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BRIDGET OF ALL WORK

BRIDGET OF ALL WORK

BY
WINIFRED M. LETTS

ILLUSTRATED IN COLOUR BY JAMES DURDEN

LONDON
HENRY FROWDE
HODDER AND STOUGHTON

1909

"We can be *artists*, also, in our daily task . . . the artist is he who strives to perfect his work ; the artisan strives to get through it. . . . One thing at least is in my power : if I cannot realize my Ideal, I can at least *idealize my Real*.

"In one of Murillo's pictures in the Louvre he shows us the interior of a convent kitchen ; but doing the work there are, not mortals in old dresses, but beautiful white-winged angels. One serenely puts the kettle on the fire to boil, and one is lifting up a pail of water with heavenly grace, and one is at the kitchen dresser reaching up for plates, and I believe there is a little cherub running about and getting in the way trying to help. What the old Monkish legend that it represented is, I do not know. But as the painter puts it to you on his canvas, all are so busy, and working with such a will, and so refining the work as they do it, that somehow you forget that pans are pans and pots pots, and only think of the angels, and how very natural and beautiful kitchen work is—just what the angels would do, of course."

"Blessed be Drudgery."

WILLIAM GANNETT

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CHAPTER THE FIRST

Scots Road

SCOTS ROAD is a little road on the outskirts of Burnton, one of those towns that cluster round Manchester like so many bees round a queen bee. Burnton is nearly as ugly as any town on earth—but still not quite, for it has a border of dingy green fields and an occasional glimpse of a ridge of hills, and it is possible to walk by a river that once was beautiful, and to see an old hall which long ago was stirred by stately life but has now fallen to the dull position of a local museum.

Scots Road claimed historical interest: there had once, in the days of the '45, been a scuffle there between the retreating Scotch and their pursuers, and the name lingered.

Old Mr. Horrocks, who was the oldest inhabitant of the Road with the exception of Sebastian Joy, Bridget's grandfather, was its warmest eulogist. "It's 'ealthy and it's got hantiquarian interest," he would say to friends from less favoured places, "and of a summer night I wouldn't ask a finer spot"—this with a wave towards the field on the opposite side.

If Bridget Joy passed at the moment and turned to smile at him he would use her as an example.

"There's a fine young woman that's lived in this road five years an' never known a day's sickness but measles," he would say, "an' the old gentleman—that's her grandfather—a scholar and a hartist—is wonderfully well set up though he's crippled with a fall he had once."

Mr. Horrocks, who had been a well-to-do grocer, was proud of the Joys. They were inpecunious and shabby, and their front curtains were not as clean as they should have been, nor their doorstep as well whitened as other doorsteps, but ~~the~~ Joys were gentlefolk. Being a Lancashire man, Mr. Horrocks counted no man better than himself—few nearly as good ; but he had a sort of interest in hereditary titles and in the ways and manners of gentle people. Old Mr. Joy's stately ways impressed him, though he concealed any momentary sign of the impression, and he took a certain pleasure in stirring his tea with a crested spoon. He regarded it as almost a pity that Miss Joy had a manner so unassuming. A little hauteur would have tickled his fancy. It was a shock to him when he found that she spent happy evenings in the kitchen and only used the parlour in warm weather. He had a vague hope that some day a carriage and pair, the carriage crested if not coroneted, would drive up Scots Road and stop at No. 8, and that distinguished

personages would alight and claim relationship with Bridget Joy before his eyes.

But Bridget grew up and no carriage came, and the window curtains at No. 8 obviously required repair and grew daily more unfit to welcome distinguished persons of any sort. Bridget seemed to have no expectations of this kind. She found Mr. Horrocks in his front garden one day and paused to talk about bulbs, though she was wearing a big holland apron and had a rent in her dress, and was not, as he reflected, looking at all like an elegant young gentlewoman.

"And how is Gran'pa?" asked Mr. Horrocks. In Lancashire, relationships are titles of honour, and if you have the luck to be Ma or Pa, Uncle or Aunt, Grandpa or Grandma to any one, you are so to all their neighbours.

"Grandpapa is very well, thank you, Mr. Horrocks."

"And how is the book getting on, Miss Joy?"
Bridget laughed.

"Oh, it's going on finely, we use such a lot of ink in our house. Grandpapa upset the ink-pot in his bed this morning, poor darling. He thought I'd be cross, but of course I wasn't. I laughed. Mother used salts of lemon when I spilt ink on my pinafore. I think I'll try that, Mr. Horrocks."

"I hear your Ma was a charming lady, Miss Joy."

Mr. Horrocks put down the bag of bulbs and the trowel, and leaned upon the gate opposite to Bridget.

"Yes, Mother was lovely. She always wanted us all to be happy. I sometimes think she wasn't quite happy herself."

Bridget's eyes filled with tears. She wiped them with the back of her hand and pushed away some wisps of sandy hair that blew across her face.

"Your dear Ma was a southern lady?"

"No; Mother was Irish. Her father was a country doctor. I'm afraid he was almost too kind and jolly—when he was jolly, I mean; when he wasn't he was awfully depressed. When he died, Mother had nothing, so she went to live with an Aunt in London, and there she met Daddy and married him. I think the Aunt died. You see, I really have no relations at all. It's a great pity, isn't it? You know, I had little twin brothers, and they died. That was such a sad thing for us all. I do think big families are lovely. I know I'd like heaps of children all dancing about."

Mr. Horrocks looked at Bridget kindly through his spectacles. She was a tall well-made girl, not beautiful in any way, but with an air of health and good cheer about her that made you feel a sort of comfort in looking at her face. She had sandy hair and grey eyes set a little wide apart, and her mouth was not small, but when she smiled she had white even teeth, a glory so rare in Lancashire that smiling might be abandoned there. As a child she had been like one of the angels in Botticelli's "Coronation of the Virgin," the good

little angel who is looking down at the two who hold up a book.

"Has Gran'pa no relatives?" asked Mr. Horrocks. The Joys were rather a mystery to their neighbours and Bridget's father was an insoluble problem.

"I don't know, Mr. Horrocks. He may have, but we never hear from them; and they might not be nice, so I think we'd better not look for them. Besides, they mightn't care to know us. I don't think they would, you know."

Bridget cast a glance upon the worn-out toes of her shoes and the soiled apron girt about her.

"Grandpapa had a brother who was knighted for something—he was a big doctor; but he died the other day," she added.

"You didn't go into black?"

Mr. Horrocks was rather shocked by this wasted chance. Mourning confers such dignity upon its wearers, especially on their first solemn visit to church.

"Oh no! I never knew him, so I didn't really care, and we couldn't afford mourning."

Mr. Horrocks sighed.

"'Twas a pity your Pa died so young."

Bridget flushed.

"Oh, Daddy's not dead!" she answered, with some confusion, "but we've—well, we've lost him."

Mr. Horrocks seemed so surprised by this confession that Bridget tried to explain further.

"Daddy was a sailor, you know; he was a very

nice man—I suppose he is still. You have simply to adore him even when he's selfish and not a bit dutiful. I can't explain him to you, for he's not like Grandpapa or me or any one here. Did you ever hear of the 'Pied Piper of Hamelin,' Mr. Horrocks?"

"The 'Pied Piper of 'Amelin'? Let me see, Miss Joy. I dare say, I dare say, but I can't get my mind quite to it."

"Well, he piped all the rats and all the children out of Hamelin. He was queer-looking and shabby, but they had to follow him. Daddy is like that; you want just to look at him and hear his voice and see him being happy. Animals love him and he loves them. Daddy can do anything with quite savage dogs or horses. He could make animals run to him. I know I can make them like me, but I think it's just because I'm his daughter."

"Most curious!" said Mr. Horrocks; "and you lost him—was he wrecked somewhere?"

"No. I saw him last when Mother died. He had come home from a voyage. But he was only in time for her funeral. He minded terribly that he'd not seen her. He was quite wild with sorrow. I found him in her empty room kneeling by the bed. I tried to comfort him, but I couldn't, so we cried and cried together. I begged Daddy to take me to sea with him, but he couldn't, and he told me about bringing wild animals back from Africa to England. It was lovely to listen to

him. And then he kissed me again and again and said he couldn't bear not having Mother, and that Grandpapa bothered him. Of course darling Grandpapa didn't mean to, but they never liked the same things. Daddy said that Grandpapa had money and would take care of me, but that he must go. I was rather selfish, for I clung round him and begged him to stay. And then he said, 'Would you keep your old seagull in a cage?' That was so sad that I knew he must go. He could never bear little houses and towns. He gave me everything of Mother's except her wedding-ring, and then he went away. He wouldn't even stay for supper. I remember I was so sorry, for I'd made him a potato pie and an omelette, and I ran upstairs with the omelette on a pan, and Daddy was gone. He'd left a note on his plate to say good-bye."

"Dear! dear!" said Mr. Horrocks; he took a lively interest in the affairs of his neighbours, and the departure of young Mr. Joy without his omelette or his daughter struck him as dramatic.

Bridget sighed.

"I had to eat the omelette myself," she remarked. "I was very hungry. Crying does make me hungry. I was thirteen then and I'm nearly eighteen now, but I've never seen Daddy. He writes occasionally from different ports, but I don't think he'll ever come back to us. I don't really think it's quite right of him, but then we don't know what it is to feel restless and wild."

"Thank the Lord, no," said Mr. Horrocks. He had no wish to be a seagull or anything wilder than an alderman. He took Bridget's hand and shook it.

"Some young gentleman will come for you some day, and I trust as he'll be a real good one, Miss Joy; and if 'e's not, there'll be Emmanuel' John 'Orrocks to reckon with."

Bridget treated the ever-to-be-relished matrimonial joke in a grave and literal fashion.

"Oh no, I think not! I never meet young men," she answered, "and I don't think they'd look at me again if we did meet, and besides I couldn't leave Grandpapa. And I'm very happy, too, with the cats and 'Beau' and the canary you gave me. I must plant my bulbs, Mr. Horrocks, and I do pray the sparrows won't eat all the crocuses."

Mr. Horrocks pressed a nobbly bag into Bridget's hands. He gave of his best, but the story had touched him.

