'elp my looks?' I says.

"'Yes, you can,' says she, quite out of 'er mind. 'It isn't proper.'

"'Don't insult me, madam,' I says. 'May be I'll be as old and ugly some day—as other people.' She was took down a little by that.

"'It isn't the 'ouse I expected,' says she.

"'Wot's the matter with the 'ouse? There isn't a finer in the place.'

"'No,' says she, 'it's very 'andsome, but not like a lodging-'ouse.'

"'Everybody 'as to say so,' I told 'er. 'It's more of a mansion than any-

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

thing else, and you can go from top to bottom and find taste and good furniture everyw'ere. Will you come into the drawing-room?' says I.

"'No,' says she; 'I can imagine wot it's like.'

"'Ardly!' says I. 'It's all in red plush, with Indian things scattered careless. Nobody *ever* takes it for a lodging-'ouse. I've got two great Chinese jars made of terra-firma and a stuffed bird nearly as big *as me*. You should see 'ow surprised strangers is always at the taste of that room.'

"'We shall keep to our *own* rooms,' says she. 'I could see 'ow select 'is family was.'

"'I'm sure you'll like these apartments,' I says. 'You'll find every-thing 'andsome in your bedrooms. The gentlemen 'ere all says there 's no 'ouse were they get such beautiful spring mattresses and every compliance.'

"'Wot?' says she, still very peppy.

"'Everything is comfortable and 'andsome,' I says, 'Patent blinds and gas all thro'—every compliance. You



## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

noticed perhaps the stairs is so wide, four people could come up abreast."

"Will you take them ornaments off the mantel-piece?" says she. "I'm afraid I'll break them. That's all I want at present."

"Well, after 'is mother and 'is aunt went away (they got to be very fond of me, and were always ringing for me)—after that 'e got worse and worse. Oh, you may think some of the things in novels doesn't 'appen! You'd believe anything if you knew wot I'd been through."

"W'y, I was coming along one night after dinner with a cup of coffee for Captain O'Bally. 'E 'ad the sitting-room just be'ind Mr. Co—the gentlemen in my broach. Captain O'Bally was a lovely fellow. Ah! 'e used to send his coffee down without tasting it if I didn't bring it up to 'im. So this night, as usual, I was comin' along with the coffee-cup in me 'and, and me shoes in the other, so that Mr.—the other one—shouldn't 'ear, w'en out 'e bursts and seizes 'old o' me."

"You're spilling the coffee," says I.

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

"Your breaking my 'eart," says 'e. "Oo's coffee are you takin' to 'im?"

I was all of a tremble.

"By God," 'e says, "if it's for Captain O'Bally, I'll break 'is neck."

"No, don't, don't, please don't,"

"Wot's Captain O'Bally to you?"

"With that out comes the Captain, and 'e says dreadful things to my Mr. Cooper. Oh therel I've let it out. Fred-die Cooper was 'is name. Promise me you'll never divulge. Well, they quarrel so, I 'ave to say"—

"Gentlemen! *Gentlemen!* (like that). 'ave some respect for me. Wot'll the rest o' the lodgers think? Please go to your rooms and remember I'm a widow."

"Well they did, for there was nothing they wouldn't do for me. But that night, after we'd all gone to bed, they fought a duel down in the 'all."

"Heavens! Anybody killed?"

"There would 'ave been, but I 'urried down just as I was. In a case like that you can't think of what you 'ave on—and there I was begging them not to bloodshed, in my nightgown with em-

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

broidered ruffles, and pink felt slippers."

"And that calmed them?"

"Well, they went to bed. But they always 'ated each other after that."

### PART III

"My friends, of course, never liked me takin' lodgers. They would 'ave it, that the military compromised me by such marked attentions. And they used to try to set me against Mr. Cooper. 'E's always talkin' about you outside in society,' says my sister, 'and it makes people ask questions. Wherever 'e goes, 'e 'olds you up to other ladies as a paragram. All the town is talkin'."

"So I remonstrated with 'im. But all 'e 'd say was I 'ad meself to blame for 'oldin' 'im off so. And 'e got more proud about me than ever. Didn't even like me to answer the door. Oh, 'e used to go on something dreadful at my demeaning meself to be a menial. One day w'en old Victoria was out, there come a knock, and I 'ate to go and open the door. But Mr. Cooper, 'e

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

with 'is eye on me as usual, 'e 'eard me. 'E comes out to see 'oo it is. I 'ad on a black velvet, made very simpl. I always looked best w'en I was simpl. This black velvet 'ad a yoke, and was gathered in at the waist with a cord and tassel. W'en 'e see me goin' to open the door, 'e comes forward and pushes me out o' the way.

"Let the servant go," 'e says.

"Be 'ave, 'I says; 'the servant ain't 'ere.' But 'e 'olds me tight, and there come another knock very pruptery.

"Ha ! ' Mr. Cooper says, ' it's Captain O'Bally. And that's w'y you're demeaning yourself to answer the door. And that's w'y you 've got on this 'and-some new dress, and your 'air done pompydore."

"No ! no ! 'I says; 'please be 'ave, dear Mr. Cooper."

"But 'e was in one of 'is fits. 'E caught 'old o' me, and 'e nearly tore that dress off my back. You can imagine the strength 'e 'ad at such times, for 'e didn't look powerful. 'E was just about my height, but very manly."

"I hope you called in the police."

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

"Oh, you don't understand! 'E didn't mean it for unchivalry. W'en woman 'as been through wot I 'ave, she understands these things."

"Well, how did Captain O'Bally get in finally?"

"Mr. Cooper goes and opens the door 'imself. There stood my own sister, Mrs. Lynch, in a long sealskin jacket."

"'Oo do you want?' says Mr. Cooper, very 'igh 'anded."

"'Mrs. Tours,' says my sister, and steps in. They both stood there lookin' so proud, I had to introduce them. I 'ad slipped on a mackintosh, so no one shouldn't see 'ow dreadful I was pulled about."

"'Any relation of Mrs. Tours,' says 'e, with a bow, 'I am 'appy to know. Come into my room,' says 'e, and 'e leads the way."

"My sister, you know, won't stand anything—not from nobody; so she looked him up and down (like this) as she took 'er seat. 'E was busy settin' out the wine an' glasses."

"'Now 'elp yourself,' 'e says."

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

"'Not at your expense,' says my sister (just like that)."

"'Set down, do,' 'e says to me; 'you're lookin' tired.'"

"'I prefer standin',' says I."

"Then 'e turns to Mrs. Lynch, 'It's awfl the way she treats me,' 'e says; 'make your sister be friends with me.'"

"'I think she's friends enough with you,' says Mrs. Lynch."

"'No!' says 'e, 'she never comes in 'ere—not to set down sociabl.'"

"'I'm glad to 'ear it,' says Mrs. Lynch."

"'Don't be 'ard,' says 'e—quite mild for 'im."

"'You won't get around me like you get around my sister,' she answers."

"'Oh,' 'e says, still gentl, 'you didn't oughter 'ave spoke like that; 'is tones made my tears arise."

"'No,' 'Enrietta,' I says, 'you musn't say such things. I know 'ow to guard my h-bonour without 'arshness.'"

"'She is a nobl creature,' 'e says. 'She could make another man of me.'"

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

"Then it's a pity she doesn't," says Mrs. Lynch.

"Well," 'e says, 'use your influence with 'er. I'm goin' to the devil, all through 'er. She could keep me at 'ome.

"I'm not sure it's desirable," says my sister.

"If she'd only 'ave her piana moved in 'ere, and sit of an evening and sing 'ymns to me."

"No," says Mrs. Lynch, 'I don't approve of it.

"'Er sewin' then," 'e says more fervent. 'She might darn my socks in 'ere. She'd make a good man of me if she did.

"I think she's lowering herself to forget the best 'usband ever woman 'ad," says my sister.

"I'm *not* forgetting," I says.

"And *you*," says she to Mr. Cooper—"you're not to go usin' my sister's name in society."

"I don't," says 'e—"never until the ladies goes too far. Then I 'ave to tell them it's no use."

"You speak different to wot I 've 'eard."

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

"Yes," 'e says, 'standin' very straight and proud, 'and I'd say it before all the world: I 'ave a 'opeless love for Mrs. Tours—the pargram of women!'

"'E was the first person as ever shut up my sister, Mrs. Lynch. She went 'ome quite peaceable. I've often thought w'en I've been readin' novels 'ow much writers ud give to know the things I've been through. For I've never seen anything the least like it in a book. That's 'ow I know my life 'as been so strange; and other women think they know wot it is to 'ave men crazy about them. Ah, little they know.

"What don't they know?"

"The terrible dangers—the temptations."

"The escapes, too, I trust."

"Oh, yes, yes. I always think it must 'ave been the prayers o' my mother, or else I don't know 'ow it was I withstood. 'You are different to all other ladies,' Mr. Cooper used to say. 'W'y, I 'ave them down on their knees to me, all except you.'



## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

"So 'e makes a stratagem. I 'ad the room through the passage at the top o' the stairs like as if it was 'ere. The landing was wide and 'andsome, and at the door leading into my passage I 'ad two life-size china bulldogs very fierce and expensive, one on each side of the door that opened into the passage leading to my private apartment—quite separate and distinct from all the rest. I used to 'ang my dresses on the pegs that went all round the passage from my door to the bathroom door w'ich was next. Well, w'en I 'd come through the passage past them two bulldogs I was shut off from everybody and quite private—until this awfl night.

"I 'adn't been sleeping very good, for thinking of Mr. Cooper and wot 'e'd invent next. I 'ad only little naps and woke up tremblin'. This time I thought I 'eard a rat scratching just like this" (she pecks at the wicker chair with her nails) "I listened, and thinks I to meself, 'It's in the bath-room, and I believe I've gone and left the winder open."

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

"You thought the rat had climbed in through the window?"

"Well, with rats you never can tell.

And it wasn't safe to 'ave the window open. So I got up and felt my way through the passage to the bathroom—with my hands out so—feelin' as I went. W'en I got into the bathroom the winder *was* open, and the moonlight came in just a little. I saw a w'ite thing standin' by the bath-tub. I began to scream, and 'e came forward and clapped 'is 'and over my mouth.

"'It's me, dear Juliet,' says Mr. Cooper—'ush, it's me'."

"'It must 'ave been my mother's prayers, for I 'ad a sudden strent-th. I withdrew.

"'Ow dare you?' I says, 'and me a widow'."

"'My darling Juliet,' 'e w'ispers, coming *nearer*.

"And I—yes I always say it was my mother's prayers. I just gave 'im a great push and in 'e went with a awfl splash,—into the bath-tub!"

"Serve him right."

"Ah, you see w'en that's 'ow they

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

feel, they don't know what they're about."

"Well, what did you do after that?"

"I went back to my room and locked the door—and swooned. They 'ad to break the door in next morning. I was so shook I couldn't get up. I didn't know *what* to do."

"I hope you sent the man packing?"

"Of course, I wrote 'im a note and said 'is rooms was required."

"So you got rid of him at last?"

"Not—not exactly. Old Victoria took up the note, and 'e tore it up before 'er and dashed the pieces in the fire."

"Without reading it?"

"Oh no, 'e 'd read it. Victoria came down and told me 'ow 'e 'd took it. 'I'll see your mistress as soon as she's abl to receive me, 'e 'd said as she was goin' out."

"What! you let him stay another hour?"

"Wot could I do. 'E *wouldn't go* without seein' me; 'e *couldn't*. Oh, I understood. An' I says to old Victoria, 'Victoria, says I, 'you're a very

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

sensibil old woman, and you see 'ow things are. Wot do you think I ought to do?" She knew of the stratagem."

"She knew of the stratagem?"

"Yes, I told 'er *everything*."

"I'm sure Victoria would advise you to turn him out instantly."

"No, no, Victoria says, 'For 'eaven's sake, ma'am, don't do nothing rash. 'E's a very nice gentleman. 'E's sure pay, not to say free with 'is money. 'E don't give nobody the least trouble, and it's a pleasure to wait on 'im. I don't say 'e ain't quite mad about you, ma'am; but what can you expect, ma'am? You 'ave yourself to blame. It's you that drives the poor men out o' their senses with that little face o' yours, and the taste of the way you dresses."

"Old Victoria was a very sensibil woman, and knew a great deal—so I took 'er advice."

"You let him stay on?"

"Jest w'ile I was so overcome. W'en I got over the shock I saw 'im. We 'ad a painfl interview on the landing."

"You told him he had to go at once?"

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

"Oh yes, I asked 'im to leave. I says, 'Ow *could* you disrespect me like that, and me a widow?' and my tears arose and poured down my face."

"Well, what did he say?"

"Oh, 'e apologised; 'e had the most beautiful manners I ever saw in a man. I will say that for 'im. 'E was quite right saying women could n't elp to care for 'im—if only on account of 'is manners. 'E made me come into the drawing-room and sit on the sofa (green brocade, seven an' six the yard)—an' stood sideways. 'E fixed 'is beautiful blue eyes on the stuffed bird w'ich 'e'd always admired—and 'e asked me wot I expected. If I drove men out o' their minds, was it their faults! Then 'e promised 'e'd be 'ave and do different, if I'd promise 'im somethin'."

"Ah, he's coming to the point at last."

"I must promise solemn *never to divulge*. 'E said 'e was most sorrowful for w'at 'ad appened, but it must be a secret between us two. If I'd swear never to divulge, 'e'd be a good man for my sake. So I promised."

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

"Did he keep his part of the bargain?"

"Yes—at least, as well as he could, pore fellow. Ah! there 'as n't been many women 'as been through the temptations I 'ave."

### PART IV

"After paying me count for two years steady, Mr. Cooper lost 'cart. So 'e used a stratagem. 'E went to Africa for three years and speculated in a company of gentlemen."

"'E made another fortune, and wot 'is first thought but to come 'ome to England to see if I'd softened. 'E wrote and asked me if I would receive 'im. I answered, 'Sir' (I'd never said Dear Sir, for fear 'e'd think I meant encouragement)—'Sir! I 'ave been very unfortunate since you went away. All the military 'as been ordered to foreign lands. I 'ave no lodgers and 'ave 'ad to call a sale. But I am changeless, and do not wish to see you on the same terms. Juliet Tours."

"Then comes a telegram from 'is



## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

old aunt: 'I am very ill, probably dying—come at once—you will be met at Waterloo at three.' I 'ad always liked 'is aunt better than 'is mother, so I felt I must go.

"I caught the early train, and w'en we was coming into Waterloo—'oo should I see through the winder but Mr. Cooper standin' on the platform with 'is eyes almost out of 'is 'ead with looking for me. 'E seen me at once, and before the train stops, in 'e jumps into the carriage.

"'W'at! third class!' 'e says; 'you shock me.'

"'Of course, third class! you seem to forget I 'ave my bread to earn. I'm not a princess.'

"'Princess! No! You 're my queen,' 'e w'ispers, and lifts me out. 'I'm perishing for a good look at you,' 'e says, quite in 'is old way, and 'e tears my veil off and twists me round under the electric light. 'You 're as lovely as hever,' 'e says, 'olding my face between 'is two 'ands.

"I couldn't 'elp thinking 'ow lovely he looked too, standing there under

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

the strong light, with 'is tall 'at, and 'is long black frock-coat with button'ole and velvet collar. You can think 'ow a velvet collar would set off 'is fair 'air and military moustache, 'Ow 'e's improved! I thought! and I began to tremble.

"'Now I've got you I'll never let you go,' 'e says.

"'Ush, everybody's looking,' I told 'im.

"'You ought to be used to that,' 'e says. 'Oh, my dear Juliet!' (and 'e 'ugged me again), 'w'y didn't you answer my love-letter?'

"'You was very wrong to write me on such terms.'

"'I'm sure you put it under your pillow at night,' 'e says, laughin'.

"'Don't be under a mistake,' I says; 'I put your love-letter in the refuge of the dust-pan.'

"'And the African necklace I sent you?' 'e says.

"'I never cease to think of the dead,' I said. 'Ow's your poor old aunt?'

"'You are very depressive,' 'e says.

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

So he conducted me out and called a cab.

"'W'y doesn't your h-aunt send 'er carriage for me, too?' I asked 'im.

"'She's too ill to think of worldly things,' 'e said. So we drive along in the dark, though it was only three o'clock. The place was all smoke, and I coughed something dreadful. 'E patted my back. 'Poor little dear,' 'e said so tender for all my harsh words, 'you feel this 'orrid fog.'

"'Fog!' says I, 'I thought it was an eclipse.' Then 'e tells me about 'is life in Africa.

"'How I 'ave longed for you!' 'e says; 'not that there was n't plenty o' fine women there, but just because a little thing like you was n't there, I was ready many a time to put a knife to my jugglery vein.'

"'One 'as done,' I says, feeling cold to remember; 'e was an Australian. When I wouldn't be 'is bride that's wot 'e done, and was found so, all dead and dreadful, 'olding tight the letter I'd sent 'im saying, "No, thank you."'

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

"'You see,' says Mr. Cooper, 'wot you are to expect.'

"'I come because of a sick message,' I says; 'I 'ope you aren't going to 'amper me with love scenes.'

"'Look 'ere,' 'e says, 'I've lain at your feet for years. I used to watch you long before I became your lodger—followed you, ay, even into the cimet'ry, and seen you lay your flowers and tears on your 'usband's tomb.'

"'Others 'as done the same,' I says. "'Ow do you know?' 'e says, quite blustrous.

"'I seen their 'eads over the tops of the gravestones,' I says. I could n't 'ave 'im so proud as thinking 'e was the only one.

"'Ah!' 'e says, 'no one 'as endured for you wot I 'ave; and, Juliet,' and 'e lays 'is 'and on mine, not to caress, but solemn, 'Juliet, if I come to an untimely end (and it's more than likely), I want you to write at once to my mother. Tell 'er you know of the will. I've made leaving you *all*. And, Juliet, you must 'ave me cremated. I should feel 'appier if you'd promise to 'ave my

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

ashes in an urn—they come quite 'and some and ornamental, you know. You could set in on your sideboard. Oh! *promise* me you won't refuse my h-ashes, as you 'ave *me*.'

"My tears arose and I couldn't answer. I seemed in my mind to see 'im sittin' in a mournful urn on the sideboard at home.

"You're wore out,' e says. 'Wot a brute I am! You must 'ave a good meal. 'Stop!' e says, and before I can say no, e lifts me out in 'is arms and takes me into a fine, splendid restaurant we 'appened to be passing.

"But, I remonstrated, 'with your aunt dyin', 'ow can we—'

"It's no reason we should die too,' says 'e, and 'e ordered a most refined meal. But I couldn't eat for all 'is coaxin' ways. I was always delicate at dinner, *now* more than ever.

"Urry, please!' says I afterwards, as 'e sets smoking 'is cigar; 'wot *will* your poor dyin' h-aunt think?'

"E only smiled. I thought it so 'ard-earted I arose. 'I will go alone,' I said.

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

"*Alone!* Never again while I live to protect you!' and 'e threw down 'is cigar and paid 'is bill. We got into another cab, and I saw it was nearly dark, though there was less fog now.

"I'm rather frightened in London, some'ow,' I says. 'I'd begun to think things was n't like they ought to be.

"Then stay with me,' e says; 'I'll take care of you,' and 'e 'ad 'old o' my 'and. 'I'll never let you go a step unattended. It really isn't safe for a woman like you. If I should ever be too ill to go out with you, I'd send an escort.'

"It's a long way to this h-aunt of yours,' I says.

"It's not far now, my idyl,' e says, 'I wish it was. I wish we was going to Africa. O my darling! my darling! come to Africa.

"As your wife?' says I.

"In the eyes o' the world,' says 'e.

"Don't insult me!' I says.

"I've told you from the first about my father's will,' says 'e. 'If I marry my cousin ('e'd always used to call 'er 'is *hated* cousin—and I noticed the

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

change)—'If I marry my cousin, I've double; if I marry any one else, I'll 'ave nothin', and the money will be re-visited on the eldest son.'

"You'd better marry your cousin," says I, with feelings of interior 'orror.

"Marry my cousin!" says 'e. 'I'd sooner 'ave my 'ead severed off.'

"Isn't she pretty?" I says.

"Some say she's beautifl' ('e 'ad used to say she was), 'but I can't see as she's exactly beautifl'," 'e says, 'but she's the most educated woman I've ever met.'

"Is she?" I says, quite weak and frail.

"Oh, yes," says 'e; 'you can't mention anything but wot she's up to it, no matter *wot* it is—needle-work, botany, Shakespeare, conversation—she's up to them all.'

"She's an exceptional woman," I says; but the pains that went through my inside cramped me in two.

"'E kissed my 'and."

"Don't," says I; 'it's 'urt with toil'."  
"It's the 'and I love," 'e says, soft and gentil'.

