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IF ONLY

ETC.

BY

F.C. PHILIPS

AUTHOR OF "AS IN A LOOKING GLASS," ETC. ETC.

LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ
1904.

TO
MY OLD FRIEND AND COLLABORATOR,
SYDNEY GRUNDY,
I DEDICATE THESE PAGES.
F.C. PHILIPS.

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IF ONLY
ONE CAN'T ALWAYS TELL
SONGS. AFTER VICTOR HUGO, ARMAND SILVESTRE, CHARLES ROUSSEAU AND THE VICOMTE DE BORELLI
LOVE WENT OUT WHEN MONEY WAS INVENTED
A PUZZLED PAINTER. (WRITTEN IN COLLABORATION WITH THE LATE SIR AUGUSTUS HARRIS)

IF ONLY.

CHAPTER I.

There is a vast deal talked in the present day about Freewill. We like to feel that we are independent agents and are ready to overlook the fact that our surroundings and circumstances and the hundred and one subtle and mysterious workings of the fate we can none of us escape, control our actions and are responsible for our movements, and make us to a great extent what we are.

A man is not even a free agent when he takes the most important step of his whole life, and marries a wife. He is impelled to it by considerations outside of himself; it affects not only his own present and future, but that of others, very often, and he must be guided accordingly.

Emerson says; "The soul has inalienable rights, and the first of these is love," but he does not say marriage. Love is the business of the idle and the idleness of the busy, but marriage is quite another affair—a grave matter, and not to be undertaken lightly, since it is the one step that can never be retraced, save through the unsavoury channels of shame and notoriety, or death itself.

But perhaps Jack Chetwynd was hampered with fewer restraining influences than most men, for he was alone in the world, without kith or kin, and might be fairly allowed to please himself, and pleasing himself in this case meant leading to the altar, or rather to the Registry Office, Miss Bella Blackall, music-hall singer and step dancer.

It was unquestionably a case of love at first sight. The girl was barely seventeen, and her girlishness attracted him quite as much as her beauty, which was exceptional. There was nothing meretricious about it, for as yet she owed nothing to art—brown hair, warm lips, soft blue eyes, and a complexion like the leaf of a white rose—a woman blossom. Then, too, she was a happy creature, full of life and happiness and bubbling over with childish merriment —no one could help liking her, he told himself, but it was something warmer than that. What makes the difference between liking and love? It is so little and yet so much. There was an air of refinement about her, too, which to his fancy seemed to protest against the vulgarities of her surroundings. He thought he could discern the stuff that meant an actress in her, and prophesied that she would before long be playing Juliet at the Haymarket. He was still at the age when the habit is to discover geniuses in unlikely places, especially when the women are pretty. He raved about her when he adjourned with his companions to the bar, and they chaffed him a good deal to his face and sneered at him behind his back. He was there the next night, and the night, after and by-and-by he managed to get introduced to her.

She was prettier off the stage than on, and her manner was charming, and her voice delicious with its racy accent.

She was an American, and had been in London only a few months; and he was duly taken to a second-rate lodging in a side street near the Waterloo Road, and presented to "Ma,"—a black satined and beaded type of the race. There was also a sister, whom, truth to tell, he objected to more than her maternal relative, for she was distinctly professional, not to say loud, and the little mannerisms which were so taking in his inamorata were very much the reverse in Miss Saidie Blackall.

Still, he told himself, he was not going to marry the whole family; which might be true in a sense and yet might not mean the entire independence it implied. Bella's relations must, if he made her his wife, mean more or less to him.

However, youth is sanguine, and Jack Chetwynd did not look too closely at the thorns which hedged his dainty rose-bud round. She at least was all he could wish her to be—unsophisticated as a child, and pure and good at heart.

After a month's acquaintance it began to be understood that he was engaged to her. "Ma" wept copious tears, and reckoned her Bella was a lucky girl to get such an "elegant" husband; and Saidie wished him happiness in a voice like a corn-crake, and declared that her sister was "just the sweetest and best

girl out of N'York," which she was; "and born to lead a private life," which she wasn't.

Bella herself had very little to say. She blushed rosily when Jack made fervent love to her; acquiesced confusedly when he told her she must give up the music-hall stage, and seemed to take happily to the idea of a quiet, uneventful life as Mrs. Jack Chetwynd.

They took a small house in Camberwell New Road. Jack put up a brass plate with his name on it, and M.D. in imposing letters, and invested in a telephone for the accommodation of night callers; and Bella began to busy herself about the furnishing.

That was a delightful time. The little bride elect was so excited and eager, and showed herself wonderfully capable, and with quite a pretty taste in draping and ornamenting; but there was a terrible hole in Jack's purse: chairs and tables seemed to cost a mint of money; and the young man sighed and hoped fervently that it would not be long before patients appeared, or he would be obliged to say No to his darling when she turned her appealing eyes upon him and begged him to give her money for that "duck of a screen," or something else that was from her point of view the most extraordinary bargain, but which, Jack reflected, privately, they could very well have done without.

He was giving up a certainty in settling in Camberwell, for as House Surgeon at St. Mark's his income was assured; but then as a married man he could no longer have lived at the hospital, and "one must risk something" said Jack, hopefully.

They were married in May, just three months from that eventful night when our hero first saw pretty Bella Blackall, on the boards at the "Band Box," and Mrs. John Chetwynd was altogether so sweet and winsome in her simple white gown, that Saidie was right when she hilariously remarked that Jack might well be forgiven for falling in love with her "all over again."

The wedding was just as quiet as it could be, for Jack did not care to invite any of his friends. "Ma" and Saidie were altogether too impossible; and unfortunately no one seemed to mind whether he did or not. There was one unpleasantness connected with the day which Chetwynd felt Bella might have had tact enough to avoid. Two or three of Saidie's friends, in light and eminently professional attire, were of the party, the women a good deal worse than the men; and they all returned together to Holly Street, where a meal had been prepared in the front parlours, the landlady having generously placed them at the disposal of her lodgers for the occasion. There was a good deal of banter and side jokes were bandied about from one to another; which was galling to young Chetwynd, and made him devoutly thankful that none of his own companions and friends were present. When at last Bella rose from the table to change her gown for the pale grey he himself had chosen, with the big hat and nodding plumes in which she had looked such a dainty little mortal, he pushed his chair back with a look of disgust on his face and left them to talk amongst themselves.

Saidie was distributing small pieces of wedding cake, laughing and screaming at the top of her voice.

"Saikes, man! you are not to eat it. Put it under your pillow and as sure as I'm a Yank you'll see your intended," she cried. And then followed an amount of vulgar chaff and coarse pleasantry which caused the "happy man" to set his teeth hard and register a vow at the bottom of his heart that this should be the last occasion on which his wife should associate with her sister's friends.

And then Bella came tripping down the narrow staircase, her cheeks warm with a pale pink colour that made her inexpressibly lovely; and the carriage which Mrs. Blackall had insisted upon ordering to take the young couple to the station was at the door, and in the bustle that ensued Jack lost sight of all annoyances and remembered only that he had married the girl he loved and that he was the happiest fellow in the universe; and amid a shower of rice and a white satin slipper (one of Saidie's), which fell right into Bella's lap; the last

farewell was spoken, and they drove away.

"Only to Brighton!" cried Nina Nankin, the celebrity famed for the height to which she could raise one leg while standing upon the other. "What a mean chap! He might have forked out enough for a trip to Paris, I should have thought."

"It wouldn't satisfy me," returned Saidie, turning up her nose disdainfully; "but he isn't my style, anyway."

"Bit of a prig, eh?"

Saidie nodded.

"I do detest a man who fancies himself a head and shoulders above the rest of his kind," said that young lady vehemently; "you'll generally find out he don't amount to a row of pins. My! ain't I glad I'm not going to live with him. I would as lief go to Bible-class every day of the week. I'll bet my bottom dollar Bella'll see the mistake she's made before she's many weeks older. There's a chip of the old block about that young woman, for all her baby ways and her innocent know-nothing. He'll be a spry man, will Dr. Chetwynd, to come up to her. It'll take him all he knows to get ahead, you bet".

Saidie lay back in the chair and laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks.

CHAPTER II

It was not long before Dr. Chetwynd's eyes were fully open to the mistake he had made and that he realised the fact that you cannot fashion a Dresden vase out of earthenware, and though pinchbeck may pass muster for gold, it does not make it the real article.

At first Bella did try her "level best" as Saidie put it, to be all that Jack required of her. She took his lecturings humbly, held her peace when he scolded her (and I am afraid he constantly did), and acknowledged in the depths of her shallow little mind that she fell far short of what his wife should be. But as time went on she grew less solicitous about pleasing him. His standard was an almost impossible one to the very second-rate little American girl, to whom the atmosphere of the "Halls" was far more congenial than the humdrum, quiet life she led in the Camberwell New Road, and she slipped back little by little into the mire out of which he had raised her.

"I can never learn to be what he wants me to," she said a little pathetically to Saidie—"It is like standing on tiptoe all the time trying to reach up to his standard. I'm sick of it. If he loved me well enough to marry me, the same love ought to be strong enough to make him contented with me. After all, I'm the same Bella now that I was then."

A word of advice at this juncture might have quieted the poor little wife, and brought her back into safe paths, for she really loved Jack in her heart; but Saidie was not the person to give it. Privately she considered her sister a fool to have put up with this ridiculous nonsense of her husband's as long as she had done; and the line of argument she took was about the worst she could have adopted for the happiness and peace of the Camberwell household.

She was a good deal older than Bella, and the girl had been wont to rely upon her in a great measure, and to look up to her as a practical, sensible person, which Bella was quite ready to admit she herself was very far from being; so now, when Saidie spoke in a resolute, determined way, she listened meekly, if she did not in so many words acquiesce in the wisdom and justice of what she said.

"As far as I can see, you don't get a bit of fun and happiness out of your life," remarked Saidie, critically examining her features in the glass. "What did you

marry him for, I should like to know? You might as well be Bella Blackall, on the boards again, and free, as the wife of a stingy fellow like that."

"Oh! Saidie, he doesn't grudge me anything." The young wife felt a little compunction in her heart.

"Yes he does." Saidie turned round and faced her sister. "He don't like you to enjoy yourself, not a little bit. He would keep you wrapped up in cotton wool if he could, and if you don't make a stand now, once and for all, and let him see you have a mind of your own and intend to do as you like, you'll regret it to the last day of your life. Who is he, anyway? I guess our family's as good, if we knew anything about them, which we don't, worse luck. Just you give him back his own sauce, Bella, and next time he finds fault with you, laugh in his face and tell him he has got to put up with what he finds, for it ain't likely you can alter your nature to suit his high mightiness. Pitch on a thing or two he does which you don't like, and give him a sermon as long as your arm. You see; he will come off his pedestal. Sakes alive! he ought to have me to deal with; I bet I'd teach him a thing or two."

And then Saidie whipped herself off to the "Rivolette," where she sang a doubtful song and displayed her finely turned limbs in a style that would have disgusted her brother-in-law, if he had been there to see.

But music halls were not to his liking under any circumstances. He had never really cared for them, even in his bachelor days, and now he would have cut his right hand off rather than be seen with his young wife beside him, at such resorts.

Then, too, Dr. Chetwynd felt that it behoved him to be circumspect in all his actions, for his practice was steadily increasing and he was becoming popular, and had serious thoughts of migrating westward. It was a constant source of vexation to him that Bella was not liked as much as her handsome, clever husband, and he began to be painfully alive to the fact that she could not have been received in certain houses whose doors would have been gradually opened to him. In a social sense his wife was a failure, and with a sigh he realised that it was almost an impossibility to show her where the fault lay; he could not always be at her elbow to guard against little solecisms of manner and speech which he knew must jar and grate on others even more than on himself.

It went terribly against the grain, for he loved her none the less that his eyes were not blinded to her shortcomings. She was still the same winsome girl he had made his own; large-hearted, gentle and affectionate, but—and he sighed impatiently, for that something lacking was for ever pulling him back and standing in the way of his own social advancement.

He became less demonstrative, less congenial, and his practice made huge demands upon his time, and left but scant opportunity for pleasure-seeking. Lines traced themselves upon his brow and lurked at the corners of his mouth; he aged rapidly, and began to look like an elderly man while Bella was still little more than a girl.

On the night of Mrs. Chetwynd's return from the maternal roof (for Mrs. Blackall still lived near the Waterloo Road, and her elder daughter continued to make her home with her), she found her husband, a good deal to her surprise, seated in the drawing-room, gay with flowers and crowded with knick-nacks of every description. He had in his hand a book which he flung down with an annoyed gesture as his wife opened the door.

It was perhaps no worse than others of its type, but it had not an honest moral tone and was not therefore, John Chetwynd considered, a desirable work for his young wife's perusal.

"Have you read this?" he asked.

"No; it is one of Saidie's. Is it interesting?"

John Chetwynd's answer was to hurl the volume under the grate with an

angry word.

Bella flushed.

"Why did you do that? I want to read it."

"I will not allow you to sully your mind with such filth. It only goes to prove what I have so often told you, that your sister is not a proper associate for any young woman. A book of that description—faugh!"

Bella picked up the offending volume and looked ruefully at its battered condition. "I should have supposed that as a married woman I might read anything," she said with an assumption of dignity.

"Why should you be less pure because you have a husband, my child? Don't run away with any such notion."

"Well, I will read it and give you my opinion of it."

"You will do no such thing. I forbid it, Bella."

"In a matter like this I shall judge for myself." Her cheeks were scarlet, and she kept her eyes downbent.

"I will not—"

"Bella!"

It was the first time in their married life that she had defied him, and he looked at her in utter astonishment.

"Yes," she cried, turning on him like a small fury, with the book tightly held in both hands; "I'm not a child to be dictated to and ordered to do this and that. I'm perfectly well able to act for myself and I intend to do so now and always. I'm sick of your eternal fault-finding, and the sooner you know it the better. If it's not one thing it's another. Nothing I do is right and I'm about tired of it."

John Chetwynd sat perfectly silent under this tirade. He was a shrewd man, and he knew that Bella had been spending the evening with her own people, and jumped at once to the conclusion that in defying him she was acting by their advice, and his brow grew black and lowering.

Then he looked up at Bella, who, a little ashamed of her vehemence, was slowly unbuttoning her gloves, having laid aside the unlucky cause of the battle royal.

"My wife," he said kindly, "if you will not act on my advice, let me beg of you to think twice before accepting that of others, since I at least may be credited with having your real good at heart."

"And you think that—you mean to imply that—"

"That your sister has her own ends to serve? Undoubtedly I do."

"You are all wrong—all wrong." But the tell-tale blushes on Bella's face showed him plainly enough that he had been right in his conjecture, and had to thank his wife's relatives for her rebellion and newly developed obstinacy and resentment.

"Now, Bella, from to-night I cannot allow you to go to Holly Street: stay," as Bella would have spoken, "you may see your mother here when you please, but you must let your sister fully understand that she will not be welcome. Something surely is due to me as your husband, and that there is no great amount of sympathy between you and Saidie you have said repeatedly; therefore I am asking no great sacrifice of you. Do you hear me, Bella?"

"Yes, I hear."

"And you will respect my wishes in the matter?"

"I don't know," she spoke uncertainly.

She was not fond of her sister, as he had said; certainly not sufficiently fond of her to allow her to come between herself and Jack; and yet she felt that it would be unwise and undignified if she were to give in and refuse Saidie admission to their house. She had just declared that she would stand no coercion; and after all, what had poor Saidie done?

"I don't think you have any right to keep my people away," she said at last, sullenly. "This is my house as well as yours, remember."

"I am not going to argue over it, my dear girl." Dr. Chetwynd rose determinedly from his chair with an expression on his face which his wife had learned to know and dread. "I forbid you to ask your sister here again. I am sorry to have to speak so decidedly; but your conduct leaves me no alternative."

And he walked quickly across the floor and the next moment the door closed upon him.

"I don't care what he says. I won't be ordered about," flashed out Bella, all that was worst in her nature roused by Jack's resolution. "Saidie is quite right; if I don't put my foot down I shall soon be nothing better than a white slave."

"Putting her foot down," certainly had one effect, namely, that of making life anything but a bed of roses for the unfortunate doctor.

Never had Bella shown herself so unamiable and unloveable as during the next two days. She hardly addressed her husband and she flounced about the room and tossed her head and hummed music-hall ditties (which she had caught from Saidie) under her breath, and altogether comported herself in the most exasperating fashion.

John Chetwynd hardly knew how to act towards her. If he pretended to be unconscious of anything unusual, it would probably provoke her to stronger measures, and yet he was very loth to stir up strife between them, and leant towards the hope that this spirit of fractiousness would die out in time and that Bella would become her loving, tractable self again. But he reckoned without his host.

Saidie, who was duly apprised of the condition of things, urged upon her sister to stick to her guns and on no account to yield an inch, and although desperately miserable, Bella took her advice.

Returning from seeing a patient a day or two later, Dr. Chetwynd ran into the arms of an old friend, a man he had not seen since his marriage.

"Why, Meynell, old chap, where have you dropped from?" he exclaimed, grasping the outstretched hand.

"Where have *you* hidden yourself? is more to the purpose. No one ever sees you nowadays."

Dr. Chetwynd smiled.

"Perhaps you do not know I am a married man," he said. "Which accounts for a good deal of my time, and as a matter of fact I have but little leisure, for my practice keeps me always at the grindstone."

"Doing pretty well?"

"Yes, I think I may say I am. Uphill work, of course, but still—"

"And where are you living?"

Chetwynd hesitated.

"Close by here," he replied the next moment. "Come home with me now, if you have nothing better to do, and allow me to present my wife to you."

And they walked on side by side.

"You have dined? I am afraid—"

"My dear fellow, I have this moment left the club."

Dr. Chetwynd put his latch-key into the lock and ushered his friend upstairs to his wife's pretty drawing-room.

But Bella was not there; and finding that she was not in her bedroom, or in fact in the house at all, he rang the bell and questioned the maid as to when her mistress had gone out and if she knew when she would be likely to return.

"No, sir, that I'm sure I don't. My mistress never said anything to me."

"Well, she is not likely to be away long," remarked the doctor philosophically. "Have a cigar, Meynell."

"Thanks, no. Your wife spoils you, Jack, if she allows you to smoke in her pretty little room."

"Oh, she will not mind; but we will go down to my den shortly. You see, Meynell, I'm a bit of a Bohemian, although I like to preserve the customs of the civilised world all the same, to a certain extent. But my little wife—well—she—she—I daresay you may have heard she was on the stage before I married her."

"No, indeed I hadn't." Gus Meynell looked a good deal surprised.

"Well, I mention it because perhaps she is not quite like the ordinary run of women."

Meynell could no longer be blind to the want of ease in his host's manner, and in his turn became proportionately uncomfortable.

"Hang it all! A man marries to please himself," he said awkwardly.

"She is just the dearest girl in the world," continued Jack Chetwynd, with warmth. "I'm not only fond of her, but proud of her too, but you know—"

"I perfectly understand what you mean. To my idea unconventionality is the most charming thing a woman can have. I hate the bride manufactured out of the schoolgirl. The oppressive resemblance between most of our friends' wives is one of the safe-guards of society."

"What is that?" Chetwynd broke in upon his friend's speech with a nervous start and exclamation. The hall door opened with a loud bang and a woman's noisy laugh could be heard as a pelter of high-heeled shoes came along the tesselated hall and then the vision of a pretty girl at the doorway, accompanied by a man and two women.

"Hallo, Jack! You are home before me, then."

"Bella, my dear, I must introduce you to an old friend of mine: Meynell, my wife."

Bella bowed a little coldly.

"My sister, Mr. Meynell," she said, seeing that the doctor was looking straight over Saidie's head. "My sister, Miss Saidie Blackall; daresay you have seen her from the front before." Then, looking towards the open door, "Come in, come in. Jack, I think you have already met Mr. and Mrs. Doss."

Chetwynd looked terribly annoyed; but there was no choice left for him but to extend his hand and mutter something to the effect that he had not had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of his wife's friends before.

"Glad to know you, sir—not one of us—not in the profession, I think?"

"No—er—no," responded Chetwynd feebly.

"And the 'appier you, take my tip for it. The wear and tear of the 'alls, sir, no one but a pro can estimate."

Here his wife, an over-dressed, showy individual a shade more of a cockney than himself, interposed with a coarse laugh.

"Get along, you jolly old humbug, you! You couldn't live away from them—could he, dear?" addressing Saidie, who was maliciously enjoying the effect that their sudden entrance had produced upon her brother-in-law and his friend.

"Ah; you think so, d'ye? that's all you know about it. Give me a nice quiet 'public' with a hold-established trade and me and the missis cosy-like in the private bar; that's the life for yours truly when he can take the farewell ben."

"How soon are your friends going to take their leave, Bella?" asked Chetwynd in an undertone to his wife.

But Bella turned her back upon him without deigning to give him so much as a word.

"I think I had the pleasure of seeing you perform the other night, Mrs. Doss," remarked Mr. Meynell.

"Don't she look a figger in tights? now tell the truth and shame the old gentleman: a female as fat as my wife ought not never to leave off her petticoats, that's what I says."

"Samuel, fie! You make me blush." His wife coughed discreetly behind her hand. "It's a new departure, I grant; but I've had a good many compliments paid me since I took to the nautical style, I can tell you."

"Gammon!" grunted Mr. Doss, with a dissatisfied air. "Did you see her as the 'Rabbit Queen,' sir? My! the patience that woman displayed in the training of them little furry animals would have astonished you. Struck the line, sir, out of her own 'ed! 'I'm going, Samuel,' she said, 'to supply a want.' 'You!' I says. 'Me!' says she; 'they have got their serpents,' she says, 'and their ducks, and their pigeons and their kangaroos,' 'What's their void?' said I. 'Rabbits,' she says, and there you are!"

"Saidie, why don't you sit down? We will have some supper directly," said Bella.

"Oh, my dear, I'm dying for a drink!" cried Miss Blackall, flinging herself in an attitude more easy than graceful into an armchair.

Bella opened the chiffonier and produced glasses and a spirit stand.

"Saves the trouble of ringing for the servant," she said archly to Meynell.

Chetwynd could fairly have groaned; and when his wife put the climax upon everything by drinking out of her sister's glass he could contain himself no longer. "I never saw you touch spirits before," he said, determined that his friend should know that his wife was an abstemious woman.

"Ah," she said lightly, "there are lots of things you never saw me do, Jack, which I am capable of, all the same." Whereupon Saidie burst out laughing as at some prodigious joke.

"Good for you, Bella! All right, dear! I'm not one to tell tales out of school."

"Are you a married man, sir, may I ask?"

Doss put his thumbs under his arm-pits and looked scrutinisingly into Meynell's face. "I should say not."

"No, I'm a bachelor, and likely to continue one."

"Well," remarked Mrs. Doss sentimentally, "I don't know nothing jollier than courting time. Such little ordinary things seem sweet like, then."

"Hark at the old girl," chuckled Doss.

"You can't kidd me, Doss. You know it, too. I think of our own billing and cooing, sir—his and mine. I was not a draw in those days; the last turn in the bill at the "Middlesex" was about my mark, and Doss, he hadn't risen, neither. We used to walk 'ome that lovin' up Drury Lane, and Doss, he would say, 'fish, Tilda,' and I would say, 'if you could fancy a bit, Sam.' And in he would pop for two penny slices and chips. And eat—lor', how we did eat. When I look back on that fish, sometimes I could cry. Money and fame ain't everythink in the world, believe me, they ain't. You may be 'appy in your 'umbleness."

All this was gall and wormwood to John Chetwynd, and he approached his wife again and whispered.

"It is getting late—are these people never going?"

"Not until they have had supper, most certainly."

"And do you expect my friend to join you?"

"You can please yourselves. I don't think either of you would be much acquisition in your present frame of mind. Mrs. Doss, somebody interrupted you; you were talking about a kindred soul and an attic. Money and position are not everything you were saying. I agree with you. Give me an easy life and no stilts."

John Chetwynd could stand it no longer.