"Tulips, Miss Joy—*Gesneriana*, fine red colour, two feet 'igh, black at base of calyx. Put 'em in at the front. Scots Road is the finest in this parish for front gardens."

Bridget thanked him enthusiastically. The bulbs to which she had referred were a withered and limited collection, and the thought of the tulips brightened her eyes. She ran down the road, Mr. Horrocks watching her. It must be admitted that her heels were not guiltless of holes, and her shoes were barely respectable; but the old

man, who had a warm heart for anything young, said to himself softly, "She's a lady, I do say, though Gran'pa did give me to imply the family was a bit grander."

He went into the house and related Bridget's story to the regnant "Grandma" of his household. They discussed the condition of the Joys with interest. It was rumoured that old Mr. Joy had private means and was a scholar of note engaged on some vast book which would bring fame to Scots Road if not to Burnton, but it was gathered that the means were small. For Bridget was behind even the poorest mill-girls in her Sunday attire, and she shocked the whole congregation by wearing her week-day hat on Sunday with the mere addition of a bunch of faded violets. The marketing, too, was obviously done on a very small scale, though even then it was rumoured that the bills were not paid for months at a time. And no servant was kept, and Bridget did the household work with the aid of a charwoman.

Many held that it was impossible that Miss Joy could be a lady, for she had been seen going out without gloves, and there was no haughtiness in her manner. The proper hall marks were wanting, and she had, moreover, a vulgar way of referring to ladies and gentlemen as men and women. And she was not among the *élite* ladies who had "at home" days and called upon one another. But they agreed that she was "obliging," and she was accepted tolerantly.

CHAPTER THE SECOND

Bridget's Birthday

THE houses in Scots Road were small and the bedrooms few. Old Mr. Joy occupied the "best" bedroom, and Bridget had an attic.

But the attic was a joyful place to her, a lofty castle from which she could see distant fields and forests of mill chimneys. The treasures of her childhood and girlhood were stored there. And though the spirit of order frowned and fled at Bridget's approach, the more complaisant little spirits of cheerfulness and miscellaneous interests flocked about her. The walls were covered with many pictures, some really good old prints among them, elaborate crayon drawings of ruined castles, and of lap-dogs, watery water colours, ancient and hideous family groups, silhouettes of old gentlemen in portentous stocks, with fobs on their waistcoats, and old ladies in still more portentous caps. All these adorned the walls.

The mantelpiece was a museum of cherished toys, china animals, photographs and shells.

The bookshelf, too, had a row of those treasured books that Bridget and her mother had read together in what were described as the "old days."

Somewhere in this room a small bed found place, and on this Bridget slept the sleep of the

perfectly healthy and innocent. On a chair beside her sat the alarm clock, malignantly waiting for the exact moment when he could raise his clamorous voice.

He seized the moment and burst into a torrent of talk about the virtues of early rising. Bridget caught him, hid him among the bed-clothes, and fell asleep again.

It was the milkman's insistent bang and clash that roused her the second time. She jumped out of bed, scrambled into a tight and ancient dressing-gown and hurried downstairs.

For fear of offending Stevens' sense of propriety Bridget hid behind a half-opened door and held out a hand bearing a jug, in much the way that the Lady Nimuë must have held out Excalibur to Arthur.

Stevens knew all his customers' morning aspects, the bristling curling-pins of some, the dressing-gowns of others, the perfect array of the few. Stevens called upon those he wished to favour, but sent his boy to the others. He disagreed with Mr. Horrocks on theological matters, so he sent his boy to him, but to the Joys he went personally, which was strange, for the milk taken there was little and the payments often tardy.

Stevens, though in this case his left hand would have scorned with Lancashire sense the doings of his right, even added little spills to Miss Joy's half-pint. Bridget spoke from behind her door.

"How is Tommy's tooth, Stevens?"

"Out finely, Miss Joy. Mrs. Stevens says you must come and see our Tommy."

"I will some time, thank you."

"Gran'pa well?" Stevens inquired.

"I hope so, thank you. I haven't looked yet."

Bridget remembered that it was her eighteenth birthday and she longed to share this news with some one.

"I'm eighteen this morning, Stevens," she announced.

"Are you, Miss Joy? Well, you're a gradely girl for your years, an' I wish you well—'ealth, 'appiness."

He added nearly a cupful to the milk-jug before he clattered away.

Two cats scurried in from a cold outer world and followed the milk-bearer to the kitchen. Without her cats and dog the house would have been a very quiet and lonely one. But they constituted what Bridget called a "family." They were young and affectionate, and could share in the downstairs life, which Mr. Joy, almost bed-ridden and absorbed in dreams, never could. The cats bore the names of Tabitha and Dorcas. Bridget's dog, of a slightly uncertain breed, may be described as a small brown hound. He was called a lurcher by Stevens, and "a big whippet" by Mr. Horrocks. Bridget had no concern for his breed; she called him "Beau," being entranced by gazelle-like eyes and an air of sweet melancholy.

Bridget's sudden appearance in the kitchen caused great disturbance among the late revellers of the black beetle world. There was a rush for crannies while the mistress of the house scrambled frantically on to the table.

"Oh, cats, why don't you kill them?" she asked.

Tabitha sat in a draughty place and mewed with that illimitable discontent which belongs to cathood. But Dorcas, still unsophisticated and joying in her youth, purred loudly and sprang on to Bridget's knee. Bridget addressed the family.

"Children, I'm eighteen to-day. If I were a grand Miss I should come out to-night at a splendid ball and wear a 'creation' in chiffon and lace. As it is, I shall wear my night-dress, which is too short, and my nice old dressing-gown, which is just fit for Mrs. Noah. And I'm quite as happy."

The dressing-gown had indeed a prehistoric air; it had been bought in the by-gone days when Bridget had measles. It came from the Army and Navy Stores, and in its freshness had worn a military air, for it was blue with red facings. But constant service had reduced it to the state of an old veteran. There was nothing at all dainty about her scanty wardrobe. That dull word "serviceable" had been applied to all her purchases.

She scrambled off the table, put the kitten on her shoulder, and set some water on to boil on the gas bracket. Then she went upstairs to dress.

Dressing was a hurried affair, in which a dim little mirror had no very important share.

By the time her hair had been hastily twisted on top of her head the postman's rattle and bang resounded. How exciting is the knock of a birthday postman! The excitement must be 'instinctive, for Bridget rushed downstairs, though reason told her that as no one knew her birthday it was foolish to expect anything. Perhaps, though she did not anticipate a visit from those grand personages of Mr. Horrocks' dream, she vaguely pictured a small parcel from some unknown relation, or some curious foreign present from her absent father.

There³were three envelopes lying prone on their faces in the hall. Bridget lifted them one by one. How is it that the senders of bills make it so apparent, even by their writing? She had no hope left. She felt with eager fingers in the letter-box—nothing! She even opened the door and looked outside—nothing but Beau surveying some hens with melancholy interest. There was no present there.

Bridget took the bills to the kitchen. She opened them with tears of vexation. There was the gas bill; that was as startling as gas bills often are. Secondly, stationery; this for the third time, with the hint that "Our Mr. Thompson will call during the morning." And lastly, a plumber's bill for certain repairs. She surveyed them disconsolately and added them up in the hope that there might be a mistake somewhere.

To those who live with the happy carelessness of the lilies of the field, the necessary facts of daily bread and money to pay for it make no great appeal. But Bridget, trained early in the ceaseless consideration of how two ends could be dragged together, knew that the management of the smallest house means constant expense, and constant anxiety too.

She laid the bills down while she fried some bacon, made the tea, and arranged breakfast on a tray. Followed by her devoted satellites the cats, she went upstairs and into her grandfather's room.

"Good-morning, Grandfather."

Mr. Joy sat up and smiled at his grandchild. He had dim, sweet blue eyes and white hair that straggled out from a knitted night-cap of red wool. He was swathed in a curious wrapping which had belonged to Mrs. Joy.

Bridget put the tray on his knees and kissed him twice.

"Two kisses and three pieces of bacon, one more of each! What has happened, dear child?" he asked.

"Only because it's my birthday, Grandpapa. I'm eighteen."

"Eighteen! Eighteen! And I'll be eighty on my next. Dear! dear! 'Crabbed age and youth'! But I'm sure we're happy enough. You must choose some present for yourself, dearie, some nice little ornament; young girls love finery, eh? Get it put down to me or use the household money."

"Thank you, darling ; how kind of you."

Bridget accepted these imaginary gifts in the spirit in which they were offered, and Mr. Joy never asked to see them. It was all a graceful little act performed for the sake of love and courtesy.

"And get a cake, Bridget. Young people love sweet things, don't they? A nice sugary cake ; you'll like that."

"Thank you very much, Grandpapa."

Bridget sat down in the window and looked out.

"Eighteen seems so much older than seventeen, doesn't it?" she remarked.

"Your father was born when your grandmother was eighteen. Times have changed. Old people are young now-a-days. You'll be married soon, Bridget."

"I don't think I want to be, Grandpapa."

"Eh? not married! Oh, you must marry, Bridget. Don't be a new woman, my child. 'The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.' I hope to see you suitably married before I die."

Bridget sighed.

"You know husbands aren't always satisfactory," she answered, "and one has to be so wise and good to cope with them. You'd need to be quite old, really, to cope with some husbands. I don't even call Daddy a very satisfactory husband. He loved Mother, but he never helped her much, did he? And the kind that stay away are almost better than the kind that are always at home and in bad tempers."

Sebastian Joy nodded.

"But, my dear, good women spoil us poor men. Your grannie spoilt me, and your mother spoilt your father, and don't you do it. An indulgent husband sometimes makes a woman selfish, but I must confess it is oftener that a good wife makes a man an exacting brute. Human nature is not always beautiful, Bridget, but we must strive by the aid of books, philosophy and religion to make it so."

Mr. Joy dismissed the problem of human relationship and nibbled his bread and butter with satisfaction. He could never give his attention to terrestrial matters for more than ten minutes or so. After that time he returned to the pathway of his spiritual life, though he still continued to eat his bread and butter.