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

"It's good to cook," I says, despairin'.

"Cook! ugh!" 'e groaned (just like that). 'Don't speak of *cooking*,' 'e says.

"I'm sorry," I said, for I remembered 'e 'ad a most refined mind. 'I won't do it again,' I says.

"That's right, my 'queen!" and 'e kissed me and stopped the cab.

"'Ere we are," 'e says.

"Is *this* your h-aunt's?" says I, and my suspicions arose.

"It's all right," 'e says. We went into a wide 'all, and only a servant to take our things. I looked about. It did n't seem to me like an aunt's 'ouse. I began to ask meself, was that sick message only 'is craft to lure me to London. The more I looked about, the more I felt the place wasn't like a gentil' 'ome.

"Come into the drawing-room," says Mr. Cooper. 'My aunt is asleep, they say,' and he foiled me to his breast.

"It's very dark and foggy 'ere," I says, almost with tears.

"Oh, Juliet, Juliet! come away with



## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

me to sunny South Africa,' 'e says.  
'Let us start to-night.'

"'Ow can you insult me so,' I says,  
'and your old aunt dyin'?'"

"'Oh, damn my aunt!' says 'e.

"Then a dreadful fear shook me very  
legs. 'E stands off and looks at me.

"'Same old face,' 'e said, 'same old  
'at, same old cloak.'

"'Yes,' I says, crying and tremb-  
ling, 'it's the same old 'at and the  
same old cloak. The military is or-  
dered away, and I can't afford the de-  
corations I used to.'

"'Ah!' he says fervent, 'wouldn't I  
like to dress you in scarlet satin!'

"'Don't insult me,' I says; 'I'm still  
mourning for my 'usband.'

"'Or green velvet with gold trim-  
mings! That would set off them red  
cheeks. O my queen!' and 'e kisses  
me something frantic. I was nearly  
out of my mind w'en I saw 'ow 'is 'at  
flew off with 'is passions. I tore out  
of 'is arms.

"'A curse 'angs over me,' I says,  
and my sobs was cruel. 'Let me go  
'ome. Let me go 'ome.'

## The Fatal Gift of Beauty

"'Never w'ile I live,' 'e says; and I  
seem to see wot 'e meant.

"'Come to Africa,' 'e says; 'you  
can't think 'ow thick the diamonds is  
there. I'll cover you all over with  
sparklers.'

"'If you talk to me till the next  
generation,' I says, 'I'll only be your  
sister,' and I almost swooned.

"'Decline on the sofa,' 'e said; but  
I said no, not there was no declining  
w'ile 'e was in the room.

"'Then I'll see about your apart-  
ments,' 'e says; 'but don't stir till I come  
back. It isn't safe,' and 'e leaves me.

"'I prayed God to 'elp me, and show  
the way. Then I went out into the 'all,  
and I seen a tall young girl lighting the  
gas. 'Excuse me, Miss,' I says; 'I've  
forgot the post a letter,' says I; 'w'ich  
is the door to get out off?'

"'This way,' she says, and laughed  
quite pleasant. So I 'urried out, and  
took three 'busses to Waterloo. It was  
dreadful late w'en I got 'ome, and I  
thanked God for savin' me.

"'From that day to this I've never  
known 'appiness.'

## Only Man is Vile

There is one thing in common between Mrs. Portman and the author of "The Heavenly Twins." They both entertain a low opinion of the opposite sex.

I am in a position to say that Mrs. Portman's view seems in a measure justified. Awful as was her first experience of the marriage state, she did not lose heart until her second venture failed—and she is not a woman easily discouraged. You see that at the first glance, just as you know before she opens her lips that she is not an Englishwoman. She has kept the stump of the German peasant in her face, despite twenty years of London life and a liberal education in British husbands.

One doesn't know whether to attribute the astonishing behaviour of her lower jaw to the "Drang" of field-work

## The Portman Memoirs

in the Fatherland, or the "Sturm" of English "usban's." Certain am I, that no such jaw is "made in Germany," or any other country, without time or labour.

Mrs. Portman, *née* Wilhelmina Teltmartz, must have started out in life with the lower part of her facial anatomy somewhat underhung. Perhaps she came to attribute to this fact her failure to subdue and guide the men who crossed her path, and so set about remodeling her contour. At all events, she has acquired an amazing faculty for doggedly thrusting forward the lower jaw, with an effect of such dour ferocity, that people—especially men—seeing her for the first time, are shaken to their very souls.

One expects to hear them "presently proclaim their malefactions" like guilty creatures at the play.

For the rest, Mrs. "Portman" (as she calls herself) is very tall, very gaunt, with faded round blue eyes and no teeth. She speaks a fine blend of Cockney and platt Deutsch. At present she is a widow for the second time,

## Only Man is Vile

living with her seven young children in a single room in a Soho tenement.

Out of the "lutté pour la vie" she has brought three strong emotions—a horror of drink, a splendid devotion to her children, and an abiding scorn for men.

If you once accept the doctrine of masculine "total depravity" (and of course we all do now), you are rewarded by leaves out of Mrs. Portman's autobiography.

She begins with her freshest grievance; Mr. Portman (whose Christian name, if he had any, was never divulged) had departed this life only last year. His widow, however, affected no cheap regret at a consummation so devoutly to be wished.

"My secon' usban' was awful fur de drink! I went out an' earnt de money—'e come 'ome and took it away. Spend it part in public 'ouses, part on odder women. Ugh! de men! and she thrusts out her jaw with savage contempt.

A single gentleman of Mrs. Portman's acquaintance, in whom she took



## The Portman Memoirs

a motherly interest, confided to her his intention of engaging a Frenchwoman as cook.

"Don' yer do it, sir." She shook her head solemnly.

"Why not?"

"No, no. Don' yer git a French."

"Oh!"

"No, I wouldn't advise yer ter trust a French, sir. Dey're awful deceitful dem Frenches,"

"Not *all*, I hope."

"Dat's de way folks git took in. Dem Frenches is all de same. *I* know. My fader was one ob 'em."

"Oh indeed. Your father——"

"Yes, an' e wus de wicketest man I eber knew." (She had forgotten the two 'usban's for the moment.)

"Really, what did he do?"

She sticks out her jaw ferociously.

"*Doe?* Eberyting."

"Oh!"

"Yes—all kinds. Oh dem Frenches is awful! 'E used ter treat my moder—well dere! An' os poor little chil'en de same. 'E wus werry rich; 'is fader wus a general, an' 'e serve unner Na-

## Only Man is Vile

poleon. Dey all awful proud o' dat. My fader got all de money an' tings w'en de general died. My moder she 'ad money too. Ob we 'ad our rights, sir, we'd be ridin' 'bout in our carriage."

"Your father lost everything?"

"*Lost* it?—'e throwed it away on odder women. 'E was jes like my gran-fader, only 'e didn't serve unner Napoleon."

Turpitude amongst the men of this illustrious race was an old and deep-seated affair.

"My gran-fader—de general yer know—'e got tired ob 'is wife, an' 'e jis took 'er an tied 'er to 'is 'orse's tail. Yes, sir—an' 'e druve de 'orse up an' down de garden till de men come outer de stable an' jes took my gran'moder away from 'im—treatin' 'er like dat jes 'cause 'e 'd got tired! Well, *she* got tired too, so she took 'er littlest girl—an' she went away from my gran-fader an' 'e lef' all 'is money ter de odder women. Dat's w'y I'm so pore."

Still, though, the simple-minded bachelor couldn't see how Mrs. Portman's father—"de wicketest ob all dem

## The Portman Memoirs

Frenches"—got heaps of money from the illustrious general—besides "tings."

"Oh yes, sir. My fader was werry rich. 'E 'ad 'ouses an' lan's an' 'e live till 'e was eighty, an' e wus wicket up till 'e die. Yes, yes, 'e ill-treat my moder as long as 'e 'ad stren'ter move 'is 'ands. 'E sold de lan' little bit by little bit all trou' 'is life. And 'e drink, sir, an' 'e 'd go off wid odder women an' stay away fur mont's. Den 'e 'd come 'ome in rags ter my moder, an' she nebbber 'ad de sense not ter take 'im in. W'en we wus little, we used ter see 'im draggin' 'er all round de 'ouse—we 'ad a splendid grea' big 'ouse—we little child'en used ter see 'im draggin' 'er all roun'—*everywhere* by de 'air ob 'er 'ead. Oh it was a splendid 'ouse, sich grea' big rooms!"

She seemed not to realize that it may have appeared too extensive for "moder" under these conditions.

"An' it wus shameful, sir, de way 'e treat os child'n. W'en my oldest sister wus born 'e wus *dat* put out!"

"Oh, he did n't want a family?"

"Oh yes—least, if 'e didn't, 'e went

## Only Man is Vile

de wrong way 'bout it. My moder 'ad seventeen child'en. Yes, sir, one ebery eighteen mont's.

The blushing bachelor cast down his eyes contritely. But Mrs. Portman knew very well that this affectation of reticence and shrinking was but the Machiavellian cloak that hides the unvarying villainy of man. She was not the woman to spare his skin-deep sensibility.

"No, my fader was like all de men. Yer see 'e wanted most *drifal* to 'ave a boy so 's 'e could call 'im Napoleon. Dem Frenches tinks sich a lot o' Napoleon. An' my fader was dat proud dat 'is fader serve unner Napoleon,—'e didn't want noddin' but boys. Well, sir, w'en my eldest sister wus born, my fader wus dat put out—'e jest went away, and nobody knowed w'ere he wus for mont's. De same ting ober agin w'en I kem along. Oh, 'e treat my moder shockin'—*every time*—an' *she* couldn't 'elp dey wus all girls!"

"What! never a boy?"

"Oh, yes, dere kem a boy by'm-by. Oh, my moder neber gib up 'ope.

## The Portman Memoirs

She t'ought by'm-by Napoleon would ken."

"Well, did he?"

"Yes, sir, seberal times."

The bachelor sighed with grateful relief.

"But 'e always died."

The case was indeed desperate.

"My fader was so put out 'e got wicketer and wicketer. We girls done all de field-work, 'e jes set an' smoke an' drink all day, and in de evening e'd wake up like, an' drag moder 'bout de 'ouse.

"W'en I wus sixteen I 'ad a 'oliday. Me an' anodder girl an' two boys we went fur a walk. My fader 'e see os kemini 'ome outer de winder. It wusn't nine o'clock. 'E wus smokin' 'is pipe in 'is night-shirt. My moder wondered wot made 'im put on 'is trousers. But 'e did n't say noddin'.

"I come upstairs not t'inkin' I 'd did any'ting wrong—an' I 'adn't; dey wus all respectable people wot I 'd been walkin' wid. I ondress meself and I lay down in my bett. My fader 'e 'd got 'is trousers on, an' 'e went out ter

## Only Man is Vile

de stable. 'E got a 'orsew'ip an' 'e kem in. I 'eard 'im feelin' 'is way up de stairs—stumblin' like. I says ter myself, 'Fur Gawd's sake, wot's 'e up ter?' Pretty soon I knowed. 'E come in an' w'ipped me till I t'ink I die. But I didn't mek no noise. I jes lay dere waitin' till de time come to die. My moder 'd 'eard 'im stumblin' up de stairs, an' she come out ter see wot 'e wus up ter. W'en she see 'im wid de w'ip she come runnin' in an' try ter git atween us. Den I cry out, 'Don't ye come, moder; 'e can kill me ob 'e likes.'

"Den my fader 'e stop w'ippin' me dat minute, an' 'e stare at os. Den 'e turn roun' and went back ter finish 'is pipe, leavin' me all rore and all over wid blood. I says ter my moder, 'I t'ink I 'ad 'bout 'nough o' dis. Soon's I ken walk I t'ink I go! An' I did. I borry some money from a frien' an' I pack my t'ings. I 'ad two dresses,—one fur Sunday and one for ebery day. I 'ad two pair o' shoes—one nice, one 'ob-nailed. Ebery'ting I 'ad went inter a little French band-box dat belong ter

## The Portman Memoirs

my gran'fader wat serve unner Napoleon.

"Well, sir, I went to Köln. I 'ad a uncle at Köln. 'E took me in an' 'ad metaught 'ousework. Yer see I knowed noddin' but field-work, an' dat ain't any good ter ye in Köln. But I ken learn. I wus werry qveeck gettin' to know 'bout 'ousework. Den my uncle 'e found me a sitecwation. Eight poun' a year, an' I 'ad ter work! Dey wus kind ter me, but dey didn't gib me nough ter eat. I writ ter my moder. She writ back dat w'ateber I did, I wasn't ter hoonger; an' she send me a loaf o' bread. So after dat it wus better. My moder kep' sendin' me ebery now an' den a nice big loaf o' bread. Sometimes she 'ollowed out a little 'ole an' filled it wid butter. Sometimes she 'd put a shillin' in. So I got along some'ow. But w'en dat year wus up, I says, 'I tink I 'ad 'bout 'nough o' dis. Now I go.' Den dey want to gib me more money—two pound more—but I says, 'No, I tink I 'ad 'nough.' An' I pack up my gran'fader's band-box, an' I go back ter my uncle fur a wist and fur

## Only Man is Vile

ter git something ter eat. Den my uncle 'e got me a sitecwation in de Hotel du Nord. Dere wus thirty ob os girls. Dey gib us fourteen poun' a year an' plenty ter eat. It wus werry nice, ob only dey wus n't so strict. Dey didn't let os see nobuddy—nobuddy at all. Dere wus only os girls dere. Some of us 'tought it wus 'bout time we oughter be 'avin' some yoong men 'bout, an' see 'bout gittin' married. We wus a pack o' fools; but we didn't know dat. De 'ousekeeper didn't let os out, an' she did n't let no yoong men in—not eben ob we said dey wus brodders.

"So eight ob os girls we said we'd go ter Essen—w'ere dey make de Krupp guns, an' w'ere dere's a lot o' workmen, an' see ob we couldn't git married. De 'ousekeeper at de Hotel du Nord say we wus fools. We couldn't believe it. De 'ousekeeper say ter me, 'Ob yer stay 'ere yer kin git married.'

"But I 'd tried dat, so I say 'No, I go ter Essen.' An' eight ob us did.

"Oh yes, sir, some on 'em get married. I went ter a farmer's near Essen. Dey wuz English. Dey wuz my first



## The Portman Memoirs

'usband's folks. 'E' was only sixteen w'en I got dere—but 'e says, 'Ob I don't marry dat girl, I don't marry no girl at all.' I was twenty-four. De ol' folks told 'im 'e was to go ter de station an' meet me. 'E' said 'e wouldn't. 'E'd nebbeer seen me den. 'E didn't know w'at I'd be like. Den dey send de older brodder fur ter meet me. I didn't know it, but de yoong one (my firs' 'usban') wus stan'in' on de 'ill by de station wid 'is barrow watchin' ter see me come. I didn't see see 'im till I got ter de farm an' changed my clo'es. I put on a grey dress an' a wite apron. It wus summer, an' werry 'ot. My grey dress 'ad little short sleeves up ter yer, an' my arms wus showin'. Well, I come down stairs w'en I wus dressed an' I sit down. I shall nebbeer forgit it, sir,—I set like it wus 'ere by de winder. My first 'usband's moder she gib me a basket an' she say, 'Yer ken darn dem stocken's.' So I set dere in de winder seat and darn de stockens. Den my firs' 'usban' come in an' 'e set down like 'ere oppo'syte, an' 'e kep' lookin' an'

## Only Man is Vile

lookin'. I wus so shamed I didn't tuk my eyes off'n de stockens. 'E didn't say noddin'. 'E jest set there lookin' an' lookin'. I wondered wus it cause I 'ad on dat grey dress wid short sleeves, Part ob de time I wus awful glad dem sleeves wus so short, and part ob de time I wus awful sorry. After w'ile 'is moder say, 'Yer ain't 'avin' any'ting ter eat. Come ter de tabel' But I say, 'No, t'ank yer, I ain't hoongry.' An' I wus *awful* hoongry! But 'e wus lookin' at me, so I didn't feel as if I could git up and walk.

"Well, in t'ree year we wus married. Shall I tell you wot I foun' out afterwards? Well, sir, de 'ousekeeper ob de Hotel du Nord wus right. We wus all fools.

"I ain't complainin' 'cause Tom beat me. Not eben when 'e knock my teet' out, I ain't said werry mooch.

"But soon's my Willum wus born wid de 'air lip, Tom brings os ter Eng-land. We 'ad two rooms Islington way; an' a 'underd and fifty poun' in de bank. So we furnished dem rooms 'andsome. But Tom, 'e fell in wid



## The Portman Memoirs

Jimmy O'Brien, an' took ter bettin' on de wrong 'orse. Ob 'e 'ad n't 'ad a fight wid Jimmy at de Derby dat year, 'e would n't 'av' lef' me sich a lot o' nice furniture an' t'ings when 'e *did* die. Dat fight finished 'im 'fore 'e 'd had time ter sel' mooch.

"Dey brought 'im 'ome in a coster's cart, an' w'en I seen 'im all over wid blood and 'eard 'ow Jimmy O'Brien 'ad been 'ammerin' 'im, I says, 'Well, Tom, yer knows now 'ow I feel some-times.

"But dat wus w'ere I mek a mees-take. I ain't foun' out yit 'ow I feels w'en I 'm dyin', 'cause I allays gets well agin. Tom didn't. But dere! de men's like dat. Dey can't stan' t'ings like de women."

## My Seccon' 'Usban

"In bello non licet his errare."

De most on os women 'as ter put oop wid marryin' once. We all on os 'as ter 'ave our 'ixperience. But w'en we paid fur dat we ought settle down an' be t'ankful. De woman wot goes an' gets married agin—well dere I der ain't no 'elp fur 'er. I foun' it out too late.

My seccon' 'usban was a widder. 'E an' 'is son lodged wid me. Dat's 'ow I knowed 'im. 'E done everyt'ing 'e could t'ink of fur ter 'elp me, and 'e wus kin' ter my William and little Tom. Dat wus *fore* I married 'im. 'E wus a soldier,—'e 'd given it oop w'en I knowed 'im, but 'e 'ad been in de wars, an' dere's somet'ing 'bout soldiers—well dere! I s'pose I took after my gran'moder. She used ter say she could stan' a lot from a man wot serve unner Napoleon. My seccon' 'usban

## The Portman Memoirs

ain't done dat, but he 'ad a medal. 'E'd lost it, but everybody knowed 'e'd 'ad a medal.

'E was a good-lookin' feller, and we all t'ought 'e was so kin'. Humph I 'E used ter busy 'isself 'bout de 'ouse fur me, and carry all de t'ings wot was 'eavy. 'E got so 'e didn't nebbel like me ter go out by meself. Allays wanted to come wid.

'E was like dat fur nine monts. De neighbours all say, "Ob yer don't marry dat kin' good man, yer deserve ter be misabel all yer days. Jes' see 'ow 'e goes on 'bout yer!"

Well, at last I t'ink may be dey's right. I t'ink I try 'im.

So we git married.

Ob yer can beliebe me, it wasn't but two weeks from de weddin' day w'en one mornin' at breakfast 'e was nasty ter my Willum! 'E 'd been drinkin' pretty 'eavy, but I t'ought it was 'count o' gettin' married. I kep' t'inkin' now tomorrow 'e 'll settle down. Dat night before 'e 'd been drinkin' terrible—drinkin' till de daylight came, and at breakfast 'e treat my Willum shock-

## My Secon' 'Usban'

in'. Willum 'ad a 'air lip, and no roof ter his mout, an' 'e couldn't git along wid mooch eatin' in de mornin'.

Yer see w'en yer got no roof ter yer mout, all wot yer tries ter chew gits oop into yer nose, and den dere's trouble. So w'en my secon' 'usban' says ter Willum at breakfast, "W'y don' yer eat yer bread and drippin', 'stead of askin' fur more tea?" Willum say as 'ow 'e couldn't eat de bread an' drippin' and wanted 'is secon' coop o' tea. Den my secon' 'usban' leans 'isself over de table and 'e gibs my Willum such a knock wid 'is fist, as send de boy clean ober on ter my sewin' machine.

I was like wid. I gets oop and rooshes at my secon' 'usban', an' I pooshes 'im ober gin de mantel-piece, an' I says—

"Ye droonken eye-eena, wot yer doin' like dat ter my Willum fur?" An' 'e lif' oop 'is fist ter me. Den I goes under de table an' I gits de wooden stool and I lets it fly. It come wid sich a crack gin 'is skull I t'ought I broke 'im. 'E tummel down

## The Portman Memoirs

on de floor, and I leabe 'im dere. I go and lock de coopboard and de drawers, and I take all de money an' my two child'en, an' I goes out and lef' 'im dere snorin' an' groanin' on de floor. 'Is son Bobbie (wot didn't b'long ter me) set dere lookin' at 'im. Me an' my child'en went ter 'wisit a friend. I jes' tol' 'er wot dis kin' good man 'ad been oop ter, an' she say she couldn't believe it. But w'en she 'eard from 'is own son—from Bobbie—'ow it wus, den she beliebe it.