"Madam," he said, addressing Mrs. Doss; "I must really apologise, but Mr. Meynell and I have important business to discuss, and—"

Mrs. Doss might be vulgar, but she was not obtuse. Seeing she and her husband were not wanted, she sprang to her feet.

"Sam—right about face; we must be off 'ome."

"Nonsense, you must have some supper before you go," said Bella.

"Oh, I think we will be toddling, thanks. Are you coming with us, Saidie?"

"No, I'm not," returned that young woman, sturdily. "Since this house is the joint property of Dr. John Chetwynd and his wife, I reckon I shall stop awhile. Bella, you are not going to turn me out, are you?"

"Not I. I can't imagine what Jack means by behaving so inhospitably. I hope you will all stop."

But Mr. Doss, exceedingly affronted at the slight offered him, had tucked his wife's arm under his own and was already at the door.

"Good night, gents. My best respects to you, Mrs. Chetwynd, but we knows who wants us and who doesn't."

Bella turned indignantly to her husband. "And you call yourself a gentleman!" she cried.

"For heaven's sake remember we are not alone!" whispered Chetwynd in distress, "you have distinguished yourself quite enough."

"I don't care—you have insulted my friends."

"Friends!"

"Yes, and as good as you or I. What did you marry me for if you are ashamed of my connections?"

"I did not marry the whole variety stage."

At this juncture Meynell rose.

"Awfully sorry, but I must be going old chap, promised to look in again at the

club." And Chetwynd did not press him to stay. Humiliated to the last degree, he followed him downstairs.

"I have given you a very enjoyable evening, Meynell," he said bitterly.

"My dear fellow, what ought I to say?"

"I'm damned if I know; I've never visited a friend who made such a marriage as mine. I should have pitied the poor devil profoundly if I had. Good night, old chap."

The hall door shut, and Chetwynd went slowly, sorrowfully back to the drawing-room.

"I hope you have disgraced me enough to-night," he said stormily.

"Where's the disgrace, I should like to know, in inviting a couple of old friends into one's own house?" demanded Saidie aggressively.

Chetwynd promptly turned his back upon her. "I am addressing my wife," he said frigidly.

"Yes; I would like to see you talking to *me* in that tone of voice," returned his sister-in-law.

"Bella, what have you to say for yourself? Have you no self-respect whatever, and no consideration for your husband's position?"

"Oh, I'm sick of hearing about your position," said his wife pettishly. "In the days when you had not any, we were a lot happier. You didn't turn up your nose at my associates when I was on the boards at the Band Box! Everything was charming. You laughed then at what you now call "vulgar," and you thought it good fun, and you would have taken the property man to your heart if I had told you he was my brother. But now I am your wife it is quite a different tale. My friends are too common for you to mix with. By the Lord! I'm not at all certain whether you think *me* good enough for you, myself."

"Bella, Bella!"

"Oh! Yes, it is easy enough to look broken-hearted. How dare you turn my friends out of the place? It is you, not I, who have brought disgrace upon us by introducing a stranger here and mortifying and humbling me in front of him. If the Dosses are good enough for me, they are good enough for my husband."

"My dear wife, they are not good enough for you. There is the whole truth. Why are you so altered? Why will you not listen to me and take my advice as you used to do? Have you forgotten how happy we once were with each other?"

There was a little break in his voice, but Bella was too incensed to heed it.

"You mean that you did not abuse me when you had it entirely your own way! Wonderful! Perhaps you did not know that you bored me to death the whole time. And now you have got it at last. I'm tired of your cheap gentility and Brummagem pretensions; sick to death of hearing that nothing I have been used to is "proper." If my world is a second rate one, show me a better. Why don't you introduce me to your own, if it is so vastly superior? Have you done it? Not you! You bury me in this poky little hole and deliberately insult the only friends I have who take the trouble to come and look me up."

Chetwynd passed his hand over his brow dreamily. The whole thing was such a shock to him, he could hardly realise it.

"I hope you are saying much more than you mean," he said at last. "God knows if you have been dull I never suspected it."

"Because I have not grumbled—because I smiled instead of yawning, and laughed when I felt like crying, you never suspected it! Did you ever ask

yourself what amusements you were providing for me while you were out all day? Not for a moment. Men like you never do, when they marry girls like us. You fancy you have been very noble and chivalrous and plucky; but what you have really done is to get what you want and leave me to pay the cost. Once your wife, there was an end of the matter so far as you were concerned, and to marry you was to complete my destiny! I was to sit all day long staring at the four walls, and if I happened to feel lonely, take a look at my marriage certificate to cheer myself up! well—" she drew a long breath and suddenly left her seat and came quite close to him. "Well," she said again, "I am not satisfied—do you hear? It may be the height of ingratitude, but it is a fact all the same. I am not content and I have made up my mind (you may as well know it now as at any other time) to go back to the stage. The life suits me and I am going to do it." And then she paused.

If she expected her husband to storm and rave, insist and expostulate, she was disappointed. He sat dumb and voiceless, his face buried in his hands, and he did not even look up when, with the air of a victor, Bella marched across the floor, beckoned to her sister, and went up to her own room.

"I never gave you credit for such real grit," began Saidie, admiringly; but to her surprise Bella flung herself on the bed and burst into uncontrollable sobs.

"I wish I was dead," she cried. "I am a beast—an ungrateful beast; and I have said what is not true. I have loved him always—always."

"Well, you can't go back from your word now," said Saidie; "You said you would do it."

"Yes, and I will." Bella sat up and dried her eyes. "I will go back to the stage; but I did not say I would stop there, and I shan't if I'm not happy, and if it makes a break between me and Jack."

"Don't talk like that," cried Saidie disdainfully, "You make me tired!"

CHAPTER III.

After this there was a lull; John Chetwynd observed that he had need of more forbearance towards his wilful wife, and tried to exercise it. He told himself that there was love enough and to spare; that with the deep affection he was convinced Bella bore him there was nothing really to fear. She was young and ill-advised, and it behoved him to keep a careful watch over her, and above all things not to draw too tight a rein. As for her threat of returning to her old life and its meretricious attractions, after the first shock he dismissed it from his mind. She had not really intended doing anything of the sort; such a step was impossible. It was a wild idea, born of the excitement of the moment, and unworthy of a further thought, and so he put it aside. Had not the question been argued and threshed out once and for all soon after marriage? He recalled with a curious lump in his throat how she had put her hands into his and said; "Your wishes are my wishes, now and always, Jack." And there had been an end of the matter.

"I will wait until the atmosphere has cleared a little," said John Chetwynd, reflectively, "and then I'll tell her that at the end of the year we will leave Camberwell and take a larger house in a better neighbourhood."

Thus, out of his love for his young wife, he made excuses for her and took her back to his heart again.

And Bella? Jack's conduct puzzled her. She had fully expected that he would be exceedingly angry and displeased, and in her own mind had prepared certain little set phrases which were to impress him with the fact that she intended to do as she pleased and would not allow herself to be dictated to or coerced. And thus it was that on the following morning she came down to

breakfast with it must be confessed a forbidding look upon her pretty face and a defiant air about her bearing. But all her newly formed resolves were put to flight when Jack came towards her and deliberately kissed the lips which she vainly tried to withhold.

"Bella, you and I love each other too well to quarrel," he said kindly; "let us forget all that happened last night."

What could she say? In spite of herself she felt that she was yielding; and though she did not meet him half way as he had fondly anticipated she would do, still she allowed him to draw her into his arms and did not repulse his caresses.

She might have shown a more generous spirit, it is true. Since he had tacitly acknowledged that they had been mutually to blame, she might have offered something in the shape of an expression of regret; but peace in any shape and at any cost Chetwynd felt he must have.

But Bella had by no means surrendered her determination of going on the stage again, and was already with Saidie's assistance on the look-out for an engagement. It would be difficult to define her feelings towards her husband at this juncture. That there was still a veiled hostility John Chetwynd could not fail to see; but in his newly formed resolution to be patient and forbearing, he simply ignored it and diligently cultivated a kindly, gentle bearing, interesting himself in her little domesticities and the general routine of her everyday life. This amused Bella intensely, and although she would not have acknowledged it, perhaps touched her a little.

Why had he not done this before? And having been careless and indifferent once, why was he not so still? For this is how it was with Bella; she was learning to compare her husband with her lover, and be very sure the former suffered by comparison.

"Les absents ont toujours tort" and Saidie found so much to say and said it in such a contemptuous, scornful way to Howard Astley, about her sister's husband, that perhaps there was some little excuse for the young man's impression that Bella Chetwynd would be vastly better off under his protection than amid her present surroundings.

"The man was a brute," Miss Blackall declared.

Poor John Chetwynd! Not only was he far removed from being a brute, but he was also miles above the man whom Saidie delighted to honour, and whose addresses and attentions she thrust upon Bella at every turn.

At first, to do her justice, the young wife shrank back dismayed. Beyond his handsome face, Howard Astley had but little to recommend him, and after listening to his commonplaces and enduring the fulsome compliments it pleased him to pay, she would hurry home with tingling pulses and a shamed heart to Jack—Jack, who had once been all the world to her.

Once! Oh, and such a little time ago! After all, how little she had to complain of in the man who had made her his wife!

He was "uninteresting," wrapped up in his profession, "dull." That was all, but it meant a very great deal to Bella. It meant everything; and the sluggish conscience which just at first had a word or two to say in his defence, gradually went to sleep again and troubled its owner no longer.

Why should she not enjoy herself as other women of her age did?

Why, indeed? She did not intend to do anything that was really wrong, or even unbecoming in her position as Jack's wife; but still she was resolved on extracting the utmost amount of amusement possible out of life, and thus with slow, subtle drifting and unconscious eyes—eyes that would not see their peril —she reached the point where temptation steps in.

It was his wealth that dazzled her.

She did so long to be rich. John was apt to be mean about trifles, but this man—the man she allowed to make love to her—was a very prodigal in his liberality. He spent money like water. He rarely came empty-handed. Probably he knew the manner of woman he had to deal with, and Bella hid the trinkets away with a guilty blush; they were not much good to her after all, for she did not dare to wear them, lest Jack should ask awkward questions concerning the source from whence they came.

"I never can do anything I like," said Bella with a pout.

And then there came a night when John Chetwynd found the pretty drawing-room deserted and his wife flown.

The hours went by and as she did not return he grew seriously uneasy.

Where could she be? When eleven o'clock struck he put on his hat and, terribly though it went against the grain, started for Holly Street—she might be at her mother's.

No, Mrs. Blackall had not seen her, she said; and she looked searchingly into her son-in-law's face as she spoke. "Did Dr. Chetwynd really not know where she was?"

"No, madam, or assuredly I should not be here."

The doctor spoke with some heat; that there was something behind all this was very evident, and he naturally objected to being made a fool of.

"You don't know, then, that Bella is on at the Tivoli?"

John Chetwynd sat down suddenly. This news literally took his breath away.

It was not possible that Bella had taken such a step without his knowledge or sanction. He looked up with such hopeless misery written in his white face that Mrs. Blackall could not help a certain pity for her son-in-law, although in her opinion he had brought the thing upon himself, and the very compassion she felt for his suffering had the effect of making her more harsh and unsympathetic.

"What did you expect?" she asked. "As a man of the world could you really imagine that a young, high-spirited girl like my daughter would content herself with the life you tried to chain her down to? She had had just taste enough of the admiration and applause of a public life to get a liking for it, and in an instant it is all taken away and nothing given her in its place. It ain't commonsense, it—"

"It may not be," said Chetwynd wearily; "but there are women nevertheless to whom home and husband are all-sufficient and who ask for nothing beyond."

"You made a great mistake, Mr. Chetwynd, when you—"

"I did," he interrupted quickly; "you are perfectly right; I did when I believed my wife and your daughter to be one of these. Well," and he rose wearily, "she has put a barrier between us to-night that can never be broken down."

"Tut, tut, man; you have got your duty to do by her, and I'll take good care you do it. She is doing no wrong to join her profession again."

"Our ideas as to right and wrong probably differ. I am certainly not going to argue the point, nor do I wish to shirk what responsibility I took on my shoulders when I married. But if it is upon your advice she has acted in this matter, ask God to forgive you for the cruel wrong you have done us both!"

Then he picked up his hat and went out of the house. It was long past midnight when Bella returned; but late though it was, she knew by the lights in the drawing room that her husband was waiting up for her, and with an impatient sigh, determined to get her lecture over, she ran lightly up-stairs.

He was there, sitting in her own cosy armchair, and he looked round

expectantly as the door opened.

"Well," she said nervously, stripping off her gloves, and avoiding meeting his stern, sad gaze. "I daresay you wonder where I have been and what has kept me so late; but, my dear old Jack, you will have to give up the bad habit of sitting up to all hours for me, for I'm likely to be late most nights now."

She paused for a reply, but none came. Her easy assurance staggered him; he could hardly believe that this self-composed, glib-spoken young woman had been at one time his diffident, shy little love. The unhappy man found it very hard to reconcile the two. "Why don't you speak?" she asked impatiently, facing him in a defiant manner; and as he looked up at her he noticed for the first time that she had grown older and had lost all at once—at least, so it seemed to him—the rounded, childish look from her sweet face and involuntarily a sigh broke from him.

"One would think I had committed a crime," cried she in disdain, and then, catching her skirts up, she broke into a step dance, humming a popular music-hall air.

"Stop—do you hear me?—this instant stop!" the devil in him burst out; he could restrain himself no longer.

"Woman! What are you made of?" he cried in a voice of thunder, and she, shrinking back a little, fell half frightened into a chair. He never could quite remember afterwards what he did say. He tried with rough eloquence, that might have moved a heart of stone, to show her what it was she was doing, to appeal to her better, nobler self, to her love for him; he implored and entreated her to give up this new life—for his sake.

He had nothing better to urge than that, poor fool! It weighed with her as just so much chaff. The time had gone by when his words would have touched her; they glided lightly over what she called her "heart" now and left no impression there.

And then he went on his knees beside her and prayed her to grant him this one boon; he poured out a flood of feverish words, hardly pausing to think; he tried to paint an alluring picture of their life in the future: they would leave Camberwell, he said; she should go where she liked if she would but listen to reason; it would ruin him in his profession, he pleaded, if she persisted in returning to the stage. As he talked the pretty face grew harder and older. Bella had made up her mind, and the man beside her had not the faintest power to sway her by his reproaches or entreaties.

And then he stumbled to his feet and stood waiting for his answer.

It came at last, clear and cold, falling like pellets of ice upon his impatient fervour.

"The thing is done now, and all the talking in the world will not alter it."

"And that is your last word to me—your husband?"

Finding she did not speak, he walked across the floor, turning at the door, hoping against hope, but she lay back as still as if she were dead.

When he had gone, Bella opened her eyes and held up her hand curiously. It was wet with—what?—tears.

Her eyes were bright and dry.

For a moment something of the old feeling swept over her.

Poor Jack! She half rose, then sank back again.

It was too late, she was thinking; as if it were ever too late to make amends, to atone, while we have still breath and life!

"It is all for the best, anyhow," she murmured after awhile, and when

philosophy is well to the fore, love hides its diminished head.

CHAPTER IV.

Six months wore themselves away; six months in every day of which John Chetwynd lived a year, measured by the anxiety and misery it held for him. He could no longer delude himself into the belief that Bella loved him, for all her actions went to prove the contrary. But her end just once gained, there were no more bickerings and disputes—she even condescended to consider her husband's wishes, when they did not clash or interfere with her own. But night after night he sat alone with the hateful consciousness that the woman who bore his name was parading her charms to Dick, Tom and Harry; in fact, to anybody who chose to pay his shilling for the privilege of contemplating them. It was in moments such as these that the iron entered his soul and there was no escape from it; he must bear his burden as many a better man had borne it before him. And thus it was he buried himself in his profession, working with a will and vigour that astonished no one so much as himself. He was rapidly becoming a popular man. Through sheer good luck (as he really believed it to be) he had diagnosed one or two cases with an ease and accuracy which not only filled his purse beyond his utmost expectations, but helped him up the ladder of fame at an amazing rate. But when emboldened by success, and always remembering the fact that however wilful and oblivious she might be, she was still to all intents and purposes the wife of his bosom and equally interested with himself in all his undertakings, he recounted his triumphs and declared his intention of leaving Camberwell forthwith and settling in Camelot Square, Bella smiled, yet proved in no way elated at the intelligence.

"So, my dear, you can go as soon as you like and fix upon a house," he said.

Bella yawned and stretched her arms above her head.

"Oh, you will know much better than I what is required," she replied.

"Have you, then, no interest in our new home?" he asked, more hurt than he could well have expressed.

"Do you ever show the slightest interest in what concerns me?" she retorted.

He winced. "This is a mutual interest, surely, since we must occupy it together."

"Must?" she echoed dreamily.

"What do you mean?" he asked sharply.

"Nothing, except that 'must' is the word I have banished from my vocabulary," and she smiled at him—actually smiled, though she must have known she was stabbing him to the very heart.

He said no more; and indeed, words seemed to be useless.

So he chose the house himself,—one that could not fail to please Bella, he felt exultantly. She would be less than woman if she were not glad to exchange the second-rate little dwelling in the Camberwell New Road for the substantial residence, with its modern improvements and embellishments in such a neighbourhood as Camelot Square.

It was not perhaps a palace, but it was a very great deal more imposing than anything they had dreamt of in the early days of their married life, and yet John Chetwynd told himself with a sigh that he would gladly give up fame and prosperity to win back the old love-light in his wife's eyes.

And there are some among us who cannot love for so little—"Of man's love a

thing apart." Perhaps John Chetwynd would have been a happier man had he been one of these.

Even the task of furnishing fell to the doctor's lot. Bella did not refuse, nor did she object to accompany him on what he might have naturally supposed would be a congenial task for her, but she showed herself so indifferent throughout that, after an effort or two to make her contented, he gave it up, and it ended in his carrying the whole thing through himself.

And he was not sorry when at length it was completed. On the morrow he would bring Bella to her new home.

He stood under the bright lighted chandelier and looked round him. The carpet was thick and soft. Bella liked carpets her feet could sink into, she had once said. There by the fireplace was the most luxurious easy chair he could purchase, upholstered in her favourite colour, pale blue. He pictured the dainty figure nestling in it, and a little glow stirred at his heart. After all, she was his wife, his fondly loved wife, and who could tell? Perhaps with the old life, old feuds would die out and with the new, joy and happiness dawn for them both once more.

John Chetwynd was not a religious man; he rarely went to church and he never prayed; but now he covered his face with his hands, and his lips moved inaudibly.

He was asking for a blessing on the new life, and there was something like a tear in his eye and a suspicious huskiness in his voice as he called out "Come in" in answer to a hurried knock at the door and flung open the lid of a grand piano which was littered with music and songs, running his hands over the keys and smiling a little.

The piano was to be a surprise: Bella knew nothing about it.

Perhaps it would keep her more at home, for she was very fond of music.

It had cost more than he ought to have paid, but still it was for her.

"Come in, Mrs. Brewer—what is it? I'm just off. You will have us both here to-morrow at this time for good and all, I hope."

"Indeed, sir, and I'm glad to hear it. Things do look most beautiful, and no mistake."

The good soul shambled across the floor and held out a letter wrapped in the corner of her apron.

"A boy brought it, sir, half an hour ago, but I clean forgot it, and that's a fact."

"Never mind. It is probably of no importance."

But it was. By-and-by his eyes fell on it as it lay where Mrs. Brewer's hard-working fingers had placed it, on the edge of a little gaily-lined work table destined to hold Bella Chetwynd's cotton and needles, and to his astonishment he observed it was in his wife's handwriting.

Ah! written just before she started for the——.He caught it up and tore it open. The next instant it fluttered from his hold.

For fully ten seconds John Chetwynd sat spell-bound, and then he broke into a laugh—mirthless, hollow.

"And I prayed to my God to send his blessing on—our—future," he said in a dull, mechanical manner. "Well, the last act is played out and they may ring the curtain down. From to-night I believe neither in woman, Heaven, nor hell, save that which each man makes for himself."

Bella had turned her shapely back on the apotheosis of respectability for a life of excitement and the protection of another man. Nobody was surprised but John himself.

Everybody had predicted it months ago. The only astonishing feature of the scandal was, that it had not occurred before.

The one other thing people found surprising was the callousness with which the injured husband took it.

It had always been believed that what love there was, was on his side, but now—

Well, it is indeed an ill wind that blows us no good. If notoriety was what John Chetwynd desired, he got it in full measure, well pressed down and brimming over; his waiting room was besieged, for many patients flocked there, wide eyed in scrutiny, martyrs to symptoms discovered or invented for the occasion.

Of course he would divorce her. And he did.

In due course he obtained his decree *nisi*, which later on was made absolute.

Bella's picture no longer stared him in the face from every hoarding, and the newspaper advertisements knew her no more. She had gone back to the States, and by-and-by was forgotten on this side the Atlantic.

Now and then he was disagreeably reminded of her existence.

Once in the Club a young fellow to whom Chetwynd was personally unknown stretched himself behind a newspaper and muttered, "Bella Blackall Wasn't that the name of Dr. Somebody's wife who ran away with another fellow?"

"Yes, Bella Blackall was my wife," John Chetwynd answered with unruffled equanimity, picking up the paper which the other had thrown down. "She used to be rather a clever dancer, too."

And he calmly perused the line which included her name among some well known American stars touring in the provinces.

"And he never turned a grizzled hair! I give you my word I felt more over the thing than he did," remarked Captain Hetherington afterwards; "without exception the most cold-blooded individual ever met."

But John Chetwynd was far from being this. He had felt his wife's desertion far too deeply to show his scars, nor was he a man to wear his heart upon his sleeve; but as time went by and the utter callousness of Bella's conduct came home to him, he realised to the full that she was unworthy of a single pang, and he became reconciled to the inevitable. His profession claimed every spare moment, and for a man ill at ease there is no specific like hard work. By-and-by as the years rolled on, another distraction presented itself. He became interested in one of his patients, the only daughter of the Duke of Huddersfield, Lady Ethel Claremont, and this interest blossomed into something stronger and warmer—something that at last he dignified by the name of love, though he was by no means without misgivings as to whether it could ever really lay claim to the title.

Certain it was that there was no more of the old exultation about his heart that had formed so large a part of his former courtship; there were no extravagances, no quickened pulses—rapture's warmth had yielded to the mildest of after-glows; but there was no reason that it should not prove as satisfactory in the long run. It is an open question whether the doctor, popular though he undoubtedly was, would have been considered an eligible suitor from the maternal point of view, had it not been that just about this time fortune elected to bestow another favour upon him; his career had reached its apex, and (again through sheer good luck, as John Chetwynd modestly declared) he was offered a baronetcy.

Now, every man is flattered and gratified that his merits should be recognised, and Chetwynd was no exception to the general rule, but there were a good many bitters mingled with the sweets, and the hidden thorn among the rose-leaves had a nasty trick of obtruding itself. This step in social

advancement materially helped his cause with Lady Ethel, and the Duchess of Huddersfield deigned to smile graciously upon her future son-in-law.

Ethel Claremont was an excellent girl, precisely the type he ought to marry. Decorous, with an ease and repose about her manner that were eminently patrician, she would be even more admirable as a wife than as a *fiancée*, but he could have found it in him to wish that she were just a little less faultless, a little more "human," he would have said, only that the word has not a pleasant ring; yet it was not easy to substitute another unless it were "womanly."

"Pshaw!" he cried angrily, "who am I that I should be exacting, with such a past, such a history? and yet I am ready to quarrel with perfection, I who can never be grateful enough! A little wealth and the love of a charming woman—what more can I possibly desire? It is strange how soon one becomes accustomed to changes in life, and how quickly an emotion fades into a memory. If I could but feel as I felt when I was struggling along battling with the hundred and one difficulties which beset the path of a poor man, instead of having to remind myself perpetually what my emotions were then, there would be some excitement in the contrast. I—I wonder—what she is doing? Is she alive or is she dead? What does it matter? But at times the doubt will come whether—no, no; it is wicked—I was always good to her. I loved her, and she dishonoured me. The book is closed for ever, and I am weak when I reopen it."

CHAPTER V.