Bridget gazed with knit brows across the dingy view. Her grandfather roused her presently.

"Now, darling, my writing materials, please."

Mr. Joy's manuscript lay scattered broadcast over the floor. In the flurry of inspiration he cast paper, and ink too, in all directions, so much so that he looked like a venerable mouse busy in a nest of paper.

Bridget moved the tray to one side, then taking her grandfather's hand in her cold one, she spoke with that evident effort with which the easy-going discuss unpleasant subjects.

"Grandpapa, we must talk business for a little while."

"Business, eh? What business is worrying

your little head? Let's have it out to-morrow. Yes, to-morrow, Bridget. I do not want to disturb the even flow of my thoughts this morning. Remember, Bridget, Art is our first mistress. We mustn't put the affairs of the body before divine Art."

"Grandpapa, I believe Shakespeare was quite a business man. I think, if you please, we must talk to-day, for some one called 'Our Mr. Thompson' is calling this morning for ready-money, and you know we haven't any."

"What Mr. Thompson?"

"He's from Pickford's shop. There's a big bill for foolscap and ink. And then there's the gas bill and the bill for mending the tap in the scullery."

Sebastian Joy seemed almost to shrivel when these alarming facts were thrust upon him.

"I can write cheques," he suggested hopefully.

"Well, it depends on what we have in the bank. A bank account won't go on for ever. I wish you could help me to understand our income, Grandpapa."

"Dear child, I never understood it myself. I've had losses, you know, Bridget. I bought a lot of mining shares. I expected a great deal from them as the prospectus spoke so highly of them, but they're not paying any dividends at all. They've asked me to attend their meetings several times, but I always reply that I'm a scholar and not a business man, and couldn't help them at all. It seems wrong of them to give me

nothing for my shares. But I fear some business men are very ungentlemanly. Then the Northern Canal shares did me no good. That failed, you know, so I've not got what I had. But when the book's done, Bridget, we'll have plenty. I'll give you a nice little dowry."

He waved his hands towards the scattered sheets of crabbed writing.

"There it is, Bridget—there's your dowry."

Bridget looked hopelessly at the floor.

"But, Grandpapa," she said, "we must do something before the book comes out. I'm sorry to worry you, darling, but we must think it out. The tradespeople are all so kind that it makes me ashamed not to pay them; it's like cheating one's friends. I suppose I'll have to change my dress and go to the bank and find out what we have. And I think I'll have to sell something."

"Sell something! Oh, Bridget, that would be very unladylike."

"Grandpapa, I'm not a lady, I'm just a common young woman, and I'll try and sell the Chelsea shepherd and shepherdess. I believe they're rather valuable."

"Don't sell them, they belonged to your grandmother."

Old Mr. Joy yawned; his mind was going off on its airy journey; he could not consider ways and means any longer.

Bridget seized her last moment and announced her plan desperately. "I shall take a lodger," she said clearly, and in a voice of authority rarely used.

"A lodger? Bridget!"

"Yes, he'll never worry you. I see that we can't live without a lodger, and I must look for one. It's dreadful. But it's inevitable."

Mr. Joy tied the strings of his night-cap securely, swathed his shawl round him, and looked wistfully at his manuscript.

"I've had a remarkable idea," he said, "about the essential unity of man. I must write it down while it's in my mind."

Bridget smiled, collected the manuscript for him, and retired downstairs.

By loud sounds in the kitchen she realized that Mrs. Crumb had arrived. She went to the kitchen, where a bustling little woman was raking out cinders from the fire.

"Master Joy well?" Mrs. Crumb inquired.

"Quite well, thank you."

Bridget sat down at the corner of the table and began her breakfast. She was unusually silent. Mrs. Crumb looked at her keenly. She put the silence down to love or ill-health.

"You're studying on something this morning," she remarked.

"Yes, I am, Mrs. Crumb. I do wish you'd advise me."

"Oh, Lor', Miss Bridget! I'd advise any one about anything. What is it now?"

"Well, Mrs. Crumb, I'm thinking of taking a lodger."

Bridget blushed before Mrs. Crumb's astonished eyes.

"What sort of lodger, Miss Joy?"

"Oh, respectable of course," Bridget explained anxiously. "I thought if we could find some nice old man or woman who wasn't too particular, or some business person who would be away for meals, we might make them comfortable here. Do you think we could do it?"

"You'd be too easy like, Miss Bridget. Lodgers are that queer sometimes you'd never be up to them."

"Don't tell me about them; I *must* take one. You see, Mrs. Crumb, Grandpapa and I haven't got much money; in fact, I sometimes don't know if we have any at all. Money is so queer you never seem to see it; it's all paper and coupons and things. But I have a dreadful feeling that we're living beyond our income."

"Dear! dear!" said Mrs. Crumb; "real gentlemen like your grandpa are as simple as little children, 'tis that easy to take them in."

"Yes, and I am not very practical, Mrs. Crumb; I'm not at all financial, I fear. But I do see that we must cut down expenses. In fact, I was going to say that I think I must do all the household work myself. Please do not think I don't value you, dear Mrs. Crumb; I do. But with a strong girl such as I am it seems extravagant to have extra help."

Mrs. Crumb, arms akimbo, contemplated Bridget and the situation.

"Our Amelia could do a turn now an' again," she remarked; "it would do her good. She's a real

flighty girl, an' she needs work. Don't you think of paying her, Miss Bridget, for you're welcome to any 'elp me and mine can give you or grandpa."

Bridget's eyes filled with tears, an emotional habit which she had inherited from her mother. "

"You *are* kind, Mrs. Crumb. But I'd try to give Amelia something. Now, what sort of lodger should I take?"

"A young gentleman. That sort gives least trouble in the long run. Not that I've much to say for them and their goings on. Such tales I've heard, staying out half the night and setting the curtains on fire, an' terrible language. But I do say an 'old lady gives more trouble with it all."

Bridget, horrified and deeply interested, sat upon the kitchen table, her hands clasped round her knees.

"But there must be some respectable men if one could find them," she suggested.

"Even the best are that worriting, Miss Bridget, they'd weary you of life. For one thing, the nicest gentlemen are saucy with their victuals."

"I suppose they are. Mother always said men were dainty, but that they liked cold beef. And it's a comfort to know of one thing they like. You frighten me very much, Mrs. Crumb, but I'm resolved. Now, what shall I charge?"

"Well, Miss Joy, I'd begin at a pound a week—washing extra. And you might come down a shilling or two if need be. But stand out for a

pound. Don't you be took in. My father allus said to us that if there's too much money to be got, 'twould be 'im as would get it. And I just take after poor Pa. Ask too much but never too little."

• Bridget looked scandalized.

"Oh, Mrs. Crumb, what a dreadful plan! But don't you think a pound is too much?"

"Not a bit, not a bit. But you'll not get more in a place like this. We'll do them for a pound, Miss Joy; there's a lot to be made out of lodgers in little ways."

"That is very ugly," said Bridget gravely. "I'll make out a card, Mrs. Crumb, and put it in the parlour window. I suppose Scots Road will think me very vulgar, but they know we're poor, and Mr. Horrocks always helps me to do things."

Bridget retired to her parlour, and after a long search discovered a card and a suitable pen. She devised the motto in bold capitals:

LODGINGS FOR A BUSINESS GENTLEMAN.

This seemed to her a quite impossible legend. But "Lodgings for a Respectable Young Man" seemed to imply a sort of insult to the neighbourhood, which had a pride in its respectability.

To soften the crudity of her advertisement she enclosed it in a broad red line, and finally devised an owl which appeared to hold the notice in its beak. This gave the card a slight jocularly which mitigated its cold formality.

With a nervous hand and a guilty face Bridget stuck the card in her front window, and retreated in blushing haste to the kitchen. She started violently when the baker's boy knocked at the door.

The baker's boy walked in and deposited a neat parcel on the table.

"From Miss Helphinstone," he ejaculated, and retired.

Miss Joan Elphinstone was Bridget's great friend, and a parcel from her was a matter of vast excitement. It looked suspiciously like a birthday present.

Now, presents need due ceremony: the string should be unpicked with careful fingers, the address considered, the enclosed letter read first.

Bridget gave the cats and Beau a full view of her first and only present, and invited them to sniff it. Then she read the enclosed note aloud.

"DEAREST BRIDE,

"A very happy birthday. Come to us to-night. Laura expects her Mr. Rice, and a friend of his. Mr. R. has a gramophone. Do come if you can get away from the Reverend G.P.

"Your loving

"JOAN."

The Reverend G.P., Bridget's grandfather, had the conspicuous virtue of never being lonely. He was really indifferent as to whether Bridget were

there or not. So the small festivity was possible, and the thought of it very pleasing to one who had too few pleasures to be critical.

The book turned out to be *The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini* in the "Everyman Edition." Joan, who was a fitter at a big Manchester shop, was a lady of discrimination and a very well-read young woman. She could talk of books and of pictures, and in Bridget's eyes no one was wiser or more interesting, or more fitted to be a heroine of romance, than her friend Joan. For Joan was twenty-eight, and had had a very unhappy love affair, and had, besides, rejected two eligible suitors. This accumulated romance, though rarely alluded to by either of the friends, had a supreme interest for Bridget, who had no lovers, and was far too bashful to encourage any.

On the strength of the approaching festivity Bridget put on the clothes she distinguished as "best," and went to the bank. The big red building was unspeakably terrific and awful to her mind. It took at least three minutes of indecision before she could push open the swing door and face Mr. Ellis and Mr. Browne and young Mr. Coventry. The very courtliness of their manners increased her nervous fears, and made it requisite to fumble spasmodically first for a handkerchief and then for a purse. Had either been missing one can hardly say what would have been the issue of the moment. On this occasion both were in her pocket.

Bridget said a threefold good-morning, gave a threefold smile, and addressed herself timidly to the suave Mr. Ellis.

She began hurriedly with the vital question :

“ Mr. Ellis, have we any money, please ? ”

Mr. Ellis smiled. Young Mr. Coventry grinned, and Mr. Browne looked paternally interested.