W'en 'is fader slep' de drink off 'e gets oop an' 'e says—

"Bobbie, w'ere 's yer moder?" Bobbie say I been gone away. Den my secon' 'usban 'e gets oop and goes ter fin' me. 'E wisits all de neighbours and I ain't dere. Den 'e goes ter 'is growed oop son and 'e says—

"W'ere 's yer moder?" Matt says "I dunno. Wot yer done wid 'er?" "I ain't done noddin'," says my secon' 'usban'.

"Yes yer 'ave," says Matt, "or else yer wouldn't come 'ere askin' 'bout ef'."

## My Secon' 'Usban'

"I t'ought she might 'a come to wisit yer," says 'is fader.

"She don' neber come wisitin' 'ere," says Matt: "an' wot yer lookin' like dat fur?"

"Like wot?" says 'is fader.

"I can see in yer face," says Matt, "yer been on de drink, an' yer been cuttin' up dem capers wot killed my moder."

"No, I ain't," says 'is fader, an' 'e goes away.

Den 'bout four o'clock in de afternoon 'e send Bobbie ter Mis' Brown—dat 's w'ere I wus—'e send 'im ter ask ob I wus dere.

Mis' Brown say wot fur should I be dere, an' I set be'ind de door wid Wilum an' Tom an' listen.

"Wot 's 'appened?" says Mis' Brown.

"Fader went fur Wilum," says Bobbie, "an' moder poosh 'im gin de fire-place. Den fader lif' oop 'is fist ter 'it moder, and moder she gth it to 'im ober 'is 'ead wid de stool. Fader 's been lyin' down since dat, but now 'e 'd like 'is tea."

"Yer better go 'ome," says Mis'

## The Portman Memoirs

Brown: "yer moder's sure ter come back in time ter get yer tea."

Den Mis' Brown shut de door and beg me ter go back.

"Yer must n't go an' run away from yer 'usban' at de fust little tiff," says she. So I goes back. I gib 'im 'is tea, but I says, "Now look 'ere. I ain't lingit wot yer done ter William, an' I ain't goin' ter. I wish ter Gawd I ain't been sich a fool as ter marry yer. An' I tell yer dis. Ob yer lay yer finger on me or my children after dis, *I kill yer*. Dat's straight. I gib yer yer tea, I gib yer yer breakfast, an' I gib yer yer dinner, an' dat's all. I done wid 'usban's."

But dere I wot's the use o' talkin'? We ain't no match fur de men. I kep' on workin' up almost ter de day de children wus born, an' 'e kep' on spendin' de money wot I can't fur drink. 'Ow 'e kep' 'isself so strict all dem nine mont's fore I marry 'im, I don't know. But dere! de men's like dat!

I used ter go an' fetch 'm outer de public 'ouse regguller. One day jes' as

## My Secon' 'Usban'

I wus goin' fur 'im, I 'eard de doctor at de door—"e wus comin' ter see de Eycetilians on de top floor wid measles). I 'eard de doctor sayin' ter de landlady—

"Oos dis lyin' be'ind de door?"

I says ter meeself, dat 'll be my secon' 'usban'! So I 'urries oop stairs.

"No, it's Mrs' Gallagher," says de lan'lady w'en she see me comin'; "I been ter tell 'er 'usban' ter come an' carry 'er in."

"Well, dat's right," says de doctor, "she oughten't ter be let' be'ind de door."

Mr. Gallagher, 'e wus comin' down by den; 'e lif' 'er oop and took 'er away. I stand dere a minute lookin' after dem Gallaghers, t'inkin' 'bout—well, jest t'inkin'—w'en I 'ears my secon' 'usban' comin' long de street singin'—  
So I wats.

"E come in swingin' 'isself an' w'en 'e gets inter de passage, 'e look oop ter de hangin' lamp an' 'e begins ter swear. Wit' dat 'e lif' oop 'is arm an' 'e gib that 'angin' lamp sich a bang

## The Portman Memoirs

wid the flat o' 'is 'and dat it went smash agin de wall, an' all de wite shade an' chimley an' eberythin' wus broke in little pieces. Wit dat 'e wus so s'prized 'e tunnel down an' lay dere groainin' an' cursin'. Ebery one in de 'ouse—ebery one but Mr. Gallagher and de Eyetalians wid de measles,—dey all come an' lean ober de stairs. I try ter mek 'im git oop. I talk an' talk, but dere! it ain't no use talkin' ter de men! So I jest lif' 'im oop in my arms, an' carry 'im downstairs, an' throw 'im on de bett, an' lef' 'im. 'E'd been a night watchman, w'en I married 'im, but 'e los' da' t'rough de drink, an' 'e couldn't neber fin' noddin' else. So I jes' s'ported 'im. Sometimes w'en we 'adn't nough money ter buy t'ings fur de child'en ter eat, I'd mek it 'ot fur 'im.

"W'y don' yer get some work? Odder men fin's work."

"I been tryin'," 'e'd say.

Den w'en I'd let 'im 'av a bit o' my tongue, 'e'd go out an' roosh about de streets fur hours an' hours.

W'en 'e'd come back, I'd look at 'is

## My Seccon' 'Ushan'

boots, an' I'd say, "Fur Gawd's sake, wot yer been oop ter?"

"Lookin' fur work."

Den I'd say, "Yes, Willum seen yer rooshin' 'bout Covent Garden, but 'e didn't see yer askin fur no work."

"I been lookin' 'bout fur sometin'," 'e'd say.

"Yes," says I, "I know 'ow yer does dat. Yer starts a runnin' and a galloppin' t'rough de streets, 'spectin' folks 'll take 'old ob yer w'ile yer rooshin' by an' say, 'Please Mr. Portman, can yer spare de time ter stop dat galloppin' a minute an' do dis job?' Dat ain't de way folks git work. It's de way de wear out dere shoe ledder. Yer see, 'e'd been a soldier—sixteen years in de service, an' 'e wasn't good fur anytin' else. Dat's de way wid soldiers."

"I foun' 'im work ebery now and den, but I couldn't find 'im a war. It seemed like noddin' else would do fur 'im."

"Yer don't want ter see me disgrace meself, do yer?" 'e'd say. "Yer fur-git I been in 'er Majestie's service," den 'e'd 'old oop 'is 'cad an' blow out



## The Portman Memoirs

"is chest, and go an' treat de women in de public 'ouse. I used ter grt wild wid sich goin's on. I'd go ober an' ketch 'im setting in de "Elephant." I'd stan' in de door and say—

"Fur Gawd's sake, wot yer oop ter?"

De way 'e'd look at me yer'd tink 'e nebber sec me fore dat minute. "Oos money yer treaten dese women wid?" I'd say. Den 'e'd get red in de face, an' all de people 'ud laugh.

"I ain't goin' ter put oop wid sich goin's on," I'd say. "Yer furgit I ain't like dese pore misabel English women, wot don't know no better. I got a drop o' French blood in me."

Den dey'd speak werry sassy, and I'd tell 'em wot I tink about dem. "Come 'ome, Wilhelmina, come 'ome," my secon' 'usban' 'ud say. But I stan' dere an' tell 'im wot I tink ob 'im, an' ow 'e wus allays sassier fore dem odder women. "I ain't goin' ter put oop wid it," I'd say. "I tol' yer 'fore I married yer dat my gran'fader serve unner Napoleon."

"My heve!" 'e'd say, lookin' at Mis' Macshane, and dey all laugh.

## My Secon' 'Ushan'

"Yer don't beliebe it?" I'd say.

"Wot yer got ter show fur it?" 'e'd say sassier dan ebber.

"I ain't got noddin' but a band-box."

I says, "an' two fists. Yer been introduced ter bo't ob 'em. But ob yer furgotten or don't beliebe me——"

"I beliebe it right enough," says 'e, quieter, "an' I ain't furgot noddin'. But, 'e'd say, drawin' 'isself' oop and lookin' like a toorkey, "yer mustn't furgit I been a soldier meself."

"Awe yer?" I say.

"Yer don't beliebe it?"

"I ain't seen noddin ter muck me tink so."

"Yer seen my papers," 'e'd say, lookin' roun' at Mis' Macshane an' dere rest. "Yer all seen my papers."

"I don't gib no 'count ter papers," says I; "'ow does we know dey means wot dey says."

"Well, Wilhelmina, yer know dey gib me a medal," says 'e.

"Wot fur, fur Gawd's sake?" says I.

"W'y, fur bein' so brave," says 'e.

"Den, I say, "dere *mus'* a been some mistake,"

## The Portman Memoirs

"No, dere ain't," 'e'd say werry loud.

"Now ob dey gib medals fur drinkin' I could beliebe it," says I.

Den Mis' Macshane 'ud laugh and my secon' 'usban' 'ud begin ter swear.

"Come and ask Matt," 'e'd say, and we'd get along 'ome. Matt used ter come in ter tea den; 'e wus workin' near os. 'E'd allays say as 'ow 'e ain't furgotten 'is dad's medal, an' 'e remembred w'en 'e brought it 'ome.

"W'ere is it?" I'd say.

"W'y you allays ask me dat?" my secon' 'usban' 'ud say; "yer know I lost it."

"Oh!" I say, "*yer lost it*. Yes, I been noticin' yer ain't wearin' it since I knowed yer." Den 'e'd git soolkey an' wouldn't ave no tea. But 'e 'ad been a soldier, an' I knowed it, 'an 'e 'ad done sometin', or else der wus a mees-take; any'ow 'e wus to 'ave a pension besides de medal wot got lost. Dey ain't pay dat pension fur t'ree yer. Den dey pay it allgedder. It wus fifty poun'.

No, 'e didn't gib me none ob it.

## My Secon' 'Usban'

De first'ting wot 'e did wus ter git 'isself made a new medal, an' 'e went 'bout wid it pinned on ter 'is body.

Nebber shall furgit dat firs' day w'en 'e come 'ome wid it. 'E' walked inter de room wid 'is chest first, and all de res' ob 'is body follerin' on be'ind.

"I tink dat 's better nor an ole band-box," says 'e, walkin' oop an' down, "an' it ain't from my gran'fader, I been an' git it in de battle wot I fought fur meself."

"Yes," says I, "dat 's w'ere I gits most o' my'tings."

Den 'e went out an' drink an' treat de women ober ter de public 'ouse. Mis' Macshane t'ought 'e wus sometin' w'en 'e come in wid 'is chest blowed out wearin' dat medal.

No, 'e didn't gib me none ob 'is pension money.

'E mek a great looss 'cause 'e bought a secon' 'and bedstead wid some ob it. But dat wus 'cause de childen wus gitten so big dey could kick 'im in de night. So 'e bought 'em a bedstead ter derselves. An dat wus all 'e eber bought fur any ob os as long as 'e

## The Portman Memoirs

fibbed. I don't count de big lookin'-glass.

"No!" I says ter 'im, "yer needn't tink I'm goin' ter tank yer fur dat. No; not w'en we all needs shoes and somethin' ter put in our stomicks, I knowed w'y yer got dat glass. So's yer could stan in front ob it an' see 'ow yer look wid yer chest out and dat medd on. I seen yer standin' dere an' blowin' yerself out like a tootkey. Don' tell me yer got dat glass fur os, 'cause yer lyin'."

No, no! I wouldn't advise no one ter git married more 'n once. As I been say'n, once is in de way o' nature, an' yer got ter take yer share o' de troubles o' dis worl'; but ob yer goes an' does it *agin*—well, dere!

Yer allays lookin' back an' sayin', "Tom neber done dat," an' by an' by yer furgit Tom wusn't no serryphim needer. It's allays like dat—and it's bad fur secon' 'usbans.

Yer see yer don't tink ter say, "Dat's werry good wot yer done w'en Mina 'ad de carache. Tom ain't neb-

## My Secon' 'Usban'

ber walk de floor wid Mina all night." Yer see der wusn't no Mina w'en Tom wus 'live, an' yer furgit 'ow 'e 'd curse an' swear ob 'e wus waked out of 'is sleep. W'en I 'd go fur my secon' 'usbans, 'e 'd say—

"Oh yes, fling Tom in me face. Dat's right. Tom ain't neber done noddin' wrong. It's only me as does t'ings wrong. Den 'e 'd swear 'orrible an' say, "I wish ter Gawd yer 'd furgit Tom fur a spell."

"Is it a man like you wot 'ud mek me furgit Tom?" I 'd say. "No, I neber will! an' I 'l talk 'bout 'im jes as mooch as I likes, an' ob yer dat wicket yer don't like ter 'ear 'bout a good man, yer ken go an' git yer dinner somew'ere else. Course I talk 'bout Tom. Wot else 'ave I got ter talk about 'except de way yer drinks an' goes on wid 'Mis' Mac-shane." I used ter ketch 'im takin' down de photograph of Tom wot I 'd ober our bett an' t'rowin' it away. Den I 'd go fur 'im, and git it back an' 'ang it oop agin.

"E often used ter t'row dat photograph away—unnerneat' de bed, in de

## The Portman Memoirs

coal-box—anyw'ere. Den I'd go fur 'im an' 'e 'd say as 'ow 'e wus sorry an' all dat; but I seed 'e wusn't sorry no more nor noddin'.

Once while I wus gitten dinner I say somet'ing 'e didn't like, an' 'e t'row that photograb in de fryin' pan. I got it out and wipe it dry. But it look shockin'. So I 'ad ter wash it an' iron it. I tink I 'ad 'bout 'nough by den, so I nails Tom on ter der wall—made 'im a solid frane o' nails, so 's my secon' 'usban' couldn't neber git 'im down. But ob yer can beliebe me, 'e 'd set dere an' look at dat pore little spotty picture wid murder in 'is heye.

One day we wus talkin' 'bout it—quiet and jes' settin' still, an' my secon' 'usban' say as 'ow 'e wouldn't mind de picture o' Tom ob I 'ad one ob 'im too 'angin' ober de bett. So I says—

"Werry well, we 'll git one, an' 'ave a litle peace."

"Yes," says 'e, gittin' oop an' walkin' 'bout like a toorkey, "we 'll 'av a picture o' me an' a picture o' you, and a picture o' dem blessed childen."

## My Secon' 'Usban'

"'Ow we going' ter do dat?" says I. "Av' yer got anoder pension?"

"No," says 'e, stoppin' sideways 'fore de glass an' 'ollerin' out 'is back.

"Do yer want ter sell dat glass?" I seen 'ow awful sorry 'e look by dat, an' I says, "P'raps yer 'd radder sell de medal."

"Wot yer t'inkin' 'bout?" says 'e. "W'y, would I 'ave me picture took ob I 'adn't got no medal?"

"Tom did," says I.

"Yes," ses 'e, "*an jes look at 'im!*"

Dat way 'e wrinkle oop 'is nose at Tom mek me wild.

"Git outer dis," I says; "ob yer don't, I 'll set *you* in de fryin'-pan an' see 'ow yer looks afterwards," and I druv 'im outer de 'ouse. But dere! de men allays gits de best ob us women. My secon' 'usban' talked me inter meetin' 'im at de photograbber's wid de child'en. But ob yer can beliebe me, 'e didn't want ter av Tom's boys in dat photograb. 'E kep' sayin', "No, Wilhelm!na, jest *os* dis time. We 'ad 'nough o' 'Tom."

"Dis is only de child'en," says I.

## The Portman Memoirs

"Same t'ing," says 'e.

"Come 'ere," I says ter Tom's Willum an' little Tom, "yer can set in de corner ob de picture."

"Den I won't come inter de grupp," says my secon' 'usban, "ob yer 'as Tom's child'en in."

"Den stay out," says I.

I knowed 'e 'd stay outer de grupp. But I wus werry angry w'en I 'eard 'im talkin' ter de photographer 'bout pictures wid 'air lips in de corner." De photographer wus a friend o' my 'secon' 'usban, and dey goes inter a little dark coopboard an' talks 'bout de picture. I notice dey comes out smilin'.

"You jes' set dere in de corner," I says ter Willum, "an' don' yer move. An' Tommy can be 'ere in de front."

"No," says de photographer, "Tommy 'll 'ide de baby ob 'e stan's dere. You come 'ere 'e says, and 'e sits 'im in de corner by 'is brodder."

"Deys too fur off," says I; "it looks ob I ain't carin' 'bout 'em."

"Oh no," says the photographer, "yer moons't be all tied oop in a knot. Dey looks beautiful ober dere by dat

## My Secon' 'Usban'

palm." Den 'e goes an' looks at os t'rough de machine.

"Now, Mister Por-rtman," says 'e, "you 'stan' in de middle. Meka little room, child'en, an' 'e clear away some space, an' 'e 'old oop all our 'eads wid dem tongs."

"Yer needn't open yer mout's," says de photographer.

"Can't git it out o' my 'ead dat I 'm goin' ter 'ave a toot' drawed out," says I, but we shuts our mout's, and de picture 's took.

Ob yer can beliebe me, dem child'en in de corner ain't dere!

"W'ere 's Tom's boys?" says I, w'en I se'ed it.

"Dey moved," says my secon' 'usban, "moved clean outside de frame."

But 'e ain't moved! Der 'e wus standin' 'igh ober de res' of us, like Gawd A'mighty, wid 'is chest blowed out an' 'is 'ead oop.

"De medal's keen out werry well," says 'e, an' 'e looks sassy over ter Tom's pictur.

"Yes," says I, lookin' at de grupp, "but wot made yer roll yer eyes oop



## The Portman Memoirs

like dat fur? Anybody 'd t'ink yer seen a bottle o' beer flyin' 'bout in de air."

I allays says ter de women, "Don' yer nebbber troost no man. De best on 'em is made deceitful; dey can't 'elp deceselves. An' w'en it comes ter secon' 'usbans'—well dere! Wot can yer 'spect. Dey knows dey ain't de fust, and dey t'ink "wot's de use!"

I allays knowed 'e wus decevin' me, but I couldn't nebbber prove it till after my Jack wus born. Jack wus de fift' child wot I 'ad wid my secon' 'usban'.

Well, I 'd jes got meself oop an' gone back ter me work. By den I 'ad a s'itecation wid a lady down ter Twickenham, doin' cookin' fur a time. She wus werry good ter me, but I didn't like bein' dere, cause I 'ad ter leabe all dem child'en—two I 'ad from Tom an' five from my secon' 'usban'. I 'ad ter be away from 'ome fur weeks at a time. So de lady, w'en she see I wus frettin' fur de baby, she say, "Mis' Por-rtman, yer can go 'ome dis Friday mornin' an' stay' till Monday, cause my 'usban's goin' ter Paris, an' I don' need yer." So by dat I goes 'ome.

## My Secon' 'Usban'

I git back 'bout twel' o'clock, an' I foun' Tom's child'en, William an' little Tom, gone ter school like dey oughter, an' all de odders in de back-room. (We 'ad two rooms den.) All dem little child'en in de back-room by deirsels. De baby in de cradle, an' de nex' one sittin' in de badth-toob by de fire nursin' 'er doll, so 's she couldn't git out and 'urt 'erself.

"Were 's yer fader?" says I.

"E's in dere," says de ones wot could talk. An' Tina says—

"Ol' Mis' Beazley" (dat wus de lan'lady), "ol' Mis' Beazley's been inter see ob we gittin' on all right."

Den I goes inter de nex' room, an' I finds my secon' 'usban' asleap in 'is bed by twel' o'clock in de day wid 'is boots on. I see 'e wus droonk, so I kem out an' shut de door. I says ter de child'en—

"Don' tell yer fader I been 'ome. I 'll be back ter git yer dinner."

Wid dat I goes out ter buy t'ings, fur I seen dere ain't nodin' to eat. W'en I come 'ome, I stops a minute ter speak wid Mis' Beazley, de lan'lady, an' t'ank 'er fur seein' ter de child'en. She

## The Portman Memoirs

wus ole an' lame, an' a weerry good woman.

W'ile we we wus talkin' dere comes a knock ter de door.

"Dere's somebuddy dere," says I.

"Is dere?" says Mis' Beazley. "Now yer 'ere, yer ken go an' see oo it is fur me."

So I goes, an' I sees a woman wid a big yallar 'at.

She look at me an' she say—

"Mr. Por-r-tman."

"Wot about him?" says I.

"I wants ter see Mr. Por-r-tman," says she.

"Wot fur?" says I.

"Dat's my business," says she, gittin' red unneath de yaller 'at.

By den I 'eard a scramblin' downstairs.

"It's my business, too," says I. "I'm Mis' Por-r-tman."