Since the thing was to be, there was nothing to be gained by postponement. So decided the Duchess, and however fond of airing her own sentiments and securing her own way Lady Ethel might be, on ordinary occasions, for once she raised no objection. She was perfectly willing that her marriage with Sir John Chetwynd should take place at once. Perhaps in her home Lady Ethel was not quite the plastic lay figure she was wont to appear in public, and the Duchess had spoken to her most intimate and confidential friends of the approaching nuptials with almost a sigh of relief, and a whispered word.

"She has indeed been very difficult to manage, and really, though I am speaking of my own daughter, I never can quite understand Ethel; she is not like other girls. It will be a huge responsibility shifted from my shoulders when she is married."

And everybody had wondered what the girl had seen in Sir John, that he should have taken her fancy. To the outside world and to those who had not come within the immediate charm of his manner and bearing, it did offer food for speculation, and since his engagement he had grown greyer and stiffer and more professionally precise than ever.

But he suited Lady Ethel, or she fancied he did; which answered the purpose quite as well. She had always detested very young men; she liked a man whom she could look up to and lean upon, and certainly this she could do with perfect faith as regarded her *fiancé*. Now Duchesses are no more exempt from the weary ills which weak flesh is heir to than their less favoured brothers and sisters, and in the early summer the Duchess began to complain of certain aches and pains and to bethink her that Sir John's advice might be worth following; so she drove over to Camelot Square and was shown into the waiting room with the rest of his patients. She had some little time to wait, and while the Duchess sat tapping her foot impatiently at the delay, Ethel looked round the spacious apartment and decided on certain improvements she would effect when she should preside over John's establishment.

And then the door was flung open, and Soames, the eminently correct footman, ushered them into his master's presence.

The Duchess advanced gushing a little.

"So good of you to see us so soon! I was positively timid at coming without an appointment, even with Ethel."

"It is you who are good, Duchess, to give me such an unexpected pleasure."

Sir John touched Ethel's cheek lightly with his lips and motioned his visitors to be seated.

"Now is not that a pretty speech from a professional man! Ah, you lovers, you are all alike, and when you are married—Ah! then you are all the same."

"What an accusation! I hope Ethel does not credit it, or I shall never be permitted an opportunity of refuting such a calumny."

"I know too well how highly Mamma thinks of you, John," said Ethel, prettily.

"Well, I admit it—I do admire you immensely—I admire your power, your position, your ability to make an income—a large income, sitting comfortably in an arm chair. And then there is such solidity in a doctor's profession—people are always ill."

"Mamma is ill herself," broke in Lady Ethel, "and that is why we have intruded to-day."

"I hope it is nothing serious, my dear Duchess."

"How sweet of you! Ah, I am a martyr! I have hay fever to such a distressing extent that I am positively ashamed to go into society."

Her daughter laughed.

"We were at the Opera last night, and Mamma's sneezes were most *mal-à-propos.* It was very embarrassing."

"Yes, I am convinced that Romeo glowered at me, and at church on Sunday it was such a charming sermon, so encouraging and tactful, I sneezed violently in the man's best moments. At my age I cannot consent to become a public infliction, yet I feel I am a nuisance."

"Mamma said, as soon as we got home—'I shall go and consult Sir John,'" cooed Ethel.

"And now you can cure me?" The Duchess looked anxiously into the grave face opposite.

"I have not the slightest doubt you will be entirely recovered in a few days at most," said Sir John reassuringly; "you have caught a severe cold."

"Nothing of the sort, I assure you. I have had colds before, and I know better."

"What, better than your doctor?" The stern face relaxed, and Sir John laughed.

"Well, better than my future son-in-law. Now I beg you not to be obstinate. Give me something potent—one of those drugs that work such instantaneous wonders."

"I fear they are not in the Pharmacopoeia."

"I don't think it is kind of you to discourage me."

"But if I make you well in a week, will not that satisfy your Grace?"

"I shall be radiant."

"I will write you a prescription."

"Thanks! What an invaluable husband you will make with all that knowledge at your finger ends! I need have no misgivings as to Ethel's health, and she has always been so subject to chills. The risk of entrusting one's daughter to an unobservant man is shocking, but to a physician! To have for one's daily companion a great and renowned doctor, what an advantage—what a

security!"

"Really, mamma, to hear you talk one would suppose that I was an invalid, and I never remember to have suffered from anything worse than the measles."

"When Ethel comes to me she will be guarded as sacredly as a girl can be."

Sir John smiled kindly at his betrothed.

"I have made but a few protestations of what I feel for her; perhaps I am more reserved than I should be, but I am no longer a boy. I doubt whether I ever was very romantic, even in my younger days, but I think that she and I understand each other, and if we don't tiff and 'make it up,' if we have been engaged three months and have never had a quarrel, that does not mean that my affection is not most sincere and deep."

"I should hope we like each other too well to quarrel," said Lady Ethel haughtily.

Like! After all, was it love on either side? Sir John asked himself.

"My dear Sir John," broke in the Duchess pompously. "A few words from such a man as yourself impress me more profoundly than rhapsodies from another. Ethel, just look out of the window and see if the carriage is waiting. We are going to take the Lancaster girls to the Academy, and Payne has driven round to fetch them while we had our consultation with you."

"Yes, mamma, it is there."

"I will follow you in a minute, Ethel; say good-bye to John—," and when the door had closed upon her daughter, she began hurriedly:

"It is hardly the time and place perhaps, but you will pardon that. I—really, it is very awkward. Can you not help me, Sir John? The weeks are slipping by, and I should, I confess, like to make my arrangements for leaving home, but until I know definitely what yours are—."

"Mine?"

"Yes; yours and Ethel's."

A light broke in upon Sir John's somewhat obtuse mind. He had no desire to expedite matters, but then he was not the principal person to be consulted, and it certainly was not for him to raise any objection, so he acted immediately on the hint given him.

"My dear Duchess, what can I say? The matter rests entirely in your hands. Let it be when you please. In another month I shall be comparatively free, and we can visit Switzerland if Ethel wishes."

The Duchess smiled. "That you must arrange with Ethel herself, and perhaps you had better broach the subject yourself to her. Girls are apt to be a little curious on these points."

"Then I will ask her to fix the day for our marriage." He bowed with old-fashioned gallantry over the pearl-grey suede, held out in farewell, and the Duchess rustled away with Soames, the deferential, in close attendance.

Soames did not like the idea of a mistress, but these "accidents" he was well aware, would happen in the best regulated families, so he was now bent on making friends with the Mammon of Unrighteousness in the shape of the Duchess of Huddersfield and the bride elect.

Left alone, Sir John stood upright, his hand on the back of his chair and his brows tightly drawn together.

Well, why not? What possible excuse could he make to his own heart for the delay?

None, none. And yet he felt a good deal as if a thunderbolt had fallen from the skies at his feet, and it was more or less of a shock to him.

Presently he rang his bell.

"Who comes next, Soames?"

"Lady Rutherven, Sir John, but—but a lady who has no appointment has been waiting for more than an hour, and I thought perhaps you would see her first. She seems very ill."

"Show her in!"

A second later the door swung open again and Soames announced:

"Miss Blackall!"

Sir John started, but recovered himself in the next instant.

"Take a seat, madam."

He waved her to a chair and for several minutes they looked at each other without speaking. The woman was the first to break the silence.

"I have come back," she said with a nervous laugh. "I am ill; I thought you might try to cure me."

She had seated herself, but he remained standing.

What a handsome woman she had become, he was thinking, and how expensively dressed! There was something strange in the very familiarity of the countenance presented to him. It had altered much from what he remembered it, but curiously enough he remembered it the more vividly because of that very alteration.

"What is your trouble?" he asked huskily—"Why have you consulted—me?"

"It is my lungs. I don't know—let us call it a whim. I thought you would do me good if anyone could." She paused a second: "You used to be my husband once."

"Once! Well, I am willing to be your doctor."

"I suppose you would do your best for a dog if it were dying, wouldn't you? though you might not care if it recovered."

"I have a very faithful dog," he said significantly.

Bella winced.

"Dogs ask so little for their love. Oh, I didn't come here without a struggle. And I knew you would speak like this. But I have been abroad so long, and on the voyage home I got worse, and women—women of your sort who had taken no notice of me, suddenly grew kind. I said to myself, 'Bella, it looks bad for you when ladies forget how common you are,' and then the thought struck me, London meant you! As a patient I might come to your house and be let in. You are clever and you are great; if I had any self-respect I could not ask you; but I have not, you know; I never had any and'—and—I am—frightened! It keeps me awake at nights, the fear. I—I am not going to—die?"

"I have said I will do what I can for you."

"You will sound me?"

"Loosen your dress."

As he bent over her she raised her hand as if to smoothe his hair, and the colour came into her face, but she did not touch him.

Her fingers, from which she had drawn her gloves, were laden with rings—rings which he had not given her. His breath came a little faster as he stooped

over her neck.

"Don't be scared to tell me the truth," she said; "I guess I'm pretty bad. You need not take the trouble to lie about it."

He examined her thoroughly and replaced the stethoscope before he spoke.

"Your lungs are not right. They used to be."

"Oh," she replied bitterly, "I used to be. I have come too late—is that what you mean?"

"I mean that you must exercise great care and avoid excitement. Don't brood—don't worry yourself by misgivings, which will only do you harm. Go away from England when the summer is over; go where the sun shines and the air is mild. Lead a life of ease and indolence. I can say no more."

"And then?"

"And then I see no reason why you should not live for years to come."

Bella flung her hands out with a sort of despair.

"Your prescription is impossible," she said dully.

"Impossible?"

"I have only just come over from the States. I have an engagement at the Empire for six months. I have got to stay."

"You will be very unwise. The laws of health demand that you should cancel any such contract."

"Beggars can't be choosers. I must sing to live. It is my trade now."

He sighed. "You do not look as if you were in pecuniary difficulties."

"Well, I make money easily enough, but it melts like ice cream; everything is so beastly dear."

"Are you not with—him?"

"Him? Oh no; he left me years ago. I am alone—very much alone. It seems sometimes as if I had spent the best part of my life alone. I am so dull I—I wonder why I dread to die. There! I can follow your advice so far as this; I'll take the greatest care of myself—in London. I am glad I came to you, though it does not seem to have delighted you much. I suppose if—if I had run straight and stayed with you, I might have been quite well, eh?"

"That is difficult to say. Bella, have you—it is a foolish question, but—have you ever regretted?"

She laughed recklessly.

"Oh, as to that—what is the good of looking back, anyhow? I have and I haven't—when I have been sick it has been awful lonesome. You didn't grieve much, that's certain. And you got your title soon after I went. It was lucky for you. Scot! I should have been Lady Chetwynd if I had stopped with you, wouldn't I?"

"You would have been an honest woman."

"Ah!" She rose from her chair and looked curiously round the room. "I remember those bronzes," she said; "they used to hang in your little library in the old house. You are a good deal changed in the face; your manner is just the same. You were always a good fellow, I will say that. I know it better than I used to now I have had so—since I have been—"

"Hush—the past is dead. I was not so patient and tender with you as I should have been."

"You saw that—you had made a mistake, but you tried to hide how sorry you were—I know you did that and I—well, I didn't marry you to make you sorry. Do you know how we lived—he and I, when I left you? He took me to Paris; and didn't we make the dollars spin, the pair of us—rather; and then one fine morning we heard a beastly bank had gone smash and he had lost pretty well all he had got."

"And you left him?"

A smile curled the corners of her mouth.

"No," she said, slowly; "I didn't. We took two little rooms over a baker's shop in the High Street, Islington, and I stuck to him. I used to go out in an evening and do the marketing with a hand basket, to get it cheap. When we wanted a change we would take a bus to the Park and look at the swells across the railings; and sometimes Saidie gave us tickets for the theatres. Seems odd, don't it? but it's a fact. I was livelier then than ever I've been in my life. While he was fond of me—he showed me he was fond of me, you see."

"You were capable of love, then, after all?" he said bitterly.

"I don't know. I loved the freedom I think, anyway, and perhaps I took him with it. I don't know! what does it matter? It was a release for you and you are glad that it happened, eh? now that the shame of it is forgotten? We were never suited to each other, were we?"

"Why speak of what is past?"

"You see, if I had remained with you I should have been no happier," said Bella, reflectively; "you expected too much from me."

"I did my best to make you happy."

"Yes, perhaps! then if I had been more grateful and different, would you be glad if I was with you still?"

"I cannot answer that question. I loved you—I had no thought for any human being outside yourself."

"But now," she persisted, "now that the wound is old, do you not say to yourself, 'it was better so'? Suppose that you and I were still what we were once to each other, would you be happy to know that I was your wife to-day?"

"I beg you to be silent. It is impossible that we can discuss such a question."

She came close to his chair.

"I am," she said with a sort of feverish eagerness, "no more of a lady now than I was then. I am just what I used to be when I made you ashamed of my ignorance and my mistakes. But if I were pure, if I had never been divorced, if I were standing here your faithful wife, would you be glad?"

"Hush! You are paining yourself and me."

"Jack!"

"For God's sake be still!"

She fell on her knees beside him.

"Jack, say you would be glad."

"If you had never left me, if you had remained my faithful wife, heaven knows that I should be a happier man!"

Bella burst into tears and sobbed convulsively, then pressed her handkerchief to her mouth. It was bright with blood when she withdrew it.

"Oh, be careful of yourself," said John Chetwynd, terribly moved; "you must do what I advise."

"I'll try. I wonder why you should care one way or the other. It is more than I deserve—you make me so sorry and ashamed. I shall never see you any more, shall I?"

"I cannot."

"No; I understand, I ought not to ask you. Well, good-bye. There is my address if you should take a notion to come. It is only a six months' engagement over here, and if I'm not long for this wicked world, I may not live to finish it. Keep my card. If one day you should feel that you could come—just once. You don't hate me?"

"Hate you? No."

"I dare not ask you to forgive; but I begin to know and feel what my action towards you really meant. Jack, see I am on my knees. Forgive me!"

"I do. I forgive. If I was hard to you; if, as you say, I expected and exacted too much from you, may God forgive me."

The tears were still raining down Bella's cheeks.

"Kiss me, Jack."

He shrank back. "You must not ask me that. I cannot."

"Is it that you despise me so utterly?"

"No, no; you don't understand. I—"

"Kiss me."

"Why do you make me speak? I am going to be married again. I kissed her—a young girl—in this room half an hour ago. I could not outrage her trust in me."

A sort of stung expression came into the face of the kneeling woman and she staggered to her feet.

"You are going to take another wife! My God! I never thought—I never dreamt. It seemed so—so—impossible. I hope she will make you happier than I did."

"Oh, hush, hush!"

"She is one of your own class—a lady? What is her name?"

"I would rather not mention it. Give me your hand and let us part in peace."

"Tell it me," she pleaded. "What name do you call her by?"

"Ethel."

"Ethel and Bella. Ah, Ethel is far the nicer name. We didn't think once that you would ever be telling me you were going to be married to someone else, did we? It feels queer, and it hurts me—a little, I think. Good-bye, Jack. I see now why you could not kiss me—it would not be right of you. She is a young girl and she might find it hard to forgive you if she knew. I am going. You used to have a bell on your table, I recollect, with a little white knob that you pressed when Mary was to go to the hall door. Do you use it still? Oh, I see. Let me press it instead of you, may I? I sha'n't feel so much as if you were turning me out. Good-bye." She said the word lingeringly, tenderly. "Say 'Bella' once again, for the sake of old times."

Jack Chetwynd took the slender trembling hand in his with God knows what of anguish and pity stirring at his heart.

"Good-bye—Bella."

And the door fell to.

She was gone.

He could hear her hollow cough as she passed down the tesselated corridor.

CHAPTER VI.

It was two days later. Sir John Chetwynd sat in his big easy chair with an open letter before him. "We are surprised to have seen and heard nothing of you," wrote the Duchess; "more especially as after the few words we had in private upon a certain important matter, I fully anticipated an early visit from you. But such a busy man as yourself and one so much in request, both socially and professionally, must not be judged by the rules which govern the common herd, I suppose; at the same time (although I assure you she has not said a word upon the subject) I can say that dear Ethel feels herself a wee bit neglected. You must have been *professionally* engaged last night, I presume, since we were obliged to dine without you and go to see Sarah Bernhardt alone."

He had spent the whole evening in his consulting rooms, totally forgetting his promise to escort his *fiancée* and her mother to the theatre.

Well, he would see them both on the morrow and make his peace, and then—he dropped his head on his hands and fairly groaned. It was useless to argue with himself, to bring commonsense to bear upon the point, to count up the advantages to be derived from this union with Lady Ethel; look at it which way he would, the fact remained the same, that he had no longer the remotest desire to marry again.

The knowledge had certainly come tardily, but not the less surely.

He did not, he told himself, love Lady Ethel as a man should love the wife of his bosom. Middle-aged, worn, and unemotional though he might be, he knew that he was yet capable of a much deeper feeling than she had evoked and he had wakened to a realisation of this since he had again seen Bella.

He was no fool; he was, on the contrary, a shrewd, clever, quick-witted man of the world and it was impossible to shut his eyes to the trouble. He thought of Bella as she was when he had first married her; he recalled their courtship, her pretty half shy, half tender ways—the girlish prettiness which time had turned into shame.

She had left a scrap of lace on his table for her throat or her veil—Heaven knew what—and his eyes grew blurred and dim as he gazed at it. He repeated mentally phrases which had fallen from her, piecing them together and trying to weave the pattern of her life out of the fragments.

She had changed pathetically. She had acquired the manner that her sister used to have, and which he had so strenuously objected to—the slangy, devil-may-care tone, the total absence of which in the old days had made his little sweetheart so conspicuously different from her environment. She wore now the impress of evil, from her Regent Street hat to her Paris gown. Manifestly she had risen in her vocation, but he knew that her salary alone had never supplied the costume or the rings, and his heart ached.

That night he sat at the Duchess of Huddersfield's table facing his *fiancée*, and for the first time he wondered if sang-froid or perfect equanimity were all that a man such as himself might desire. She was, as Bella had put it, "One of his own class—a lady," which she had never been, poor Bella! but he did wonder just a little how much of real heart beat under the dainty laces that shrouded Lady Ethel's bosom. He had reflected once and not so long ago that that portion of a woman's anatomy was superfluous, but he wavered in his belief now. He could stake his professional honour, his hopes of eternity—of—everything—on the absolute purity of this girl; nothing would ever tempt Lady Ethel to swerve ever so little from the path of rectitude and decorum. The cold, proud patrician face spoke for itself, and yet—he was in a brown study

when the voice of his prospective mother-in-law brought him out of the clouds.

"And now," she said in a significant tone and with a glance full of meaning, "now I suppose you young people have lots to talk about, and will forgive me if I run away."

And the silken draperies swept themselves across the floor and the door closed softly upon her Grace.

Ethel lay back in a low, lounging chair with a big ostrich feather fan in her hand, and she looked up expectantly into her lover's face. There was nothing else for it, and he took the plunge valiantly—and with precisely the correct amount of maidenly hesitancy, Lady Ethel named a day for their marriage. And then—somehow there seemed nothing more to be said; each sat silent.

Sir John felt rather than saw his companion yawn behind her fan, and realised desperately that he must break the silence.

"Ethel," he said gently; "I am old compared with yourself, and grave and sad even beyond my years; are you sure I can make your future happy?"

She looked at him with a good deal of surprise, and a frown puckered her smooth brow.

"Why not? Why should we wish for rhapsodies and commonplace love-making? We can leave all that to the Chloes and Daphnes of a by-gone age. It would be boring to the last degree. One must take pleasure just as much as sorrow, with a certain amount of equanimity. If there is one thing more than another that I hate, it is to be ruffled. Emotion of any sort ages a girl so terribly."

The sword would never wear out the scabbard so far as Lady Ethel was concerned! He doubted if she were capable of any great depth of feeling. But he did not say now as he would have done a week ago—"So much the better;" he no longer felt that it was altogether desirable.

He looked at her more scrutinisingly than he had ever done before, and for the first time he told himself that the beautifully moulded mouth was hard and unloving, and that the chin spoke of self-will and an amount of resolution unusual in such a young girl.

He hastened to change the subject.

"You would like to visit Switzerland or Italy?" he asked.

"No; I don't care for scenery much, or nature! I like human nature best; it is much more interesting, I consider. I should prefer Paris or Vienna."

"Then Paris or Vienna let it be, by all means," he hastened to reply, and Lady Ethel smiled, well pleased.

"Mamma," said Sir John's *fiancée* an hour or two later, when mother and daughter were alone. "Do you know who Mrs. Chetwynd was?"

"My dear Ethel, it is much better that subject should not be discussed."

"I don't agree with you. Since I am going to marry John it can only be right and proper that I should be made aware of every detail connected with his former marriage."

When Lady Ethel adopted that tone, her mother knew by past experience that it was a saving of time and temper to yield.

"I only know that she was beneath him in position—a dancer, I believe, and she ran away with someone else. Really providential, I consider; it must have been a happy release for poor Sir John."

"He was plain Mr. Chetwynd."

"Yes; but already very popular. It was exceedingly fortunate that he did not

get his baronetcy earlier, for had he done so, she would probably have refused to be faithless."

"I wonder if he felt her desertion much?"

"The world says not; they had lived unhappily for some time before, and the general impression was that he did not care in the least."

"But you spoke of her to him when he asked your consent to our marriage?"

"Yes, Ethel, I did; I referred to it as delicately as possible, of course. I believe I said, 'your early misfortune,' or something to that effect."

"And what did he say?"

"Well, he spoke very nicely; he said he was aware that it added to the disparity between a man in his position and my daughter."

"And you?"

"I believe I replied that because a bad woman had caused him misery and suffering in the past, it was no reason why he should not win and hold the love of a good girl, and that because of the sorrow he had endured, I felt the more assured in trusting my child's happiness into his keeping."

"That was sweet of you, mother; but did it not occur to you that there was just —a little risk?"

"How?"

"I don't think that John is a man who would forget easily."

"Good Heavens, child! what do you mean? you cannot doubt the sincerity of his protestations of affection for you, surely?"

Her daughter laughed.

"I certainly do not wish him to be more demonstrative, mother dear; love-making is the most boring process imaginable; but still, I should prefer, I must confess, that there was no under-current of feeling for wife number one."

"You amaze me, Ethel, by suggesting such a horrible idea. The woman may be dead for anything I know; at all events, she left England before he obtained his divorce, and no one has heard anything of her since. It is extremely improbable that she will ever return to this country."

But in this, as we know, the Duchess was in grave error.

At that very moment Bella was sitting by the open piano in her cosy apartments in a street off the Strand, idly striking a note here and there and humming the air of a new song; but her cough, which was incessant, made singing almost out of the question.

"I believe I'm getting worse," she cried, rising and flinging herself on the sofa, "I'm sure I was not so bad as this three months ago—not so bad when—he never came. Ah! why should he? How could I expect it? Perhaps to-day may have been his wedding day! Come in."

The door opened noisily, and Saidie Blackall, very much over-dressed and distinctly rouged and made up, entered, followed by Mr. and Mrs. Doss, looking precisely the same as on that memorable night when they had been the innocent cause of so much trouble to Bella's husband. The old music-hall singer and his wife had lost no time in looking her up when she returned from the States, and were really well-meaning, kindly folk.

"Hallo, Bella, you look done up!"

"I am," admitted the girl wearily. "It was as much as I could do to pull through to-night, and I have got a beastly new song to tackle."

"I don't like your cough, my dear," said Mrs. Doss, looking distressed; "it shakes you to bits."

"I've got a little more cold, I fancy; but I'll be all right in a day or two."

"You're not looking the thing—I saw you from the front to-night—and—well, I guess it was a bit of a heffort to sing at all, eh?"

Bella turned quickly and looked sharply into Mr. Doss's face.

"If you have got anything disagreeable to say, don't be afraid, out with it. I suppose you have jumped to the notion that I'm dying?"

She tried to laugh, but it was a piteous attempt, and ended in a fit of coughing which left her white and trembling in every limb.

"There, there!" cried Mrs. Doss, compassionately; "you must not excite yourself; we will do the talking, and you keep quiet."