“ You mean, are you ‘ overdrawn,’ Miss Joy ? I will give you Mr. Joy’s bank-book. I hope he’s well ? That’s right, you look well, Miss Joy. Do you think we shall get any skating ? I hope so. Here is the book ; you will see that Mr. Joy has about three pounds still to his account.”

Bridget gave a sigh of relief and extended a cheque for that sum to Mr. Browne, who commented very suitably on the weather as he cashed it.

Again Bridget turned to Mr. Ellis.

“ I’ve drawn it all,” she said breathlessly. “ It seems rather rash, but I’m going to take a lodger, Mr. Ellis, that is if I can—or—or—I can sell certain things. Any way, please don’t let me overdraw.”

Mr. Ellis smiled. Bridget had that patent testimonial, an honest face. “ It will be all right, Miss Joy. Remember me to your grandfather,” he said, and the threefold good-morning having been repeated, Bridget went home to meet “ Our Mr. Thompson ” with some ready money.

CHAPTER THE THIRD

The Claims of Society

BRIDGET'S evening blouse was of necessity washed before every social function. Having begun its career as a Japanese silk reduced at sale time, it had come down to a papery substance that crackled as you put it on. The blouse was further adorned by a "chou" of flowered ribbon, this to celebrate a new year of its life.

Bridget, in her cold little bedroom, began her preparations by vigorous ablutions that left her face glowing. She tried several methods of doing her hair. But the results were unsatisfactory and she returned to the everyday style. A chrysanthemum stuck at one side of her hair appealed to her at first, but was finally rejected as too coquettish. A brown Sunday skirt had to do duty in the evenings too, and it must be owned that her shoes were lined with layers of brown paper to keep out the wet.

Of jewellery Bridget had a large and deeply-treasured but not priceless store. Her mother's old leather case stood on the dressing-table. In its trays were all those trinkets which the pleasant days of Queen Victoria made popular. The hair

of dearly-loved relations, boiled in glue and fashioned into bracelets with little clasps and ornaments of gold, mourning brooches with little willow trees of hair and borders of pearls, mosaics from Italy, filigree from friends who had passed Malta, cameos that once pinned the folds of Paisley shawls, bracelets of lava heads, peach stones set in gold, scarabs, bog-oak brooches of unutterable sombreness, chains and manacles of jet, garnets that glowed with the splendours of blackberry jelly, round and pleasing brooches of bright pebble, hair ornaments of Wicklow spa, necklaces of shells, of cornelian, of agate, of Connemara marble shamrocks. All these were Bridget's jewellery, to her mind boundless wealth, to be preserved lovingly and handed down to children's children.

The garnets were finally chosen, and her ornamentation being complete, she blacked her shoes (which showed her lack of method). Then she visited Mr. Joy and made up his fire and left his supper near him.

"Be happy and enjoy yourself, my child," said he, but did not look at her, for he was drawing with a careful pen the violent descent of Lucifer from heaven.

Even Bridget did not know the compass and theme of the "Book." Sebastian Joy described it as an allegorical romance, showing the journey of a soul through many worlds. It was to be in the manner of the great William Blake but still to be very much the work of

Sebastian Joy. However, when the genius of Sebastian Joy flagged it must be owned that he freely drew on William Blake. Bridget, having grown up with the Book, had a great reverence for it. The old man who wrote it was so heart-whole, so earnest about it, that one could not look at it without a sense of reverence for human endeavour. Day by day new sheets of crabbed writing, with the long S at frequent intervals and the letters turning faithfully to the right, were added to the volume. And occasionally a strange and very mystical illustration, that made even the obscure text obscurer, was added to the pile.

That was Sebastian Joy's life. He had a dream-life of necessary meals and occasional conversation, and in this dream-life Bridget was the pleasant little angel who cared for his needs and did not worry him, except at those nightmare times when she brought him bills and asked about his banking account. What are banking accounts and bills to a soul conscious of the great mystery of its coming and going, and concerned with a wonderful spiritual romance? Sebastian Joy never accused himself of selfishness, nor was he selfish in an ordinary sense. He never complained, even when the rice was over-baked or the potatoes under-boiled. To Bridget he was always courteous and affectionate, but he concerned himself not at all for her future. For Bridget was part of the dream called earthly existence, and when she had kissed him and left him he forgot all about her.

Bridget did not find life like a dream. It was always an active, generally a pleasant reality.

The approaching festivity filled her with excitement. She was only distressed by the necessity of leaving Beau, the ever faithful, by himself. But he, being a dog of a musical mind, was in the front parlour accompanying a distant barrel-organ with long-drawn howls. And he did not even hear the departure of his mistress, so lost was he in that melancholy and exquisite sense of music which is so well developed in certain dogs.

The country and the town are just exactly what we make them. Town is either a dirty, rainy, intolerable place, or it is a living page of breathless romance where comedy and tragedy jostle down the streets. Bridget thought Burnton very interesting at night. Alas for her morals that she thought even the public-houses, of which there were far too many, pleasant-looking! And the streets were full of life, of life relaxed from the long toil of mill and shop and office. And this full life was delightful after the hush of the old scholar's room and the business that centred round a very old man full of dreams.

Miss Joan Elphinstone and Miss Laura Elliott lodged with Mrs. Tuke of the leading millinery shop of Burnton. Joan was a fitter at a big Manchester shop, Laura was a typist. Girls of an utterly different nature, they were happy enough with Mrs. Tuke, who was midway between them as far as character went, being prudent and slightly

oppressed by life, as Joan was, and very fond of excitement and fine clothes, as was Laura.

Bridget found Mrs. Tuke in the shop putting away boxes, and she stayed to help her. When the shop was closed Mrs. Tuke conducted her to a bedroom and left her there to take off her hat.

A youthful person called "Our Alfred," who was supposed to be asleep, woke up as Bridget came in.

"Miss Joy, there's a ghost under my bed," he sobbed; "I heard it gnawing with its teeth."

Bridget, to the detriment of the brown skirt, crawled under the bed and emerged red-faced and towled.

"It's only a little mouse going house-hunting," she said. "Go to sleep, Alfred, and dream you keep a sweet-shop." But when she turned down the gas, "Our Alfred" burst into stormy sobs. Bridget was powerless. She was rather hungry, and the cheerful sound of tea-cups clattering had an allurements, but the tears of a child were not to be resisted.

So she stayed, which was certainly weak minded, for "Our Alfred" was full of guile—*rusé*, as Joan, who had learnt French, would have said.

"Tell a tale, Miss Joy, a tale about murder," he entreated.

Bridget sat down on his bed.

"Certainly not about murder," she said. "I'll tell you a story about the noble adventures of three worshipful cats. I've just thought of the

name. I'll tell you one adventure every time I come. The first is called 'The Adventure of the Milk-jug on the Top-most Shelf!'"

So the story rambled on, and it was not so exciting that "Our Alfred" could refrain from sleep. In fact, early in the adventure his eyes closed and his grip of Bridget's finger relaxed.

Very quietly she stole out of the room and shut the door.

Joan met her and hugged her affectionately. "I knew that naughty little boy would keep you," she said; "you're no disciplinarian, Bride. But come in to tea at once."

Bridget followed her into the sitting-room, which was just above the shop. The first thing that greeted her was a violent odour of Parma violets. It seemed well-nigh to envelop Laura, who did nothing without vigour and a certain extravagance. That a little may go a long way was a doctrine displeasing to her mind. Laura was tall and fair; she was dressed in a white satin blouse with short sleeves, and a rather shabby black skirt copiously flounced. Her hair was curled elaborately and decked with cheap combs. She had rubbed her face with scented paper and powdered her nose. She looked just what she was, a pleasant, rather vulgar girl, brimming with good spirits from her Louis Quatorze heels to the splendid curls on her head. Her voice was loud and clear, and she talked whenever any one would listen, and even when they would not. Laura worked very hard all day,

and she had many home anxieties when she chose to consider them ; but her work done, she gave herself up to enjoyment with that fine zeal that makes Lancashire among the foremost counties of England.

Laura's Mr. Rice, a young man who did something or other in a grocery shop, had brought his friend Mr. Miller, a depressed person who presided at a hosiery department. Mr. Rice had a well-waxed moustache and the happy impression that he was attractive, which he really was, for he had sound sense and a cheerful, kindly nature.

The festivities took the form of a sort of tea-supper, at which you could eat as much or as little as you chose. It seemed to Bridget a very lively and delightful occasion. Laura and her lover were a source of boundless interest to her. Their imaginary quarrels, their badinage, their moments of real sentiment filled her with wondering awe. Bridget thought it would be glorious to have a lover, though she did not feel that Mr. Rice would have been quite her choice. Mr. Miller was silent and shy. Joan and Mrs. Tuke tried nobly to draw him out, but he was not at ease ; he was "not much with ladies," he explained suddenly, in a burst of nervous confidence.

Mr. Miller looked up and found friendly grey eyes upon him. He blushed and Bridget blushed. And both being shy, they refrained from looking at one another again. So tea proceeded, and Mrs. Tuke pressed every one to help themselves, and protested warmly that no one had any

appetite when they reached the stage expressed by Mr. Rice as having "done nicely, thank you," though from the general look of things the appetites were quite normal.

After tea Joan and Bridget cleared away and washed up for Mrs. Tuke. And Mr. Rice unpacked the joy of his heart, a gramophone of shining splendour. Bridget came in at the moment when riotous coons were doing a laughing chorus in a nasal but ecstatic fashion. Laura screamed, for that was her way of being thoroughly sociable, and besides, loud noises were pleasant to her.

Mr. Miller was shyly examining a book in one corner of the room. He looked rather lonely; for Joan, who was tired, was looking at *The Studio*, which she bought second-hand as a satisfaction to her artistic cravings, and Mrs. Tuke and Laura were hovering round the irresistible Mr. Rice. Bridget was shy, and the genus "young man" filled her with terror, but the loneliness of Mr. Miller made her bold.

She crossed the room and sat down near him. Mr. Miller started and blushed, then he coughed. Bridget felt suddenly paralyzed. She could not imagine what could be said in a friendly and cheerful way to put the young man at his ease.

"It is very cold," she said.