Den de door open down in de basement, an' dere stan' my secon' 'usban mekin' 'er a sign. But I leans ober de railin' an' I sees 'im. So I says—

"Wot yer oop ter?"

An' e says, sleepy like, but scared

## My Secon' 'Usban'

an' stotterin', "Oh, dis young woman come ter see 'bout a sittcewation."

I looks at de yaller 'at, an' I says, "Do she t'ink *you* got a sittcewation fur 'er?"

"She come from de Rigistry office—

ain't yer?" 'e says.

"Yes," says she, "I come 'bout 'ouse work."

"I does all de 'ousework by Mr. Por-r-tman meeself," says I, "I don' need yer 'elp."

"Oh," says 'e, lookin' up t'rough de railin's, "it's fur a lady wot called 'ere."

"Yer 'avin' a great many ladies callin' 'ere w'ile I'm down ter Twickenham,"

says I.

"She come fur you," says 'e, gittin' ixited, "an' dis young girl 'as been sent fur instid o' you."

"Dat's wot I t'ought," says I, lookin' at 'er, "but yer needn't come 'ere no more wid yer yaller 'at instid o' me."

Den my secon' 'usban mek a great show o' gibbin' 'er de address ob de lady wot want de 'ousework, an' den she take 'er yaller 'at off down de street, an' my secon' 'usban go in an'

## The Portman Memoirs

shut de basement door. By den I was ragin'!

I rooshes back ter Mrs' Beazley, an' I says, "Wot yer tink? Do any women wid yaller 'ats come 'ere w'ile I'm killin' meeself wid de work down by Twickenham."

"I don' know," says she.

"Now tell de trut', Mrs' Beazley. Ain't yer nebber seen no yaller 'ats about?"

"Fore Gawd," says she, "I ain't."

"Well," says I, "yer 'alf blind. I musn't furgit dat. Ain't yer nebber met no yaller 'ats in de 'all?"

"Nebber," says she.

"Yer so ole an' lame, yer don't go 'bout mooch," say I, "I musn't furgit dat."

Den I says, "Do ye ebber 'ear any-buddy goin' down in de basement way, late by de night?"

"No, nebber," says Mrs' Beazley.

I was werry angry by dat, 'cause she'd ougter been my friend. So I says, "Mrs' Beazley yer gittin' deerfer an' deerfer." An' I goes downstairs.

Dere was my secon' 'usban' goin' on

## My Secon' 'Usban'

like as ob 'e been takin' sich good care o' dem child'en all de time.

By den I was ragin'!

"I can't ask dese pore little t'ings wot can't 'ardly talk 'bout yer goin's on, but jes' wait till Tom's boy comes 'ome from school."

'E say, 'fore Gawd dere wasn't noddin' wrong, an' 'ow dis lady came in 'er carriage ter git me ter go an' do 'ousework fur 'er, an' 'ow it wus knowed by de Registry Office dat she gib 'im 'er address."

"Wot fur would a lady wid 'er carriage gib you 'er address?" says I.

"'Couse she t'ought you might kem 'ome unexpected."

"Dat wus werry clever o' dat lady," says I, "but I tink yer lyin'."

Den Tom's boys comes runnin' in.

"See 'ere," says I, "w'ere did I tell yer ter sleep w'en I went ter Twickenham?"

"All on os wid fader."

"Den wot's dis bed and de cradle doin' in 'ere?"

"Fader brin' 'em in."

"Yes, I 'ad sich a 'eadache," says

## The Portnan Memoirs

my secon' 'usban', "an' dey meks sich a noise."

"Ow long yer 'ad dat 'cadache?" says I.

"E did n't answer.

Den I says ter my 'l'le Willum, "Ow long yer been sleepin' in 'ere by yerselves?"

"Eber since you went away," 'e says.

"Do anybody come 'ere ter see yer fader w'ile I'm away?"

"Oh yes," says Willum.

"Oo?" says I.

"Brudder Matt," says Willum.

"Dere!" my secon' 'usban' says.

"Wait a minute," says I. I goes ober an' looks at de door. We 'ad n't nebbber 'ad noddin' but a latch ter dat door, an' dere lookin' me in de face wus a shiny new bolt.

"Wot's dat?" says I.

Den my secon' 'usban' 'e look queer.

"Wot's dat?" I says.

"Dat," says 'e, tryin' ter speak cheerful, "w'y, dat's a new kind o' fastenin' I t'ought yer might like. It's a s'prise fur ye."

## My Secon' 'Usban'

Den I tink it's 'bout time ter gib 'im a s'prise. So I did.

W'en I git my bre't agin I says ter my Willum—

"Do yer fader lock 'isself in wid dis new s'prise?"

"I tink so," says Willum.

"An' I spose yer 'ear talkin' an' soun's in der?" says I.

"No," says Willum.

"Dere!" says my secon' 'usban'.

"E sends os ter bett by six o'clock," says little Tom.

"Do 'e?" says I.

"Yes," dey all says, "by six o'clock.

an' hoongry, awful hoongry!"

"Wot yer done wid de money I been an' earnt an' gib yer fur de child'en?" says I.

"E didn't say noddin'.

"E buys mustard," says little Tom.

"Mustard?" says I, "fur plasters?"

"No, fur 'is meat," says Tom.

"Yes," says Willum, "w'en 'e opens de door in de mornin' an' lets os in, dere's empty beer bottles an' glasses standin' 'bout, an' cheese an' meat lef' on de plates."

## The Portman Memoirs

" . . . wid mustard on," says little Tom.

"Ow many beer bottles?" says I.

"Four or five," says Willum.

"Ow many plates?" says I.

"Two," dey bot' says.

"Ow many glasses?"

"Two."

"Allays two?" says I.

"Allays," dey all says tergedder,

Only my secon' 'usban' 'e don't say noddin'.

By den I wus ragin'! De chiiden see 'ow wild I wus, an' dey git away inter de far corner—all but de two wot couldn't walk.

"Fur Gawd's sake!" says I, "is dis wot yer oop ter? Gibbin' suppers ter yaller 'ats wid my eannin's and starvin' de child'en!" Den I gib 'im anodder s'prise, an' w'en I gits my bre't, I tells 'im wot I tink o' de men.

"Ow yer ken bear ter look at dem pore little t'ings I don' know. Don't it mek yer 'shamed ter see dat angel in de badh-loob an' 'ear 'ow she's yellin' fur de bread wot yer been an' trowed away on a yaller 'at! But

## My Secon' 'Usban'

dere I yer a man," says I. "Ow should yer 'ave feelings?"

Den I kerry de child'en's bett back inter de odder room, an' de cradle too.

"Now," says I, "you move 'em out agin ob yer dare."

'E kep' a sayin' as 'ow 'e didn't 'ave no use fur yaller 'ats—but I knowed better.

Ob yer can beliebe me, w'en I went back ter my work I couldn't tink 'bout noddin' else. I couldn't eat an' I couldn't sleep, an' w'erebber I look dere wus a yaller 'at. De lady I wus doin' cookin' fur come ter me an' say—

"Yer ain't like de same woman. Wot's 'appened?" says she. "W'en yer come back o' Monday yer look like yer seen a ghost."

"No," I says, "I ain't seen noddin' but a yaller 'at."

"A yaller 'at?" says she.

"Yes," says I, "dat's wot's de matter wid me."

She didn't say noddin' more. I seen she t'ought I wus goin' out o' my mind.

Well, after dat I knowed it wusn't



## The Portman Memoirs

no use. My secon' 'usbun' used ter be 'opin' I 'd ook in. "E 'd 'ave liked it werry well ob I taken all dem child'en an' run away. But I say to 'im, "Don' neber tink I goin' ter leave *you* all dis furniture wot 'om earnt an' lett me. Yer ain't neber goin' ter git a stitch ob it. An' I ain't goin' away ter leabe 'you an' de yaller 'at ter play yer games 'ere wid 'om's t'ings. Ob yer don' be 'ave yerself yer 'll git de stool on yer 'ead—but dat's all I 'll ebber waste on yer."

I got ter 'ate 'im so I wonder I didn't kill 'im. I used ter say, "Ob yer dare to lay a finger on me or my child'en, I 'll pin ye on ter de wall wid de carbin' knife clean t'rough yer—sure 's my name's *Wilhelmina*." An' I 'd a done it!

But dere I 'e neber gib me de chance. 'E 'adn't spirit 'nough fur dat. I used ter sit an' tink 'ow I 'd do fur 'im till I was sorry, *awful* sorry 'e didn't 'it some ob os so 's I could 'a killed 'im. I used ter 'ave times o' feelin' 'orrible wild—but I allays gib 'im a warnin'.

"Don' yer furgit I got a drop 'o

## My Secon' 'Usban'

French blood in me," I 'd say ter 'im. "It ain't for noddin' wen yer gran'-fader serve unner Napoleon, an' ob yer dare ter lift oop yer dirty 'and agin me or de child'en——" Den 'e 'd pin 'is medal on 'isself an' go out fur a walk.

'Fore 'e died, I git 'im dat frighten 'e used ter run away fast as 'e could ob 'e see me comin'. An' 'e call 'isself a soldier! It ain't dat kin' wot serve unner Napoleon. W'y, ob I be 'ave like dat ter 'om 'e 'd a beat me to a jelly. But dere! like I been sayin', wot can yer ixpect o' secon' 'usbans'?

## A Temperance Story

Yer need n't neber sen' me no wine; not ob I'm dyin'. No, an' yer need n't tink needer, 'cause I'm a German, dat I wants beer. De doctor said I 'ad ter 'ave somethin'? Dat new doctor's a fool.

W'iskey? Br—r—r—! Ow de people in dis country can put all dat 'orrid stooof inter der inside, *I* don' know. I seen a lot o' drinkin' in my time, wid my two 'usban's—dey wus bot' on 'em *English*, yer know. M—m—I can smell dat w'iskey now. De way dey pour it down rore, an' neber blink—an' den de way dey smell—well dere!

I allays cross de street ob I see a public 'ouse comin'—jes' passin' de door meks me seek.

I oughter 've got used to it?

Yes, but I ain't t'inkin only 'o my 'usban's. I took care ob a lady once. She 'd been a dressmaker. W'en I

## The Portman Memoirs

knowed 'er she wus a drunkard. Yes, sometin' awfull! She came werry well recommended too—by Miss Macdoof. Yer don' know Miss Macdoof? Well, she teach de Bible class an' she 's awful pertickler. But she come ter our lan'lady an' recommen' Miss Glispie so 's she could git a room in de same 'ouse as me an' my secon' 'usban'. Miss Glispie wusn't yoong any more, but she wusn't old needer.

Yes, so I *did* took care ob 'er—after w'ile. You jes' wait till I come ter dat. She was jes' a lodger at first, like all de res'. She 'ad de room nex' ter my secon' 'usban' an' me. She b'long ter de Sunday school; an' Miss Macdoof, spite o' being so strict an' teachin' in de Bible class, she gib' er a good character an' kep' lendin' er books. Yer see dis Miss Glispie 'ad money in de Birkbeck Bank, 'an furniture. Yer nebbor see sich furniture, all carbed—an' a piana an' a lot o' splendid 'orse 'air chairs! But dat werry fust week she wus drunk de whole time. So drunk she couldn't say "good mornin'" w'en yer passed 'er door—an' w'en yer come 'ome at

## A Temperance Story

night yer could 'ear 'er tummellin' ober dem 'orse 'air shairs.

Wid all dat money in de Birkbeck Bank, ye see, she 'd gib up 'er dress-makin' an' took ter drinkin'. Yes, makin' an' readin' dem Romances wot drinkin' an' readin' dem Romances wot Miss Macdoof gib 'er. Dem books done er o' lot o' 'arm. Dey 'd stooft 'er 'ead so full wid all dose foolishness, she didn't 'av no more sense left. Dey got 'er so she wus jes' dyin' fur a man. All she went ter de Bible class about, wus jes' ter git more o' dem Romances outter Miss Macdoof, an' ter sit dere an' look at de curate. She wus awful in love wid dat curate. Den she got tired after w'ile cause 'e nebbor said noddin' to 'er, 'xcept 'ow her soul wus. So she got acquainted wid a booss-conductor, a reel roof, awful-lookin' feller. One day 'e come ter see 'er. 'E look roun', an' 'e see all dis furniture, an' de piana, an' de 'orse 'air chairs, an' 'e jes' made up 'is mind 'e 'd got on a bit o' luck. Pretty soon 'e 'eard 'bout de money in de Birkbeck Bank—den 'e wus *sure*. So 'e jes' made a fool ob 'er. 'E use ter 'ang round all de time. 'Oo took care

## The Portman Memoirs

o' dat booss, *I* don't know. 'E didn't. Ye see, Miss Glispie wus awful glad she'd got a man at last. No nonsense about 'er soul dis time. So she use ter gib 'im money, an' 'e didn't mind 'ow much drink she'd send 'im fur, 'e allays went an' brought it—an' forgot 'bout de change.

Well, dey carried on shockin'. Miss Glispie didn't go much ter der Bible class 'bout dat time. She got awful fond ob dis 'Arry Witte—'e like de money an' de drink. I know'd 'e didn't care 'bout 'er.

Well, one night I 'eard 'er cryin'—oh cryin' bitterlich. I says to mysecon' 'usban', "'I'll jes' go an' see wot ails Miss Glispie.'" So I gits oop, an' I goes to 'er door, an' I see all de 'orse 'air chairs stan'in' roun' like dey oughtened to. Den I knowed someting was de matter. I goes into de room, an' dere wus Miss Glispie lyin' on de floor by de fire. Den I stan' dere like dis, an' I says, "'Fur Gawd's sake, Miss Glispie, wot yer been up ter?'" She say, "'Noddin' at all, Miss Por-r-tman.'"—an' I kep' a cryin'. W'en I 'd picked 'er

## A Temperance Story

oop, I foun' she'd 'it 'er 'ead on de fender, an' de blood was runnin' 'bout. But it wasn't no use liftin' 'er oop. She wus so drunk she couldn't stan'. So she jes' trew 'erself down on de bed, blood an' boots an' all.

"Well," says I, "'I don't know mooch about ye, Miss Glispie, but I *think* yer 'ad too mooch ter drink."

"No, I ain't," she says, "'yer can ask Miss Macdoof!'"

"Wot's Miss Macdoof got ter do wid it? It's 'Arry Witte wot's been 'ere wid ye."

"You don't unnerstan'," says Miss Glispie, "'ask Miss Macdoof. *She* knows 'ow ladies gits faintin' firs some-times."

"Yer got dat outer dem Romances," says I, an' wid that I goes back ter bed. Well, I ain't been abed werry long w'en der came a knock to de door.

"Oo 'is dat?" says my secon' 'usban'. "It's me," says Miss Glispie. "'I want ter speak ter Mis' Por-r-tman.'" So I gets oop an' goes to de door, an' dere wus Miss Glispie wid a towel roun' 'er 'ead.



## The Portman Memoirs

"Wot is it?" says I.

"Ere's a letter," says she.

"Oo to?" says I.

"Ter Mis' Macdoof," says she, "bout some books. I mus' ha' some more books. I read all dem she sen' me an' I mus' ha' some more."

"Wot yer want o' Romances dis time o' night?" says I.

"Oh," says she, "Mis' Macdoof unnerstan's. She knows I can't git 'long out'n I 'ave a book perickiller w'en I feels bad. Please, Mis' Por-r-t-man, sen' yer little Jack wid dis letter. Mis' Macdoof 'll unnerstan'."

"Woman," says I, "'d ye know wot time it is?"

"No," says she.

"It's twel' o'clock," says I. "Mis' Macdoof ain't got no books fur yer dis time o' night. You go back ter yer bed."

"Oh," says she, "Mis' Por-r-tman, yer don't know wot it is ter go ter bed out'n even a book."

"No," says I, "I *don't*, Mis' Glis-pie, but I don't see 'ow I can 'elp ye dis time o' night."

## A Temperance Story

Den my secon' 'usban' 'e begin ter laugh.

"Ye might sen' Jack wid de letter," she says. "I don't feel able ter go myself."

"No," says I, "ye might git one ob dem faintin' fits on de way—den kind wot only Mis' Macdoof unnerstan's."

"Oh, I wisht I 'ad a book," she says.

I 'd 'ad 'bout 'nough o' dat, so I says—

"Yer can't expect t'ave sense w'en yer reads dem Romances all de time. Stan's ter reason. Yer go ter yer bed, an' in de mornin' I 'll bring yer a coop o' tea."

So she went away. An' after dat I took 'er in a coop ob tea ebery mornin' fore I went out ter work. She said I wus better to 'er dan 'er own modder. Yes, I done all I could. I scold 'er 'bout de drink, an' I warn 'er 'gin dem Romances, an' I talk to 'er 'bout dat 'Arry Witte. But I couldn't do noddin' wid 'er. She wus jes' dyin' fur a man. Didn't seem ter mek no difference ob 'e wus most young 'nough ter be 'er



## The Portman Memoirs

son. 'E kep' comin' an' comin', an' stayin' later an' later. By'n by de way dey wus goin' on come ter Mis' Macdoof's cars. So she jes' stepped in one day an' blowed Miss Glispie oop.

"Yer oughter be 'shamed," she says. "Yer can't *fin* 'ow dey talks 'bout yer in de Bible class. Dey does noddin' but say 'ow yer an' dis 'Arry W'ite goes on—drinkin' an' you mekin' love! W'y it's *disgraceful*, Miss Glispie! Yer jes' oughter 'ear all wot dey says in de Bible class."

Den Miss Glispie she told 'er dat wot dey says in de Bible class ain't true, and dat she'll be'ave better ob Miss Macdoof sen' 'er some more books. Den dey wus frien's.

Dat ebenin' Miss Glispie she set by de winder waitin' fur dem books. Miss Macdoof mus' a furgit 'em. Den dat 'Arry W'ite 'e come by. 'E see Miss Glispie, so 'e come oop.

By'n by I went out ter git some bloaters, an' dat 'Arry W'ite come down de stairs be'ind me. W'en I come 'ome 'e wus goin' in wid two bottles unner 'is arm.

## A Temperance Story

"'As Miss Macdoof sen' dem Romances yit?" I says ter my secon' 'usban'.

"No," says 'e, "but don' you worry. Miss Glispie got a frien' now dat 'll bring 'er all de Romances she can take care ob."

Well, dat 'Arry W'ite didn't go 'ome at all *dat* night. 'E slip out werry soft w'ile I wus gitten breakfast nex' mornin'.

W'en I went inter Miss Glispie wid 'er tea, she wus soun' asleep. I woke 'er opp.

"It's yer coop o' tea, woman," says I.

"Oh, you *are* good ter me!" she says, tired like.

Well, 'stead o' turnin' round an' be'avin' 'erself after dat, tings got worse. She gib dat 'Arry W'ite 'er latch-key, an' 'e kem in an' out jes' as if 'e b'longed dere. An' dey set up 'alf de night mekin' de mos' awfl noise wid de drink. Den der 'd come times w'en dey wus quiet. My Tina was gettin' 'er teedth dat winter, an' I wus up an' down all night. An' I couldn't

## The Portman Memoirs

'elp ter laugh, fur ebery time Tina'd begin ter yell, dat 'Arry W'ite 'e'd begin ter swear—somet'ing awful! Oh, I could 'ear plain's anyting. Yoong men don't like a baby wot's gettin' 'er teedth. I used ter set oop in bed an' laugh.

But by'm'by I t'ink we 'ad 'bout 'nough o' dat 'Arry W'ite an' sich goin's on; so one day w'en I took 'er in 'er coop o' tea I says, "Yer wiseters stays werry late, Miss Glispie."

"Oh, yer *ar* good bringin' me tea," she says.

"Miss Glispie, 'ow late did dat 'Arry W'ite stay 'ere?" says I.

"I don't know, Mrs. Por-r-tman," she says, "my watch stopped."

"Ow 'bout de clock?" says I (fur she 'ad a beautiful gold clock, wid a angel on top playin' ball).

"De clock?" she says. "I furgit dere wus de clock."

"See 'ere," says I, "dere's somet'ing wrong w'en yer forgit dat clock."

"No," says she, "I ain't nebber cared fur it."

"Well," says I, "it wus pretty late

## A Temperance Story

w'en yer wisiter went 'ome—it wus mornin'."

Den she git red in de face an' say, "I don't know 'ow late it wus—but dere ain't noddin' wrong. 'E jes' set dere in dat 'orse 'air chair an' see ob my bank book wus all right."

"Dat's all yer tells me," I says; an' she look awful queer.

Well, dere wus one night w'en dat 'Arry come an' brought whiskey an' all dat sort, an' dey set dere drinkin' an' drinkin' till by'm'by we 'eard an awful row.

"Nebber min'," says my secon' 'usban', "it ain't *our* funeral." So we went ter bed.