Bella lay back on her cushions, weak and exhausted, and when the Dosses at length went away she gave a sigh of relief.

"What did they come for to-night?" she said thoughtfully.

"Well, Bella, Doss had heard a bit of bad news and thought it as well to put you on your guard; but finding you like this put it out of his head, I suppose."

"Bad news? What do you mean? He's not married, is he?"

Saidie stared at her.

"Not that I know of—why, he would have you to-morrow; you know that as well as I do! you are treating him in a rough way; there's no mistake about it."

Bella fell back again relievedly.

"Oh, you're talking about Charlie, are you?" she said.

"Who should I be talking about? There isn't no one else as wants to make an honest woman of you, is there?"

The shaft fell short of its mark. Bella did not even wince.

"Well, it strikes me, my girl, you'll have to fall in with his views," Saidie continued presently; "for if what has come to Doss's ears is true, you'll be out of a berth before you can say Christopher Columbus."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"The management are getting dissatisfied, and we know what that means."

The pale face flushed poppy red.

"They can't help themselves," she said eagerly. "I have a contract for six months. They cannot cancel it, you must know they can't, and it's not very likely I shall allow myself to be played fast and loose with as the fancy takes them."

"But if you're not able to fulfil your share of the contract—"

"Who says I am not?" cried Bella fiercely. "Old Robertson is a fool, and if he thinks I'm going to put up with any hanky-panky, he's jolly well mistaken. Let him try it on, that's all! I should immediately take steps to enforce my rights, the law is on my side, that's clear enough."

"I don't know! You heard what Doss said—about how you looked from the front; and others have got their eyesight as well as him, and can see you are not well and not—"

"Not fit to sing—that's what you are driving at?"

Saidie was silent.

"I tell you I will sing. Nothing and no one shall stop me. I shall just defy them all, and go on, and there's no law in England to stop me."

"If you are not a goose, Bella, I never saw one! What in all the world keeps you on the boards, I cannot see. Here's a man come over from N'York with the intention of marrying you; a man who is earning his hundred dollars a week, and you turn up your nose at him. I can't understand you. You seemed proud enough of him a week or two back; but now all on a sudden, for no earthly reason, you show him the cold shoulder."

"I suppose I can please myself," answered Bella, and her lip quivered, and the tears began to roll down her cheeks.

"I wish to God I had never left—Jack," she said weakly.

Whereupon Saidie gave her what she was pleased to call a "piece of her mind" as to the insane folly of any such speech, the result of which was that Bella wept and coughed herself into a state of collapse, and had to be carried off to bed.

Things did not mend. Bella persisted, ill though she was, in appearing night after night in public until at length what Saidie had predicted came to pass, and she received a formal notice cancelling her engagement at the Empire on the ground of the extreme delicacy of her health.

Mr. and Mrs. Doss happened to be with her at the time she received the notice, and Bella partially appealed to them.

"You will help me, won't you? You won't allow them to impose upon me so shamefully. They have no right to do it. It's infamous—'annul my engagement' indeed! They shall find out who they are dealing with. It would be ruin for me, it would simply spoil my career. I shall go down at once and see Robertson. It's a likely thing that I'm going to sit down calmly and quietly and accept my dismissal. Not if I know it. I'll give Robertson beans."

"I wouldn't do it if I were you," said Mrs. Doss quietly.

"Not do it; what do you mean? You must be dreaming. It is the only thing to be done."

And now Mr. Doss, obeying a pathetic glance of his better half, put in his oar.

"Be a bit patient; wait and see how things turn out; don't do anything in a 'urry—that's our advice—the old gal's and mine."

"Yes, take things heasy, I say," chimed in the "Rabbit Queen."

"I don't see what there is to wait for. Show me what is to be gained by waiting, and I will consider it."

"Well, Bella; Doss here will tell you what we was thinking of; he puts things clear like."

"What was in our mind was to talk the thing over first. Allus talk the matter well over, was my motto as a boy. It saves a peck o' bother and a deal o' doing. Don't flare out about it, but take it gently and conversational."

"Fussing over things won't make you no better," echoed Mrs. Doss. "Lor', bless me, didn't I have a sister what killed herself fussing! Fussed herself into the grave, she did! And might have been here, leastways in Camberwell—alive and hearty at this minute."

"The question is—am I too ill to fulfil my engagement? and I say 'no,'" cried Bella, angrily.

"And me, the missis and me—we says, certainly you are, and so heverybody says. You want a thorough rest, and then you will pick up again."

"That may be your opinion; it is not mine! you may talk till doomsday; you won't convince me. I may surely be allowed to be the best judge of my own state of health. I shall not wait a day—not an hour. I'm going at once down to Robertson to have the matter out with him."

The distressed pair exchanged glances, and then Mrs. Doss said in a coaxing way, "If you must go, you will let me come with you, my dear."

Bella hesitated.

"If you're on my side and mean to stick up for me, all right; but if you're going to hum and haw and look grave, and take the part of the management, you had best stay away."

Mrs. Doss tucked Bella's arm within her own and trotted upstairs to the bedroom, where Bella arrayed herself in total silence, and her friend, beyond a vigorous sigh or two, was mute also.

Mr. Robertson was disengaged, and the ladies were at once ushered into his presence.

"Now then," began Bella, dashing into her subject, "I have come to know what all this means. You cannot dismiss me at a moment's notice, and you know it just as well as I do. Ain't you satisfied with me?"

"Perfectly. It is no question of that sort—but in your present state of health you are not up to your work, and there was no other alternative."

"Oh!" said Bella disagreeably, "does anybody else say I am not up to work except you?"

"My dear Miss Blackall, I regret that this has been necessary. I am exceedingly sorry that we brought you over from America and then are compelled to terminate your engagement so soon, but in your present condition—"

Mr. Robertson flung out his hands with an eloquent gesture.

"Well, look here; I'll give up my dance—that does shake me a bit, I'll grant; but you must let me sing the new song—you really must; I'm a nailer at it and I'll wrap up! My cough will soon go: give me another chance!"

Her cheeks were flushed with excitement and her eyes were sparkling—she really did not look so very ill this morning; perhaps after all, things had been exaggerated. Mr. Robertson wavered. Bella was quick to see her advantage and to press it.

"Withdraw your notice," she said, "and let me come on for one song only for a week or two."

"It would really be better, I think, if you were to have an entire rest for a month or so."

"Yes, for someone else to step into my shoes! Thank you for nothing."

"I will pay you a fortnight's salary in lieu of longer notice; and if you are desirous of returning to your friends in the States, perhaps something might be arranged."

"I have no friends here or there," said Bella simply; "my profession is all I have."

"Well, well, we'll give it a week's trial. If at the end of that time you are sufficiently recovered to do your work properly, well and good; but if not, you must really consider your engagement at an end."

All this time Mrs. Doss had said nothing. Bella had talked so volubly and so fast, there had really been no chance of getting in a word; and when the manager rose to his feet to intimate that the interview was at an end, there was nothing to be done but to follow Bella out into the street.

"There!" she cried triumphantly, "I told you I would bring him to his senses. You saw how soon he caved in. It is not a question of my health at all; you may bet your bottom dollar I have an enemy, but I flatter myself I've routed him."

Her breath was coming in gasps and she spoke with difficulty. Now that the excitement was over and the necessity for bearing up at an end, there came the reaction.

"I think I had better go home and lie down," she said, "or I shall not be at my post to-night, and I must, you know, I must."

"Poor child, I could fairly have cried," said kindly Mrs. Doss to her spouse after Bella had been safely escorted home.

"I'm not satisfied with you, old girl," said Mr. Doss, shaking his head mournfully. "I can't 'elp thinking you might ha' managed things better. If Bella Blackall goes on a singing at the Hempire, you mark my words, she'll sing herself into 'eaven."

CHAPTER VII.

A week went by slowly: the hours crept like snails, and yet the days were surely slipping away, bringing nearer and nearer the one which was to give Sir John Chetwynd his second wife.

He had hardly seen Lady Ethel since the evening when she had yielded a coy assent to his not (it must be confessed) very amorous request that she would fix an early day for their nuptials, and his state of mind was anything but an enviable one. If ever a man was torn two ways, halting between prudence and worldly consideration on one side and the force and power of a love which he had honestly believed was laid for ever in its grave, that man was Sir John. The idea of seeing Bella again did not occur to him for some days, but when it fastened on him he could not shake it off. It was stronger than himself. He excused his temptation by the condition of her health, though in his heart of hearts he knew well enough that this was not sufficiently critical to serve for a reason.

Twice he seized his hat with the intention of going to her, then laid it aside, angry and disgusted with his own weakness.

His profession no longer occupied his thoughts to the exclusion of every other topic. He sat for hours buried in the newly awakened memories that that one brief glimpse of her had conjured up, unable, unwilling to rouse himself.

And then he made a compromise with his own weakness and irresolution. He would not go to Cecil Street, since by so doing he would be offering a tacit insult to the woman he had pledged himself to marry, but he would, he must see Bella, himself unseen and his presence unsuspected, and this he could effect easily by going to the Empire.

The notion pleased him, and that self-same evening he carried it out.

Bella was worse. She could no longer deceive herself. It was only by a superhuman effort that she could pull herself together sufficiently to sing the one song which was all her part consisted of now.

After she had got into her pretty sea-green skirts of lace and tulle and shimmering silk, like so much sea foam, she had to lie still and, let the poor over-strained lungs and heart recover themselves, and then, when the summons came she called up a smile to her wan face and pluckily did her best.

But that night she looked up at Saidie after the last ribbon was in its place.

"I'll have to throw up the sponge, after all," she said wearily; "it is beyond me. They are right and I was wrong,—I must have a rest."

Saidie muttered something in reply, but when the door closed upon her sister, she sighed.

"She *is* bad; there is no denying it," remarked the dresser, who was busily stroking out the roses which were to garland Saidie's dress. "It gives me a turn every time I see her go on the stage."

"She looks worse than she really is," returned Saidie; "sometimes she is as brisk and lively as you like—she so soon gets tired."

"She is a tidy sight worse than 'tired,' and it strikes me her voice was weak like to-night. Did you notice it, Miss?"

"Oh, she varies so. I guess she would be as right as any of us the moment she was on the boards."

Nevertheless, although she was not going to confess it, Saidie was troubled and uneasy. There was something in Bella's face she had not seen before, and it frightened her—a little. She stood at the wings with a quick-beating heart, but the next moment laughed at her own fears.

Bella was singing her very best. Not a falter in the clear, bell-like tones, and her face was smiling and radiant.

And then—her eyes fastened themselves on a box in the grand tier; with a scared expression she shrank back a little, and her lip quivered, but with a mighty effort she controlled herself and caught up the refrain again—carolled a word or two, faltered, swayed helplessly, uncertainly forward, and fell headlong on the stage.

They were round her in a second, lifting her gently and tenderly. Her head had fallen back and a thin stream of blood was welling over the laces at her bosom.

"She is dead!" cried Saidie. "Oh, will someone fetch a doctor, quick!"

But almost before the words were spoken he was there, and when Bella opened her eyes they fell on the grave, anxious, kindly face of the man whose wife she had been.

"Jack! Jack! is this—the end?"

"Hush—no—no! Keep still—perfectly still—you must not move."

"I am not—in pain—a little dizzy—nothing more, and my head feels light."

"Drink this and don't talk. As soon as you are a little recovered we will go home."

"Home! Jack!"

Oh, the wistful look in the deep blue eyes—the prophetic droop about the perfect mouth! It was almost more than he could bear.

"I will go with you myself if you will do what I tell you, keep absolutely quiet—your life depends upon it."

She looked up tremulously.

"I don't care—a—cent *now*," she whispered.

She bore the journey to Cecil Street better than they could hope, and the bleeding from the lungs had ceased.

Downstairs Saidie expressed a wish to remain all night with her sister.

"She ought not to be left," she said.

"Most decidedly she must not be left," replied Sir John—"I intend remaining with your sister."

"You! Well, this beats all, upon my word!"

So great was Miss Blackall's surprise that when she found herself ousted from the position of head nurse and the door metaphorically closed upon her, she had not a word to say, but called a hansom and had herself driven to Bayswater, where she had been living since her mother's death, now nearly a year ago.

"And I used to think he didn't amount to a row of pins," she murmured with an odd sort of penitence. "Well, I guess I was wrong, that's all."

Through the long hours of that never-ending night John Chetwynd watched by Bella's bedside. For the most part, she lay mute and inert, but towards morning she grew restless.

"I must talk," she cried excitedly—"to see you sit there and to think—to remember—oh! if only I had run straight, Jack—I don't think I was meant for this, do you?"

He had no words with which to answer her. He folded his arms across his chest and looked out vaguely into the slant of room beyond. The folding doors were open and on the sideboard he could see a basket full of peaches, at this season an extravagance denied his own table. On the mantelshelf to his right hand were some exquisite hot-house flowers, carelessly crushed into a cracked, cheap little vase, and a penny packet of stationery and a powder puff in a sprinkling of chalk.

She stretched out her arms so that her fingers touched him, and he held them tightly in his own—rings and all.

She was never meant for the life she had chosen!

His heart felt breaking.

The delicate features, the sweet, wistful, childish face, the pathos in her regretful cry—the past with its load of gall and shame and misery—which could never be obliterated. Never!

"Why do you look at me like that? I am better. I know I am better. I thought—I feared—I was going to die; if I had there was no one to care but—Saidie."

"Do you not think what it would mean to—me?"

The words broke from him against his will.

"To—you, Jack! then you care—still!"

"Care!"

He drew his hand away and walked over to the window. The morning was breaking: morning in the Strand; and already there was a busy hum without.

Her eyes followed him wistfully, with a little wonderment in them—and then the lids fell over them.

"I feel strangely weak—but—so—happy, Jack," she said. Her breath came more easily and she slept.

Sir John Chetwynd was in his accustomed place at the accustomed hour, grave, attentive and professional as was his wont; but after his consulting hours were over, he went back to Cecil Street, leaving word with Soames where he was to be found, if wanted, prepared for another night's vigil.

"She seems neither better nor worse," said Saidie, meeting him in the little sitting-room and carefully pulling to the door behind her. "She is very, very weak. Is there a chance for her?"

"I am afraid to say—it depends so much on what recuperative power she has. If the bleeding can be stopped, I shall be more hopeful."

"What is she to do, poor Bella? She will never be able to sing again, I suppose?"

"Never." He spoke curtly, almost cruelly. Saidie burst into tears.

At that moment came a smart tap at the door.

"Mr. Bolingbroke, Miss," said a voice from without.

"He can't come up." Saidie sprang from her chair. But she was too late. The handle turned, and a tall, distinctly good-looking man walked in.

"Miss Blackhall—how unkind to deny me admittance. You must know how fearfully anxious I am. How is she?"

"There's the doctor—ask him."

The stranger turned eagerly.

"This is not serious, I trust. She was always delicate, but—it is wonderful how she pulls together when the worst is over."

For almost the first time in his life John Chetwynd was tongue-tied.

Who and what was this man, and what was he to Bella? He forced himself to give a professional opinion, and answered mechanically a string of questions Mr. Bolingbroke poured forth, but he hardly knew what he was saying.

"If only she gets over this she shall never be bothered any more, poor darling," he said brokenly. "I suppose I can go in, eh?"

His hand was on the door—John Chetwynd sprang to his feet.

"No one must see her," he cried excitedly. "I absolutely forbid it. It would be most dangerous—most improper."

The two men looked into each other's faces for the space of several seconds; then Mr. Bolingbroke turned away with a sigh and an impatient word. "Absurd! As if I could do her any harm," he said. "Well, I will be round again later in the day," he added with a nod to Saidie, and a minute later the hall door shut upon him.

"Who is that man?" asked Sir John sternly.

Saidie shrugged her shoulders.

"You shall tell me—what is he to Bella?"

"He is a good and noble man, and let me tell you there ain't too many knocking around. If she lives to get over this he will make her his wife."

And there was silence—a silence in which John Chetwynd read clearly his own heart at last, and stood face to face with facts—facts stripped of false adornments—naked, convincing.

Then he strode across the room and entered that in which Bella lay.

She was asleep, and he drew his chair close to the bedside and fixed his eyes on the wan, thin face, fever flushed, and fought the fiercest battle of his life with his inner self; and when the struggle was over, Pride lay in tatters and Love was conqueror.

She slept at intervals almost the whole of that day. Waking late in the afternoon, her eyes fell on the silent watcher by her side, and she smiled happily, contentedly.

Saidie bent over her and whispered a word or two.

"No—no," cried Bella vehemently; "send him away. I don't want to see him."

"But he is so anxious, dear."

"Is he?—poor Charlie! Tell him I am in no pain, and I should like to think he will never quite forget me."

"He will never do that," said Saidie, going away with her message but half satisfied, and Bella turned a flushed cheek to her pillow.

And then, for the second time, John Chetwynd asked, "Who is that man?"

And Bella tried feebly to tell him. He had been attached to her for a long time, and had come over with her from the States.

"And you—did you mean to marry him, Bella?"

"I had thought of it—it seemed suicidal to say no to such an offer, and then I—oh, Jack, when I saw you I knew I could never love any other man!"

He poured out a draught and held it to her trembling lips.

"I feel so strangely weak," she said; "you are going to marry Ethel, and I am nothing to you now?"

John Chetwynd drew her close to him, so that the tired head rested on his shoulder with the sweet familiarity of long ago.

"Listen," he said. "I have been a coward, frightened of the truth. The world was dearer to me than happiness, or I thought so, and I hesitated, afraid of its contempt. But amid my weakness was one thought, one impulse, which no amount of worldly prudence or consideration could stifle, and Bella—my wife—that was my love for you."

"Jack, Jack, is it true?"

"I have loved you always, through all my life, you and no other. I see now how hard I must have seemed to you and how wild and unreasonable I was in my expectation from you and how at last it drove you from my side. The shame of it is not more yours than mine. We both erred, we both sinned; but I was older and should have been wiser; the burden of it should fall on me. The world is nothing to me now—less than nothing. Let us take up life where we broke it off. Give me back the past, which held for me all of happiness I have ever known."

She lay with a smile of peace upon her face, both hands clinging to his.

"I have communed with myself and thought it well out, and I believe that to bind my life, with its memories of you, to the girl to whom I am engaged, would be a cruel wrong and an injustice to her. She deserves a better fate, and I honestly feel that the rupture will not grieve her much. We will remarry, you and I. I will take you away from England, I will guard and cherish you, and in my love for you, you will grow stronger. Oh! my darling, my darling, if you knew what life has been to me since you went; how I have blamed myself,—I who ought to have shielded you against yourself, and have been a moral backbone to your weakness. Then as time went on I persuaded myself that I had succeeded in putting you out of my heart,—that I had forgotten you,—and then—you came back to me, and the past leapt living from the years that had no power to bury it, and I knew that you were more to me than honour or fame or anything the world held. Hence-forth I will be so gentle with you, so tender—so loving."

"Will you—kiss me—Jack?"

She had gradually pulled herself upright on the pillows.

"Will you kiss me—and say—once more, as you used to—'God bless you—wifie'?"

Their lips met and clung together.

"God bless you—wifie."

And there was silence, a long silence, broken by a gasp, a sigh, and a gentle unloosening of the clasping arms.

"Bella—Bella—speak to me, my beloved."

But the passionate cry fell on ears that heard not.

The tempest-tossed soul was at rest; above were the pitying Angels' wings, and over all the solemn hush of Death.

ONE CAN'T ALWAYS TELL.

From Miss Rose Dacre, Southampton, to Miss Amy Conway, 30, Alford Street, Park Lane.

YACHT "MARIE,"
SOUTHAMPTON.
July 15th, 1901.

Dearest Amy,

Here am I on Jack's yacht, anchored in Southampton waters. The weather is perfect, and I am having a very good time. Jack's mother is on board, and is really devoted to me. I am a lucky girl to have such a sweet mother-in-law in prospective. She is the dearest old lady in the world. The wedding has been decided upon for the last week in September, so I suppose that I shall have to come back to town before very long to see about my trousseau.

There is really nothing so bewildering to anyone who sees it for the first time as the exquisite order and dainty perfection of a yacht in which its owner takes a pride, and can afford to gratify his whim. And this is the case with Jack. The deck shines like polished parquet. The sails and ropes are faultlessly clean, and Jack says that the masts have just been scraped and the funnel repainted. The brass nails and the binnacle are as perfectly in order as if they were costly instruments in an optician's window. There is a small deck cargo of coal in white canvas sacks, with leather straps and handles. And there is the deck-house with its plate-glass windows and velvet fittings and spring-blinds.

Soon after I arrived I went down into the engine-room, where I saw machinery as scrupulously clean as if it were part of some gigantic watch which a grain of dust might throw out of gear. On the deck are delightful P. and O. lounges with their arms doing duty for small tables. All around the wheel and upon the roof of the deck-house, and here and there on stands against the bulwarks, there are ranged in pots, bright red geraniums contrasted with the yellow calceolaria, and the deliriously scented heliotrope. Altogether, everything is charming.

We go delightful trips every day, and it doesn't matter whether there is a favourable wind or not, as Jack's is a steam yacht. We have slept on board except one night when it was rather rough, and then Mrs. Vivian and I stayed at the South Western Hotel.

Altogether I am enjoying myself more than I have ever done in my life. Jack is an angel and adores me, the darling.

Fond love,
From your affectionate
ROSE.

P.S.—There is a Mrs. Tenterden, a widow, coming down to the yacht on

Thursday to stay for a few days. Mrs. Vivian tells me that she is very good-looking.

From the Same to the Same.

YACHT "MARIE,"
SOUTHAMPTON.
July 22nd, 1901.

Dearest Amy,

We are still here. Mrs. Tenterden, the lady I spoke about in my last letter, arrived here on Thursday.

I hate her! I hate her!! I hate her!!!

You will doubtless wonder why I, who am, as a rule, a quiet, harmless little dove, should indulge in such sinful feelings, but you will cease doing so when I tell you the truth.

Mrs. Tenterden has set her cap at Jack! He has—I know it—fallen under the spell of the enchantress. And she is an enchantress. She is a woman of about thirty, tall, fair, with striking features, lovely eyes, and the most superb complexion I have ever seen. The best complexion I ever recollect was that of a peasant girl's at Ivy Bridge in Devonshire, but hers was nothing to compare with Mrs. Tenterden's. It is perfect. I can say no more.

Then she is extremely amusing, being a brilliant talker (for I heard Jack say so) and very witty (for he is constantly laughing at the things she says, and which for the most part I don't understand).

But this I know, that since her advent I have changed from the happiest girl in the world into one of the most miserable.

Mrs. Tenterden is the widow of Colonel Tenterden, who was a brother officer of Jack's father, Colonel Vivian. Her husband died in India about six months ago, and she has lately returned to England. Jack had never seen her before, but Mrs. Vivian, who knew her as a young girl, asked her down here.

She has made a dead set at Jack, and I feel (I can't help it) that he has fallen a captive to her bow and spear, for his manner towards me has entirely changed. He is not my darling, loving Jack, at all, but merely a polite friend.

Mrs. Vivian must be blind not to see what is going on. But I cannot enlighten her, and what am I to do? Do give me your advice, dear Amy?

Ever your affectionate
ROSE.

From Miss Amy Conway to Miss Rose Dacre.

ALFORD STREET.
TUESDAY.

My dearest Child,

Just got yours. You ask my advice, and to use a phrase of my brother Tom's, "I give it you in once." Don't be a little goose and bother your pretty little head. I am older than you, and I understand women of the Mrs. Tenterden type. They amuse men for a time, and very often take them captive, but in nineteen cases out of twenty the prisoner escapes. In other words, they are not the women who men care to marry. Fancy your Jack, for instance, preferring a *rusée* garrison hack, like Mrs. Tenterden, to your own sweet self. It is absolutely ridiculous.

Do nothing and say nothing. Don't worry yourself and all will come right. The temporary infatuation will pass away, and Mr. Vivian will love you all the better afterwards. You will see if I am not right.

So be comforted, darling Rose.

Ever your loving

AMY.