Fate, which had denied Bridget beauty and riches and genius and the bigger gifts on her Christmas tree, gave her two little presents of some value—a low, sweet voice, and a delightful smile.

When she said that it was cold, Mr. Miller suddenly felt rather warmer.

"I don't know that it is," he said, and tried to look friendly.

"I've got a chilblain on my finger," said Bridget. "Do you ever get chilblains, Mr. Miller?"

"I don't know as I ever do, Miss Joy, but I've heard it said that to rub the hand with a honion is a good remedy."

Mr. Miller rarely dropped an "h," but he generally put them in where they were not needed. A desire to be genteel produced a paroxysm of aspirates.

"What were you reading, Mr. Miller? That is—I mean—if you don't mind telling me."

"Not at all, Miss Joy; it was Shakespeare. It's a book of Miss Helphinstone's, I believe. She is a very well-read young lady, I fancy. Do you read Shakespeare, Miss Joy?"

"Oh yes, I often read him aloud to myself, and act little bits, especially Hamlet. I love doing 'To be or not to be.' I get the cats and Beau to listen to me. It's great fun. You see, I never go to the theatre, so I get my acting that way."

"Dear! dear!" said Mr. Miller. Well, I'm very fond of good hacting myself. Nothing I do like better than a good play, something tragic especially."

Laura, from behind the gramophone, exclaimed, "Oh, you two in your corner, what a

noise you're making! Now, just listen to 'Hoh dry those tears.'"

With many blushes the quiet pair in the corner subsided into silence, whilst Laura, whose spirits rose every moment to higher levels of excitement, waltzed Mr. Rice round the gramophone.

"Does Melba really sing through her nose?" Bridget asked.

Laura stared and Mr. Rice looked offended.

"Bridget Joy, what *do* you mean?" Mrs. Tuke inquired.

"I only mean that all these great people who sing through the gramophone do seem to sing through their noses, don't they? I don't mean that it's ~~not~~ ^{not} awfully nice when you forget about the nose."

"There *is* a nasal quality in a gramophone," Mr. Miller remarked. He felt that he must support Bridget.

"Well," said Mr. Rice, "you can't exactly expect to get as good as the best seats in the Halbert Hall or the hopera. It isn't an age of miracles, you know!"

Bridget, silenced and ashamed, smiled apologetically and listened to the haunting melody. "Life was not made for sorrow"—judging from Laura and Mr. Rice, it was meant for keen enjoyment. And Bridget, stirred by the melody, felt vague longings for the glamour of the world, that romance that lies beyond the service of pots and pans, the daily tasks of the housekeeper. Joan said that glamour was deception, and duty

the only happiness to be expected, but Joan had had bitter disillusionment and saw life in a perpetual noonday glare without any moonlight or twilight effects.

At the end of the song Mr. Miller turned to Bridget and spoke.

"Do you read Hibsén, Miss Joy?"

"I've read his *Peer Gynt*, Mr. Miller. I love that because of the Trolls and the Boyg and the queer things."

"Hibsén is to my mind a heducation," said Mr. Miller. He was a serious young man possessed by an almost frenzied desire to improve his mind. He came of Methodist stock, earnest and thoughtful people, frugal in life and deeply given to searchings of the Scripture. He had cast aside the Methodist tradition but retained a sober method of thought. He had awakened to a world of poetry and art by some evolution of the soul, an evolution which is perpetually going on among Lancashire people. He had "discovered" Shakespeare and Ruskin and Carlyle, had studied Darwin, had listened to Wagner, had felt vague aspirations. He spent Sunday afternoons at a Socialistic Brotherhood listening to lectures, which his parents would have thought Satanic—especially on Sundays. And he took country walks in company with the like-minded and awakened of his companions.

But a lady was something that Mr. Miller rarely met. He knew delightful girls, refined in thought and action, but they styled themselves "young

ladies," and their speech was the speech of Lancashire. In Bridget the young man perceived that slight inexplicable quality that set her, shabby blouse and all, in a higher social class than the other women present, though he admitted that Joan was very near Bridget.

"Now, 'Sing me to sleep,'" said Mrs. Tuke; "that's just 'eavenly to my mind."

"We'll talk about Hibsen hafterwards," murmured Mr. Miller.

But after "Sing me to sleep" Bridget felt obliged to take leave.

"We can see you 'ome, can't we, Bertie?" said the smiling Laura to her lover.

But Mr. Miller rose.

"I'll be happy——" he said, and blushed warmly.

Laura giggled loudly and nudged her Bertie.

"Oh, well, we won't deprive Mr. Miller," she remarked.

"I'm sugared!" said Mr. Rice. "Miller's quite a ladies' man after all."

Bridget looked despairingly at Joan.

"I'll see Bridget home; I want to talk to her. And I dare say both Mr. Rice and Mr. Miller are tired. Come along, Biddy," said she.

Mr. Miller retreated to his corner and to Shakespeare, and Joan and Bridget went off.

"How nice it is to get away from those two excellent young men," said Joan as they left the shop.

"I think men are delightful," said Bridget, "and women too, and animals almost more so. Oh, Joan, I've had such a lovely birthday!"

CHAPTER THE FOURTH

The First Lodger

SCOTS ROAD did not fail to read the card in Bridget's front window. It saw and disapproved. The unconventionality of the Joys had always been a grief to the Road. It had only swallowed it on the score of Mr. Horrocks' suggestion that people of ancient lineage have a curious habit of consulting their own opinions rather than those of their neighbours.

But the lodger and the extraordinary card with an owl upon it were a severe shock to them all. Even Mr. Horrocks disapproved secretly, though he asserted stoutly that Bridget was a sensible girl and knew her own affairs. Had the Road known that Bridget went to town to sell two Chelsea figures, it would have been the more convinced of her ungentility. It was probable that she was cheated to some extent, but she found a fairly average value for her treasures by going first to several shops and rejecting their offers. She returned from town with some sovereigns in her purse and the sense of being a mistress in bargaining.

There was money enough now to pay all the bills and start clear again, and of course when the

lodger came that would smooth the way. Mrs. Crumb, in a hurricane of activity, turned out the parlour and the bedroom allotted to the expected one, and cleaned them with scrupulous care, till at last there was nothing wanted but his arrival. Then he came.

It was Amelia, the flighty and much be-curled, who announced him to Bridget, who was making pastry.

"There's a gentleman at the door—a real gentleman—come about lodgings," she cried.

"Oh, show him into the parlour, Amelia."

Amelia departed, after having studied her face in the kitchen glass. Bridget scurried to wash her hands and brush her hair. The terrible moment had come, and what impression would she make? It was Bridget's turn to look in the glass. Did she look like a landlady or any sort of lady? She was doubtful. Shabby from collar to shoes might have been the verdict of an impartial jury. Her heart beat very fast as she went downstairs and opened the door.

A gentleman rose from a chair and bowed politely. Bridget had an impression of a heavy moustache, patent leather boots and pink cuffs.

"Miss Joy, I believe," said the unknown.

"Yes. You have come about lodgings? That is very kind of you—I mean, I hope you'll like them." Bridget looked at him appealingly. "This is your sitting-room."

The gentleman with the moustache looked at

Bridget. He saw her nervousness and he admired the shape of her chin, for he was a good judge of many things. Then he looked round the room.

"It's charming—quite a lady's room. I fear I deprive you of a drawing-room, Miss Joy."

"Oh no; I like the kitchen. Your bedroom is at the back of the house. I hope you don't mind. But in the summer you can see people's back gardens, and that's rather nice."

"Charming! I adore nature. I believe we shall have much in common, Miss Joy. I see you are a lover of the beautiful."

The manners of the unknown were ingratiating and suave. He surveyed his apartments with courteous expressions of delight. Pictures and ornaments he scanned through half-closed eyes, after the manner of the true connoisseur. This always impresses the amateur.

Bridget was impressed.

"You do not come from Lancashire, do you?" she asked.

The unknown raised his fine eyebrows.

"Oh, thank the Lord, no! I'm rather a cosmopolitan, Miss Joy; but if you ask me where I was born I will tell you—Southampton. My father was a sailor."

"So is mine," said Bridget. "I wonder if they've ever met."

"No doubt. I knew at once that we had much in common, Miss Joy. I am very susceptible to

sympathetic influences. When you came into the room I said at once, 'This is not a landlady, this is a friend—in a world where friends are rare.'"

A shade of doubt passed over Bridget's face. The manner of the unknown aroused vague suspicions. But she hated suspicions. And the cosmopolitan nature of the lodger had to be taken into account. But somehow it occurred to her that he was rather like her conception of that rascally person "Peer Gynt."

"These rooms seem to me perfectly charming, Miss Joy," said he, "so different from the terrible type of lodgings. Some kind angel must have led me here. Now, will you take me in?"

Perhaps had Bridget asked with another meaning if he would take her in, the question might have been apposite. The unknown did not mention terms, and to the amateur landlady it seemed indelicate to press the point. To save herself, she had written them down on a card with the request that a week in advance should be paid. This was Mrs. Crumb's advice. The card was now produced and handed to the lodger, who in his turn produced a silver card-case, and with a great flourish presented his card. Mr. Ambrose Lester—that was his name. Bridget considered it with interest.

"Ah!" said Mr. Lester, and sighed; then he looked sadly out of the window. "I am a poor man, Miss Joy, at least, I have to be very careful just at present. I fear your terms would be

beyond me. I am sorry, for I could be so happy here. It seems such a haven of peace after the troubles I've had. But there's no good thinking about it. I must bid you good-bye and thank you."

Mr. Lester cast a very sad glance round the parlour.

"Dear little happy room, what peace one might have here. I wonder whether I could manage your terms, Miss Joy? Shall I tell you something? You remind me so much of my sister who died. That makes me feel the more at home in this house. But a pound——!"

Bridget was touched.

"Perhaps I could make it eighteen shillings, Mr. Lester," she suggested.

"Miss Joy, you're too kind, you're an angel. I suppose you couldn't make it fifteen?"

Bridget considered. She might not find another lodger, and Mr. Lester seemed easy to please. It might be as well to agree. But with some courage she claimed another sixpence.