Dat noise kep' on till by'm'by we 'eard 'er rooshin' outer de room an' lockin' 'im in.

Den she come an' knock on our door.

"Mis' Por-r-tman, Mis' Por-r-tman," she kep' sayin'.

My secon' 'usban' wus fur answerin'. I says, "You lie still." But she kep' on knockin' an' callin' Mis' Por-r-tman; after w'ile she got tired, an'

## The Portman Memoirs

(it was all trou' de drink) she slip on de little step an' she tummel downstairs. We 'eard 'er fallin' an' den eberyting was quiet. We kep' still 's de mice. Den in 'bout ten minutes we 'eard 'er agin outside our door speakin' low an' faint.

"Won't yer 'elp me, Mis' Por-t-man?" Oh, I'm dyin' Mis' Por-t-man."

So I gits oop an' I opens de door an' she tunnels in.

She was all over wid blood from 'er 'ead to 'er 'eels—an' 'er 'air---she 'ad beautiful black 'air—it was all likes if it 'ad been painted wid red shiny paint; all 'angin' down an' drippin'.

"Fur Gawd's sake, Miss Glispye," says I, "wot yer oop ter?"

Den she show me 'ow she 'd driv a comb inter 'er skull w'en she fell downstairs, an' 'ow she cut 'er face—all dis side 'ere—someting awful!

I says ter my secon' 'usban, "Yer got ter take 'er ter de 'ospital."

Den she cry out, "Don'—don' sen me ter d'ospital! I gib you £5 if you let me stay 'ere." So we wash de blood off'n 'er, an' I cut all de 'air

## A Temperance Story

away, an' wrop oop de wound. Den my secon' 'usban say, "Put 'er inter yer bed. I 'll go an' sleep wid de boys."

So dat's wot we did. W'en I 'd got 'er ter bed, I took de key out'n 'er pocket an' I went inter 'er room.

W'en I open de door, dere stan' dat 'Arry White wid a knife.

"Fur Gawd's sake," I say, "wot yer up ter!"

"E looked s'prized ter see it was *me*.

"Yer jes' go out'n dis 'ouse," I says.

"It 'll take somebody better 'n you to git me out," 'e says.

"Den," says I, "dere 'll come somebody better in de mornin'."

"*Will* dere?"

"Yes," I says, "you 're a willain—spong'in' on a woman."

"Wasn't spong'in'," says 'e, "I was wisitin'."

"*Wistin'* wid a knife!" says I. "You git along out'n dis."

"Git along yerself," says 'e.

"Yer oughter be 'shamed,'" says I, "mekin' 'er drunk an' losin' 'er character."

## The Portman Memoirs

"I ain't," says 'e. "I'm as good as married ter 'er. I'm master 'ere,"—an' 'e look round greedy like on de 'orse 'air chairs.

Den I went down an' woke oop de lan'lady.

"Wot we goin' ter do?" says I.

"Well," says she, "we can't put 'im out, yer sec, 'cause Miss Glispie she in-wited 'im in."

"Werry good," I says, "let 'im stay till mornin', den we 'll get de p'lice."

So we all went ter bed.

Next mornin' 'e wus outer dat room—slick! Nobuddy seen 'im go.

Miss Glispie look someting' awful, 'Er face wus swoll oop—yer can't tink! An' she kep' gittin' worse an' worse. An' all de time she kep callin' fur de drink.

"Jus' go an' git me a quatern," she says w'en I 'd got 'er back inter 'er own bed—"dat's all wot yer ken do fur me."

Course I didn't git 'er no drink. But she kep on beggin', an' den she 'd use 'ard words.

I jes' went roun' an tidied oop an'

## A Temperance Story

set dem 'orse 'air chairs like dey oughter be, Ob yer can belibe me, w'recber I went I foun' little bottles. In de corners, be'ind de piana—unner de sofa cushions eberyw'ere. Y' see she 'd git a quatern ebery time she 'd go out, an' den she 'd come 'ome wid it in 'er pocket so 's I couldn't find out she 'ad any. Ob I see 'er wid a big bottle, she know 'ow I 'd go on.

An' all de time she lay dere in bed, she wus 'ollerin' fur a quatern—"jes' a quatern."

Well, dat night w'en I came 'ome from my work, dere wus dat 'Arry W'ite in de street 'fore de door talkin' ter my secon' 'usban'.

"Yer jus' stan' outer my way," 'e wus sayin'—"I got ter see Miss Glispie."

Den I comes oop an' stops in front ob 'im. "I tink I oughter tell ye dat yer 'bout killed Miss Glispie," said I, "an' by termorrer mornin' de p'lice 'll be mekin' yer a visit."

'E jes' laugh.

Den I looks down an' I see 'e wus wearin' Miss Glispie's watch chain.

## The Portman Memoirs

"Wot's more," says I, "'de p'lice 'll want ter know ob it wus 'count o' dat watch chain ye murdered Miss Glispie."

Den 'e look down sudden an' 'e git kin' o' blue roun' de mout'.

"I wus bringin' it back to 'er," says 'e. "She ask me ter wear it."

"She ain't askin' yer to wear it now," I says, "an' I should advise yer not to 'ave it lyin' roun' w'en de p'lice comes ter wisit yer."

Den I turns ter go in.

"Is she dead yit?" I says to my secon' 'usban'.

"No," says 'e, "but sne 's awful bad," Den dat 'Arry W'ite 'e come runnin' after me, takin' off de watch an' chain slick!"

"P'raps she might need dis 'fore I git back," says 'e, an' 'e 'ands it over. None on us ebber seen 'im after dat.

Yes, Miss Glispie kep' gittin' worse an' worse. I sen' my little Jack roun' fur Miss Macdoof nex' day, and she git de doctor to come. De ole one wid sense.

'E say Miss Glispie wus 'avin' ab-scusses in 'er face, an' 'e tell me wotter

## A Temperance Story

do fur 'er. I took care ob 'er ebery mornin' an' ebenin'.

She jes' lay dere all day wid 'er face awful swoll, an' 'er 'ead tied oop, readin' dem Romances an' 'ollerin' fur a quartern, 'jes' a quartern."

She use ter say she 'd git well ob I gib 'er some whiskey. "Now *do*, Miss Por-r-tman," she 'd say. "You 're *sich* a good frien' ter me, an' I 'll gib yer two o'dem 'orse 'air chairs."

One Sunday she tink she ketch me. De doctor wus dere—de ole one wid sense.

'E been so kin', Miss Glispie tank 'im an' say, "Don' yer tink, doctor, it 'ud do me good ter 'ave a little dram o' whiskey or somethin'?"

But yer see de doctor wus like me. 'E wus a teetotaler.

Yer jes' oughter 'ear 'ow 'e went for Miss Glispie.

Well, do nex' day wus Bank 'oliday. Me an' my secon' 'usban' we took de child'en an' went ter 'Ampstead 'Eath.

Dere 's an awful roof lot goes ter 'Ampstead, 'an me an' my secon' 'usban' didn't like it. "We 'll go 'ome."



## The Portman Memoirs

says 'e. An' we does. It wus de middle ob de day w'en we git back, an' I 'ear noises—awful noises—in Miss Glispie's room.

I goes in, an' dere I fin's Miss Glispie propped oop in bed wid a lot o' men an' women settin' round 'er, all drinkin'.

I stan' dere like dis, an' say—

"Fur Gawd's sake, Miss Glispie, wot yer oop ter?"

Den dey all stops dere 'owlin'.

"Is dis a fair?" I says, an' dey looks scared.

So I druv 'em all out.

"Ow did ye git de drink?" I says to Miss Glispie. She wus cryin' silly like.

"Yer gone off ter enjoy yerself," says she, "an' yer lock oop my money an' my watch. Ebery one gone out in de 'ouse, an' me 'ere alone on a Bank 'oliday."

"Course I lock up de t'ings," I says, "fur ye'd pawn 'em ob I didn't. 'Ow did yer git de drink ter day? Dem people wot yer 'ad 'ere don' mek ye a present ob anyt'ing I s'pose."

"No," says she.

## A Temperance Story

"What yer pawned?" says I beginnin' ter look 'round—"W'ere's de clock?"

"I ain't nebbber liked it, Mis' Por-r-it-man," says she.

"Yer pawned anyt'ing else?" says I.

"Yes," says she, beginnin' to 'owl 'orrible. "Yer lock up all my t'ings, Dey 'ad ter pawn all dem books o' Miss Macdoof's, an' now I ain't got noddin' ter read."

She got worse an' worse after dat, an' use ter talk about heaben an' de curate; seemed ter furgit all 'bout dat 'Arry Wite. She speak lot ter Miss Macdoof, too, 'bout de curate, an' one day she 'ear 'ow 'e'd been askin' 'bout 'er an' sayin', "W'y ain't Miss Glispie eber at de Bible class?" Den she most went out n'er 'ead. She wus sure de curate wus t'inkin' 'bout 'er an' fallin' in love wid 'er. "Don' be sich a fool," I says; "'e don' care 'bout *you*. 'E don' mean noddin'." 'E's jes' t'inkin' 'bout yer soul, dat's all!"

Well, by 'im by she begin ter get queer in 'er 'ead. Den Miss Macdoof come an' say it wusn't safe fur 'er ter

## The Portman Memoirs

be alone, an' she beg me ter gib oop my charin' an' washin' an' jes' stay an take care o' Miss Glispie fur fourteen shillin's a week. So I done it. It wusn't sich an easy job, I can tell yer.

Oh, no, she wusn't violent—no, she wus too weak fur mooch o' dat. I knowed 'er min' wus gone de firs' day w'en she couldn't open de new Romances wot Miss Macdoof send 'er. I says ter my secon' 'usban'—

"W'en she don't care 'bout dose foolishness wot's in Romances, dat's de end o' Miss Glispie," an' I wus right.

She began dat werry day ter talk French. Well, I ain't exac'y sure it wus French. But it wusn't German. An' it wusn't proper English. So I says to 'er—

"Min' wot yer 'bout, Miss Glispie. Yer 'll lose yer senses ob yer go on like dat." But she wus too fur gone by den. Some o' de time she 'd talk proper, but she wus qveer in 'er ead. She used ter gadder oop de sheets an' say, "Ob yer have a roofle o' dis it would be nice." She 'd been a dressmaker, yer know. Den she 'd drape oop de qvilt an' say,

## A Temperance Story

"Dis go werry well wid your complexing, Miss Por-r-tman." Den ob I didn't answer she 'd say, "I 'll make it werry sheep."

An' I 'd allays say, "T'ank yer, Miss Glispie; I t'ink yer right; I 'll 'ave dat." Den she 'd lay on de pillar an' smile, w'en she wus too weak ter sit oop any more.

"Dis werry good an' t'ick fur de winter; jes' feel," she 'd say, takin' 'old o' de blanket. "Shall I mek yer a nice winter jacket, werry sheep?"

"Yes," I 'd say, "ob it's sheep I 'll 'ave it." Den she 'd smile an' begin talkin' French.

Well, she got so bad by'm'by, de doctor say she must go ter de Infirmary. I took 'er dere. W'en I said goodbye I wus feelin' awful sorry fur 'er bein' dere alone, an' I said, "Gawd 'elp ye, Miss Glispie."

W'en she 'eard me sayin' dat 'bout Gawd, she t'ought I mus' be de curate, an' she mek de awfulest scene. Well, dere! Dey 'ad ter send 'er ter de 'sylum; an' dere she died. All t'rough de drink.

## The Portman Memoirs

Ob yer can beliebe me, she wus dat silly 'bout de men, she lef de curate fifty poun' in 'er will. All de res—*everything*—'er watch an' piana; de money in de Birkbeck Bank an' de 'orse 'air chairs, all wot she 'ad went ter Miss Macdoof, 'cause Miss Macdoof 'ad lent 'er all dem Romances,

I didn't git noddin' but my fourteen shillin's a week, w'en I could a bin earnin' twenty-one. But *me*, I on'y waited on 'er mornin' noon an' night,—fed 'er an' dressed 'er abscesses—washed 'er an' took care on 'er like a baby. Dat's all I done! *I* ain't lent 'er no Romances.

Below the Salt

## Below the Salt

### CHAPTER I.

THE vicar's wife had been ill and was ordered away by her doctor.

With some reluctance Mrs. Keston consented to visit her husband's sister in the South, whither the Farringdon family fled each winter, from the bleak winds and sea-fogs of Lyttelton-Leas.

The sisters-in-law had nothing in common, but weak lungs and a great love for the Rev. James Keston; albeit Mrs. Farringdon's fashion of showing her sisterly tenderness was open to certain criticism.

"Well, I'm glad," her hostess announced, the morning after Mrs. Keston's arrival—"very glad you've discovered at last that you can leave James for a few weeks without dire disaster."

This touched an old bone of contention.

## Below the Salt

"Nothing would have induced me to leave him," said the vicar's wife, "if it weren't for Anne Carter's being there."

"Oh, you like your new servant?"

"She's a priceless treasure. I never left home in my life before with an easy mind."

"She must be about fifty now."

"Who?"

"Anne. She was parlour-maid, you know, at the old place in Suffolk when I was a child."

"So James said. I'd forgotten you ever saw her."

"She used to be curiously handsome."

"She's simply one of the most distinguished-looking women I ever saw."

"Well, that I look upon as unnecessary."

"—Very tall and slight, and dresses in an unvarying black habit, that somehow makes one think of a Mother Superior. Then her grave beautiful face

"I remember she had a fine peasant colouring."

"Well, she's like a creature cut out

## Below the Salt

of ivory now, and has masses of silver hair parted in the middle—which, by the way, she refuses to cover up with a cap."

"Vain old thing!"

"Not at all—it's because a cap is a badge of servitude."

"And you give in to such nonsense?"

"My dear, you'd give in to more than that for such a creature."

"No, I wouldn't put up with airs. I wouldn't have a servant of mine mistaken for a member of the family."

Mrs. Keston smiled.

"Have you heard that's what happens at the vicarage?"

"Yes."

"I'm not surprised. She has the manners and the instincts of a gentlewoman."

"Most unsuitable—if it were true."

"You don't believe me?"

"I believe you think so."

"Well, when you see her again, you'll understand. *You'll* wonder, too, where she got that air."

"No, I shall remember that she's a servant of the servant class, and——"



## Below the Salt

"And you 'll be even more surprised than we were at her English."

"Well, I daresay I 'd find it easier to have faith in the excellence of my servants' hearts than in their grammar."

"Anne speaks like a person of education."

"Really."

"I suppose it comes partly from her refusing to associate with persons of her own class, and partly from reading Milton and the Bible."

"Milton?"

"I admit"—Mrs. Keston spread her hands apologetically—"I admit that in those first days, when I came across her reading 'Paradise Lost' over her tea, I had my doubts as to her practical usefulness."

"I shouldn't have had *doubts*," Mrs. Farringdon was emphatic.

"James said it was an unworthy prejudice."

"Of course, that's part of James's broad-mindedness."

"—That the poor woman liked good literature, was no reason she couldn't sweep a room."

## Below the Salt

"I should have been afraid it would be a reason for leaving dust in the corners."

"No, she was immaculate. James was right. But I had my revenge when he offered to lend her some light reading for winter evenings."

"Did she ask for Shakespeare?"

"No; she disapproved of plays. She thanked James in that beautiful quiet way of hers, and said it was some years since she had read Foxe's "Book of Martyrs" or the "History of the Reformation," and she would be obliged——"

Mrs. Farringdon interrupted with a laugh. Even Mrs. Keston's rather solemn face relaxed.

"We hadn't any martyrs in the house," she went on, and James had to lend her his precious marked and annotated old D'Aubigné that the Bishop had given him when he was a boy."

"James is absurd."

The vicar's wife drew herself up.

"James is perfectly right and perfectly consistent. Anne hadn't been with us three weeks, before he saw here

## Below the Salt

was the living justification of his theories."

"Oh yes, I know. All alike in the sight of God, and that kind of thing."

"Anne Carter was just the sort of person to show up the fundamental absurdity of the old-fashioned relation between master and servant. The former state of things is mediæval and outworn. It's only possible where the inferiority of the servant is absolute and impregnable. The moment a subordinate becomes a self-respecting being, with the knowledge that he has a soul as precious in the eyes of the Lord as the soul of any other man——"

"The absurdity of the old relation," Mrs. Farringdon took the words out of her sister-in-law's mouth—— "the absurdity of the old relation is forced on the least liberal-minded. How well you've got James by heart."

Mrs. Keston flushed faintly.

"But so have I," Mrs. Farringdon pursued airily. "Let's see—it goes on 'How can a society that calls itself Christian'——"

## Below the Salt

"As I told you, James is consistent. I try to be consistent too."

"And so you are, my dear. And so am I. I don't hold these exalted views."

"You are a professing Christian."

"Ah! yes. So, I understand, is the Bishop."

The vicar's wife bent over her crochets work. How had James Keston happened to have such a sister! But because it *had* "happened" she must be borne with, and, if possible, converted to a broader humanity.

"Seriously," Mrs. Keston said presently, with recovered good-humor, "you can't think what a difference Anne's coming has made to us. There's nothing she can't do, and there's nothing she doesn't do well. You've heard how she's nursed me for the past six weeks, and she's taken up all the poor and sick visiting while I'm away. Every one in Lytton-Leas has the very highest opinion of her."

"Except Father Hogan."

"What does Father Hogan know of Anne?"

## Below the Salt

"Didn't he come to the vicarage to see about the new hospital or something?"

"Oh, I remember—but James was out."

"Exactly! but Father Hogan either didn't understand or thought Carter wasn't telling the truth. 'You just go,' he said, 'and give your master my name.' Carter stared at him coldly. 'I have no master but God,' she said. 'Eh? what?' Father Hogan gasped. 'Oh, then just say I called.' He declares that as he went down the steps he heard the woman mutter, 'Aye, many are called but few are chosen.'"

"That's one of Father Hogan's embellishments. But you seem to hear a good deal of what goes on at Lyttelton-Leas."

"Oh—a—I have a letter from Miss Cardew now and then."

"I see! then there's not much left for me to tell."

"Yes, there is. I want to know about the Three Musketeers."

"Three what?"

"Your three smart young men."

## Below the Salt

"I haven't got any smart young men."

"Now! now! who are the three knights who come to see you every Sunday afternoon?"

"I don't understand you. You know quite well James and I drive over to Lyttelton-Marley every Sunday afternoon—unless one of us is ill."

"Exactly! and when *you* are ill, James goes off alone to hold his afternoon service, and you stay at home and receive the Three Musketeers."

"You're dreaming. Miss Cardew's out of her mind if she says—*Oh!*"—Mrs. Keston leaned back her head and laughed—"she means Anne's sons."

"What!"

"Of course! and they *are* fine fellows."

"My dear," Mrs. Faringdon remonstrated, "from Jane Cardew's description—"

"Oh yes, they're a great credit to Anne. Two of them have something to do with the railroad, and one's in a counting-house at Bodley, where the three live together."

## Below the Salt

"And come all that distance to spend Sunday afternoons with their mother!"

"Yes, they're devoted to her."

"Humph!" Mrs. Faringdon seemed to consider this an excess of filial piety in persons of their class. "I fancy," she went on in a moment, "that it's not Jane Cardew, after all, but you, my dear, who foster the popular superstition."

"What superstition?"

"That Anne is some great lady working out a penance."

"What nonsense! It's only because people can't get rid of the feudal idea that there's something radically degrading in service. Of course I know that Anne Carter is a servant of the servant class, but that doesn't prevent her having the nature as well as the air of a gentlewoman."

"Well, mark my words!" Mrs. Faringdon stood up, as if to emphasize her final dictum. "You'll be disappointed if you expect Anne to live up to any such standard. *It isn't in her blood.*"

"How do you know she hasn't more

## Below the Salt

virtue in her blood than we?" Mrs. Keston spoke excitedly.

"Virtue she *may* have, but servility too, and 'servant' proclivities—just as we have the natural tendencies of the dominant class."

"You don't know Anne Carter."

"But I *do* know that you can't wipe out a century of servitude with a little education. Just wait! Before you're done with her, Anne will vindicate the servant soul you say she hasn't got."

## CHAPTER II.

During the ten years that followed, when the Faringdons came back to their summer haunts near Lyttelton-Leas, the vicar's wife used sometimes to recall to the vicar's sister their first encounter about Anne Carter, and never without triumphant commentary on the intervening years. Anne was literally unchanged. Having at about fifty reached the limit of the refining and etherealising possibilities of advancing age, she stopped short, and

## Below the Salt

never thereafter grew a day older. Not so her employers. The vicar's health failed, and failed so conspicuously at the end of that quiet decade, that he was induced to give up the chapel-of-ease at Lyttelton-Marley. No one noticed that about the same time he gave up preaching privately against the vulgar and most unsound notion that manual labor and domestic service had in them anything of degradation, and he had less to say about the fine object-lesson of Anne Carter's proud and simple life.