From Mrs. Tenterden to Mrs. Montague Mount, 170A, *Ebury Street, S.W.*

YACHT "MARIE,"
SOUTHAMPTON.
July 23rd, 1901.

DEAREST LILY,

I promised to let you know how I got on, and to write as soon as there was anything to write about. So here goes. I am on board Jack Vivian's yacht, and a ripper it is. That is to say, I am on the yacht in the day, but sleep at the South Western Hotel. I hate sleeping on board a yacht, and never do so if I can help it. It may benefit one's health—daresay that it does—but I do like to take my rest on shore. Well, now, as to my news. I have made a great impression on Mr. Vivian. He is the easiest man to deal with I ever met in my life, and he is as putty in my hands. That stupid girl, Miss Dacre, to whom he is supposed to be engaged—I say supposed because he does not seem to be quite clear about it himself—hasn't got a chance with me. What Jack Vivian could have ever seen in her I can't guess. She is the usual type of English Miss who can say "Papa and Mamma," and that is about all. I can see that she loathes me, and I don't wonder at it. But I am perfectly charming to her, and affect not to notice her palpable dislike.

Mrs. Vivian—Jack's mother—seems not to have the remotest idea how matters are shaping, and fondly imagines that her beloved son is going to marry Miss Dacre. My dear Lily, as the Americans say, "it will be a cold day in August before that event comes off." The fact is that Jack pays her only the slightest attention and is absolutely engrossed with me. If I, therefore, don't pull off this *coup* I deserve to be hanged. When I have actually landed my fish I shall take my departure for a day while he breaks matters off with mademoiselle. You may not perhaps approve of this, but I know what I am about.

More in a day or two.

Ever yours,

ALICE.

From Mrs. Montague Mount to Mrs. Tenterden.

170A, EBURY STREET,
24th July 1901.

DEAREST ALICE,

I was much interested in your letter. Needless to say that I wish you the success that you are sure to attain. One word of advice. If I were you, while you are at Southampton, I should manage to be a good deal more at the hotel than you appear to be. You cannot have much opportunity for conversation on board the yacht, but at the hotel you can have Mr. Vivian all to yourself. And you can easily make excuses to get off the yacht, and as he is evidently so *épris*, he will follow you to the hotel, when you will have him more or less at your mercy. I shall be longing to hear how the plot thickens.

With fond love,

Believe me,

Your devoted friend,

LILY.

From Mrs. Tenterden to Mrs. Montague Mount.

July 29th, 1901.

DEAREST LILY,

Thanks for yours. My dear child, I have taken your excellent advice and am very glad that I did so. Your plan of campaign has proved most successful. I have had Jack with me for hours in the smoking room at the hotel, where the ladies staying in the hotel as well as the men always resort. It is a large room and affords ample opportunity for a *tête-à-tête*. Of these opportunities I have availed myself to the fullest possible extent. And with what result, you will naturally ask? With the result, my dear, of making this man absolutely mad about me. He has become an utter imbecile. *C'est tout dit*. His incoherent raving would only bore you, so, like the kindhearted little person I am, I spare you this infliction. Suffice it to say that he is mine body and soul. I say nothing about his fortune, because that naturally goes with the other two.

Let me thank you sincerely for your wise counsels,

And, believe me,
Ever affectionately yours,
ALICE.

Miss Amy Conway to Miss Rose Dacre.

ALFORD STREET.
THURSDAY.

DEAREST ROSE,

I have been anxiously expecting to hear from you, but you have not sent me a single line. I say "anxiously," not that I really feel the least anxiety about you, being perfectly positive, as I am, that all will be right. But, my dearest girl, I am so deeply interested in this affair that, of course, I am anxious to hear how matters are going on. And you are a very naughty child not to have written to me before. Repair your sin of omission as soon as possible, and let me have a full account of all your proceedings.

With much love,
Yours ever,
AMY.

From Miss Rose Dacre to Miss Amy Conway, 30, *Alford Street, Park Lane*.

YACHT "MARIE,"
COWES.
August 2nd, 1901.

DEAREST AMY,

Pray forgive me for not having written sooner. But as the French say, *tout savoir est tout pardonner.* And having been for many days in the depth of despair, worried out of my life, and half dead with anxiety, I have not really been able to put pen to paper. But now all is changed, and I am able to address you with a light heart.

I am sure, Amy, that you will be longing to know why, and for this reason I will not for a moment leave you a victim to the most terrible ailment that can attack our sex—unsatisfied feminine curiosity.

Two days ago we were still at Southampton, and it was proposed that after lunch we should take a little trip down the river Hamble—a river which runs into Southampton Water. Well, we started—Jack, and a friend of his, Captain Cleland, Mrs. Vivian, Mrs. Tenterden, and myself. All went well for about an hour, when a breeze sprang up which soon developed into half a gale. At least I understood the captain of the yacht to say so. I didn't mind it in the least, but Mrs. Vivian, poor old lady, was dreadfully ill and nervous, and though I did all I could to comfort and reassure her, it was not of much use. As for Mrs. Tenterden, she absolutely collapsed. In abject terror she uttered incoherent cries, and no one could make out what she wished to be done. Jack seemed

very upset and tried to soothe her as well as he could, but it was all to no effect, and indeed she once turned on him just like a virago, saying,

"I never wanted to come on your horrid yacht, but you would make me, and see what has happened to me now."

Poor Jack—I call him "Poor Jack" although he has behaved like a very naughty boy—seemed to wince, but made no reply.

Eventually we arrived opposite the village of Hamble, and there the anchor was weighed—if that is the right expression. Jack suggested that the three ladies, including myself, should go ashore in the dingey and stay at the hotel. Mrs. Vivian said that she did not want to do this, and Mrs. Tenterden positively refused.

"Do you think that I am going to risk my life that jim-crack boat?" she asked. "I am not quite an imbecile. Though I think I must be after all, otherwise I should not have come on this idiotic cruise."

Jack again made no reply, but there was something in his face that told me that he was becoming disillusioned.

Shortly after that he sent the skipper and a boy ashore, who returned with some marvellous looking lobsters and a huge crab. It seems that this place is famous for its shell-fish, and I can only say that I never tasted anything more delicious than the crab in question.

Mrs. Vivian managed to eat a little dinner, but Mrs. Tenterden retired to her cabin and contented herself with some soup.

I for my part, ate a most capital dinner, and I fancied that Jack seemed sorry for the way he has been treating me lately; treatment which I should never have put up with, except from a man whom I love so devotedly—a man whom I meant to rescue (selfishly, I admit) from that siren's clutches. In all I have done I have been guided by your advice, and therefore to you remains all the credit, coupled with the life-long devotion of your little friend.

Well, we slept on board the yacht, and the morning brought its revelations.

Mrs. Tenterden was not present at breakfast, and came on deck very late. And only imagine, my dear, how she had changed. That beautiful pink complexion that I had admired so much, and even envied, had disappeared altogether. Her face was of a greyish hue, and possessed no shade of pink. Those beautiful pencilled eyebrows seemed to have strangely altered, and to have unaccountably thinned down. The charming woman-of-the-world manner had entirely disappeared, and, later on, when we descended to the cabin, at luncheon time, Mrs. Tenterden cast furtive and certainly not reassuring glances at the little mirror hanging there.

I confess that at first I was a wee bit sorry for her, but after all, this Nemesis was thoroughly deserved, and when I saw the impression that the metamorphosis had made on Jack—the darling goose can't conceal his feelings—I must own to having been overjoyed.

"The Enchantress" left for London the same evening, looking in her war paint quite a different being. But this made no difference, for Jack, I need scarcely say, had evidently altered his mind.

Since her departure, everything has gone back to its old state. Jack, poor fickle boy, is devotion itself, and I have not thought proper to resist his entreaties to consent to an immediate marriage. You will not blame me, darling, will you?

Ever your affectionate and
Happy friend,
ROSE.

SONGS.

AFTER VICTOR HUGO, ARMAND SILVESTRE, CHARLES ROUSSEAU AND THE VICOMTE DE BORELLI.

DARLING ARISE.

(AFTER VICTOR HUGO.)

Pretty one, tho' the morning is breaking
Thy lattice is fasten'd close
How is it that thou art not waking
When awake is the rose?

Darling, arise! for I am he
Thy lover who sighs and sings to thee,
Thy lover who sighs and sings to thee.

Nature loud at thy lattice is beating:
I am Day says the morning above
I am music the bird sings repeating,
And my heart cries "I am Love."

Darling, arise! for I am he,
Thy lover who sighs and sings to thee,
Thy lover who sighs and sings to thee.

ROSE.

(VIELLE CHANSON DU JEUNE TEMPS.)
(AFTER VICTOR HUGO.)

I never thought at all of Rose,
As Rose and I went through the dell,
We fell a talking I suppose,
But yet of what I cannot tell.

Pebbles below and mosses over,
Rippled a cool and limpid rill;
Nature lay sleeping like a lover
In the embrace of the woods so still.

Shoes and stockings off she slipped,
And with her sweetly innocent air
Into the stream her feet she dipped,
Yet I never saw her feet were bare.

I only talked, the time beguiling
As we wandered, she and I;
And sometimes I saw her smiling,
But now and then I heard her sigh.

Only her beauty dawned on me
When silent woods were left behind,
"Never mind that now!" said she
And now I shall always mind.

REGRETS.

(AFTER CHARLES ROUSSEAU.)

Let me cherish in my sadness
Those fair days of youth and gladness!
Moments of delightful madness
Gone, alas, for evermore!
Vain regrets for misspent powers,
Wasted chances, faded flowers,
Vex my lonely spirit sore.
Had I only known before!
Let me cherish in my sadness
Those fair days of youth and gladness!
Moments of delightful madness
Gone, alas, for evermore!

TOO LATE.

(PEINE D'AMOUR.)

(AFTER ARMAND SILVESTRE.)

When your hand was laid upon mine
'Twas in painful dread that I grasped it,
For some hesitation malign,
Made tremble the fingers that clasped it.

When you turned your forehead so near,
'Twas in painful dread that I kissed it,
For some cruel prompting of fear
Made me timidly seek to resist it.

Ah!—and my life thenceforward approved
Sorrow's bitterness had o'ercome me,
I only knew how I loved
The day that had taken you from me.

IF THERE BE A GARDEN GAY.

(S'IL EST UN CHARMANT GAZON.)
(AFTER VICTOR HUGO.)

If there be a garden gay
Man has not molested,
Where blaze through the summer day
Flowers golden crested,
Where tallest lilies grow,
And honeysuckles blow
There, oh there I fain would go
Where thy foot, thy foot has rested!

If there be a rosy dream
By true love invested,
Where all things delightful seem
Close together nested
Where soul to soul may tell
The joy they know so well
'Tis there, oh there I fain would dwell
Where thy heart, thy heart has rested.

THE MESSAGE OF THE ROSES.

(ENVOI DE ROSES.)
(AFTER VICOMTE DE BORELLI.)

Oh, if the fairest of these roses
With its red lips to thee shall tell
Such things as language knows not of,
As in thy bosom it reposes,
Then keep it well
It is my love!

But if the sweetest of the roses
With its red lips shall silent be,
And only seek instead the bliss
Which thy delightful mouth discloses,
Return it me
It is my kiss!

LOVE WENT OUT WHEN MONEY WAS INVENTED.

"You're a very foolish man, John," said my sister Ruth. "You're worse than foolish. A man never gets any happiness by marrying out of his station."

"You may be right," I answered, "but after all I have something to offer. I am rich, and Marie is poor. I admit that she is a patrician and that I am a plebeian. But money, after all, counts for something, especially in these days. I don't see how Marie can spend a very happy existence now, but I am determined to make her life a dream of happiness. You will see, my dear Ruth, that my marriage will be a success."

"I think not," replied my sister, "and I therefore give you my warning before it is too late. If you don't heed it and decide on marrying Miss Dalmayne, I shall naturally do any little thing in my power to endeavour to prove that I have been a false prophetess; but, mark my words, John, I shan't succeed. And, to tell you the truth, my dear brother, I tremble for the future."

"You're a sweet little silly goose," I answered. "You let your affection for me run away with your better judgment. Why in heaven's name should I not be happy with Marie? She is beautiful, and I admit that it was her rare beauty that first commended her to me, and she has a sweet nature and character; and after all, goodness of character outweighs even good looks. Then, too, she is very clever and bright, and altogether she is exactly the sort of girl calculated to make a man happy."

"I hope that I may be wrong, and that you may be right, John," said Ruth; "but I don't think that I am wrong, and, of course, time will only show. At present we need say no more. Your mind is evidently made up, and I shall urge nothing further to prevent you from following your own inclinations. But in the time to come, don't forget that your sister warned you." And with that last shaft Ruth left the room.

My name is John Gardner, my age is thirty-six, and I am what is generally known as "a self-made man." But had I really had the making of myself I should have endeavoured to produce a different being. I recollect at the grammar school in Cambridgeshire, where I received a plain education, hearing one of the masters, Mr. Ruddock, mention a Greek proverb, "Know thyself," and advise the boys in his form to act upon the advice given by the Greek sage who pronounced these words. I was not, as a rule, struck with much that fell from Mr. Ruddock's lips, for he was a dull, stupid, and pompous man, possessing much more force of manner than of character. But I did take this advice to heart and endeavoured to act up to it, with the result that I know as much about my own uninteresting self as most other human beings know about themselves.

Well, this is how I appear in my own eyes. A strong, healthy man with an active disposition, and capable of, and a lover of hard work. A blunt manner, and with an entire absence of tact in anything in which strict business is not concerned. I know that I am truthful, for, in addition to a natural hatred of lying which I must have inherited from my dear parents, I have always recognised the fact that in business and in everything else the truth always pays the best. During the sixteen years that I have devoted to business I have endeavoured to act squarely and fairly with everyone with whom I have been brought in contact, and I may say without conceit that I have earned a good name in addition to the three hundred thousand pounds that I have been able to save.

I have never got on particularly well with the other sex, partly, I suppose, from my manners, which, to say the least, are not attractive, and partly to the fact that up to the time I met Marie Dalmayne I have never cared for a woman. I came across the girl that I have grown to love so well in this fashion. I am interested in a West Australian mine to the extent of about a hundred thousand pounds, and am one of the three partners who control the concern. One of them is a member of the great City house of Bleichopsheim, and the other is Mr. Ross, a wealthy iron-master. It was at the latter's house in St. James's Square that I met my fate.

I took Miss Dalmayne down to dinner, and I think that my heart went out to her from the first. I found her clever and sensible, and with apparently little of the frivolity which characterises most of the young women with whom I have been brought in contact. Her conversation, if not absolutely brilliant, was at any rate bright and amusing, and possessed a considerable amount of shrewdness.

Miss Dalmayne was about twenty-three, tall and fair,' possessing a perfect figure and the most beautiful and expressive hazel eyes. Her hair was nut brown with a warm reddish sun-kissed glint, and her features were regular

and aristocratic. Her smile was delightful. In short, I fell in love.

Next morning I ascertained from Adam Ross full particulars in reference to Miss Dalmayne. She is the only daughter of the Honourable George Dalmayne, and is related to many of the highest English families. Mr. Dalmayne and his wife are not well off, and the former is very much in debt and has taxed the generosity of my friend Ross to a very considerable extent. The Dalmaynes live in a small house in Eaton Terrace. They have only one other child, and that is a son who is in the Army and is at present with his regiment in India.

There are some people that one feels one can confide in in matters of a delicate nature, and there are others to whom one could never open one's mouth. Now, Ross and I have been friends for ten years, during which time we have never had the least difference. He is a man absolutely to be trusted. I told him during this interview what a deep impression Miss Dalmayne had made upon me. He said that he did not in the least wonder at it, for she was greatly admired, and added that if it were not for her father she would no doubt have made a brilliant marriage already. I told my friend that I cared nothing about her father, that I was not marrying him but his daughter—that is to say, if I were fortunate enough to induce her to become my wife.

"I don't think that there is much fear of a failure," answered Ross, "old Dalmayne is looking out for a rich husband for Marie. Indeed, in a confidential mood one day recently he told me almost as much himself. And he is not likely in a hurry to find one so rich as yourself."

"Well, I shall call upon him to-morrow," said I, "and ask his permission to speak to his daughter."

"I wish you every success, my dear friend," said Ross, "and I have no doubt as to the result of your interview. And I don't see why you should not be very happy. After all, as you say, you are not marrying the father. You are marrying Marie, who is a very high-principled girl, who is beautiful, who is accomplished, and who would, I am certain, do everything to make her husband happy."

And so it was settled, and next morning I called on Mr. Dalmayne.

Mr. Dalmayne, a tall, aristocratic man of about sixty, received me with great cordiality. Whether Ross, who had dined with him on the previous night, had mentioned anything of my matter to him I don't know, but the old gentleman did not seem to be the least surprised when I told him what the object of my visit was.

"Mr. Dalmayne," said I, "you will doubtless be wondering why I have called to see you"—Mr. Dalmayne's face assumed a sphinx-like expression—I will not keep you waiting for an explanation. The truth is that I have fallen in love with your daughter. Our mutual friend Adam Ross can tell you all about me, and I don't think that his report would be an unfavourable one. My position is this. I have saved three hundred thousand pounds, which produces an income of about twelve thousand a year. And I am making at least another twenty thousand a year from my share of our mine and other sound enterprises. Should you permit me to address Miss Dalmayne, and should I be happy and fortunate enough to induce her to become my wife, I should propose to settle two hundred thousand pounds upon her for her exclusive use."

"Your proposals are most generous," said Mr. Dalmayne, "and do you credit. But in matters of this kind I should never dream of attempting to control my daughter. You have, however, my full permission to speak to her, and if she is willing to marry you, you both have my full consent. My wife shares my views entirely. Marie is out with her mother at the present moment, but she will be in all the afternoon, and if you will call about four I will see that you have the opportunity for which you are seeking."

I thanked Mr. Dalmayne most cordially and promised to return in the afternoon. When I again arrived at Eaton Terrace I was shown into the

drawing-room, where I found Mrs. and Miss Dalmayne and a sister of Mrs. Dalmayne's. Tea was brought in, and shortly afterwards the visitor took her departure. A few minutes later Mrs. Dalmayne made some excuse for leaving the room, and I was left alone with Marie. My heart had beaten hard from excitement as I had knocked at the door, but strange to say I felt no nervousness now. I plunged into the matter that brought me without delay. I told Miss Dalmayne of the wonderful effect produced upon me by her beauty and charm, and in the fewest words possible I asked her to be my wife, promising that she would never repent it.

"You have done me a great honour," said Miss Dalmayne, "but I must have a little time to think over what you have said and to consult my parents. You shall hear from me at latest the day after tomorrow."

I shortly afterwards took my leave, and departed buoyed up by the strong hope that the desire of my heart would be obtained.

Nor was I disappointed. On the day she had promised I received a letter from Miss Dalmayne saying that she was willing to accept me, but frankly confessing that she had no love for me as yet, though admitting that she liked me. "If," she continued, "you are willing to take me on this understanding, I am ready to be your wife."

Needless to say I was willing to accept these terms, and three months afterwards we were man and wife.

It was in the month of July that we were married, and we went to Aix-les-Bains for the honeymoon. A few days previously Mr. Dalmayne asked me to lend him a thousand pounds, which I did cheerfully, for after what my friend Ross had told me I was fully prepared for such a request.

My wife had never been to Aix before, and seemed to amuse herself very much. She played a little at the tables, and with a considerable amount of success. I must admit that she was very kind to me, and though of course I easily saw that I did not at present possess her real affection, I was not discontented, and hoped for the time to come when we should be all in all to each other. We had met very few acquaintances at Aix, for it was not a good season as far as English visitors were concerned, owing to attacks on our country and Government by the French papers. But when we had been there about three weeks a Captain Morland came upon the scene. Captain Morland, who was an officer in the Grenadier Guards, had known my wife since she was a child. They seemed very pleased to see each other again, but there was a certain sadness that I noticed in the young officer's manner. He had just been invalided home from South Africa, where he had been on active service during the time with which my narrative deals. He was a handsome young man, tall and well built, and with kind and expressive blue eyes. He was singularly reticent as to his exploits during the war, though I heard from a friend of his who was with him at Aix that he had been mentioned in despatches and had been recommended for the D.S.O. He was a man to whom the merest chance acquaintance was certain to take a fancy. I am bound to say that I did so myself, and I hope that in what I am calmly relating I shall not be considered to have intentionally failed to do him justice.

It was the second week in August, and as the weather was very hot, my wife and I had determined to leave Aix and go to Trouville for a little sea air and bathing. Three days before our departure I returned to the hotel to dress for dinner. I was just going through the corridor when I heard voices in our sitting-room. They were the voices of my wife and Captain Morland.

I don't think that I am naturally a mean man, but I was mean enough to listen on this occasion.

"You mustn't blame me, Hubert," said my wife, "we were all on the verge of ruin, and I was bound to marry him."

"How could you consent to do such a thing? You don't care for him in the least."

"No," said my wife; "nor shall I ever do so if I live for fifty years. I care for no one but you. But I shall always do my duty to my husband, who is a kind and good man and lives entirely for me."

"If he died, you would marry me?" asked Captain Morland.

"Of course I would, and, as the children's storybooks say, 'live happily ever afterwards.' But don't let us discuss deplorable futurities."

This was enough for me. I saw, now that it was too late, how wise my sister Ruth had been, and how foolishly I had acted. There was nothing to be done, however, to remedy matters, in view of the words spoken by my wife, and words which breathed of truth. I went out quietly into the garden of the hotel and came back a few minutes later. I asked Captain Morland to dine with us, and he accepted my invitation. I carefully watched him and my wife during the evening, and clearly saw that the case was hopeless from my point of view.

On the morrow I made my will, and left everything to my wife with the exception of fifty thousand pounds for my sister Ruth. I then wrote the little history of my mistake, and am posting it from the top of Mont Revard to my friend Ross, and have asked him to act as he thinks best. It is hard to die, but, in my position, it is still harder to live.

Having set my entire affections in one direction, and having been hopelessly unsuccessful, there is only one thing to be done, and that is to end matters. And I shall end them to-night.

Extract from an Aix-les-Bains newspaper:—

"The body of a rich Englishman, named Gardner, who was staying at the Hotel de l'Europe, was found lying at the bottom of the precipice between Aix and Mont Revard. It is, of course, pure conjecture how the unfortunate gentleman met his fate, but no foul play is suspected, as his money and valuables were found upon his body. We anxiously await developments. The police are maintaining a strict reserve."

A PUZZLED PAINTER.

WRITTEN IN COLLABORATION WITH THE LATE SIR AUGUSTUS HARRIS.

CAST.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY, an Artist.

MRS. TEMPENNY, his Wife.

CHARLES SYLVESTER, an Artist.

MRS. SYLVESTER, his Wife.

ROSALINE, a Model.

HENRICH SCHERCL, an Art Dealer.

ROBERT ADDISON, a Sporting Man.

SARAH ANN, a Maid-of-all-Work.

SUSAN, Parlourmaid at the Tempenny's.

GROGGINS, a Sheriff's Officer.

A PUZZLED PAINTER.

ACT I.

(SCENE I. TEMPENNY'S *Studio Doors R.L. and in Flat. As Curtain rises a knocking is heard at D.R.*)

MRS. TEMPENNY (*off*).

Rembrandt—Rembrandt!

(*Door opens, enter* MRS. TEMPENNY; *followed by* MRS. SYLVESTER.)

MRS. TEMPENNY.

He isn't here. Come in, dear; I am sure he will be pleased to see you—we will wait.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

My husband hates to be disturbed in his studio. He says he can never work again all day.

MRS. TEMPENNY.

Artists are so different; Mr. Sylvester is more highly strung than Rembrandt, I sometimes think. Rembrandt likes to see his friends in his studio. I wonder where he has gone.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

Gone to have a drink, I daresay.

MRS. TEMPENNY.

Adelaide!

MRS. SYLVESTER.

He does drink, doesn't he—when he's thirsty anyhow? And artists are so often thirsty. Charles is often thirsty. He says it is a characteristic feature of the artistic temperament. Ah! my dear.

MRS. TEMPENNY.

Why that sigh?