"Fifteen and six then, Mr. Lester."

"As you like, Miss Joy. That is agreed then."

"I—I was told," said Bridget, "that one should ask a week in advance. I am sorry to bother you, Mr. Lester, but I suppose I should ask you for that now."

"By all means, Miss Joy. I'm rather short of change. Could you cash me a cheque or change a five-pound note?"

Bridget, who had five shillings ready-money in

the house, was quite unable to do either. So it was agreed that Mr. Lester should pay when he had change.

So the new lodger was established, and every eye in Scots Road watched his exits and his entrances, took stock of his apparel, of his silver-handled umbrella and of his diamond ring. The only person who was quite indifferent to the lodger was Sebastian Joy, wrapped up in the spiritual romance, and utterly regardless of the doings of Ambrose Lester, that interesting and unfortunate hero of a more terrestrial romance.

Joan Elphinstone, who often in the evenings came to visit Bridget, saw him too. For Mr. Lester came in to ask if his boots could be polished for him by Amelia. Amelia had gone home, but Bridget said the boots should be done directly.

Beau, half asleep and meditative before the fire, rolled an angry eye upon the intruder, and growled softly in his throat. Bridget had beaten him—nearly hard—for trying to bite the lodger. But he, Beau, knew that gentlemen of that type should not be admitted by any trustworthy house-dog. And with the strong conviction of the canine race he stuck to his opinion. Besides, he was not allowed to sit upon the parlour sofa and sing to barrel-organs since the advent of Ambrose Lester. In fact, this Philistine of a man had kicked him when he was in full song, and told him most insolently to “Shut up!” Beau knew

that he would never forgive Mr. Lester, as he would never forgive the postman for blowing at him, or the baker's boy for threatening him with a basket.

As Bridget polished the shoes, Joan inquired into the history of Mr. Ambrose Lester.

"Had he good references?" she asked.

"References? Oh, Joan dear, I never asked him! Should I? It would seem as if I didn't trust him."

"Of course you should ask for references. Bridget, my dear old girl, can't you get rid of the man? It seems to me that Red Riding-hood is taking in the wolf as her lodger."

"That's rather unkind of you, Joan, and you're so kind to sad people that if you only knew Mr. Lester you'd pity him. After all he can't help having a sort of stage-villain face."

Bridget looked up from the patent leather shoes with conviction in her eyes.

"I think Mr. Lester only wants kindness and trust to be a very nice and splendid character. If he had a good wife and a cheerful, pleasant home he would be very different. He said so himself."

"Did he! And went down on his knees, I suppose, and offered you his hand and heart?"

"Joan! Of course not. I shouldn't be sufficiently fashionable. And besides, he's much too old. But if every one distrusts him, how can the poor man ever get on?"

"That's true. But do you let him have whisky, Bridget?"

"Oh, he pays for that himself. Of course I'd rather he were a teetotaler, Joan, but he said the doctor ordered him whisky for his heart. He takes it quite medicinally; in fact, he says he dislikes it very much."

"What a hero!"

Bridget laughed.

"Oh, Joan, don't be cynical! I wish you weren't so hard on men. It is your only fault."

"A man spoiled my life, or nearly did. But I suppose it *is* little minded to remember that so much. But to be jilted at an impressionable age is not ~~exactly~~ a sweetening influence."

"No. I hate him for it. There now! I think those shoes will do."

"Beautifully! Why does this saint want his shoes at this hour?"

"He goes out at night to his club or to the theatre. He has a latch-key, so I never know when he comes in. I think he overdoes it rather, for he seems so tired in the morning. He hardly cares for his breakfast even, and I love breakfast. I think one feels so hungry and active in the morning."

"Bridget, you *must* get rid of him. 'Get without him!' as they say here."

Bridget, a shoe in either hand, stood at the door.

"You're just like Beau," she said. "Beau and

the cats simply hate him. Beau is a very prejudiced dog ; in fact, I fear he's rather a Pharisee."

The next morning Mr. Lester was prostrate with what he described as "nervous headache." He begged Bridget for salts and eau-de-cologne, luxuries unknown in her house. However, she made him strong tea and drew down the blinds and offered to read aloud, a suggestion which the sufferer declined. It was a windy morning, and the hall door banged. Mr. Lester forgot himself and swore.

"There! I'm sorry, Miss Joy," he said penitently, "but you don't know what nerves are. One can see it in your face. You're the most un-nervous woman I've ever met. I call you 'the angel of healing.'"

It was Saturday. Mr. Lester had spent a week with the Joys, but apparently had not cashed his cheque or changed his note. There had been no mention of money. Bridget resolved to wait till the headache had passed.

It went by dinner-time. Mr. Lester begged for coffee and his boots, and announced that he was going out to try the benefit of fresh air. Bridget, to the disgust of Amelia, who admired the aristocratic manners of the lodger and sunned herself in his presence, took him his coffee herself.

"Oh, God bless you, Miss Joy!" said he, with enthusiasm, from his sofa, as he hid a certain pink and cheerful paper under the cushion.

Bridget put the cup beside him and looked at him with eyes that somehow made his conscience squirm.

"I do hope you're really better," she said. "I don't think you're strong, Mr. Lester, and you do overtire yourself. Sometimes you look quite feverish in the morning. I really would advise you to stay quietly at home to-day or just to take a little walk by the canal or across the fields."

"The worst is, I have an important appointment in town," said the invalid, "or I'd love to stay quietly here; but I simply must meet a certain man, and, in short, for business reasons I must do the civil—give him dinner and perhaps do a theatre—so I fear I shall be late to-night. But to-morrow I'll take a good rest."

Bridget nodded.

"And could you pay me now, please, Mr. Lester?" she asked.

"Why, certainly, Miss Joy, not that I can ever repay your angelic kindness. But I'll leave the money on the table before I go out."

Bridget agreed, and retired to the kitchen, where Amelia was posed before the glass in the manner in which she would like to be photographed. She blushed slightly on seeing her mistress.

"I've served the cats," she explained hastily, to change the subject; "I thought you'd rather serve Beau yourself."

Mrs. Crumb and her daughter never "fed"



“‘Where’s ’e gone?’ he asked, with a thumb pointing vaguely towards the parlour.”

animals, but "served" them, a graceful Lancashire idiom.

It was an extraordinary oversight that made Mr. Lester leave the house without having placed the money on the table. But nervous headache explains a good deal.

During the afternoon Mr. Horrocks paid one of his solemn calls on old Mr. Joy. The two old men, different as they were in rank and intellect, were excellent friends. The genuine admiration of the retired grocer was pleasant to the scholar. And Mr. Horrocks' exclamation of "My word! Lor' bless us, what a picture!" at sight of the mystical drawings, made Sebastian's eyes bright with pleasure and self-satisfaction.

Having bidden his old friend farewell, Mr. Horrocks called upon Bridget in the kitchen. Bridget was cleaning brasses and dish-covers with a will. Mr. Horrocks sat down and sighed heavily.

"How's them there 'yacinths?" he inquired irrelevantly.

"I don't know yet, Mr. Horrocks," Bridget answered, and looked up in surprise.

Mr. Horrocks blushed.

"Where's 'e gone?" he asked, with a thumb pointing vaguely towards the parlour.

"To town to meet a friend."

Mr. Horrocks sighed heavily again. "Oh, Miss Bridget, my dear, get without that feller. We don't like him—none of us like him—we don't

like him 'ere, an' that's flat. And if one of us is to tell you the remarks that is going round, it had better be old Emmanuel 'Orrocks that is your friend and Gran'pa's friend."

So said Mr. Horrocks in a burst of courage, being urged to it by the disgust and anger of Scots Road, which condemned Bridget as well as her lodger. Bridget gazed at him.

"Is that why Mrs. Smethurst seemed not to see me the other day, and why Miss Thompson didn't hear me say good-morning, and why Stevens sends his boy, and why the nice people in the shops are so queer and silent when they used to be so friendly?"

"That's why, my dear, that's why."

"Oh, how unkind of them!"

"It's the world's way. The man is a drunken, idle fellow. There's some as knows 'im, and 'e's not a man we want or can do with in a nice neighbourhood. Get without him, Miss Joy, and if he won't go, call me."

"But I'm sorry for him ; he has no friends."

"Men like that don't make friends. He's a bad name with those that know him, as a gambler and a dishonest low chap."

"Oh, poor man!"

"He's a scoundrel, my dear. And you mustn't keep him, that's flat. There! I've said it, and I'll go home now. But if there's any trouble, call me."

Bridget spent an afternoon and evening of poignant anxiety until she, like her lodger,

experienced a nervous headache. Torn between pity and prudence, this philanthropical landlady knew not what to do. She wrote a letter to Mr. Lester, and then burnt it. At last she resolved to speak to him in the morning. For her grandfather's sake it was impossible to defy the prejudices of Scots Road.

With these thoughts Bridget went to bed and fell into uneasy dreams. She woke up with the terrified sense of some calamity. Some one was trying to rouse her. Was the house on fire? A light kept flashing into the room, and some one was banging at the door.

Bridget sat up in terror. It was the light of a lantern. What had happened? She went to the window and leaned out.

A policeman, standing in the little front garden, flashed his light upon her face.

"What has happened—whatever is the matter?" Bridget asked anxiously.

"There's a man lying here on the doorstep, Miss Joy. Does he belong here?"

Bridget screamed.

"Is he murdered?" she cried.

"Not 'e—the rogue!"

"Is he dead?"

"Dead drunk, Miss Joy!"

"Oh dear, he's my lodger! I'll come down. You'll help to bring him in, won't you?"

"Certainly, Miss Joy."

The ancient naval dressing-gown was called

into service. Bridget, candle in hand, trembling with cold and nervousness, descended the stairs. She opened the door, and the huddled figure of Mr. Ambrose Lester fell into the hall.

"There's a pig!" said the irate constable; "that's not a fit lodger for a lady's house."

"No," said Bridget, "he must go. Please bring him in and put him in the parlour. Shall I help you?"