The summer that year had been cold and rainy. There was a good deal of sickness about. One dripping afternoon in July, Anne protested against Mrs. Keston's going the usual Friday round among the parish poor. While the vicar's wife was saying feebly "No—no, she wouldn't get into the habit of staying in for the weather," Anne had put on her plain but stately garments and was on her way with Mrs. Keston's soups and jellies to their well-known destination.

It was not the first time, nor yet the

## Below the Salt

second, that she had undertaken this office in inclement weather. But that evening she came back with a cough and a chill. The next morning she dragged through her work, looking like a ghost, and the next afternoon she retired to her own room, unlocked a rarely opened drawer, took out certain articles of linen, laid them across the foot-board, undressed, and betook herself to bed. Anne Carter was very ill.

There was consternation in the vicar's household. Everybody there had been ill some time in that ten years except Anne. She had nursed them all, and half the village as well, and now this rock of steadfast endurance, this pillar of the house and parish, was stricken down.

The doctor thought the gravity of the case should be made known to the woman's family.

"I'm glad this is Sunday," said Mrs. Keston the next day, standing at the foot of Anne's bed. "Your sons will be here this afternoon, I suppose."

"No," said the sick woman feebly.

"Why, I thought they *always* came."



## Below the Salt

"Yes—only to-day——"

"Why not to-day?"

"They've got leave—gone to Didsbury."

"All of them?"

"Yes."

"I'm sorry for that. Don't you think—of course this may be nothing but a cold——"

"Nothing but—?"

The woman closed her eyes an instant, as if to keep to herself any expression of suffering they might betray. "This," she went on, opening them again with recovered serenity, "this is nothing but pleurisy."

"Has the doctor told you so?" asked Mrs. Keston.

"No."

"Oh, of course you know the symptoms. I ought to be the last to forget you nursed me through two attacks since you've been with us. Still——"

Anne looked through Mrs. Keston into space.

"I shan't have *two* attacks," she said, without expression.

"Are you alarmed about yourself?" Mrs. Keston's voice faltered a little.

## Below the Salt

"No," said the woman rigidly.

"Still, I think your sons ought to come and see you. They oughtn't to be so far away as Didsbury."

"I've sent for them."

"Ah! I'm glad! When will they come?"

"In time—in time."

"The doctor's manner has frightened you"—Mrs. Keston felt the tears rising—"but you mustn't give up hope, you know."

"I have something better than hope."

"Better?"

"I *know* that my Redeemer liveth."

This, from the point of view of physical health, was vague.

"Does she actually realize that she can't get well?" thought the vicar's wife, looking at the immobile face and steady eyes. As she moved away from the bed, with that sense of baffled kindness that Anne so often gave her, Mrs. Keston knocked down the clean linen that hung over the foot-board.

"Never mind," said Anne weakly, as the vicar's wife stooped to pick up the things.

## Below the Salt

"If these are airing," said the lady, "they'd better be by the fire."

"They won't need airing," observed Anne impassively.

As Mrs. Keston took hold of a great piece of linen, it slipped out of its folds and fell voluminously along the floor. The vicar's wife looked across its snowy whiteness to the white face of the woman.

"What do you use this for?"

"I haven't used it yet," said Anne. There was a pause.

"You don't mean——" began Mrs. Keston.

"Yes, the old way is the best. Fashions change so," said Anne Carter.

Mrs. Keston folded up the winding-sheet with a chill creeping down her spine.

"Yes," she said stupidly, just to break the grave-like stillness with a human sound—"a—yes."

"Yes," echoed Anne with her steadfast eyes on the linen—"I'm sure it will be more *in keeping*."

Mrs. Keston had assisted at many a death-bed. Yet she went downstairs a

## Below the Salt

good deal shaken. She was conscious, too, that her feeling was not all due to her very real sorrow at the prospect of losing Anne. Under the unusual stress of feeling, she found courage to penetrate to her husband's sanctum, where not even she, as a rule, dared follow him. But she explained: Anne Carter was dying and knew she was dying. He must go and administer spiritual consolation.

The vicar put down his quill and pushed back the sermon paper with marked reluctance.

"Dear," said his wife, nervously, "do make haste. She takes it in a strange terrible way."

"Ah! hysterical?"

"No—no. Only so quiet—so——"

"Ah! numbed!"

"No; dreadfully conscious of everything and—oh! I don't know—do go and comfort her."

"Comfort her!" the vicar repeated to himself as he slowly mounted the stair—"Comfort!" Any one who knew him would have thought him singularly ill at ease, but he knocked at the door

## Below the Salt

and went in. The little maid-servant who was sitting by the bed got up and came out. The vicar took her chair.

"I hope you are not suffering much."

Anne tightened her pale lips an almost imperceptible instant.

"Thank you," she said.

"Is there anything we can do for you besides ——"

"No, thank you," she interrupted in a weak voice.

"I mustn't let you talk," he said.

"Suppose we read a little." He pulled a small prayer-book out of his pocket.

"No," she repeated, "no, thank you."

The vicar looked at her in some perplexity.

"Are you feeling worse? Shall I ring?"

"The bells in this room can't be rung *here*." She looked up sternly at the row of dangling tyrants. "But I've taken some of my own medicine," she went on. "I'm easier."

"Then wouldn't you like me to—a ——" He lifted up the worn red prayer-book.

"No!"

## Below the Salt

He stared at her over the open page.

"I haven't minded coming to morning prayers when I'm well," said the woman, "but when I'm dying, I must have my own minister."

"Your own minister!" repeated the vicar, slightly dazed.

"Yes. I didn't want to hurt anybody's feelings by mentioning it before—but I'm a Wesleyan."

"Ah! really! Hm—really! But even so——"

"No, I don't believe in those prayers," she looked sternly at the old red prayer-book.

"Oh!" said the vicar somewhat abashed. "Then shan't we send for a minister of your own faith?"

"I've done that."

"Ah! Hm! When do you expect him?"

"To-morrow noon."

"And your sons?"

"To-morrow noon."

"I see. And there's nothing we can do for you meanwhile?" He got up, slipping the despised prayer-book into his coat-pocket.

## Below the Salt

"Perhaps—just to be on the safe side." Anne drew herself up a little on one elbow and pulled out a long envelope from under the pillow. "If, you understand such things," she said dubiously. "My eldest son does—but the train might be delayed." She dropped back on the pillow,

The vicar unfolded the paper.

"Your will?"

"Could you read it out?" she said in a whisper.

"Certainly." The vicar cleared his throat. "I, Anne Carter, being of sound mind—this was drawn up by a lawyer?"

"My husband's was. This is a copy. Names changed and—you'll see." She propped herself up again and leaned over the small table at the bedside.

"Anything I can give you?" said the vicar.

"No. If you'll just go on reading." She poured out a teaspoonful of medicine and swallowed it impassively.

The vicar read on. The document devised and bequeathed her husband's little farm to her "four sons."

## Below the Salt

"You mean three, don't you?" the vicar interrupted himself.

"No four. They will all be here to-morrow." She dropped back on her pillow and pressed her crossed hands over her chest. But if she was in pain, her face kept the secret. "I must tell you," she whispered. "My husband and I worked and saved in spite of bad luck, and gave the three eldest what schooling we could. When my husband died, little David was ten. I couldn't have carried on the farm without the boys, so I let it." (She stopped and panted a moment.) "But we couldn't manage little David's schooling unless I went back into serv—" her voice had sunk almost beyond hearing—"I mean," she said sharply, with sudden life: "unless I took a situation. So I came here."

"I see," said the vicar.

"And what with the rent and my—salary, little David has got through his studies" (her face lit up), "was recommended at the Quarterly Circuit meeting, passed by the Synod" (she was radiant now), "and to-day

## Below the Salt

he's preaching his trial sermon." She caught in her breath in ecstasy or pain. "His three elder brothers have gone to Didsbury to hear little David preaching the Gospel of Christ."

"A preacher!"

"David is a Wesleyan minister." The proud look faded. Her eyes filled suddenly, a strong compression whitened her patient lips. The vicar realized that he had never seen Anne moved before in all those ten years. "I wouldn't have *David* see me in a servant's place," she was saying, "except—well—I must just see him *once* before—" She turned her face to the wall. There was silence in the room.

"I couldn't let you know," she said presently, in a steady voice. "I was afraid it would cost me the place. And I had dedicated David to the Lord when he was born. So for his sake I said nothing. For his sake I had to make to myself friends of the mammon of uprightness."

"I see." The vicar accepted his new rôle without a blush, and went on reading the will.

## Below the Salt

"It seems to me to be in form, witnessed and everything."

"I thought so"—she breathed huskily.

"And I've written to the post-office to draw out what I have there. It will come in time I hope for—for everything."

"You are able to face the great Change with a blessed Faith," said the vicar.

The woman nodded feebly. He rose. "And you have better reason than most people to hope to hear on the other side—'Well done, good and faithful servant.'"

"Son," quoted the woman imperturbably, "'remember that thou in thy lifetime receivest thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.'"

"Hm! yes—yes," said the vicar without enthusiasm, edging towards the door.

"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me on my throne."



## Below the Salt

Anne Carter went on in a dull muffled chant.

"What are these which are arrayed in white robes?"

"These are they which came out of great tribulation.

"Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

"Amen," said the vicar meekly, and closed the door behind him. But he paused with his foot on the top stair. Surely Anne was better. Her usually soft low voice was swelling out behind him into a psalm of sombre triumph.

"They that are first shall be last and the last first"—Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

"The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner."

"For he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden. He hath

## Below the Salt

scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts."

"He hath put down the mighty from their seat; and hath exalted the humble and meek."

"He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away."

The vicar went on downstairs.

"I hope you comforted the poor old creature," said Mrs. Keston. And her kind heart was troubled at her husband's unsympathetic setting forth of his discovery of "little David."

## CHAPTER III.

The following Friday the vicar and his wife walked slowly home from the Dissenters' burial-ground, where they had left Anne Carter under her coverlid of damp, black soil, with her stalwart sons, two at the head and two at the foot of her narrow bed.

Mrs. Keston had been weeping.

"James," she said, when they had gone a short distance, "the way she

## Below the Salt

face'd death was a credit to poor humanity."

"Yes," said the vicar, "she showed admirable fortitude."

They paused a moment near the top of the hill to look back at the little burying-ground. The villagers had scattered, only the four young men were left there sentinel-like by the new-made grave.

"There was something antique in the splendid self-respect of that woman," said Mrs. Keston. "I mean your sister to know she died as nobly as she lived."

"Well—a—" responded the vicar with a kind of slow embarrassment, "I wouldn't force that point. We all recognized she had excellent qualities."

"James!" Mrs. Keston stopped short again. "How grudgingly you speak!"

"No—a—no," said the vicar absently, looking at the sunset through the trees; "she was a remarkable person in her way."

"You don't speak of her as you used to." Mrs. Keston's tone was almost an attack.

The vicar looked away from the

## Below the Salt

painted west and back at the little burying-ground below. Already it lay in shadow, and the sentinel sons were gone.

"Now that she's dead, perhaps I ought to tell you," he said, "for there's a lesson in it."

"Tell me what?"

"You know how fidgety I've been all my life about any one's going into my study."

"Dear me, yes—and the pigsty it's been!"

"Well, a year or so after Anne came to us—h'm!" He cleared his throat as though regretting he had begun.

Mrs. Keston smiled.

"Did she dare to give you a surreptitious dusting?"

"After she came I began to miss my books."

"Heavens! James. You might as well suspect me."

"I didn't suspect any one. I thought I'd mislaid them."

"Of course you had."

"Especially when, after a while, I'd find them back in their old places."

## Below the Salt

"You see I Why, I think I remember one of those times. You asked me about it. I told you then you'd simply overlooked it."

"So I imagined till one of my missing Moscheims turned up with a great coffee stain on the front page."

"You'd forgotten—it must have been there always."

"I'm sure it wasn't."

"But you couldn't suppose that Anne——"

"I didn't know what to suppose. I was morbidly afraid of accusing some one wrongfully. It went on for years—off and on. The books always came back. But two years ago, when the fourth volume of Wesley's sermons came home from an outing, it was a brand new book instead of one like my old set."

"What on earth did you think?"

"That something worse than a coffee stain had befallen my fourth volume."

"You didn't say anything."

"No. To tell the truth, I had come to be horribly afraid that, in spite of saying nothing, I should find some one out."

## Below the Salt

"And you never did find out?" Mrs. Keston's voice betrayed a lurking relief.

"Well, you shall judge. The first Sunday after I gave up Lytton-Mareley, you remember we went to hear the new incumbent."

"Yes, but you had a headache and came home after the anthem."

"Exactly, and left you to make my apologies to my successor. Well, by the time I got to the end of the long drive home I was better. I let myself in and went straight to the study. I heard a commotion as I reached the door, and the sound of a window being shut. When I got in, there was Anne standing in the middle of the room, painfully embarrassed, and the place filled with tobacco smoke."

"Anne—smoke?"

"Wait. I stood still a moment as embarrassed as she was. 'I—I just came in to—shut the window—in case of rain,' she stammered. 'Oh,' I said, 'I don't remember leaving it open.' 'Y—yes, sir,' she said. She had never said 'Sir' to me before. She sidled

## Below the Salt

out of the room somehow, hanging her head a little, and looking painfully unlike her usual upright self. When she was gone, I went over and felt the gas stove. The iron was hot. Evidently the flame had only been just turned out. My portfolio of Piranesi illustrations was lying on the table. The ash trays, that I never use, had come into service, the top was off my best box of cigars, and one of my tobacco jars had been taken from the shelf and left on the sofa. I sat down beside it, feeling rather dazed. As I did so, my heel touched something under the—curtain—what do you call it?—round the sofa.

"Valence," interjected Mrs. Keston, breathless. "Was it a man?"

"No—a tea tray, laden with cakes and jam, one teacup and three glasses of brandy and seltzer."

"*There!* The sons!"

"I pushed the tray back and went and opened the window. The geraniums in the flower-bed underneath were trampled, and there were foot-prints in the earth. A good many things became plain as I stood there.

## Below the Salt

I knew that my library had ministered to the intellectual needs of the Three Musketeers, and that my brandy and my tobacco had helped their mother to keep them out of public-houses and bad company. And I began to see how she might feel herself justified in spoiling the Egyptians for so godly an end. If she had only stood her ground and not told me that feeble lie. For the truth, there might be excuse—there *might* be unanswerable argument—for the lie nothing but pity that the cowardice and servility in the woman's blood should betray even such a nature as hers."

"James, I—I can't believe it."

"My dear, we expected too much. Of course I didn't know then what I know now, that most if not all the book-borrowing was for 'little David.' It was for 'little David,' you know, that she put on the yoke of service again in her old age. I noticed," Mr. Keston added, as he held open the vicarage-grate for his wife—"I noticed that 'little David' appeared less moved than any one near the grave."

### Below the Salt

"Yes," said Mrs. Keston, and her voice was heavy with disillusionment—"Yes, I thought 'little David' didn't seem to care."

She went into the house feeling that she had come home to face a bleaker misfortune than mere death. She went upstairs to take off her things—but instead of doing so at once, she walked aimlessly through the upper part of the house, till she came to Anne Carter's room. She opened the door and looked in. Scrupulously, spotlessly clean as it had been all these ten years, the only beauty, the only colour in that bare white room came through the single window opening on the west. But there was an influence there still, alive, eloquent, imperious, repudiating so sternly Mr. Keston's interpretation of that scene in the study, that his wife bowed her head with humiliation and then looked up almost radiant with relief. It wasn't true! Anne had simply shielded some one else.

Mrs. Keston had promised the sons that she would have their mother's belongings packed up and ready to go

### Below the Salt

away early the next morning. With a dim notion of making up for the vicar's unworthy suspicions, she determined that no one but herself should touch Anne's things. She took off her bonnet and laid it on the bed. The key to Anne's trunk had been found under her pillow. Mrs. Keston turned it in the old-fashioned lock and leaned back the lid. A few winter clothes were laid loosely in the bottom with squares of camphor. Mrs. Keston lifted the things out to fold them flatter. Underneath was an old lacquered box and a portly bundle labelled "David's Trial Sermons." And there were loose copies of the *Times*, apparently taking up room to no purpose. Away with them! And to no purpose. Away with them! And what were all these regular slaped packages underneath the newspaper? The wrapping round one was torn. It was a packet of writing paper bearing the house stamp:

THE VICARAGE, LITTLETON-LEAS.

Feeling like a thief, Mrs. Keston broke the wrapping on one after another. The last packet had evi-



## Below the Salt

dently been made up a long while ago. It was stamped with the crest which the vicar had given up using eight or nine years before. Mrs. Keston dropped on her knees beside the trunk, and turned up the contents feverishly. The entire bottom was lined thick with stamped envelopes and post-cards. She shrank back as if her own belongings burned her. If only it had been an ordinary servant! If only it hadn't been Anne Carter!

"I've been looking for you," said a voice. The vicar stood at the open door. "What's the matter?" He was coming in. Mrs. Keston made an involuntary movement with her hands to prevent his looking into the trunk. But he was already staring down on the varied assortment of all the stationery he had used for the past ten years. He said nothing for some moments.

Mrs. Keston had looked away. Presently she was conscious of his stooping and taking up the lacquer box.

"Did you ever see this before?" he said.

## Below the Salt

"No."

"I had it when I was a boy. When I put it away in the long cupboard years ago both the hinges were broken.

"Dear, this may be another one. You know how forgetful you are about details."

The vicar shook his head with the ghost of a smile.

"No, this was given to me by——" he broke off suddenly and looked on the underside. "There's a letter I scratched on it when I was twenty."

"She thought it was an old thing you'd thrown away," Mrs. Keston urged.

Her husband turned abruptly, and looked at the capacious drawers in the old press. "When you go through those you may find other 'old things.'"

"No! no!" Mrs. Keston's voice was almost a cry. "There's *nothing* there but Anne's own clothes. James," she added, in a lower voice, getting up hurriedly from off her knees. "Let us go down stairs. I—I—think I'll let Maria do the packing."

## Below the Salt

The vicar hesitated a moment, and then laid down the box.

"Very well," he said. But he took it up again and studied the faded lacquer.

"I'm *sure* you're mistaken," said his wife. "*This* box hasn't broken hinges." She took it out of his hands to demonstrate the fact.

"No, the hinges have been mended," he said. But she had lifted the cover to show him. He stared! The box was full to overflowing with postage stamps.

"James! *James!*" his wife whispered, looking from the box to his face and back again into the box, "you're not thinking all these——"

"Hm!" said the vicar, turning them over. "They are not in sheets, you see. They are all pulled apart as I have them in the drawer downstairs."

"But she—she may have had some fad about saving her money in that form. She may have bought them, one or two at a time, through all these years."

The vicar shook his head.

"There are only the kinds here that

## Below the Salt

I keep. Penny, halfpenny, twopence-halfpenny, and six-penny ones for telegrams."

"Oh, why, *why* didn't she burn all this hoard!" Mrs. Keston wailed. "She wasn't taken by surprise."

"My dear," said the vicar, "the reason *we* are taken so much by surprise is that we have supposed the servant code and ours to be the same. Anne Carter was the product of centuries of servitude. She looked upon these things as her perquisites. Hoarding them was an act so natural to her thrift, and so permissible in her position, that, in the great preoccupation of dying, she forgot all about it."

"We mustn't let her sons know," Mrs. Keston whispered hastily piling up the stationery. We must get all this out of sight." She seized the lacquer box.

"No, no," said the vicar, "leave that. We can't be *quite* sure about the stamps."

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Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

"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 dinner and dinner 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

Not a copy

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

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 impractical 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 diffculties 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

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

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 merely 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



## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

because she made such excellent *enfers*—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

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

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 had 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.*"

"Your 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

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

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 rosiest 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.

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

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—warning 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 'oover 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 Jimmie's worse, and I must go home. I'm afraid he's—he's——" She turned away with a choke in her voice.

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## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

"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 Jimmie 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!"

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

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

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

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' clothes 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;

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

but even Tom noticed Jane's original methods of locomotion, and stared astonishment at her as she swooped down upon him with a 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 West of England on family business.

For the next two months Rose was

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## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

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 enter-

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

tain, 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



## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

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 tea-cup in her hand, "Jane has more than once said: 'Yer can *kalk* wonderful, miss—yer can make a body think black's w'ite and w'ite'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.

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

"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 have noticed 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

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

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 she 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 tipping." 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 or two good-for-nothing sons, who have never helped

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

her, though they've both been in good position 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 awhile, and ask me if I can spare her ten minutes to do 'a little shopping.' Then she goes out and brings me in two or three faded 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 in-

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

side. 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 wrathed smiles, she presented me with a dragged 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 elevenpence halfpenny—*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 helped Rose to put on her 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.'"