MRS. SYLVESTER (*sighing again*).

Heigh ho!

MRS. TEMPENNY (*affectionately*).

Adelaide?

MRS. SYLVESTER.

Eugenia!

(*They touch each other's hands sympathetically.*)

MRS. TEMPENNY.

Aren't you happy, Adelaide?

MRS. SYLVESTER.

I am married to an artist, Euna! I wouldn't say as much to anybody else, but we were girls at school together.

MRS. TEMPENNY.

But, dear Addie, everybody knows you are married to an artist.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

I mean I would not say to anybody else that I am not entirely happy.

MRS. TEMPENNY (*enthusiastically*).

Do tell me all about it.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

I am jealous.

MRS. TEMPENNY.

Of whom?

MRS. SYLVESTER.

Oh no one—of everybody; of my husband's past, which I know—of his life to-day, which is too circumspect to be sincere.

MRS. TEMPENNY (*with misgiving*).

But—but Rembrandt's life is also circumspect.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

Poor child.

MRS. TEMPENNY.

You pity me?

MRS. SYLVESTER.

Horribly. To be married to a painter—what a fate! To have a husband who is shut up alone all day with a creature who—who wears—

MRS. TEMPENNY.

Rembrandt's models *do*—.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

Wear—?

MRS. TEMPENNY.

Plenty!

MRS. SYLVESTER (*gloomily*).

Clothes sometimes cover a multitude of sins. They are no guarantee. Rosaline wore them!

MRS. TEMPENNY.

Rosaline?

MRS. SYLVESTER.

You have not heard of Rosaline?

MRS. TEMPENNY.

No. A model?

MRS. SYLVESTER.

A serpent!

MRS. TEMPENNY.

The wretch. Pretty of course?

MRS. SYLVESTER.

Serpents are always pretty. One day, not long after we were married, I came across her photograph—I was tidying up an old desk of Charles', a photo, my dear, with an inscription that left no doubt what their relations had been. I tore it up before his face; and for a time, excepting for the girlish illusions he had shattered, that was an end of the matter.

MRS. TEMPENNY.

But only for a time?

MRS. SYLVESTER (*impressively*).

Two years ago I went into his studio, and found her there.

MRS. TEMPENNY.

Horrible.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

You may well say so. She was sitting on a table drinking brandy and soda as bold as brass. Of course he swore that he needed her for a picture he was going to work on—and, I don't know, perhaps it was true. Still considering what had been, her presence there was an outrage, and I shall never forget the quarrel there was between Charles and me. That was the last I have seen of Rosaline—she went flying.

MRS. TEMPENNY.

And was it the last that Mr. Sylvester has seen of her?

MRS. SYLVESTER.

So far as I know. But there is always the lurking, horrid doubt. You know now why I am not the light-hearted girl you remember, and why I distrust artists as a class.

Pause.

MRS. TEMPENNY (*meditatively*).

I don't see why you should distrust Mr. Tempenny because Mr. Sylvester is not steady.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

Are you quite contented?

MRS. TEMPENNY.

No—we are too hard up, but I believe Rembrandt loves me, and I love him.

MRS. SYLVESTER (*heavily*).

Poor child.

(*Enter* REMBRANDT TEMPENNY *door in flat. He wears long hair, and a brown velveteen jacket, and is smoking a short pipe*.)

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Eugenia? And Mrs. Sylvester? Why, bless my soul, how nice, what a surprise!

Don't move—don't. (*Stands peering at them with his hands over his eyes.*) What a charming effect of light on your profile, Mrs. Sylvester—how rich—how transcendental! Glorious! (*Comes down.*) Well, well, well, and so you ladies have come to pay me a visit. Can I offer you anything?

MRS. TEMPENNY.

I called on Mrs. Tempenny to inquire whether you would dine with us to-night, and she said she could not answer without consulting you.

MRS. TEMPENNY.

You have no engagement, Rembrandt?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

I am quite at liberty, Eugenia, quite. I shall be most pleased and delighted. (*Aside.*) Another confoundedly dull evening, I know! (*Aloud.*) Sylvester is well?

MRS. SYLVESTER.

Sylvester is always well.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Happy Sylvester! Myself, I am a wreck.

MRS. TEMPENNY.

I want some money, Rembrandt.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*disconcerted.*)

Eh? Oh! (*To* MRS. SYLVESTER.) And working hard I have no doubt.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

I believe so—he is out all day.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Admirable—what industry!

MRS. TEMPENNY.

(*Aside to* REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.) Rembrandt, I want some money—have you got a couple of pounds you can let me have?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*affecting not to hear*).

The hardest working people under the sun are artists, I always say so. Hard worked—hard worked! (*Fills his pipe*).

MRS. SYLVESTER.

May I look round your studio, Mr. Tempenny?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*waving his hand*).

Charmed, positively!

(MRS. SYLVESTER *moves up.*)

MRS. TEMPENNY (*insistently*).

Rembrandt, all the neighbourhood knows the butcher summoned us, and none of the tradespeople will serve us with anything unless we pay cash.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Well, we're going out to dinner.

MRS. TEMPENNY.

Oh, you drive me wild with your improvident, Bohemian ways. There's to-morrow.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Sufficient for the day is the dinner thereof. Don't be greedy.

MRS. SYLVESTER (*looking round*).

You have sold most of your canvasses, I see, Mr. Tempenny.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*aside*).

I thought she wouldn't find the gallery extensive, I must really do something to-day, I must indeed! (*Aloud.*) Sold? Yes, yes. I am starting on a fresh commission now. There's a little sketch up there you may fancy;—a mere impression, but full of tenderness, I think, and rapture.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

Rapture?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

It is the newest word by which we explain the inexplicable. "Rapture!" It says everything, does it not?

MRS. SYLVESTER (*vaguely*).

Yes—yes, indeed.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*aside*).

I made it up myself on the spot.

MRS. TEMPENNY.

(*Laying her hand on his arm earnestly*). Rembrandt—

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Yes, dear, I know what you're going to say. The other tradespeople know we haven't paid the butcher and you want two pounds. I'll give it you this evening—(*Aside.*) If I can borrow it.

MRS. SYLVESTER (*coming down*).

Then we shall see you this evening at seven sharp, Mr. Tempenny? I am going to take Eugenia round to the house with me now, to spend the afternoon. You'll find her there when you come.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Good. (*Aside.*) I wish they'd go! (*Aloud.*) You don't mean to run away yet?

MRS. SYLVESTER (*doubtfully*).

I think so.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*with alacrity*).

Well, if you really must—

(*Opens door* D.F.)

MRS. SYLVESTER.

Till seven o'clock.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Till seven.

MRS. TEMPENNY.

Au revoir, dear. (*Aside to him.*) You won't forget the—?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

(*Aside to* MRS. TEMPENNY.) The two pounds, and the butcher; I won't forget 'em. I only hope the *butcher* may forget *me*.

(*Exit* MRS. SYLVESTER.)

MRS. TEMPENNY.

By-bye, sweetheart.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Ta, ta, Duckie.

MRS. TEMPENNY.

Don't do too much—remember your precious health.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

All right, my love.

MRS. TEMPENNY (*blowing a kiss*).

There.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*blowing a kiss*).

There.

MRS. TEMPENNY.

My own darling husband!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

My angel.

(*Exit* MRS. TEMPENNY.)

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*with a deep sigh of relief*).

Thank heaven! (*Sinks into armchair, and puts his feet on the mantelpiece*) The corner is getting tight, Rembrandt. This sort of thing won't boil the pot. It won't, sonny, I assure you! Where's the sketch of my *magnum opus*. 'Pon my word, I haven't seen the thing for a month or more. (*Gets up and rummages in a portfolio.*) Ah, here we have it! (*Holds up and contemplates a small charcoal sketch.*) "Susannah before the Elders" beautiful! composition charming! Rembrandt, old pal,—I congratulate you! But where's the picture of it? "Oh where, and oh where!" Rembrandt, you're developing into a thorough-paced loafer. You always had a talent that way, but of late you've broken your own record. I'll turn over a new leaf; I will, I'll be a new man. Why not? We've the new woman; why not the new man? Excellent idea. Rembrandt Tempenny, the new man—the coming man—by George the GREAT man! I'm in earnest, I'm in a fever. I bubble over with noble resolutions. I wish the tradespeople didn't want cash—tradespeople who want cash are so damping to noble resolutions!

(*Gets out Easel and canvas, and takes off coat.*)

(*Door in Flat is kicked open. Enter* ROBERT ADDISON.)

ROBERT ADDISON.

Hullo!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Hullo!

ROBERT ADDISON.

How are you, old chap?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

I'm the new man.

ROBERT ADDISON.

The devil you are! What does it feel like?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Unfamiliar—like somebody's else's boots. I say, dear boy, can you lend me a couple of thick 'uns.

ROBERT ADDISON.

Eh?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

It's for the tradespeople.

ROBERT ADDISON.

Oh really—on principle you know—I never pay tradespeople.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Well, not to put too fine a point upon it, it's for my wife.

ROBERT ADDISON.

I warned you not to marry. Now you see how right I was—she wants two thick 'uns.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

I know it's rough on you.

ROBERT ADDISON.

It is. I'm a sociable chap by nature, and I'm rapidly being left without a friend to bless myself with.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

I don't grasp!

ROBERT ADDISON.

They all borrow my money, and then they say they're out the next time I call.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

I have got a big thing on, only temporarily I'm in a hole.

ROBERT ADDISON.

I never knew a fellow in a hole who hadn't a big thing on. What is it?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

The hole?

ROBERT ADDISON.

No, the big thing—the stable tip?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

It's nothing to do with the turf. Look here, Schercl—you know Schercl?

ROBERT ADDISON.

I know him.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

He gave me a commission for a picture six weeks ago; he's going to pay three hundred for it. He advanced a century when I accepted the offer.

ROBERT ADDISON.

They are wonderful terms, Tempenny, for *you*.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Seems rather funny, doesn't it,—but it's a fact. "Nobody more astonished than the striker," I confess.

ROBERT ADDIS ON.

Well, where's the picture?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

(*Turning round the big blank canvas*). There!

ROBERT ADDISON (*with a whistle*).

Oh my sainted mother! How does Schercl like it?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

It's good work, isn't it? Fine colour and tone! How do the harmonies strike you—correct?

ROBERT ADDISON.

Unbosom, what does it mean?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Dear boy, it means it was a royal order, and that I've been on the royal loaf on the strength of it; and, now that I repent me, I haven't got a model.

ROBERT ADDISON.

No model?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

The subject is to be Susannah—Susannah before the Elders. You know the kind of thing—(*whispers*).

ROBERT ADDISON.

Yes, of course, and I suppose—? (*whispers*).

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Yes, and—(*touches his arms and chest, signifying a fine woman—whispers*).

ROBERT ADDISON.

Exactly. I think I can recommend the very model you want.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

You? Where did you meet her—on a racecourse?

ROBERT ADDISON.

I know her—and she's worth backing.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

My dear friend, you have saved me! Where is she?

ROBERT ADDISON.

I'll look her up.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

To-day?

ROBERT ADDISON.

Now if you like. Her name is Rosaline, and she's a ripper.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

"Rosaline the Ripper," Robert, fetch her. No wait a moment, I can't do the picture here; I daren't.

ROBERT ADDISON.

Why not?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Well, you see, my wife wouldn't approve, and I blush to say that in the exuberance of early matrimony I encouraged her in an inconvenient habit of running into my studio at all hours. I'll have to work in a pal's.

ROBERT ADDISON.

All right, I'll send her there.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Well, you might bring her now, if you can, and I'll arrange the sittings with her. Does she hang out in the neighbourhood?

ROBERT ADDISON.

Over a coffee-shop in Golden Street.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Go! And I'll stand you a swagger supper when the picture's done, and Schercl parts. By the way—

ROBERT ADDISON.

Yes?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Touching the two quid?

ROBERT ADDISON (*giving the money*).

Here you are.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

I do touch 'em. Ecstasy! Bob, you're a brick; now cut along and get back with the damsel sharp. (*Knock heard at* D.F.) Hullo, whom have we here? Come in. (*Knock repeated.*) Come in. (*Knock again.*) Come in, you fat-headed, lop-sided, splay-footed, bandy-legged jay; come in!

(*Enter* SCHERCL).

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*aside*).

Schercl! Good Lord! He's come to see the work.

ROBERT ADDISON.

(*Aside to* REMBRANDT TEMPENNY). I'm off.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

(*Aside to* ROBERT ADDISON). No, I say, Bob, wait and see me through it.

ROBERT ADDISON.

Rosaline may go out—I must hurry. See you again in half an hour.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

(*Aside to* ROBERT ADDISON). What shall I do?

ROBERT ADDISON.

(*Aside to* REMBRANDT TEMPENNY). Lie! Ta-ta. I say—! You don't think it possible old Schercl has made a mistake and taken you for Tempenny the R.A.?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*staggered*).

What!!

ROBERT ADDISON.

It would explain the terms, that's all, dear boy. (*Exit* ROBERT ADDISON D.F.)

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*aside*).

Good Lord! (*Aloud, blandly*). My dear Mr. Schercl, this is a pleasure indeed.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

I do not know dat it is a great bleasure, but pusiness must be attended to, hein? Vell, my friendt, and how is the bicture, eh! Let us see how it has brogressed.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

The picture is going well—well, very well,—excellently. I am a modest man—

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Humph! (*Aside.*) This is a very boor blace for zo famous a bainter. I do not understand it! But I have certainly done goot business mid him!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*disconcerted*).

I say I am a modest man, Mr. Schercl, but I feel safe in declaring that you will be satisfied with your bargain.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

"Bargain?" I do not tink dat ven I pay tree hundred bounds for a bicture it should be called a "pargain." Tree hundred bounds is very large brice; I shall have not made a pargain.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Er—quite so. You misunderstand me. I should have said your "contract"—you will be satisfied with your contract.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

If you should have said "gontract," vy did you say "Pargain." Vell, vell, let us see the bicture.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

(*With a desperate attempt to throw enthusiasm in his voice.*) It is the best work I have done. I look to "Susannah" to advance my position enormously. People will talk about "Susannah." It is—er—full of rapture.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

"Rapture?" Vat is "Rapture?"

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

You know what "rapture" is. It is the term best understood by the movement of to-day. It is our watchword, our ideal. "Rapture!"

HENRICH SCHERCL.

(*Puzzled, but not wishing to appear ignorant.*) Oh "Rapture," I did not understand you. Of course I know what rapture is.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Of course you do. Well, "Susannah" brims over with it.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Goot, goot.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

It is the very apotheosis of rapture.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

I gongratulate you.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

It exudes with rapture.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Is dat so?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

It is bathed in rapture. (*Aside.*) I can't go on much longer.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Now show it to me.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*with feigned surprise*).

Show it to you? I can't show it to you—it isn't here.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Vat is dat you say? Not here?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Certainly not. I am working on it in a friend's studio, not my own. The light here is not nearly good enough for a work like that.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

You have always found it goot enough, I pelieve?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*with enthusiasm*).

But not for "Susannah"—not nearly good enough for "Susannah," "Susannah" demands so much; she is exacting—she must be humoured.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Vell, I am very disappointed; I came expressly to see how you had brogressed. Will you make me an abbointment?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Certainly I will. I will write you to-morrow. I am anxious to have your opinion.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Who is the friend in whose studio you vork?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Eh? In Mr. Sylvester's—Charles Sylvester. You should hear him talk about it. By Jove, he does think a lot of it. I blush to repeat what he says. He considers it magnificent.

(*Enter* SYLVESTER.)

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Afternoon, Rembrandt. Ah, Mr. Schercl, how-d'ye do.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Sylvester himself—the devil. (*Aloud.*) Dear old man, we were talking of you! I was just telling Mr. Schercl what you are kind enough to say of "Susannah."

(*Kicks him aside.*)

HENRICH SCHERCL.

You think it goot, Mr. Sylvester, yes?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

He thinks it superb, so far as it has gone.

(*Kicks him again.*)

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

What's that? Who is "Susannah?"

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

"Who is Susannah!" (*With a sickly laugh.*) What a chap to chaff you are. "Who is Susannah?" Ha, ha, ha.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

But in pusiness I do not like the chokes. Let us be serious if you please. What is your opinion, Mr. Sylvester, of the vork?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*desperately*).

Yes, I quite agree with you, Mr. Schercl, I quite agree—there is a time for all things. Tell Mr. Schercl what you think of it, Charlie, do.

(*Kicks him savagely.*)

CHARLES SYLVESTER (*aside to* TEMPENNY).

You'll break my ankle directly, hang you. What do you want?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*aside to* SYLVESTER).

Intelligence. I'll break your neck in another minute, you born fool! (*Aloud suavely.*) Mr. Schercl is naturally anxious to hear how the picture he had given me a commission for is getting along. I was telling him how much you think of it but he would like to hear your views from your own mouth.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Oh—oh!—now I know what you're talking about! Well, I have a very high opinion of the work indeed, Mr. Schercl—a very high opinion. (*Aside to* TEMPENNY.) What's the subject?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*aside to* SYLVESTER).

"Susannah before the Elders"—pitch it strong.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

The conception of Susannah, and in fact the entire treatment if I may say so, is bold in the extreme. He makes a school, our friend here. You will be surprised when you see the work, and impressed.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Vell, we will make the abbointment soon, Mr. Tempenny. I am sorry I could not see it to-day. So I shall be imbressed? That is goot. Gootday, gentlemen. We will make the abbointment very soon.

(*Exit* SCHERCL.)

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

(*Calling after him from open door.*) Mind the bottom step, it's awkward. Got it?

HENRICH SCHERCL (*off*).

It is so dark your staircase.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Yes, it is dark, isn't it? Good afternoon. (*Closes door.)(To* SYLVESTER.) Phew! You couldn't have arrived at a worse time.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Thanks.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

I don't mean to be inhospitable, but the ice was thin.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Have you done anything to "Susannah?"

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Not a stroke, but I commence to-morrow in earnest. I've a model coming this afternoon, and if you'll let me use your studio, I shall knock in enough in a week for old Schercl to see when he calls again.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Why do you want my studio—what's the matter with this?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Well, the fact is my wife is always popping in here, and if she found me with a model posed as Susannah she'd go into hysterics. You understand me?

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Understand you. I'm a married man.

(TEMPENNY *looks at him silently, and then puts out his hand*. SYLVESTER *grasps it.*)

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

I don't want to gush, but—I feel for you, old chap.

CHARLES SYLVESTER (*gratefully*).

I know—I know.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*offering pouch*).

Smoke?

CHARLES SYLVESTER (*producing pipe*).

Thanks.

(*They fill their pipes without speaking and puff sympathetically.*)

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Not but what she is a good sort—I don't want to say anything against her.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Of course not.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

But—I suppose she's too fond of me.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

It's a way wives have—they repay the superabundance of your devotion during the courtship.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Exactly. She's jealous.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Of whom?

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Of nobody—of everyone. Of my past, which was rather more decent than most fellows—of my life to-day, which is a pattern for a County Councillor.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Poor beggar.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

You're sorry for me?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Devilishly. To be married to a jealous woman!—what a fate.

CHARLES SYLVESTER (*with a groan*).

Ah! Tempenny, there was a girl I used to know when I was a bachelor—she was a model. My wife found her likeness one day after we were married. A likeness, nothing more—I thought I had destroyed it. Well, if you'd have heard the ructions she made; you'd have thought she'd found a harem.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Ah!

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

A year or two ago the girl turned up again—walked into my studio, and wanted to sit to me. As it happened I could have used her very well. Just as I had given her a drink who should march in too, but my wife.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

The devil.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

I *said* my wife—but—

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Yes, go on.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

She recognised my visitor in a moment from the photograph—abused her, insulted me, and raised a royal row. The girl cleared out like a shot, and I pledge you my word I have never seen her since, but from that hour to this not a day passes without Mrs. Sylvester making some allusion to the incident. I am the most moral man alive, and I'm watched and suspected as if I were a criminal.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

We must see more of each other than we have of late. When I work in your studio we shall be company for each other.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

I shall be very glad. Well, I'll be off, now. See you to-morrow then?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

To-morrow! Au revoir, dear boy.

(*Exit* SYLVESTER.)

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Poor old Sylvester! Had no idea Mrs. Sylvester was such a termagant. I must cheer him up a bit. So there was a girl, was there, and Mrs. Sylvester is jealous of her? Wonder who she was! Nice girl I daresay—Sylvester's taste was always good excepting when he married. Where is Bob with my model?—time he was back! (*Goes to window.*) There goes Sylvester—funny thing you can always tell a married man by his walk. There is a solidity about it—a sort of resignation. (*Turns looking off the other way.*) And here comes a pretty girl.—What a pretty girl—Funny thing you can always tell a pretty girl by her walk. There is a consciousness about it—a thanksgiving. She is stopping here. Lovely woman stopping here!

(*Throws up window, and leans out more and more till gradually only a small section of his legs remain on the stage*)

ROSALINE (*off*).

Is this Mr. Tempenny's studio?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

It is. I am Mr. Tempenny. Come up do.

ROSALINE.

No kid?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Not yet—I am recently married.

ROSALINE.

I mean you are really Mr. Tempenny.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Really and truly. (*Withdraws from window, wreathed in smiles.*) How do I look? (*Smoothes his hair before mirror.*) Perhaps she is a buyer—I had better appear busy—or inspired. (*Seats himself and adopts a far-away engrossed expression.*) "Rembrandt Tempenny at Home."

Knock at door. Enter ROSALINE.

ROSALINE.

May I come in?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Enter pray. An idea has struck me. May I beg you to sit down a moment,—In a moment I shall be at your service.

ROSALINE *sits*. REMBRANDT TEMPENNY *stares raptly before him as if lost in composition. (Business.) He starts up and rushes to small canvas, making violent sketch upon it. Then brushes his hand across his brow, and turns to her*.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

I dared not lose it—my idea! Forgive me—I have it down now, it is saved. What can I do for you?

ROSALINE.

MR. Addison sent me. He said you wanted a model.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Oh—you are Rosaline?

ROSALINE.

You have guessed it in once. He could not come back with me, so he sent me here alone.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Oh!

ROSALINE.

What do you think of me?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

I think you a charming young lady.

ROSALINE.

Then what is the matter?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Well, I thought you were somebody else, that is all. So you are Rosaline.

ROSALINE.

You keep telling me I am Rosaline—I know I am. The question is how do I do?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

How do you do?

ROSALINE.

You misunderstand me. The question is how do I suit you?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Quite so—you bring me to the point. You suit me entirely. Mr. Addison perhaps explained to you the subject of my picture?

ROSALINE.

"Susannah." Susannah is a very ugly name—.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

But she will be a very pretty girl, won't she?

ROSALINE.

Oh, go away with you.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Humour, only my humour! You musn't think any familiarity was intended. I am not that sort of man at all.

ROSALINE.

No?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Not a bit. As I told you out of the window, I'm married.

ROSALINE.

Well, I am sorry to hear it.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Now you are flattering me—now *I* must say, "go away with you."

ROSALINE.

I am sorry to hear it because I prefer sitting to single artists. Wives sometimes make rumpuses.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Oh, you have found that?

ROSALINE.

I have indeed. I shall never forget one of my experiences as long as I live.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Really? You interest me.

ROSALINE *(sentimentally)*.

I loved a man with all my soul, and *he* loved *me*. He married! No, you must not blame him for it—he was weak, and the temptation came. "To err is human,"—he married. Oh, my heart! (*She presses her hand to her side*.) Forgive me while I shed a tear.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Shed two.

ROSALINE.

I forgave him; I struggled to subdue the rage within me. I forgave him, and went to see him again. I had conquered my scorn—my better nature had triumphed—I went to him with all the old tenderness that I had lavished on him in the days gone by. He was startled, even cold, but still I feel I should have won him back to me had not something happened.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Something so often happens. It is an aggravating way of something.

ROSALINE.

His wife came between us. All was over.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Designing wretch!

ROSALINE.

I have never seen him since; I have banished his image from my mind. But that time has left its mark on me for ever. It transformed a simple credulous girl into a hardened worldly woman. I shall never feel a liking for wives again.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

One cannot blame you.