"No, Miss Joy; I'll manage him. Now, where'll we put him? He won't stay on that sofa long. Best put him on the rug and cover him up. That's right! Now send him off in the morning, Miss Joy, and if he won't go, send for one of the Force."

"Thank you. Good-night, Policeman; I'm glad he's quite quiet. What a dreadful curse drink is! He is quite a nice man in lots of ways. I *am* sorry about this."

"That's a rogue," said the constable, as he took his last look at Mr. Lester.

When he had gone, Bridget gave way to a natural instinct and burst into tears. She sat down on the stairs and wept bitterly for the fall of Mr. Ambrose Lester and for her own difficulty. As she wept, a friendly muzzle was thrust against her hands, a warm tongue licked her face. Beau was justified in his opinion of the lodger. Had he been a cat he might have looked "I told you so," but he only offered eager comfort.

His mistress folded him in her arms and wept

the more. Then she dried her eyes and went into the parlour. Beau looked with contempt at the helpless figure. A drunken man rarely is so contemptible as when his state is compared with the innate dignity of an animal.

Bridget put a cushion under Lester's head, fetched a blanket and rug, covered him up, and put a hot water-bottle to his feet.

"Oh, poor man! what shall I say to him in the morning?" she asked, as she locked the parlour door.

When morning came the moral necessity of speaking to Mr. Lester taxed all Bridget's courage. For once she was very pale and not at all hungry as she came downstairs. With a trembling hand she opened the door. Lester had moved. He was leaning back in an easy-chair, his eyes closed.

"I hope you are better," said Bridget, "for I must ask you to go this morning."

The lodger sobbed.

"I am very ill this morning, I'll try to go. But I don't know where I'll crawl," he answered dejectedly. "So you have turned against me too, Miss Joy?"

"No, but for my grandfather's sake and for the sake of all my neighbours I must ask you to go."

Mr. Lester was tearful.

"I was very ill last night, and I'm ill this morning—very ill. I do think I am not long for this world. And it's as well, for I have no

friends, no comfort, no one to trust me. You are the first good woman who has ever had a word to say to me."

Then Bridget, with great earnestness and pity, sat down beside him and talked for long of temperance and domestic virtue, and wound up with the valuable advice that Mr. Lester should go abroad and start fresh in Canada or in some such agricultural neighbourhood.

"Give me another chance here," sobbed the lodger, and he went on his knees and kissed Bridget's hand.

But a stern voice resounded through the room, and a majestic form appeared in the doorway.

"Get hup, this hinstant!" it thundered, and Lester started to his feet.

Mr. Horrocks advanced.

"Go to the kitchen, my dear," said he to Bridget; "I want a word with this gentleman."

The words were many and loud, and the answers were even louder. One might have almost feared a fight. But at last Mr. Horrocks, triumphant and angry, like a dignified and victorious turkey, came out of the parlour.

"He's going," he announced, "and you run over and have breakfast with Grandma, while I stay 'ere."

"Mayn't I say good-bye to him, Mr. Horrocks?"

"No, my dear; go at once."

CHAPTER THE FIFTH

Jeremy Fleetwood

JEREMY once said of himself in a moment of boasting that he was middle-class respectability embodied. Certainly he always looked the industrious and quiet young man that he was. He was not handsome in any way. If every face has some counterpart among animals, Jeremy's was a bull terrier.

He was always neat, and he never raised his voice or emphasized words or seemed agitated or excited in any way. But this quiet manner and voice invariably claimed attention, so when Jeremy addressed a policeman and asked him whether he could advise him of any nice lodgings in Burnton, the policeman gave him full attention.

"I want a fairly quiet road where you can breathe a little air," said Jeremy.

"Scots Road, sir ; first turn to the right. You'll find them there, I believe."

Jeremy found Scots Road. There was another policeman just at the corner, and Jeremy repeated his request.

The constable beamed, for he was the man who had carried Ambrose Lester into Bridget's parlour.

"Miss Joy's are the very thing for you, sir; there's a card in the window. But I'll show you the door."

Amelia, who was taking a survey of the road from an upper window, was panic-stricken at the sight of a policeman at the garden gate. The vision of a blue uniform always stirred in her some instinctive dread of judgment and prison gates. She rushed down to the kitchen.

"Miss Joy, there's a policeman and a young man at our door. Oh, what can we do?"

"Open the door, I should think," said Bridget. But she, too, felt a secret fear of unpaid bills and mysterious money matters. However, since *noblesse oblige*, she went to the door herself.

"This gentleman wants lodgings," said a friendly voice; "I likes his looks, and brought 'im here."

Bridget recognized her acquaintance in the Force, and thanked him. She ushered Jeremy into the parlour.

Jeremy supposed that Bridget was the general servant of the establishment. For she looked like it at the moment.

"Can I see your mistress?" he asked.

Bridget laughed.

"Well, I'm the mistress myself," she said apologetically. "I'm awfully untidy, I'm afraid, but I was cleaning out a room."

Jeremy blushed. He was much confused by his own remark. Bridget's voice had shown him his mistake. He looked round the little parlour

with deep interest. It certainly had the pleasantness and grace which some people leave as the remembrance of their passing. And this room had somehow retained the charm of Bridget's mother. She had painted the door panels with wild roses, had embroidered the cushions, had made the marvellous patchwork which covered the rocking-chair. The willow-pattern plates, the faded Belleek, the Crown Derby cups had been hers, and hers the pictures so watery and minute—and so refined. It almost seemed to Jeremy as if some gracious presence rose to welcome him, and he could picture a lady in a flounced skirt, with needlework on her lap, sitting in the easy-chair.

Jeremy looked about him in silence, then he went to the bookshelf and examined the books with profound attention—all Miss Yonge, Mrs. Radcliffe, a few of Jane Austen, Miss Edgeworth, Tennyson, Wordsworth, Byron, Keble, George Herbert, and with these many little pious books of reflection about various things.

"Miss Joy, you will never be a good landlady, I fear," he said very solemnly.

"Why?" Bridget's voice was anxious.

"You haven't got *The Wide Wide World*?"

"Do you want it?"

"Well, it is my favourite novel, and all my other landladies have provided it."

Jeremy looked up, and his face suddenly twinkled. Although he was plain he had a

redeeming smile, not seraphic, but intensely merry. As some one said of him once, "Jeremy smiles all over when he does smile."

Bridget was instantly reassured. "But I have *The Wide Wide World* upstairs, and I like it, so don't laugh at it," she answered.

"I'm not laughing. I have an intensely serious character, Miss Joy. I'm like the owl in your window card."

Bridget looked at him gravely. She knew so few young people of her own rank that she hardly knew in what spirit to take them. She moved among those who were wholly serious or wholly hilarious, and a union of the two bewildered her.

Jeremy inspected the bedroom with its view over the back gardens. He met Beau, and patted him. He even stroked the cats, and let Dorcas sit upon his shouder. Her good opinion of him was expressed by a loud roaring purr, and Bridget, looking at him at that moment, put her trust in him for ever, forgetting entirely the disillusionment of her first lodger.

"And where do you live, Miss Joy?" Jeremy asked, prompted by inexcusable curiosity.

"In the kitchen. I'd show you, but Amelia's there and she might think it odd. Amelia is the 'occasional.'"

"How do you mean?"

"There is no general servant here, because I can quite do everything—in fact, I like working.

But we have Amelia as an occasional help, you see."

"I see. Now, the question is, Miss Joy, can you, and will you, take me in? My name is Jeremiah Fleetwood—that sounds sober, doesn't it? I'm a medical student. I shall be in Manchester from dewy morn till starlit eve. I may say that I am meek, docile and biddable, and your dog evidently approves of me."

"Yes, he does. And Beau did so dislike my first lodger. But do you really think that you'll be sufficiently comfortable, Mr. Fleetwood? I'm not very experienced, and though I'm trying to improve, I really am not very tidy or methodical, and sometimes I cook badly. I am so afraid that you are taking my rooms out of politeness. Are they as nice as your former lodgings?"

Jeremy smiled again, and he looked like a very jolly and friendly terrier.

"Miss Joy, your rooms are utterly unlike any lodgings I've ever seen. I guessed it by the owl in the window card."

Bridget blushed. "I'm afraid the owl wasn't business-like," she said.

"No, of course it wasn't. It was hopelessly unbusiness-like. But when I saw that owl I was done for. I vowed I'd stay here even if you could only give me a kennel in the garden."

"That is nice of you," she said, "and I did hope you'd stay, for I think you have such a nice face—at least, I don't mean that, it would be rude

to say it, wouldn't it? But I mean I hoped you'd like the rooms."

"Oh, rather! I do. Is the old gentleman in the hall your grandfather? I think he's waiting to speak to you. He's just strolled in."

Bridget looked over the banisters and saw Mr. Horrocks in the hall. At the same time her grandfather's bell rang loudly.

"Oh dear, I wish I had an astral body to be in two places at once!" she exclaimed. "Will you go to the sitting-room, please, Mr. Fleetwood, and I'll come in a minute."

She leant over the stairs again and addressed Mr. Horrocks.

"Please sit down, Mr. Horrocks. This is Mr. Fleetwood, who is kindly going to take our rooms."

Bridget disappeared upstairs, and Jeremy and Mr. Horrocks met in the hall. The old man eyed the young one with a kind, keen scrutiny, then he shook his hand with vigour and escorted him into the parlour.

"Sir," said Mr. Horrocks, "you look to me a God-fearing and sober young gentleman."

"Sir, you're very kind. Do I speak to a relation of Miss Joy's?"

"No, sir, not at all. Miss Joy belongs to an 'igher class in society than what I do. But I'm proud to be her friend, and in the habsence of her honoured Gran'pa, I make bold to address you."

"Certainly, Mr. Horrocks. I gather that Mr. Joy is an invalid."

"Partially, Mr. Fleetwood. I may say of Gran'pa that he lives altogether, mind and body, upstairs. Gran'pa doesn't know what goes on in the kitchen, for example; Gran'pa takes no 'eed of what's done in the scullery. Gran'pa is a scholar, but practically, Mr. Fleetwood, Gran'pa is just a dummy."

"Ah! It's rather rough on Miss Joy, isn't it? She looks little more than a child. I should think any rogue could twist her round his finger."