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

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 consoles 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 doesn't in the least wonder that I can't walk much. 'Yer feet's too small to be much good to ye,' she says 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 yer part o' the country,' she asked one day, 'somethin' to keep 'em from growin'?' She was a little disconcerted

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

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 fettle; fur—ye 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 wus jes' *nothin'* they didn't ave! A garden, miss, and *every* comfort, besides

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

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 *was* fond o' me," she told Rose, "and they *was* good to me. Dr. h'Ellis 'e says to me 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 skilling-ton and shook all 'is bones at me! I *was* skereed—most out o' my wits. Dr. h'Ellis 'e laughed till Mrs. h'Ellis came a-runnin' in to see wot 'ailed 'm. *Sich* a nice gentleman 'e wus, and *so* fond o' 'is joke!" Then lowering her voice, "E 'ad a real skull, miss, and ribs all across." It was only her look of remissent 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 scary things—them skillingtons." She spoke to Rose one day with a too significant approval of some solic-

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

ous young gentleman, who had come more than once to inquire how Miss Elwyn was. Upon Rose's reproving the old familiarity, Jane had laughed indulgently.

"Law, miss, I been young myself—ye needn't mind me. I only wonder yer don't let me ax 'im in—'e's got sich 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 was in love once myself, miss.

Yes, yes, really in love. 'E was a young gentleman as kep' a first-class shop. I met 'im at Brighton, w'ere I was nurse to a lady—*such* a nice lady! I was 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 was pretty them days," she laughed a little nervous apologetic laugh.

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

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

"No, miss! Ain't I told yer 'e was the one I liked best? Ye never marries that one! Yer see there 's only one as you really 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 was 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 glistened through their chronic mist. "Ye see, yer 've got two swallers, miss. My swaller is small—*very* small, 'specially the one for food. I can't git down



## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

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 yer open yer mouth wide yer 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 ministrations, 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

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

about, and flourishing her cluster like an oriflamme. She eyed her mistress meditatively.

“Then I’s pose ye know Bina Devcreaux, since yer a theatre lady?”

“No; who’s she?”

“Oh, she’s *splendid*. She’s a theatre lady, too. Do you know Nancy Liffon?”

“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

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

her mistress on the first night of Rose's return to the theatre in a state of effervescent excitement.

"Yer was 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 clothes."

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

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

over to the dresser. She regarded the row of pendant 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 flourished over to the table and took up a jug of milk.

"But you *don't* come, and I'll have

Narrow

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

to go back to the theatre in eleven minutes;" then remembering the news she had heard at the *matinée*, Rose added in a moment of inspiration, "The Prince is coming to see the play to-night, so I mustn't be late."

"Wot, miss, *the Prince*? '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'll *need* yer teal! The Prince, the Prince! Well, well!" She sighed heavily, and lurched over to the steaming kettle. As Rose left the kitchen, she heard her muttering again, "The Prince. Dear, dear! *The Prince!*"

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

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 Prince, '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 Prince 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

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

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 Prince 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 princes 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 princes. Ye see, yer don't talk like every day folk; I don't know 'ow yer does it. Now 'ere's me, I can't do it. But yer see, *you* got langwidge, an' w'en the Prince '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."

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

"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 Prince. 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

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

let 'ave ye back; but ye see"—she nodded with a look of explanatory shrewdness—"fact is, the Prince, yer sec, *'s a givin' 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.'"

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

"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 arm-chair and leaned her head back. I mo-



## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

tioned 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 our 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."

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

"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 had 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 good-will, *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.

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

"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 knew 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. 'Ye want me to go *this very mornin'*?' she asked. 'We shall all go this morning.' 'Very well, miss,' she answered with an awful kind of calmness. She gathered up her brushes and

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

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 musn'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

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

my gaiters. 'I 'ave ter wrop ye up well,' she said, 'it's awful raw and loggy.' '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 keep themselves.' '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 sec

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

that all was right. Then she went away to put on her rusty mantel and the painfully jauntty bonnet. I knew now she must have bought the Eiffel 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 banisters and wall. I looked at the French bonnet, with its persistent dingy *chic*, and began to cry. Tom squeezed my arm and said something philosophic.

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

"At the bottom of the stairs, something prompted me to say, 'Jane, where did you put your money?' 'In my pocket,' in, 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 squandered and ignores money. Tom came down again and handed her her wages. She curtsied and thanked him, and laughs ed 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

## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

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 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 get 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 dreadfully comic, leaning over to one side. 'Oh, it's a wretched old bonnet,' Jane said apologetically. 'I'll 'ave a new one.'"



## Confessions of a Cruel Mistress

"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 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."

Vroni



## Vroni

Her baptismal name was Veronica, but by some subtle sense of fitness she had been called Vroni from her earliest infancy. She was a young person from the Rhine, with a narrow chest and a cough. She had also the ready laugh and the manners of a child—with the wrinkled face of a woman prematurely old, or of one who, despite the piling up of years, had kept the colouring and texture of early youth.

The first time I saw Vroni I thought she was either a woman of thirty-five, or a small gnome who would never be older and had never been young. The second time I looked at her I could have believed she was seventeen.

She had come to my widowed sister during a domestic interregnum, but, speedily falling a victim to that capricious lady's charms, the Rhineländerin

## Vroni

stoutly refused to consider herself as a mere stopgap.

I confess, when I first became aware of Vroni's existence the fact annoyed me. I was jarred not only by her consumptive cough, but by her objectionable habit of fleeing when she saw me, as if I had been a burglar or a ghost.

Doubtless my sister found it inconvenient too, but "she does my hair better than Trucifit's," Nellie would say, and smile indulgently.

Now I look upon myself as a peculiarly harmless and inoffensive man,

and Vroni's evident terror of me at first sight made me vaguely uneasy. If I encountered her in the hall, she would instantly turn tail and scuttle back to her lady's rooms. If it was too late to retreat, the creature would flatten herself against the wall, and avert her eyes as if unable to meet the awful menace of my countenance. Finally I could endure it no longer.

"What's the matter with your rabbit-like foreigner?" I asked; "why does she cut and run when she sees me?"

"Oh," laughed Nellie, "she's afraid

## Vroni

of those *zwei Falten* between your brows. Your abstracted frown is more than Vroni can bear with fortitude."

"Idiot! I don't frown."

"Yes you do — when you're thinking."

"Nonsense. Tell her not to be such a fool."

But the nuisance continued. I felt it an unseemly spectacle, this frightened rabbit fleeing panic-stricken whenever I appeared.

"You must speak to her again," I said to Nellie one evening towards dusk. "I was thinking of going out just now when I saw this maid of yours coming in very slowly, dragging her feet. The moment she caught sight of me at the door she turned with a diabolic 'Ach!' and fled down the area steps."

My sister rang, and I subsided angrily into the depths of an arm-chair. I would stay and satisfy myself that Nellie was sufficiently plain-spoken this time.

When Vroni came in she didn't see me.

*Narrative*



Vroni

*Nellie* (angrily). Have you any idea how long you've been gone?

*Vroni* (darkly). Yes, I feel it on my feet.

*Nellie*. I suppose you lost your way as usual?

*Vroni*. Meddam, I been hunt dat place from since two o'clock, till de sun been gone to sleep. I find it not.

*Nellie*. All this time taking my hat to Bond Street?

*Vroni*. Vell, meddam, de cook been ask me to get de game what she forgotten you dit order.

*Nellie*. That isn't your business. Why didn't she send Charles?

*Vroni*. Poor Sharl haf a sore t'roat. So I been gone to dat shop where de birds is all in dead rows—pore t'ings! But, oh, meddam, dose Lerche been so little ones.

*Nellie*. Not smaller than usual, I suppose?

*Vroni*. I t'ink when you see dem you like not to catch dem.

*Nellie*. Why not? You mean the larks weren't good?

*Vroni*. Dey good for to sing. Oh,

Vroni

meddam, nefer in my life haf I a lark eaten. I begin always to cry. I can't catch a sing bird.

*Nellie* (coldly). You are not asked to eat larks.

*Vroni* (rapturously). Oh! I tell de cook I know my lady better. I haf once, for a verr seck lady to make ready a sing bird for her to catch. Ah-h! I cry schrecklich. I say, "Oh, bird, now come I to pull dy feeders off and put du in de fire. Du didst sit and zwischerte to me perhaps last week on de window sill, and I gave du crumps and du t'oughtst, oh, bird, dat I was dy friend. Now come I to pull dy feeders off and put du in de fire for to cook. Den begin I to cry so smooth, some one else haf to come and take down his feeders—not I—not I—poor sing bird!"

*Nellie*. H'm—h'm.

*Vroni*. But dat wass before—in Deutschland. *To-day* (great dramatic effect)—to-day go I to dat shop wher de sing birds been all in dead rows, and I stop and I haf to t'ink,—formerly I could not stay and see a shicken

Vroni

geschlachtet—now stand I here like de rest, so heartless am I grown, since dat I am in England.

*Nellie.* Then you did get us the larks?

*Vroni.* No, meddam! Been I not telling you? I say to Durk—

*Nellie.* You took the dog?

*Vroni.* Yes, meddam. I could nefer loss him. My four-legs friend loaf me vell. Him stay close beside. I say to Durk when dat ve been kommen to de shop, "Look you, Durk?" I did say, "My lady's Herr Bruder haf teach you, you shall eaten dog-cake and not birds. Dat bird you did hurt in de garden, de Herr Bruder dit take away, and dit whip you to teach you von great lesson. All good dogs knows dey moss not touch de sing birds." I vish de man that keep dat shop learn his lesson so vell, like my dear Durk. So I say, "Come home, good dog—we know ve moss not eaten de sing birds." (A coal drops out of the fire and Vroni replaces it. I make frantic signs to Nellie over the chair-back.)

*Nellie.* I ought to scold you, Vroni, but I will scold the cook instead.

Vroni

*Vroni.* Ah no, meddam, scolt not de cook. She already quite sad. She say, "What haf ve now for dinner instead dose birds?" I say I will ask you to let me make a salat. Oh, my dear lady, you will like my salat better nor sing birds.

*Nellie.* What kind of salad?

*Vroni.* Vell I tell. Dere kommen in dese salat what I mean, der kommen beetroot.

*Nellie.* Ugh!

*Vroni.* Him verr good like I mean. Den dere kommen in dese salat a bay leaf and gloves—

*Nellie.* What?

*Vroni.* A bay leaf and gloves—

*Nellie.* What? Gloves! Handschuh?

*Vroni* (bubbling with laughter, which ends in a cough). Ha, ha! No, no! Gloffs I mean—little black t'ings.

*Nellie.* Oh, cloves!

*Vroni.* Yes, gloves, and Zwiebel, what you call onion—ach! (she kisses her fingers in the air ecstatically) den iss it nicely!

*Nellie.* H'm!

*Vroni.* Alle meine Bruder loaf dat

Vroni

sat! (dropping into an awed whisper): My lady's Bruder will like him plenty too.

*Nellie.* I'm afraid he won't like it very plenty; and I'll tell you something else he doesn't like, and that is your absurd fear of him.

*Vroni.* Oh-h-h (her voice shakes), I dolt you so, my lady.

*Nellie.* Told me what?

*Vroni.* Your Herr Bruder like me not.

*Nellie.* Like you? Why should he like you?

*Vroni.* No, not when he make books. Dey been always cross when dey make books.

*Nellie.* What makes you think my brother is cross?

*Vroni.* He neter smile to me.

*Nellie.* I should think not, indeed. Why should he?

*Vroni.* No, I haf notice dat too. When dey make books dey neter smile.

*Nellie* (repressing her feelings). He thinks nothing at all about you. He wouldn't know you were in the house

Vroni

but for your absurd way of running the moment he appears.

*Vroni.* I try not, but he haf always diese zwei Falten between his eyess, like dis when he see me. (She makes a horrible face.)

*Nellie* (laughing). He would never notice you if you weren't so ridiculous.

*Vroni* (meekly). No, meddam.

*Nellie.* If you can't behave more sensibly, I'll have to send you away before we leave London ourselves.

*Vroni.* Oh, meddam.

*Nellie* (softening at sight of Vroni's woe). Now go away and don't be silly any more.

*Vroni.* Yes, meddam. (As she turns away she glances up and sees my picture over the mantel-piece), Ugh! (with a shudder), dey been all like dat.

*Nellie.* All what—like who?

*Vroni.* De ghentlemen what makes books. Dey haf all dat ankry look by de eyes. It iss wid so mootch t'ink. My Bruder haf joost de same. He been verr bad to me.

*Nellie.* Did your brother make books?



Vroni

*Vroni.* He made von book for years.

*Nellie.* And frowned all the time?

*Vroni.* Vell, meddam, he frown first, when I make noise. Den he come to beating me.

*Nellie.* Oh, well, my brother won't do that.

*Vroni* (apparently dubious). No, meddam? I remember me you did say once he vass a so kind man. And I say to me, "See, Vroni, your lady been neter 'traid. When de Herr Bruder been kommen home, my lady run to de doof, and say wid laughing, 'Dat you, Dickie?' *she* not 'traid. I shall be no more 'traid selfs."

*Nellie.* That's right. Now go and say I want the lamps.

(Looking round the back of my arm-chair till I have a crick in my neck. I see at this juncture that Vroni's birdlike eyes have lighted on the toe of my boot. Her jaw drops and her eyes bulge. . . .)

*Vroni* (with guttural horror). De Herr-rr Br-ru-derr! (She turns and incontinently flees.)

Vroni

II.

I think it must have been my renewed struggle with an old eye trouble that ultimately won me Vroni's sympathy. Perhaps she concluded that the "zwei Falten" between my brows indicated not so much the natural ferocity of "de ghentlemen what makes books," as a pardonable pain in the optic nerve. Or it may have been simply because my frown was obscured beneath a mild green shade, that Vroni no longer took to her heels on my approach.

The day that an advance copy of my last three-volume novel reached me, I went down to the morning-room to show it to Nellie. The door was ajar, and Vroni stood with her back to me, helping her mistress arrange flowers. One of the house-maids had fallen ill, and since we had only a few weeks more in England, her place was not supplied, and Vroni had undertaken some of the duties of the office. I was arrested just outside the threshold by hearing the Rhinländerin say in an

## Vroni

ingratiating voice, "Oh, my lady been always so kind. I tell often to Shad and de cook, how kind is my lady. Dey know you not like me. Cook say when I got a so kind lady she will let me to come down and help mit de ploomperdings. Poor cook haf so much work mit all dem ploomperdings."

This fearsome occupation rouses Nellie suddenly.

"What are ploomperdings?" she says cautiously, as though determining not to be too "kind."

"Ploomperdings! Why, you know, meddam," laughed Vroni.

"No," said Nellie

"Meddam, dey are English."

"Well, what are they?"

"Good to eaten! I tell you quite slow now, ploomp boodinks!"

"Oh, plum puddings!"

"Yes, meddam, dat what I say! My lady let me help?"

Nellie has had her character for kindness so impressed upon her, I am not surprised to hear her say, "Yes, I shan't need you this afternoon." Of

## Vroni

course not even my sister could lightly upset a faith like that.

"Thank you, my lady," says Vroni, serenely. "I tell you, meddam, why I ask you dat. When you let me go down and help de cook yooost dis one afternoon, I tink then she forgif me what I say Sunday."

"What did you say Sunday?" asked Nellie.

"Vell, I tell. Cook vas all dress up, vid sing books and new shoes, going to church. She say, 'Good-bye, Vroni. I will bray for you.' 'Thank you, cook,' I say, 'but I tink better when you gif me my coffee hot instead of so much bray.'"

"It wasn't quite the thing to say at that moment," my sister admonishes.

"Vell bray iss verr good sometimes, but coffee comes efery morning."

I put volumes II and III on the window-sill in the hall, and stood cutting the leaves of No. I.

"Any more roses in the box?"

Nellie asked.

"No, meddam, I gif dem all. Oh, du beautiful tings!" In spite of the

Vroni

recurring cough, the words came out to me soft and clear, the childish quality in the voice uncorrected by the worn face of the woman. "Oh, meddam, I know why you like dem kind de best."

"Why?"

"Dem been your sisters, meddam, dem haf your colour, dem haf little t'in waist, dem bend so easy all about like my lady."

"What an absurd creature you are."

"No! Any one moss tink of you, meddam, if dey see dese so pale roses."

"Don't be silly, Vroni. That jug goes in the window."

"Now, little ladies, you been kom-men vid me. Ho yes! No good dat you hang your heads. You haf blenty vater and ve all loaf you. You moss not tink 'bout your home in de garden. You must tink you been bring away by nice zhentleman, to make glad my lady. Dere! Dat's right! Now sit you verr proud in the vindow and look out into de sunshine, and in at your sister what you come to visit. Soon, verr soon, vill you feel like me, nearly all homesick vill be away."

Vroni

"Did I hear you singing downstairs last night?" my sister asked.

"Yes, meddam, far away in de scullery. Ve t'ought nobody hear."

"You are fond of singing?"

"In Deutschland, meddam, vell, yes."

"But not in the scullery?"

"No! It was by dat Sharl and me been kommen to qvarrel."

"What, again?"

"Vell, meddam, it iss not my blame. I did not before know dey could not sing in England. I say ve vill haf a song wid four voices. Dey understand not. I try make dem. I show how ve do in Deutschland. You tink dey can do dat like ve 'o in Deutschland? No! Not Jackson, not Sharl, not de cook. I start dem, and what you tink? Dey gif up each der own part, and come along wid me! Go back, I say, go back! Ve muss not all make de same noisel! Den iss Sharl ankry."

"I'm afraid Charles is not worthy of you," my sister said in the midst of a laugh. "I wouldn't think about him any more."

Vroni

"Oh, meddam, I cannot help to tink. I moss. It iss qvite sure dat Sharl loaf me. He vill grow to be coachman one day. Den vill it be nicely. Ve come to marry den."

"Isn't Charles younger than you, Vroni?"

"Yes, meddam. But vhen a man loaf so derrible like dat, vhat ve to do? Poor Sharl die vhen I shall not marry him."

"Yet he is always making you unhappy."

"Vell, meddam, de men been like dat vhen you loaf dem."

I shut up Volume I., and listened to Vroni's analysis of the heart of man. She wound up with an appeal to the cards.

"Meddam, let me bring once more my cards of fortune. Dey will tell all."

Thinking she would be bursting out in another minute, I opened the door and went in.

"What's that?" my sister inquired, looking up with laughing eyes; "not your new book already?"

Vroni

"Yes; how do you like the colour?"

"Oh-h-h!" murmured Vroni, with irrepressible excitement, as she swept the loose leaves and stalks off the table into her apron.

"Yes, Vroni," said my sister maliciously, "this is my brother's great work."

"Oh-h-h!" Vroni came nearer with fascinated eyes fixed on the three green volumes. "All of dem?" she asked incredulously.

Our amusement disconcerted her slightly.

"Since I can't read this masterpiece, or anything else just now," I said appealingly, to Nellie, "have in the cards of fortune."

"Oh, sir, you heard me to say—" Vroni blushed hotly, and looked almost as alarmed as if I'd taken off the green shade and frowned at her.

"My sister has told me of your fortune-telling gifts. Come, where are these cards?"

But embarrassment had overwhelmed her.

"Zhentlemen like dem not." Her

## Vroni

head dropped woefully over her sunken chest.

"What makes you think that?"

"Dose cards make always mein Bruder verr ankry."

"What was your brother? What did he do?"

"He write a book all de time when he vas home."

"And when he was away?"

"When he vas not home writing dat book, den vas he Professor at Bonn."

"Really? Where is he now?"

"Det. Dey been all det."

"You had more brothers?"

"Yes, sir. Johannes vas like my fader. He go nach Italien and make bictures."

"Your father was an artist?"

"Oh yes!" She had forgotten her confusion now, and was beaming at me in an access of family pride. "Fader vass great artist! Ho yes! He make de ceiling in our house by Steinbrücke, like—what you call Himmel."

"How was that?"

"Oh, stars and blue and anchsels! Ho, fader vass gr-reat man! He vass

## Vroni

verr ankry dat George, instead to baint bictures, like to be Professor at Bonn and make always dat book. Wilhelm too!" She shook her head.

"What did Wilhelm do?"

"Make music—always, always. Ho, dey know to make good music in Deutschland."

"Yes, fancy, Dick," my sister said,

"Vroni has gone to the opera since she was five years old. She's on the most intimate terms with Wagner and all the big people."

"Vell, I like Wagner for *music*. Not for dat he did take away Wilhelm."

"Take him away?"

"Yes, for to be his Secretär. Ho! dey vass all verr ankry. Not me—I vass too young to be ankry den. Dey all say, Wilhelm make beautiful music selfs. Why go mit Wagner?"