ROSALINE.

I felt you would say that. (*Presses her handkerchief to her eyes.*) It was cruel.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

But in my case you will not be troubled by my wife. The sittings won't take place here, and so she will not see you.

ROSALINE.

How is that?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Well, it is very odd, but Mrs. Tempenny has the same objection to models that you have to wives. It is ridiculous, in fact it is wicked of her, but I find it best to humour her prejudices. Will you go to-morrow to Sycamore Place, Number five?

ROSALINE.

I'll be there—on one condition. No wives, or I throw up the job.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*alarmed*).

For Heaven's sake don't talk of doing that—my whole life hangs on the picture. If you don't sit to me I'm a ruined man. Rosaline, I swear to you no wives shall cross your path.

MRS. TEMPENNY (*off*).

Rembrandt, Rembrandt.

ROSALINE.

Who's that?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Mrs. Tempenny, but I won't let her in.

ROSALINE (*angrily*).

Wives already!—Everywhere—wives.

MRS. TEMPENNY (*off*).

Rembrandt, I must see you. Where are you—quick!

ROSALINE.

Here, I know the pattern of this! Let me go!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*alarmed*).

No. No. I'll get rid of her. (*Runs to window, and leans out—calling.*) Don't wait, my dear. I'm busy. I'll be with you soon.

ROSALINE (*contemptuously*).

Why, you're scared out of your life of her I can see! I have had enough of this,—I don't want the job. (*As if to go.*)

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

(*Leaving window and running back to her*). I tell you if you don't sit to me I'm a ruined man. Rosaline, I implore you!

MRS. TEMPENNY (*off*).

I am coming up at once.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*rushing to window again*).

On no account, my darling, I can't be disturbed.

ROSALINE.

I'm off. Ta-ta.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*back to her again*).

You shan't go—I'll lock you in first. There! (*Locks door, and takes out key.*)

MRS. TEMPENNY (*off*).

Rembrandt, I must come up. Something is the matter.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

No, no, no. Go home, and see the tradespeople, catch! (*Takes out the two sovereigns, and runs to window again: in his excitement he throws with the wrong hand—throwing out key.*) Good Lord! I've thrown her the key. (*Leans out of the window.*) She is coming upstairs. Skip inside there till she goes. Hurry! (*Motions* ROSALINE *off R.*)

ROSALINE (*scornfully*).

Wives, wives, wives!

(*Exit Rosaline.*)

MRS. TEMPENNY.

Rembrandt! Why did you keep me waiting—there's a sheriff's officer on his way here with a warrant. He has been at the house, and the servant ran round to Sylvester's to tell me. You must escape.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Escape?

MRS. TEMPENNY.

Fly!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

I can't fly—I am not built for flying.

MRS. TEMPENNY.

Then you must hide.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Where?

MRS. TEMPENNY.

(*Pointing to room where Rosaline is concealed.*) There!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

No, no, Hark!

(*Very heavy steps are heard ascending stairs.*)

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

I hear a footfall.

MRS. TEMPENNY (*in terror*).

Hide yourself—quick.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*in terror*).

I can't.

MRS. TEMPENNY.

Why not?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*loftily*).

A hero never hides. Ah, I have it. I'll jump from the window.

(*Struggles into his coat and hat.*)

MRS. TEMPENNY.

There is the conservatory underneath.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

I'll jump clear of it. Don't let him in for a minute.

(*He plants a lay-figure in front of canvas, with its back to door in flat, then proceeds to dress it up to resemble himself at work. Brush in hand, etc.*)

GROGGINS (*off*).

MR. Tempenny!

(*Knocks at door.*)

MRS. TEMPENNY.

Who's there?

(*She goes to door, half opening it, so that* GROGGINS *has a partial view of lay-figure.*)

GROGGINS.

I have a warrant here for Mr. Rembrandt Tempenny—matter of forty pun'.

MRS. TEMPENNY.

Sh! He is painting.

GROGGINS.

I can't help whether he's painting or not, marm. The question is whether he is paying or not.

MRS. TEMPENNY.

Man, my husband cannot be disturbed. Don't you see?—he is inspired.

GROGGINS.

Well, he'll be in—Wandsworth if he don't part.

MRS. TEMPENNY.

Sh! talk softly. Your voice will jar upon him.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*aside*).

Now for it. (*At window.*) One—two—three—I don't like the look of that glass-house much.

(Hesitates).

GROGGINS (*decisively*).

I must come in, marm—out of the way if *you* please.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*aside*).

Oh! It's now or never.

(*Jumps out. A tremendous crash of broken glass is heard.*)

MRS. TEMPENNY (*with a shriek*).

Ah!

GROGGINS (*pushing her aside*).

What's that? (*Aside.*) Oh, there he is. (*Aloud.*) Here you Mr. Tempenny, sir, I've a warrant 'ere on a judgment summons.—Suit of Cole the butcher. (*Addressing lay-figure.*) Do you pay up, or come along o' me?

MRS. TEMPENNY (*at window—aside*).

He's picked himself up—he waves his hand—all is well.

GROGGINS.

Which is it, sir? I allus likes to do business pleasant, only you must make up your mind, you know. Pay up, or lock up—take your choice.

MRS. TEMPENNY.

(*At window. Excitedly aside.*) He disappears—he's lost to view—the danger's past.

GROGGINS.

Well, if you *won't* speak, you *won't*, of course! I've done my 'umble best to do my dooty affable, and since you're sulky, why—(*Going up to lay-figure*) Mr. Rembrandt Tempenny, I've a warrant for your arrest.

(*He slaps the lay-figure on the shoulder, it collapses with a crash*).

GROGGINS (*falling back in terror*).

Got 'em again, as I'm a sinner!

(MRS. TEMPENNY *runs to* D.F. *as if to go*. ROSALINE *half opens* R.D. *and pops her head out with an ejaculation.*)

Act drop, quick.

ACT II.

SCENE:—SYLVESTER'S *Studio*. (*The next day.*) *Doors R. and L. At back cupboard*. TEMPENNY *discovered painting*, ROSALINE *posed*.

ROSALINE.

I'm getting tired.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Sh! (*goes on working frenziedly*).

ROSALINE.

I say I'm getting tired.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Wait a minute, and you shall rest. There! now you can move if you like.

ROSALINE (*stretching herself*).

Thank goodness. Let us look! (*Looks at canvas.*) Oh!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

What do you think of it?

ROSALINE.

Not much.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Ah, that shows your profound ignorance of the School. It promises to be a superb example. (*Contemplates it sideways.*) Exquisite!

ROSALINE.

I say, where is your friend?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Who?

ROSALINE.

Didn't you say this studio belonged to a friend of yours?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Oh yes; he hasn't come yet. I expect he will be here this afternoon.

ROSALINE.

What's this? (*picking up Mandarin's Wig.*) One of his props?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

That? That is a Mandarin's wig. Yes, of course it is one of his props. He has just been engaged on a great work: "The Decapitation of a Mandarin after a Chinese Reverse." The gentleman who sat for the Mandarin wore that wig.

ROSALINE.

What a funny subject to choose.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Rather playful, isn't it? He likes 'em like that. That's his forte.

ROSALINE.

What is his name—do I know him?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Charlie Sylvester; and a rattling good chap he is, let me tell you.

ROSALINE (*with a shriek*).

Oh, my heart! This is fate!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*alarmed*.)

I beg your pardon? Don't go off like that. What's the matter?

ROSALINE.

It is *He—He* who—! Oh, I am going to faint.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

No,—no, for goodness' sake, don't do that. What do you mean by "he?" Here, I say, compose yourself.

ROSALINE.

It is the man I love. The finger of Fate is in it. Where is he? Bring him to me! Charlie, my own!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*very flustered*).

Oh I say—look here, you know—? (*Aside*.) This is the devil and all—Charlie will never forgive me! (*Aloud*.) My dear good girl, he *isn't* your "own," I assure you he isn't. There is a Mrs. Sylvester, as you know very well. (*Aside*.) If he comes in and finds her here, there's an end of all my sittings. What a piece of infernal luck to be sure!

ROSALINE *(resolutely).*

Where is he?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*sullenly*).

I don't know—I suppose he is at home.

ROSALINE.

Fetch him then—let me see his dear face again.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

What???

ROSALINE.

Bring him to me—now, this instant! We have been divided too long already.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

You have, have you?

ROSALINE.

Far, far too long.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*aside*).

I must humour her. (*Aloud*.) Well, perhaps you *have*, on second thoughts. Yes, it is a long time.

ROSALINE.

I have never forgotten him. I have always treasured his memory in my soul.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*soothingly*).

That was very nice of you. You are a very nice girl—I saw it at once.

ROSALINE.

He used to say that—he used to call me his "Toppett."

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

His little "Toppett?" It is a pretty name, and I am sure he will be delighted to

find you here, when he comes. It will be a surprise for him, won't it; quite a surprise! (*Aside.*) A perfect devil of a surprise!

ROSALINE.

For all he knows I might be dead—dead with the violets blooming over my tomb.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Yes, yes,—buttercups and daisies. (*Aside.*) I shall get the giddy push from here when he does come; I see it sticking out a foot. (*Aloud.*) I say, Poppett—I mean "Rosaline," do you feel equal to going on with the sitting till he arrives?

ROSALINE (*passively*).

As you please—I must live.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*aside.*)

It is doubtful whether Sylvester will see it in the same light. (*Aloud.*) Well, then, suppose you take up your position again.

(*He poses her with much difficulty, as each time he places her arms in the required attitude, she moves to wipe away a tear*).

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

There, now we've got it at last. (*He goes back to the easel, and commences to work*).

ROSALINE.

(*Bursting into sobs, and collapsing altogether.*) Boo—hoo—hoo!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*despairingly*).

Oh, great Jupiter! This is too much! Can't you contain your emotion? I know it is very praiseworthy, but can't you bottle it up? How on earth am I to paint you while you keep going on like this.

(*The street-door bell rings*).

ROSALINE (*joyously*).

He! (*She clasps her hands and listens.*) My heart tells me so!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*disagreeably*).

It *ain't* he—because he never rings. So your heart's told you a lie.

MRS. SYLVESTER (*off*).

Mr. Sylvester—is he in? Not in? What do you mean?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Snakes!—it's his Missus.

ROSALINE (*passionately*).

Another wife?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

No, it is the same one—do you think he is the Grand Mogul?—but she will be enough for *you* if she finds you here, and for *me* too!

ROSALINE.

I do not fear her. I am doing no harm—I am your Model, brought here by you.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*in terror*).

Now look here, you know, don't say that; I won't be mixed up in it! I tell you I'll have nothing to do with the matter! I didn't know who you were, or I wouldn't have brought you within a hundred miles of the place. Hark.

MRS. SYLVESTER (*off*).

I will wait in his studio till he comes. He ought to have been here long ago.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*in terror*).

Ought he! I won't be seen here—I can't. She is a friend of my wife's. I won't be found in your company. I'm a moral man, and she knows you.

ROSALINE (*indignantly*).

What?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Here, hi, I will be a lay-figure. By George, I've got it—I will be the Mandarin, see!

(*He disguises himself with Rosaline's assistance as a Mandarin, and sits cross-legged at back, wagging his head.*)

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

How is that?

ROSALINE.

Beautiful. Hush!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Am I sufficiently impregnated with the Chinese sentiment?

ROSALINE.

I don't know what you mean. Sh! Here she is.

(*Enter* MRS. SYLVESTER *L.*)

MRS. SYLVESTER (*aside*).

A young woman—who is this?

ROSALINE.

Good morning, madam. Who do you wish to see?

MRS. SYLVESTER (*with a start*).

Can I be deceived? Is it possible you are the—ahem—the person I take you for?

ROSALINE.

I really don't know who you take me for. My name is Rosaline, and I'm a model.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

I knew it! How dare you come here—how dare you? Two years ago I forbade you ever to enter my husband's studio again.

ROSALINE.

I did not know it was your husband's studio when I came. I am here to sit to a friend of his.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

I'm the friend.

MRS. SYLVESTER (*to* ROSALINE).

What did you say?

ROSALINE.

I did not speak.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

Now let me quite understand you. Do you mean to say that it was not Mr. Sylvester who brought you here?

ROSALINE.

Certainly I do. I came to Mr.—

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*in terror aside to* ROSALINE).

MR. Brown.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

Who did you say? Who is Mr. Brown?

ROSALINE.

I did not say "Mr. Brown." A gentleman engaged me to sit to him, and told me to come here this morning at ten o'clock. He said he was a friend of Mr. Sylvester's.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

Then you did know that this was Mr. Sylvester's studio!

ROSALINE.

I did not. He said it belonged to a friend of his, but did not mention his name.

MRS. SYLVESTER (*impatiently*).

Whose name?

ROSALINE.

His friend's name.

MRS. SYLVESTER (*passionately*).

Who was this friend, girl? Who told you to come? Answer me.

ROSALINE.

Oh, that is very easy. I was engaged by Mr.—

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*aside to* ROSALINE).

MR. Smith.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

I do not know any Mr. Smith. Where has he gone?

ROSALINE.

I never said "Mr. Smith."

MRS. SYLVESTER.

What?

ROSALINE.

Certainly not. I have no reason to mind telling the truth. I am naturally a truthful girl. His name was—

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*aside to* ROSALINE).

Robinson.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

Once and for all—will you tell me the man's name?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*aside to* ROSALINE).

No, never!

MRS. SYLVESTER.

You refuse?

ROSALINE.

No.

MRS. SYLYESTER.

Then why did you say "never?"

ROSALINE.

I never said "Never."

MRS. SYLVESTER.

I warn you, girl, my patience is nearly exhausted.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*aside*).

So am I. My legs ache at the joints.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

You will either make a clean breast of it, or I shall take steps—

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*aside to* ROSALINE).

Let her take steps—that's what I want her to do.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

Ah, wait—doubtless my husband is in hiding. I will see.

(*She opens* R.D. *and exit.*)

ROSALINE (*going up to* REMBRANDT TEMPENNY *angrily*).

What do you mean by getting me into all this trouble? What do you mean by it?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Oh, you be hanged—you're a perfect nuisance.

ROSALINE.

What!

(*She slaps his face*. MRS. SYLVESTER *re-enters*.)

MRS. SYLVESTER.

I heard a noise.

ROSALINE.

I was playing with the idol, that is all.

(REMBRANDT TEMPENNY *wags his head mechanically*.)

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*aside*).

This is a dignified position for a husband and a ratepayer!—the butt of a bad girl!

MRS. SYLVESTER.

Your frivolity will avail you nothing. If you were indeed brought here by a friend of Mr. Sylvester's, I can guess who he is. His name is Tempenny, and I shall enquire into the matter at once. (*Going*.)

ROSALINE.

Of course his name is Tempenny—I never denied it.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY and MRS. SYLVESTER (*aside*).

What?

ROSALINE.

I am nobody's accomplice—I am an honest woman earning a living. I will tell lies for no one.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*aside*).

The cat!

MRS. SYLVESTER.

Oh, this is infamous! So Mr. Tempenny assists my husband to deceive me, does he? We will see what his wife has to say to it. Birds of a feather—as I always thought. Abandoned wretches both!

(*Exit L.*)

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*springing up*).

You mischief-making little beast—what have you done?

ROSALINE.

Don't you talk to me like that—I won't have it!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*furiously*).

You won't have it!

ROSALINE.

No, I won't.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

You—you—! You smacked my face!

ROSALINE.

And I'll smack it again if you aggravate me. If it weren't that *he* will be here later on, I'd walk straight out of the studio, and never come into it again.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

I've a good mind to bundle you out neck and crop, I can tell you. That woman

has gone off to complain to my wife. Here, get me out of these things. (*He divests himself of the Chinese wig and costume.*) I think I had better go. I don't know how I'll do the picture—I'll *never* do the picture. I think *you* had better go—if Charlie Sylvester finds you here after this, he will murder you.

CHARLES SYLVESTER (*off*).

Tempenny!—Tempenny—are you upstairs?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*agitated*).

He! Oh, I say, you know—don't yer know—this is awful!

ROSALINE (*rapturously*).

I know his voice.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*dancing with terror*).

Yes, so do I! He'll kill you—I warn you he will make a corse of you—or *me*. I won't meet him. I can't. Get rid of him for the Lord's sake—I'll hide in there till he has gone.

(*Exit R.*)

ROSALINE (*taking out powder puff*).

After years we meet again!

(*Enter* SYLVESTER *L.*)

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Why the devil couldn't you answer, Tempenny, I say—

ROSALINE (*turning*).

Charles! Ah! once more!

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Great Scott! My dear girl, what on earth are you here for?

ROSALINE.

It is like that you greet me?

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

"Greet" you? Well, upon my word I don't quite know what you expect. I thought it was understood between us last time we met that—that—we weren't to meet? You see I've got a wife, and—

ROSALINE.

I know. I have just seen her.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

What's that you say? You have just seen my wife?

ROSALINE (*nodding*).

She has been here. She has only just gone.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

The devil! What did she say to you—what did she think?

ROSALINE.

She thought you knew about it—she was angry!

CHARLES SYLVESTER (*furiously*).

And very rightly too. You have no business here—why did you come?

ROSALINE.

MR. Tempenny brought me.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

What? Are *you* his model? This is really too bad. Where is he?

ROSALINE (*pointing R.*).

He has gone in there.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

What for? (*Calling.*) Tempenny! I say, Tempenny, I want you!

(*Enter* REMBRANDT TEMPENNY *very nervously.*)

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Ah—er—good morning, dear boy. What weather, eh? What weather we're having to be sure. (*Aside to* ROSALINE.) You malicious, base-hearted—(*Shakes his fist at her.*) Oh!

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Look here, you know, Tempenny, this won't do. You have no right to bring the girl here. I don't think it was at all friendly of you. I—I consider it a damned liberty of you in fact.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*shrinking*).

I was afraid you would be vexed, but don't be cross, dear old man; don't be "put out" about it. (*Trying to laugh.*) There are worse troubles at sea, as they say—worse troubles at sea!

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

(*With rising indignation.*) But I *am* put out. Damn the sea—what's that got to do with it. Mrs. Sylvester has been in and seen her, I understand? You have served me a very shabby trick, Tempenny—I am very sorry about it!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

(*Still trying to laugh it off.*) All comes out in the wash, old chap—all comes out in the wash, I assure you! (*Slaps him on the shoulder.*)

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Don't do that—I don't like it!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*nervously*).

Ha, ha, ha! (*Does it again.*)

CHARLES SYLVESTER (*shouting*).

Don't!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*collapsing*).

All right, I won't.

ROSALINE (*advancing*).

Charlie!

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Don't call me "Charlie"—I don't like it.

ROSALINE.

Once—

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Well, then, I don't like it twice—do you hear! This is all your fault, Tempenny. You have got me into a pretty mess upon my word. My wife won't believe me, and I shall never hear the end of it.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

And what about mine?

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Yours?

ROSALINE.

Yes, she has gone to tell her.

CHARLES SYLVESTER (*roaring with laughter*).

Ha, ha, ha!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*miserably*).

Remarkably funny, isn't it?

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Ha, ha, ha!

ROSALINE.

Ha, ha, ha!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

(*To* CHARLES SYLVESTER; *pointing to* ROSALINE.) That girl is a perfect devil. She smacked my face just now when I was posing as a mandarin.

CHARLES SYLVESTER (*staring*).

As a what!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

I was a mandarin when your wife came in—I thought it best—and this ex-mash of yours took advantage of me, and smacked my face.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

(*To* ROSALINE.) I tell you what it is,—I think you had better go. You had better be off—I can't have you here.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

I quite agree. *I* don't want her—she is more trouble than she is worth.

ROSALINE.

You are very rude to me, both of you. (*To* CHARLES SYLVESTER.) Your manners have not improved with matrimony, my friend.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

I am not going to discuss my manners—

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

No, he is not going to discuss his manners.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

The point is—

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

The point is—git!

ROSALINE.

The point is that if you don't ask me properly, I shall do nothing of the kind. Now you've got it.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

(*To* REMBRANDT TEMPENNY *angrily*.) What the devil do you mean by bringing such a firebrand here?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Now don't lose your temper again. (*To* ROSALINE.) Will you go?

ROSALINE.

No, I won't.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

That settles it. (*The two men look at each other helplessly*.)

(*Enter* SARAH ANN.)

SARAH ANN.

If you please, sir, there is a gentleman downstairs who wants to see Mr. Tempenny.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Me? What's his name? What does he want?

SARAH ANN.

He says his name is Mr. Schercl.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

I'm out. Go and tell him so. It only wanted this to complete my happiness. I won't see him, do you hear?

SARAH ANN.

If you please the gentleman said he must see you, but if you was engaged, he'd wait.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

You won't get rid of old Schercl in a hurry, if he has advanced you any of the "ready."

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Tell him I'm out. Then let him come up if he likes.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

What are you going to do?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

I am going to dissemble. I am going to be an Eastern potentate, and I am going to spoof the old boy. (*To* SARAH ANN.) Menial, slope! (*To* CHARLES SYLVESTER.) Help me.

ROSALINE.

This is the rummiest studio that ever I was in!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Yes, originality is what we pride ourselves on. (*He disguises himself as the Maharajah of Slamthedoor.*)

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

And what am *I* to do?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

You must be very deferential. I think you had better salaam when you speak to me. Try it.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Like this? (*Salaams.*)

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

That's it, only more so. And mind, if he wants to see Susannah, you don't let him look at it. It's only just begun. How do I look?

ROSALINE.

You look like a Guy Fawkes.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Dear child! how pretty she talks! Where did you originally find such a treasure?

(*Enter* HENRICH SCHERCL *L.*)

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Ah, Mr. Sylvester, how do you do? Where is Mr. Tempenny? I hoped to see him.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

He has been compelled to go out on most important business.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

The business of you gentlemen is always "most important" excepting when it concerns them that find you the wherewithal. (*Aside.*) What a nice girl!

(ROSALINE *smiles at him.*)

CHARLES SILVESTER.

I don't think, my dear Schercl, that you have much cause to complain. You don't lose by us; now confess!

HENRICH SCHERCL.

My dear sir, if I lost by you how do you think I should garry on my business? One must live. But you artists don't give us much chance. You are always bleeding us for what you call "a bit on aggount."

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*coming down*).

Your conversation is very interesting, but I wish to see Mr. Tempenny. He is not here, and if he is not coming I shall go. Allah Bismillah Remdazzlegefoo!

HENRICH SCHERCL.

(*Aside to* CHARLES SYLVESTER.) What does he say?

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

(*Aside to* HENRICH SCHERCL.) He's swearing because Tempenny is out.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

I wanted to buy some of his great works. The Maharajah of Battledore told me that he was one of your most favourite painters.

ROSALINE (*aside*).

Good old Rembrandt Tempenny. What larks!

HENRICH SCHERCL.

(*Aside to* CHARLES SYLVESTER.) Let *me* deal with this sportsman.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

(*Aside to* HENRICH SCHERCL.) Bosh, why should you?

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Do you want to sell your "Battle of Agincourt?"

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Of course I do.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

How much?

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Two hundred—you know that!

HENRICH SCHERCL.

A hundred ready?

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Yes.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

You will have a jeque to-night.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

On your word?

HENRICH SCHERCL.

On my word.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

An open one?

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Yes, my dear young friend. Now oblige me by skipping.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Right you are. Allow me to introduce to your Highness, Mr. Schercl—Mr. Schercl, the Maharajah of Slamthedoor.

(*Exit R.*)

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Allah Bismillah Pottamarmala Goo!

HENRICH SCHERCL (*aside*).

He's swearing again. (*Aloud.*) I am sorry your Royal Highness has been kept waiting. These artists are such gurious people. Your Highness broboses to buy bictures, yes?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

I have built a new palace at Slamthedoor, and I must have, of course, some pictures for my galleries.

ROSALINE.

Does your Highness want any slaves too?

HENRICH SCHERCL.

(*Aside to* ROSALINE.) Go away, girl—go away! One deal at a time! (*Aloud*) May I make so bold as to enquire the size of the new palace, Oh glorious One? (*Salaams.*) (*Aside.*) I think that is right!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

The size? It is no bigger than my other one—it is about four times as large as your Buckingham Palace.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Great heavens! And you will have a vast picture gallery, Oh Light of my Eyes!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Five—five picture galleries, and I desire to fill them. That is why I am looking up these artists. My cousin the Maharajah of Battledore has given me several introductions.

ROSALINE.

Doesn't your Royal Highness want any slaves? Ye before whose radiance the sun pales and the stars grow dim—no slaves?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Can you dance, damsel, as I would see you?

HENRICH SCHERCL.

(*Aside to* ROSALINE.) Go away—go away—go away. Oh, demmit, will you go away! (*Salaaming.*) Most Serene One—

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Proceed. But be quick—I am impatient to be gone. Allah Bismillah, be quick!

HENRICH SCHERCL (*aside*).

What a temper he's got! (*Aloud.*) Be guided by your servant. I have your Royal Highness's interest at heart. (*Aside.*) Also my own. (*Aloud.*) These bainters are so queer—they do not understand business at all, at all. Nach, they know nothing about it—at least very few of them. The less you have to do with them directly the better for your Royal Highness. If your Royal Highness wishes to fill the picture galleries of your new palace I'll take on the job at contract. I'll save you sixty per cent, s'welp me!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

That is very kind of you. Why should you do it?

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Well, your Royal Highness, I was struck by your demeanour and to tell your Royal Highness the truth, except with the Brince of Westphalia I have never

done any business with royal families before.

ROSALINE (*aside*.)

Modest violet! There's nothing like being frank!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

You do not advise me then to see this Mr. Tempenny, or the other painters whose names I have?

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Certainly not, your Royal Highness. Let *me* arrange everything. Here's my card—Heinrich Schercl, 41 Golden Square.

ROSALINE.

(*Aside to* HENRICH SCHERCL). Look here, what am I to have for this.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

(*Aside to* ROSALINE). For what?

ROSALINE.

(*Aside to* HENRICH SCHERCL). I can queer your pitch.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

(*Aside to* ROSALINE). We will talk later—we will talk later. Don't bother me!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

My dear Mr. Schercl, I am delighted to have met you. You are quite confident you can *fill* my galleries?

HENRICH SCHERCL.

With genuine works of art. (*Aside*.) Poor Gamboge died last week; I am sure he hasn't sold more than three pictures during the last ten years—I can get the lot cheap. Only there must be 200 at least. What with all the other stony devils I can lay hands on, I'll soon decorate the old josser's walls.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Well then, I shall wait no longer—there is no need now. I shall call upon you, and settle our business together. Good-bye, miss, for the present. This is your daughter, I suppose?

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Eh—oh, yes, my youngest—my ewe lamb.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

I congratulate you. She is worthy to be a Princess.

ROSALINE (*aside*).

This man's a flyer! I thought he was a mild young mug, but he fairly takes the merry little bun!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Good day, sir. My time in London is short. If I cannot call upon you, I will ask you to come to me at Claridge's.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Charmed, your Royal Highness. I shall be entirely at your disposition.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

That is well.

(*Exit R.* SCHERCL *and* ROSALINE *salaam*).

HENRICH SCHERCL.

(*Skipping with ecstasy*). Jampagne! Little girl, I will stand you jampagne to zelebrate the deal.

ROSALINE.

Good biz! (*Opens L.D. and calls*). Here Mary, Matilda, Susan, or whatever your name is, you're wanted.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

And you are a very charming girl, that is a fact. (*Lighting a cigarette*). I think I must give you a sovereign, yes?

ROSALINE.

I don't mind if I do. (*Taking cigarette from his case*). A "sovereign?" What are you talking about? My commission on this is a tenner—and I'm cheap at that!

(*Enter* SARAH ANN *L.*)

HENRICH SCHERCL.

(*Giving her money*). Fetch me a bottle of jampagne, and bring two glasses, eh?

SARAH ANN.

Yessir.

ROSALINE.

And look slippy. Go on, I'm parched. Mind, the *best* champagne. (*To* HENRICH SCHERCL.) Got a light?

(*Exit* SARAH ANN *L.*)

HENRICH SCHERCL.

What is your name, my dear? (*Gives her light*).

ROSALINE.

Rosaline—you may call me "Rosie" if you like.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

May I—why? (*Chuckles*).

ROSALINE.

Well, I was struck by your demeanour, and to tell your Royal Highness the truth I have never done business with such a nice gentleman as you before.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Ha, ha, ha! You are a sharp girl too! You are too good to go to India to be a slave. You could do better in London.

ROSALINE.

(*Coquettishly*). Think so?

HENRICH SCHERCL.

You shall have a slave of your own—a slave who would love you.

ROSALINE.

It sounds very well. In the meantime what about the tenner?

HENRICH SCHERCL.

(*Taking out his notebook*). You shall have it. There! Will you give me a kiss for that, my Rosie, with your rosy-posy lips?

(*Enter* SARAH ANN *L. with champagne and glasses*).

ROSALINE.

Not before the child! Put it down, my girl, that'll do—Come on, Heinrich of the Golden Square, come and pour out the fluid.

(*Exit* SARAH ANN *L.*)

HENRICH SCHERCL.

(*Lifting his glass*). Gezunteit!

ROSALINE.

Very likely. (*Aside.*) This is the best day's sitting I've ever done. (*Aloud.*) Now this is what I call comfortable: a bottle of the boy, a cigarette, and a cosy chat. I am very glad to have met you.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

(*Putting his arm round her waist*). Really—is that so?

ROSALINE.

That is really so. But mind you, an hour ago, I should not have let you do this.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

I am so blessed we did not meet an hour ago.

ROSALINE.

It is true. An hour ago I was in love, but I have been treated very badly. Just now my heart is at the rebound.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Leedle heart—let me gatch it!

ROSALINE.

Now you are making fun of me. I am not so simple as you think. Why, we have only just met.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

But we can meet again. Besides, I am not going yet—I will stop and talk to you. You shall tell me all about your love-trouble, and I will gonsole you. Hark, what is that?

ROSALINE.

Somebody is coming upstairs.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Then I will step into the next room. It would not look vell that I should be found trinking jampagne mid a pretty girl like you. When they are gone I will come back.

ROSALINE.

MR. Sylvester is in there. Here, if you don't want to be seen, get into this cupboard.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Is it glean? Are you sure?

ROSALINE.

Clean as a new pin. Come on if you mean it, there's no time to waste. Now or never?

HENRICH SCHERCL.

(*Going into cupboard, gingerly*). I am certain it is not glean.

(ROSALINE *shuts the door and turns as* MRS. SYLVESTER *re-enters with* MRS. TEMPENNY).

MRS. SYLVESTER.

I told you so! Here she is as bold as brass. Now what do you say to that?

MRS. TEMPENNY.

If indeed my husband brought her here—if he has really assisted Mr. Sylvester to deceive you—

MRS. SYLVESTER.

(*Scornfully*). "IF!" The creature does not deny it. Speak, girl.

ROSALINE.

Good afternoon.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

"Good afternoon?" It isn't a "good afternoon" I want you to say. Speak, I tell you.

ROSALINE.

What shall we talk about?

(*R.D. slowly opens a little—showing* REMBRANDT TEMPENNY *and* CHARLES SYLVESTER *listening*).

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

(*Aside to* CHARLES SYLVESTER). Can you do it, do you think?

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

I can do it.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Threaten to punch my head.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Yes, yes—and you had better be very violent too.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

I twig. Wait a moment.

(*They withdraw*).

MRS. TEMPENNY.

(*Bursting into tears*). I will never forgive him as long as I live.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

I should think not. When I see Charles—!

MRS. TEMPENNY.

Oh, and when I see Rembrandt—!

MRS. SYLVESTER.

I *will* see him, if I stop till midnight!

MRS. TEMPENNY.

And *I'll* see him, if I don't go home for a week!

(*Enter* REMBRANDT TEMPENNY *backwards, very disordered attire—his entrance to suggest that he has been flung in*. CHARLES SYLVESTER *follows*).

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

(*With affected fury*). If you did not bring this person here, sir, how did she come?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

How?

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Yes, sir—how?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

How do I know?

MRS. SYLVESTER and MRS. TEMPENNY.

What is all this? Oh, good gracious, the men have been fighting!

ROSALINE (*aside*).

I know what it is—it's spoof.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

(*Rushing to* CHARLES SYLVESTER). Charles—Charles, compose yourself!

MRS. TEMPENNY.

(*Rushing to* REMBRANDT TEMPENNY). Rembrandt, be calm.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Don't interfere, Adelaide.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Eugenia, this concerns us alone. Mr. Sylvester accuses me—

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Yes, sir, I accuse you—

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

(*Throwing himself upon him*). Ah!

(CHARLES SYLVESTER *throws him off*).

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

The best of wives—

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Don't you dare to mention Mrs. Sylvester's name, sir!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

I am talking about Mrs. Tempenny. I say you would lead the best of wives to suppose that I—I—introduced this creature into your room. (*Weeps.*)

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

And through you I may be falsely suspected by Adelaide. (*Weeps.*)

(ROSALINE *whispers to* REMBRANDT TEMPENNY *aside.*)

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

(*Aside to* ROSALINE.) Great Jupiter!

MRS. SYLVESTER.

All this is very fine—but who *is* the man who brought her here if you didn't? Answer that.

MRS. TEMPENNY.

Yes, if neither of *you* did it, who did? Where *is* the man?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

(*Throwing open cupboard triumphantly and disclosing* SCHERCL *covered with paint.*) There!

Curtain.

ACT III.

SCENE:—*Drawing-room at Tempenny's house.*

TIME:—*Next day.*

(SUSAN *discovered dusting. As Curtain goes up bell is heard off.*)

SUSAN.

Was that the bell again? It is not the sort of place I am used to, this—where the master's afraid to see half the people who calls for him. I only hopes my wages is right. They was precious particular about *my* references when they took me. Was I sober, honest and industrious, and the Lord knows what? Wish I'd been equal particular about theirs. The master ain't remarkably industrious, that I do know, for he often don't paint nothing for a week at a time; and he frequently ain't sober. Whether or not he is honest I shall find out at the end of my month. (*Bell rings again.*) It *was* the bell—I'd better go and see who it is.

(*Exit L.*)

HENRICH SCHERCL (*heard off*).

Mr. Tempenny in? Nonsense. Then I'll wait till he is.

SUSAN (*expostulating*).

But, sir, if you please, sir, really—

(*Enter* HENRICH SCHERCL *followed by* SUSAN.)

HENRICH SCHERCL.

I tell you I mean to see him. Now let us have the truth, girl, where is he?

SUSAN.

Mr. Tempenny, sir?

HENRICH SCHERCL.

"Mr. Tempenny, sir?" Yes, ma'am, who else? Now, is he at home?

SUSAN.

No, sir, he isn't; he has gone out.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Not to his studio, for I've just been there.

SUSAN.

No, sir, he has gone to his dentist.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Then I'll just sit down here till he comes back. You may go in and tell him so.

SUSAN (*confused*).

I hope you don't think I tell stories, sir? If Mr. Tempenny's out how can I take him your message?

(*Enter* REMBRANDT TEMPENNY *R.*)

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*briskly*).

Now, you understand, Susan, I am out to everyone, and if a Mr. Schercl calls —(*seeing* HENRICH SCHERCL—*aside*). Good gracious! (*Aloud.*) Beg him to wait till I return—I want to see him.

HENRICH SCHERCL (*sardonically*).

He *is* waiting, sir.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*affecting surprise*).

My dear friend, how glad I am—how very glad! (*Aside.*) This is the very devil! (*Aloud.*) All right, Susan, you can go.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

I want a leedle talk with you, my friend, without delay.

SUSAN (*aside*).

I hope the master'll enjoy himself, I'm sure! I did *my* best for him anyhow!

(*Exit L.*)

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Mr. Tempenny, I am here to demand an exblanation, sir—an exblanation of your strange behaviour of yesterday. And there is something else, sir. I find you are not Mr. Tempenny at all, sir, you are an imposter.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*aside*).

He did take me for Tempenny R.A., Addison was right! (*Aloud.*) An imposter, Mr. Schercl?

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Zertainly, sir. I took you for *the* Mr. Tempenny—it was to *the* Mr. Tempenny, I brobosed to give my commission. You 'ave cheated me, you fellow.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Now, now, take care! How was *I* to know you took me for somebody else? You came to me, and you made me an offer, and I accepted it. How could I tell you thought I was another—I may say an *inferior*—Tempenny? I say how could I know you were making a mistake?

HENRICH SCHERCL.

You knew it very well. I would not pay tree 'undred pounds to *you*! What do you think I am—a fool? You 'ave obtained an order from me under false pretences, do you hear. I say you 'ave robbed me.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Gently! gently! this is slander, old gentleman. It will cost you a good deal *more* than three hundred pounds if you aren't more guarded in your remarks.

HENRICH SCHERCL (*spluttering*).

What?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

It will really. I shall owe it to myself to have you up for slander, and it would be a very good advertisement for me too.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

What! what! what!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

A really excellent advertisement. And what a fool you'd look! Come, come, you don't suppose your other Tempenny would have done you a work of this size for three hundred, do you? Nor as good either? No, no! As to the affair of yesterday, my wife was very much to blame—I am very angry with her. You see she has such curious ideas, and when she found you hidden in a cupboard with a paint-pot upset over you she thought it strange. It *wasn't* strange, of course—(*airily*) most natural thing in the world, but she couldn't see it.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

I felt very hurt to be so misunderstood. The only person who abbeared to have any zympathy for me was your model—the Miss Rosaline.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Nice girl! charming girl, isn't she? Full of feeling, and—I say, Schercl, you've made a conquest there, and no error.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Nonsense—go away mid your rubbidge!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Well, you have, you know! She made an awful scene after you left—said you were the only man she ever saw look dignified with a pot of paint upset over him. It is a pity in one way she *is* so taken with you—I feel for her.

HENRICH SCHERCL (*flattered*).

Vat rot you talk. Why should you feel for her?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Because you meant nothing by your attentions, Schercl, and the poor girl doesn't know that. She is thinking about you—not to put too fine a point upon it, she has fallen in love with you; and what do *you* care?—you laugh!

HENRICH SCHERCL.

No, I do not laff—I have a 'eart, have I not? I have the emotions and sensibilities.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

You have, you have. But you do not realise how serious an impression you have made.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Well, now about Susannah. You can do it as well as your namesake. Yes?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Ah! (*Enthusiastically.*) Wait till you see it!

HENRICH SCHERCL.

It still progresses?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Superbly.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

"Zuperbly!" But I do not see it, and to me you never abbear to paint.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

My dear friend, how can you doubt the success of the picture after you have seen the model who is sitting for it? Fair—beautiful form—exquisite arms—er —

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Yes, yes, yes. So Miss Rosaline sits for your Susannah, eh?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Won't it be worth the three hundred—won't it be a dream.

HENRICH SCHERCL (*eagerly*).

I will come in one morning when you are at work! Yes, I am satisfied with the gontract—I say no more. I will come in when she is sitting.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNV.

No, you don't, my boy—oh no, you don't! The picture is what you get for your money—the real, living, breathing woman ain't included. Not much! Oh, no, Schercl, you old rogue—only the picture, sonny, no more. Ha, ha, ha!

HENRICH SCHERCL (*confused*).

You misunderstood me quite—I had no idea but of my business. I do not think of other things. Er—when will the picture be done, Tempenny, I would like it soon?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Ha, ha, ha! Control yourself, Romeo, it's coming on.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

But according to our contract, it should be done in a week's time. If you disappoint me, my friend, we shall fall out again.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*aside*).

It strikes me you'll be precious lucky if you get it at all. The infernal "contract" is the bane of my life. (*Aloud.*) All right, Schercl, I will push on with it—I want the other two hundred, you know. I shan't delay for my own sake. (*Enter* CHARLES SYLVESTER *L.*) Hallo, Charlie, how d'ye do. How are things at home?

HENRICH SCHERCL.

I see another of yesterday's gulprits. However I have forgiven you.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

That's all right. (*Aside to* REMBRANDT TEMPENNY:) Rosaline's downstairs —wanting to see you. Where is your wife?

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Out. (*To* HENRICH SCHERCL.) That poor girl has followed you here. Perhaps out of pity you ought to go down to her and say a kind word.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Miss Rosaline—she is here? Well, I never! Yes, I will go down and speak to her. Where is she?

(*Enter* ROSALINE *L.*)

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*aside*).

Damn it, in the drawing-room! Look here, Schercl, you can't go till *she* does. If my wife comes in and finds her, she is your affair. Don't leave her for Heaven's sake.

ROSALINE.

Good morning, gentlemen. Oh, Mr. Schercl! What a pleasure—how *do* you do?

HENRICH SCHERCL.

I am very well, I thank you. And you?—I need not ask, you look most beautiful.

ROSALINE (*aside*).

Dear man!

HENRICH SCHERCL.

(*Aside to* CHARLES SYLVESTER.) Why is Tempenny so afraid his wife should see her? You too—why are *you* so afraid? Is she not of a good character, this Miss Rosaline?

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

(*Aside to* HENRICH SCHERCL.) The girl is a paragon. They are jealous of her, that's all. She is too good-looking for 'em.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Ha, ha, I see!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

I think we'll leave you, old man. Rosaline, Mr. Schercl, has something to say to you—we shall be in the way. (*Aside to* CHARLES SYLVESTER.) Come on, old chap—I wouldn't risk being found in the room again with the girl for a monkey.

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Yes, I have some business to discuss with Mr. Tempenny. If you will excuse us—

(*Exit R.*)

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

(*Aside to* HENRICH SCHERCL.) Take her away soon, there's a trump, or there will be another row. I give you five minutes to get her out of the house, Take her to breakfast—or—or—wherever you like, only hurry! (*Exit L.*)

ROSALINE.

How funny to be left alone like this, isn't it, I really called to know when Mr. Tempenny proposed to continue the sittings. Do you know?

HENRICH SCHERCL.

No, I have no idea. But I am very glad you called—our conversation yesterday was so inderrupted.

ROSALINE.

Yes, and we were getting on so nicely too, weren't we? Do you like my new hat? I bought it out of the tenner you gave me. What do you think of the bow—isn't it a duck?

HENRICH SCHERCL.

You do not sit to Mr. Tempenny in a hat, I think.

ROSALINE.

In a—? Oh no, not in—. The subject is classical.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Zo I understand (*he sighs*).

ROSALINE (*sighing*).

Ah!

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Why do you sigh? You are not happy?

ROSALINE.

Did I sigh? I was thinking.

HENRICH SCHERCL (*sighing*).

Heigho!

ROSALINE.

But now it is *you* who sighs. Aren't *you* happy?

HENRICH SCHERCL.

I alzo, I was thinking.

ROSALINE.

Of what?

HENRICH SCHERCL.

If I was to tell you, you would call me "sentimental old fool."

ROSALINE.

Not *old*. Never a *fool*. (*With sudden persuasiveness*.) *Tell* me!

HENRICH SCHERCL.

I was thinking then, of you.

ROSALINE.

Of little me? What of me.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

I was wishing I was this Mr. Tempenny.

ROSALINE.

Why? (*Realising reason, and covering her face bashfully*.) Oh!

HENRICH SCHERCL.

I mean you go to him every day, and your zociety is very fascinating. That is all.

ROSALINE.

Of course, if you were Mr. Tempenny, you would see more of me. I should have said you would see me "*oftener*."

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Heigho!

ROSALINE.

Heigho!

HENRICH SCHERCL.

The little that I *have* seen has made a great impression on me, Rosie—I shall never forget your face.

ROSALINE.

Really?

HENRICH SCHERCL (*eagerly*).

Yes, yes, really—it is true.

ROSALINE.

I am only a model, you know—a poor girl.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

You are a model of perfection. I zympathise with you.

ROSALINE.

You do not think the less of me because?

HENRICH SCHERCL.

I assure you I think of you the more. Nevertheless I do not like the idea.

ROSALINE.

And why?

HENRICH SCHERCL.

You must find it zo chilly in the winter.

ROSALINE.

I have got used to it. And besides I am fortunately of a warm temperament. The wind is tempered to the shorn lamb.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

I have not ever in my life seen a young lady who did make me feel for her the strange attraction that I feel for you, Rosie. I am jealous of this Mr. Tempenny.

ROSALINE.

Jealous! Do you mean you are in love with me? (*Aside.*) Oh, my goodness, what a joke!

HENRICH SCHERCL.

And if I did, would you laugh at me? Supposing I was to say to you—"Rosie, I

would like to marry you," what would you answer?

ROSALINE.

Say it, and see. (*Aside.*) He's in earnest. I do believe.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

I am a very rich man. I could give you lots of such hats, and jewellery, and a big house.

ROSALINE (*sentimentally*).

I wish that you were poor.

HENRICH SCHERCL (*in a fright*).

No, no, for goodness sake, don't say that! Why?

ROSALINE.

You would not doubt my sincerity then. Now, you may think—

HENRICH SCHERCL.

No, no, I do believe you. Do you care for me a little, Rosie?

ROSALINE (*archly*).

Perhaps I do—a little. No, you are making game of me! (*Turns up.*)

HENRICH SCHERCL.

I am not—I am not! I love you desperately. Rosie, will you be my wife. Say "yes" my darling.

ROSALINE.

Yes. Now you may kiss me.

HENRICH SCHERCL (*kissing her*).

This is paradise. And Rosie—

ROSALINE.

Yes, Mr. Schercl.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Ah, no, you must say Heinrich.

ROSALINE.

Yes—Heinrich?

HENRICH SCHERCL.

You will not sit to Mr. Tempenny any more? It is not fit, now that you are to be Mrs. Schercl, that you should earn your living in such a way.

ROSALINE (*doubtfully*).

He will be very disappointed. He can't finish "Susannah" without me, and if he don't finish it, he won't get the two hundred pounds.

(*Enter* MRS. SYLVESTER *and* MRS. TEMPENNY. *L. dressed for walking.*)

MRS. TEMPENNY.

Sir!

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Ah, my friend Tempenny's wife. And Mrs. Sylvester—how do you do?

MRS. SYLVESTER.

This creature again?

MRS. TEMPENNY.

By what right, sir, do you bring this person again—and into my private house.

ROSALINE.

Creature! Stand up for me, Heinrich.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

I will, my treasure. (*To* MRS. TEMPENNY.) I must trouble you, my good madam, to speak in terms of more respect of a lady who will shortly be my wife.

MRS. TEMPENNY }
} (*aside*).
MRS. SYLVESTER }

Schercl's wife! We must be very civil to her!

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Let me introduce you: Mrs. Tempenny, Mrs. Sylvester—the future Mrs. Heinrich Schercl.

(*The two women gush up to her and shake her hands.*)

(*Enter* TEMPENNY *and* SYLVESTER. *L.*)

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

What's this I see, do I dream?

CHARLES SYLVESTER.

Are visions about?

MRS. TEMPENNY (*aside to* TEMPENNY).

Why on earth didn't you tell me? They are engaged—I might have offended him for life!

MRS. SYLVESTER (*aside to* SYLVESTER).

How stupid you were! They are going to be married. Why, you might never have got an order from him again!

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY.

Dear, dear, dear, but my very good friend, if this lady is going to be your wife, how about "Susannah?"

HENRICH SCHERCL.

Forgive me, "Susannah" cannot be. I release you from the contract.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*aside*).

Tidings of joy! (*Aloud.*) But—but—this is very hard on me.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

I release you, and I pay you just the same.

REMBRANDT TFMPENNY.

But she has had the money for a dozen sittings.

HENRICH SCHERCL.

I pay.

(*Enter* SUSAN.)

SUSAN.

If you please, sir, there's a hofficer of the law downstairs and he wants Mr. Tempenny or forty pun', sixteen shillings and ninepence.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*waving his hand*).

Schercl!

HENRICH SCHERCL.

I pay—and I gif you the balance by a jeque.

REMBRANDT TEMPENNY (*with mock despair*).

Pay—you pay? But the work of my life unfinished.—What money can compensate for that?

(*Sinks forlornly into chair.*)

Curtain.

THE END.

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