"But he can make music *now* by himself?"

"Yes, up in clouts. He die quite soon. Ve all die quite soon. Wilhelm make music now in Himmel. But I sometimes tink Wagner dere too, perhaps."



Vroni

Her look of sisterly anxiety compelled the question—

"You think Wagner had better be kept out?"

"Vell, when Wagner dere, all de music moss be Wagner's. He make all de oddsers to be quiet and listen to him. Ho! you will see!"

Our amusement drove Vroni, shrinking, to the door.

"Take away the tray, and those other rosebowls," Nellie called after her, "and bring the cards—bring them now."

Vroni looked back at me as she gathered up the things.

"You will not be ankry, sir?"

"No; on the contrary."

She beamed and bustled out, carrying the tray laden with ewer and empty bowls and glasses. A few seconds and the sharp crash of broken crockery. Nellie lifted her eyebrows. We sat in silence. By-and-by the apparition of Vroni, a lump on her forehead, despair in every feature, and both hands behind her back.

"Oh, meddam, I haf had an unluck!"

Vroni

"A what?"

Slowly she brought her hands into view. Each one held gingerly some fragments of a rose-bowl.

I go to the window, and pretend to study the passers-by.

"How many have you broken?" asks Nellie sternly.

"But dis. Him by de corner. Him come off."

"Did n't you fall down?"

"Yes, meddam. After dat I set down de tray, and run so quick, to get this pore broke bowl. Meddam, I will buy anoder."

"I don't want you to buy another. I want you to get out of your habit of piling up things, and carrying too many at a time. How often I tell you to make another trip—come back for the rest."

Meddam"—she lowers her voice—"it is while I vish not to disturb de Herr Bruder vid so mootch come back. When he read, or write, or tink, and I come always back, it makes him sit up."

"Yes, you make us both sit up occasionally," said my sister.

### Vroni

"Vell, meddam, you forgiſt? You haſt not changt de mind. Shall I to bring de cards of fortune?"

I make Nellie a ſign from the window behind Vroni's back.

"Well, well, don't tumble down ſtairs again. Go ſlowly."

"Oh, meddam! 'Tank you."

I can hear that ſhe pauses a moment as ſhe paſſes the table in the middle of the room. I turn round. The lump on her forehead is turning blue. She is ſtaring, an awestruck inſtant, at my novel. "Tree of den!" ſhe murmurs, with unabated aſtoniſhment, as ſhe goes forth on her congenial errand.

### III

"Do you ſuppoſe ſhe dreamed the Secretär and the Profeſſor at Bonn?" I aſked Nellie.

"Heaven knows!" ſaid my ſiſter. "All I can ſay is, ſhe's aſtoniſhingly familiar with the great operas, even for a German girl, and can quote you apt lines from the maſterpieces of literature."

### Vroni

"No!" I proteſted.

"Quite true!" She'll recite Schiller and Heine by the yard if you let her. We had a tragic moment yeſterday, when ſhe called Goethe to her aſſiſtance. She came in here after breakfast, redolent of contending perfumes.

"Vroni," I ſaid, "you've been ſpilling the ſcent."

"Spillink?" ſhe inquired innocently.

"I repeated the charge in German. She grew ſcarlet."

"Oh, meddam, you will never forgiſt."

"I may," I ſaid, "if you tell me honeſtly what you've been doing."

"Vell, I tell. Dis morning I feel me verr bad. I been vating of a good news from Deutſchland. Dat good news come not. I tink I feel better ven I ſmell dat nice ſmell in your bottle."

"And you spilled some accidentally?"

"No, meddam. I moſs ſay true. Him not spill. I trow a little on my ſleeſt."

"She looked so woe-begone I couldn't help laughing."

## Vroni

"Oh, wait, you laugh not ven I tell. I been *more* vickel—vorse and vorse! I like dat smell verr mooch, but I feel me derrible homeseeck. I tink' (she lowered her voice to dark conspiracy's pitch)—'I tink I will go to de Herr Bruder's dress-room. Dere vill I smell de nice smell of Köln. I go! I pour little of de nice smell of Köln on dis odder side.'

"Both her sleeves were soaking. I suppose I showed my astonishment.

"Oh! oh! she howled, 'my lady make me de black look.'

"Hush! I said, 'hush this instant! Oh! oh! I am wie Gretchen! she sobbed.

"Like Gretchen! I said, a little alarmed; 'how like Gretchen?'

"Ach!

"Meine Ruhe ist hin  
Mein Herz ist schwer."

My lady make me de black look.'

"I couldn't help thinking how much more surprised I would have been," Nellie wound up, "if an English servant had said, 'I am like Ophelia,' and

## Vroni

had quoted Shakespeare in a domestic crisis."

"I imagine she'd get her month's notice if she did," I observed.

"Quite right too!" said the little British matron with dignity. "One makes allowances for a foreigner. There's one thing about Vroni—if you once forgive her she wastes no ignoble regrets on the past; the sin is wiped out. While she was in my room last night I noticed her smelling with surreptitious rapture, at first one sleeve and then the other. But she smiled quite happily when she caught my eye.

"Dis side smell of my lady," she announced; 'dis one smell of Deutschland—and de Herr Bruder.'

"But mind, Dick," Nellie went on, with a sudden attempt at gravity, "we mustn't spoil the girl for service. She has to be constantly repressed."

"You'll never run Vroni into the regulation servant mould."

"At all events, after this I shall have no more lapses in my training process. I'm indulging you to-day because of your eyes."

"Sh! I said, and Vroni came in, fluttered, rather shy, very important.

"May I bring de little table, med-dam?"

"Yes."

She set it on the hearth-rug between my sister and me. Then she stood hesitating an instant, looking from me to Nellie and back again to me.

"You vill not be ankry, sir?"

"No."

"Meddam, you like dat I do it before a zhentleman?"

"This once."

"Vell"—she pulled some cards out of her pocket—"I mix first," she said, shuffling them feverishly.

"Are these ordinary playing-cards?"

I asked my sister. Nellie shook her head.

"Oh, no, sir," Vroni said. "Dis kind always been true—always, always."

"I see."

"Now!"—she laid them down—"who vill cut? Who vill dere fortune haf?"

"You, Nellie," I said.

I thought Vroni looked a shade disappointed.

"Vell, meddam, make de vish and cut. Die rechte Hand!" Nellie cut, and Vroni laid out the cards. They were greyish white, illustrated with little rude woodcuts, and had legends or verses, or, in some cases, only the names of qualities, printed in German text by the side of the picture. In the right-hand corner were zodiacal signs. As she laid down the cards Vroni indulged in divers cabalistic clucks and "Achs," which added greatly to the impressiveness of the ceremony.

"Hal! Dis die Karten betragende Dame," she said of the tenth card, as she arranged them in rows of seven.

"Yes, that is me," Nellie admitted with reluctance; "and from the look of me I'm at least old enough to know better."

I bent down, and under my green shade I scrutinized the card-questioning lady. She is apparently a soured individual of fifty, with pinlike eyes and very *décolleté* shoulders, from which a shawl has slipped down. Her hair is

## Vroni

dressed in 1830. She wears a crinoline, and clasps her hands in anguish of soul.

"Meddam, see you dat before you dere is *dis* card. Ha! mekwürdig!"

"What does it mean?" I asked.

"It is something new what come to my lady. A changch! A different way she vill go. Ha! dese cards is always so true. Dey make me 'traid."

The picture represents a perilous winding road and a signpost. One arm points piously heavenward. The legend is—

"*Drohendes Uebel auch Rettung.*"

"Auch Rettung!" Vroni gurgled with entire satisfaction.

"Make haste! What's next?" urged Nellie, impatiently.

"Oh, meddam!" Vroni pressed the rest of the pack to her breast. "What vill come de odder side of you." She paused one palpitating instant, and then laid down card No. 15.

"Gott in Himmel!" she ejaculated with preternatural gravity. Even my sister looked disturbed. The card de-

## Vroni

picts a snake darting out a forked tongue, and the legend reads—

"*Falschheit und Unbräu.*"

"Meddam," Vroni whispered, "you haf a bad friend. She look not like you. She been a verr dark woman. Oh, you moss been careful. She make you bad tings. She vant selfs something you haf. She try take him away. Please not to forgotten I did warn you. She vill make you an un-luck in de end—unless— Ha! Ho! Gott sei dank!"

At this cry of ecstasy I examined the next card laid down. "Is this a strawberry?" I enquired. "Why has it got five stems?"

"Stupid! it's a manly heart," said Nellie, "don't you see, plucked up by the roots."

"Yes, meddam, 't is de heart what proud to die for my lady. Oh, it vill save you! You been lucky, meddam! Ha! said I not so! Here comes de Glückskind, vid my lady's best vish. What can hurt my lady when comes de Glückskind!"



## Vroni

This welcome child beyond a doubt suffers from mumps; hence her pained attitude as she stands in pantallettes, by two hollyhocks as tall as pine trees. She holds in her hand a bunch of writhing serpents—or maybe vines—I couldn't make up my mind which. The legend ran—

### "*Liebesvolles Herz Grosse Güte.*"

We paid our respects to the Glücks-kind and passed on.

"Hal! Gelt! Here is mooney, moon-ey, my lady!" I cannot think Vroni could look more radiant if she heard that she herself had inherited \$10,000 a year. The card shows three agonised fishes curling desperately about two wavy lines of sea. The legend is—

### "*Grosser Reichtum auch Verlust.*"

Vroni never mentioned the "Verlust"—not she!

"I wish de cards been efer so good for me," she says, by way of great encouragement.

The next has a picture of something like a crossing-sweeper's broom. The

## Vroni

silence preserved with regard to it is ominous.

"What is that meant for?" I ask.

"It iss an unluck," says Vroni with a shudder.

The legend is—

### "*Sorgen und Unfrieden.*"

"But it iss not near my lady! and, oh! oh! *beautiful*, meddam." This is the greeting accorded to a plithoric black bear, with a jaded, not to say seasick, aspect.

"Dat kind bear will keep away de unluck. It iss good when a lady haf a bear."

Opposite this well-disposed animal is inscribed "*Glück und Weid.*" In every case, as I begin to see, Vroni ignores the less favorable suggestion.

"You vill haf luck—see?—'Glück.'"

De bear brings always a kind luck."

The next card laid down shows us a stork.

"Ah! *Bern* dey not true! Merk-würdig!"

Nellie read out—

## Vroni

### "Veränderung des Wohnorts."

The majestic bird has arched his neck with great effect. One leg is jauntily uplifted with drooping claw, like a dog offering to shake hands.

"He know quite vell you go away, meddam. He vill say, 'Good-bye, lady.'"

"Hal! Now, sir! I t'ought you neter come." This is addressed to the card next the last. It depicts a gentleman in a very frank wig, with a sausage curl on each cheek. His hand is laid jauntily in the breast of his long-tailed coat, a squint in the near eye, and about his mouth a smile of low cunning. "He iss der Karten betragende Herr!" But he is also Nellie's fate—Nellie's second husband. Vroni sparkled as she counted how he is some mystical number from Nellie's "vishing-card." She looked up shyly at her mistress as she said in a whisper, "Meddam Sieben." But, oh, the significance of that glance! A slight pause. She laid down the last card, saying solemnly, "Ve can hide t'ings from *beopple*—we can neter hide

## Vroni

t'ings from de cards. See, meddam?" She reads the first part of the final legend, "*Gute Nachrichten*."

"*Auch Kummer*"—I finish the ignored conclusion. But Vroni points gaily to the picture of a letter. "Meddam, de cards say you vill go away to a new place, where you find dis gentleman and your best vish. Dis is de gentleman vid de true heart. Dis is de letter what he send my lady. He vill ask in dat letter dat you marry, *meddam!*" she says reproachfully at Nellie's smile. "You can see selfs. Iss it not in the cards?"

"*Auch Kummer*," I repeat.

"Nol nol! *Gute Nachrichten!*" she insists. "For iss dere not up here de kind bear!" I perceive if there's a loophole for cheerfulness Vroni may be counted on to crawl blithely through. She unhesitatingly accepts the agreeable half of each legend, and will have nothing to say to the hedging, somewhat cynical spirit in which the compiler of fortunes mixes good and ill.

Nellie, to my regret, sends her away after this.

Vroni

"But before you go," I say, "can you explain why it is that in almost all the cards there are such contradictory things?"

Nellie translates me.

"It is all to mislead the ignorant," says Vroni in her own tongue, "all to entrap the unwary, who understand not the true art of card-reading. Es ist alles fur Verwirrung," she winds up. "If you know not to lay de cards right — if you know not to read true, you make derrible meestake. You shall as vell go look in de moon."

"What's that noise outside?" asks Nellie.

"Dat iss my four-legs friend what tink I been away too long. So he come and krats on the door. Don't do dat, Durk!" she turns the knob and calls out; "you vill krats all de baint down." Then she turns a smiling face back at us for one explanatory moment. "He loaf me so, my dear four-legs friend. I go now. Tank you, my lady. I hobe, sir, you have better eycss anodder day." A shy little curtsy, and she is gone.

Vroni

IV

*I.* Hello! what are you crying about?

*Vroni.* Oh, noddng, sir.

*I.* Come in here a moment (I open the library door). What's up?

*Vroni.* Meddam (sniffes), your sister, say I haf to go away, sir.

*I.* Well, you don't want to stay here alone.

*Vroni.* N-no, but I vish meddam go not nach Indien.

*I.* Well, you see we've got to. *Vroni.* So meddam say. And I ben gone to find me anodder blace.

*I.* Come, cheer up. You'll find one after a bit.

*Vroni* (shaking her head). I been gone to try yesterday and de day before. Dey like me not.

*I.* They are sure to like you, Vroni, *Vroni.* Noo-oo. Yesterday I haf valk and valk till I nearly todt. I find not de right blace. In London de right blace iss ever far.

*I.* Why didn't you ask some one to direct you?

Vroni

*Vroni.* I dit. Dey tell me, "Go right." Den dey tell me, "No! go lett!" Den I go and go till I haf to cry.

*I.* Couldn't you find the address at all?

*Vroni.* Yes sir, at de end I find him. Too late. Anodder girl go right all de time and she get dere first. She been engaged and I—(fresh emotion) —

*I.* Oh! well, better luck next time.

*Vroni.* Nex' time wass dis evening. I wass dolt by de rigistry office dere wass a so nice blace for me in de Oxford and Cambritch Mansions. I go. Dere come to de doer ein kleines Geschöpf, and stand like dis—(with sudden animation she jumps up and runs outside. She pulls the door nearly to and peers through the crack)—like dis. She wass a leetle young t'ing, and haf a ghentleman's dressing-coatround. She look out like dis and say, "What you want?" "You did send for me?" I say. "No! no!" she tell me werr ankry. "Yes, meddam," I say; "I come from Miss Berry's office." "Oh!" she say, "you too young!" (violent

Vroni

sniffles). I vasn't youonger nor she. But she say only dat. Yoost "You too young!" and shut de door. Oh, sir, why say dey all I been too young?

*I.* Well, you aren't very old, Vroni. *Vroni* (indignant and defiant). I t'irty-one.

*I.* I shouldn't have thought it.

*Vroni* (with more tears). Oh, it iss my hat! I moss haf anodder kind of hat.

*I.* You ought to be glad to be told nothing worse than that you are too young. It's a fault you 'll mend.

*Vroni.* Dey belieff not I am t'irty-one. Dey all make open eyess. It iss best dat I take my Taufschein in my pocket.

*I.* I wouldn't bother about that.

*Vroni.* Oh yes. Dey shall see I wass baptize t'irty-one year ago, by Sanct Johannes in Steinbrücke-am-Rhein. Hol Dey shall see I am old—werr old! (wiping her tear-stained face as she goes to the door with an air of almost martial resolution. She turns back on the threshold to say gravely). It iss part de fault of de wedder.



Vroni

*I.* The weather?

*Vroni.* Yes, sir. De winter wedder make me look frish in my sheeks. It iss not dat I am young, (Exit. Pause.)

*Vroni* (returning). Oh, here iss my lady. Tea been in dis room to-day. Shall I de kettle bring?

*I.* Jackson will do that, thank you.

*Vroni.* No, sir! I met Yackson on de gate. My lady send him somewhere. And now my lady comes de stairs up. (She bustles out.)

*Vroni* (outside). I hobe you enjoy yourself, meddam.

*Nellie* (shortly). No, I didn't. Take my things.

*Vroni.* Ah vell, meddam, ve are de one like de odder. But ve bot' been come home save, bless God.

*Nellie* (coming in). Brute of a day. (She sits by the fire, and for ten minutes we exchange grumbles. We are both rather angry with the weather and the world.)

*Nellie.* This state of domestic dis-organisation is enough to drive one frantic. Everything's going wrong everywhere.

Vroni

*I.* Yes, at home and abroad. What the devil is Vroni about? She says she is to bring tea.

*Nellie.* Yes; everything's here except the hot water. (I ring violently. Before the bell stops jangling, in bursts Vroni with very "frish sheeks.")

*Vroni* (bearing a steaming hot-water urn, with a plate of muffins balanced fearsofely atop). I am ashame of me-sels. You moss not been ankry wid me.

*Nellie.* No, no! That's all we require. (Vain hope that Vroni will realise she is not to speak unless she's spoken to.)

*Vroni* (in a stage whisper). Sharl verr bad to-day.

*Nellie.* Never mind. That's all.

*Vroni.* Yackson say when he gone on dat errant dat Sharl haf to help me. Sharl say I moss do it selfs.

*I.* Do what?

*Vroni.* Stretch de butter.

*Nellie.*

*I.* { What?

*Vroni.* I go bring him now.

*Nellie.* Bring whom?



Vroni

*Vroni.* De bread and butter. You haf but cake and muffs. But it iss so cold wedder, it iss not easy to stretch de butter on de bread. Sharl verr bad. He say I moss do it self. (Exit Vroni.) (Tea and "muffs" somewhat restore us. We have forgotten our Rhineländerin.)

*Vroni* (bursting in with an enormous plate, piled high with thick slices of bread, on which lumps of butter are ineffectually stretched. Her brown eyes are ablaze—her cheeks fly crimson flags. She mutters under her breath, "Oh, Sharl! Sharl!"). Meddam (offering the bread), can I to speak wid you?

*Nellie.* After tea.

*I* (hailing a possible diversion). Let her speak now.

*Nellie.* No! (Lower), How can I ever teach the girl if you—

*I.* You won't have time to do much teaching. What is it, Vroni? You know you're not afraid of me any more.

*Vroni.* No, sir. (She is choking with emotion.)

*I.* Come, what is it?

*Vroni.* Oh, it iss Sharl and de cook

Vroni

and de boots (with an outburst). What is boo-oo-oor?

*I.* Boo—— I don't know.

*Vroni.* De cook say I wass a Zherman boor. De boots say I will nefer get me a blace. All of dem downstairs will fight me and my Kaiser Wilhelm.

*I* (mendaciously). I don't understand.

*Vroni.* I t'ought dere moss been somet'ing all dese days when Sharl been so qweer. Dey tell me it is now some weeks dat de English haf a wah wid de Ghermans.

*I.* Oh, I think that's a mistake.

*Vroni.* Dey say when I read de bapers I will see. Dey say I will get me no more a blace. Oh, my lady, is it true dat you haf a wah wid me?

*Nellie.* No, Vroni. Of course not.

*Vroni* (with sudden tears). T'ank you, my lady. Dey say downstairs, my Kaiser haf send a Goddam telegram. He would nefer send a Goddam telegram; would he, my lady?

*Nellie.* One wouldn't have expected it of him.

*Vroni.* No. Dey say de English

Vroni

hates de Zhermans. I would not believe it till Sharl said — Oh ! oh ! (she clenches her hands.)

*I.* What did Charles say ?

*Vroni.* He said dat girl iss a koshun. What iss "koshun ?"

*Nellie* (to me). She means caution.

*I.* Well, to say you 're a caution isn't very bad.

*Vroni.* Oh, he mean it bad. He mean it for wah !

*I.* I can't think that.

*Vroni.* Yes, yes ; and de cook haf a vishun.

*Nellie.* A what ?

*Vroni.* Vishun, what you call. She say de Emperor's telegram been no surbrize to *her* ; for de night before she dit haf a vishun.

*I.* What was it like ?

*Vroni.* She vake up in de dark, and see a man vidout his head, sitting by her bett. She look more, and she see he haf his head in his hands. She say she know den dere going to be drouble wid de Zherman Emperor. It vass a vishun.

Vroni

*I* (soothingly). I don't think there's going to be any war after all, Vroni.

*Vroni.* All what I can say, sir, iss, ve haf wah already downstairs. Wah wid de cook — wah wid Sharl — nodding but wah ! wah ! (Exit Vroni, wringing her hands.)