"Exactly, Mr. Fleetwood; that's my point. Now, sir, our last lodger was a disgrace to this road. We 'ad to get without him. We couldn't get on with our last nohow. Miss Joy is that soft she would 'ave stood anything. But it won't do. Now, the point is, sir, that as a mere matter of form references should be given. And I'll make bold to hask you, always as a matter of form, for some references."

Mr. Horrocks looked at Jeremy with bright blue eyes, and Jeremy looked honestly back at the blue eyes.

"Quite right," he said. "Well, I can refer you to various people, Mr. Horrocks. My grandfather on one side is a Dean, my granduncle is a Bishop. I have four uncles who are Rectors, two cousins who are Canons, and six other cousins who are Curates, Shall I give you a list of their addresses?"

Mr. Horrocks beamed, and held out a horny old

hand to squeeze Jeremy's. "Most honourably connected, sir. Proud to know you, Mr. Fleetwood—proud! The Dean and the Bishop will be quite sufficient as references."

"Then," said Jeremy, "to add to my family respectability I will tell you, Mr. Horrocks, that I am engaged to be married to my cousin, Miss Lucilla Fanshawe. I hope to be married in two or three years, when I'm qualified."

"All the better, sir—all the better."

So the matter was settled, and the new lodger established himself, this to the infinite interest of the Road. For on all sides Jeremy was observed, and, on the whole, approved. Amelia, always loyal to the departed Lester, said that Mr. Fleetwood, who wore no ring and no watch-chain, was therefore incomparably less of a gentleman than the injured and lamented first lodger. But Mrs. Crumb, who professed to know "the cut of a gentleman," liked Mr. Fleetwood, and referred to him as "Our Jeremy"—a sign of trust and favour.

And Jeremy himself? He was content. He found out that Bridget was not tidy, not methodical, an uncertain cook, an absent-minded landlady, far from perfect in most respects. But he spoke of his lodgings as home, and he found there something that had been lacking under the excellent administration of his step-mother in her perfectly ordered house.

Jeremy, who was, as he boasted, the soul of respectability, found himself looking forward to

those quiet evenings of work in the little lady-like room in Scots Road. And as he worked, most kindly, with his blind up, the inhabitants of Burnton took delight in the vision of his studious back. Sometimes he brought friends back to spend the evenings with him, or sometimes he went out; but this was rare enough, for he was working with might and main.

Bridget, who was at the age of high-souled romance, regarded the photograph of Lucilla as the inspiration of his work. Love affairs were of an exquisite and almost sacred interest to her, and every morning she dusted Lucilla's photographs with a silk duster, and with such a gentle touch that it was like a caress. And after she had looked at them for long she was sometimes foolish enough to look in the glass and to observe how very different the faces of two girls can be—as different as a white rose and a homely marigold.

For the face that graced Jeremy's mantelpiece was a beautiful one, and every photograph in the collection showed Lucilla's charm. Whether in evening dress or in a riding habit or in a golf jersey or in winter dress and furs, Lucilla was always beautiful and radiant with health and spirits.

But one day the largest photograph of Lucilla dropped, it fell from Bridget's hands on to the grate and the glass cracked. No cat was guilty of the deed. The landlady herself stood dumfounded at this act of sacrilege. She waited for

Jeremy's return with a sinking heart. She had never before dreaded the sound of his key in the lock, and his cheerful greeting to Beau who ran into the hall to meet him.

He came in with his books and found Bridget standing by the table. Her face confessed some great misfortune, but she held the photograph behind her back.

"What's the matter, Miss Joy?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh, I've done something awful!" she said. "I think you'll never forgive me or trust me."

Jeremy smiled.

"Won't I? Not even when you're so penitent? Do tell me what you could possibly do that I couldn't forgive?"

"Oh, don't laugh! It's really bad. I've dropped Miss Lucilla into the fender."

"Have you? Well I should think that electrocution would be the punishment for that."

Bridget held out the photograph. "And the glass is cracked just over her lovely face. And if she gave you the frame you will hate me for breaking it. Please be angry with me. I know you're only trying to keep it in. If I sent her the money would she give you a new frame?"

Jeremy laughed.

"It doesn't matter one bit. Lucilla *would* be amused if she could see your face, Miss Joy; she's the most careless monkey in the world herself. And the remedy is perfectly simple. I'll get her a

new frame—no! you're not to think of getting it."

"You're very kind to take it like that. But I can't tell you how sorry I am."

"You're too sorry. Lucilla will be coming back from India in another month. And then I'll see the original."

"Did she go to India?" Bridget asked; she longed with a longing—sentimental, no doubt—to hear anything about this heroine of a real romance.

"Yes, she went with an aunt of hers, and had a lovely time. I thought she'd never come back. For, as you say, she is a lovely girl."

Jeremy whose manners were not made in Manchester, continued to stand as Bridget was standing, so she sat down on the table and he took the rocking-chair.

"But," said she, "isn't she in a fearful hurry to get back to you, Mr. Fleetwood?"

"I don't see why she should be. She's been a sort of fairy princess out there. And really I'm not a very exciting sort of person to be engaged to. To say the truth, I sometimes think this engagement is hardly fair on Lucilla. She's only twenty-one now. And we've been engaged for four years."

Bridget was very solemn. Her lodger had not confided in her before, and she received his confidence with a sympathy that shone in her eyes as she fixed them on him.

"She was only seventeen then?"

“Yes; you see her mother was really my mother’s cousin. She was kindness itself to me. I spent my happiest days with her and Lucilla. She was very anxious that her daughter should have a steady sort of old bumbler like me to lean upon when she herself should die. She knew she was dying before Lucilla or I knew it. Lucilla came back from a French school just in time to see her before she died. We were betrothed then—by her death-bed. That was a very solemn sort of betrothal, Miss Joy, and you can understand the position I’m in. I mean I’ve got to be a jolly sight more to Lucilla than the usual cheery sort of *fiancé*. I want to be what her mother wanted, me to be to her, a sort of comprehensive father, brother and lover. But I’m always afraid of boring her to death.”

Bridget looked into the fire for a minute, then she started and jumped off the table.

“Good gracious! the sausages will be burnt to ashes,” she said, and disappeared.

CHAPTER THE SIXTH

A Visitor

"ARE you going out to-day, Mr. Fleetwood?" Bridget asked as Jeremy came in, one Saturday, to a late lunch.

"Miss Joy, I am not a being of heroic mould. The fog may come in to see me, but I'm not going out to see the fog."

The little room would have been dark with the heavy gloom of a Manchester fog had not the gas been lit. Bridget drew down the blind, and saw with gladness that the room looked very cheerful, and the lunch, which was really dinner, was well arranged. For by earnest endeavour she had become a better housekeeper than Jeremy in his early days had thought possible.

"If you're not going out, then, would you mind if Grandpapa called upon you? It would give him such pleasure to come down and see you."

"Oh, that's awfully kind of Mr. Joy!" said Jeremy, "but wouldn't he rather that I called upon him? I should be only too glad to do so."

"No, he'd better come. If you came we'd have to clear up the manuscript, and that would confuse him. And would you mind asking me to bring you both some coffee? Grandpapa would like that

so much, but he'd like it to be your suggestion. Really it'll be quite a little diversion for him to come downstairs and see some one else. He must get so tired of me, I often think. I've been mending his best coat for him, and hunting for his skull-cap. It was in Beau's bed, and I can't think how he got it there. It'll be good for Grandpapa to think about something material ; his mind is so full of souls, and abstractions and visions that I'm often afraid he'll forget to be alive at all."

Jeremy looked forward to meeting old Mr. Joy, the unknown denizen of an upper room, the dreamer of dreams, who seemed to live on paper and ink, and not much else. In his own mind, Jeremy was angry with the old man. He held him responsible for the toilsome, anxious life that was Bridget's lot from day to day. She was happier than many girls, he knew, happier than girls with leisure, and fine clothes, and relations to take care of them. But with a certain chivalry of nature he was angry on her account. He wanted her to have the glory and pride of youth while she could enjoy it, to have time to sit in the sun and talk nonsense to other girls, to have money to buy quite useless, frivolous knick-knacks, to have admirers to praise and flatter her. He admitted that Bridget might be made for the nobler ends of loving, faithful service, but he was angry with the whole world when he saw how red and roughened house-work had made her hands, and how very

shabby her clothes were. He minded these things for Bridget infinitely more than she minded them for herself.

Whether good angels or good fairies were with her Bridget was a very happy person. She had no time to be morbid, or to fancy herself misunderstood or ill or restless. Her work lay clearly before her, and she liked it sufficiently well. When Jeremy came she extended to him the sort of motherly affection which she lavished on her grandfather and on her pet animals.

She mended his clothes, and almost enjoyed any symptoms of cold which she could fight with hot drinks and hot bottles, things for which Jeremy had no liking. To such a nature happiness generally comes unsought. It came to Bridget in full measure, and she always sang or whistled as she went about on the innumerable works of the household.

At about four o'clock in the afternoon Jeremy was startled by a curious sound of continuous bumping, like a very heavy object slowly rolling downstairs. He went out into the hall to inquire into it. There he saw an old and very reverend-looking gentleman, in skull-cap and tail-coat, descending the stairs by the slow process of sitting on each step and bumping to the next. Bridget went before, apparently pulling the useless leg to assist his progress. She looked round hastily, and waved Jeremy back to the parlour. The bumping continued for a minute or two.

Then there was a knock at the door. He opened it at once, and confronted old Mr. Joy leaning on Bridget's arm. Jeremy drew the rocking-chair before the fire, and Sebastian Joy sank into it, holding out his hands to the blaze. •

"And may we have some coffee, please, Miss Joy?" asked Jeremy, remembering his instructions.

Mr. Joy protested. "My dear sir, not for me, I beg. You are taking it? Well, that is very kind of you. I like coffee of an afternoon, I must admit. As a boy I spent a long while in Brussels, and how I enjoyed the coffee there!"

Sebastian Joy was a conversationalist in the sense that he greatly enjoyed a monologue with a sympathetic listener.

By the time that the coffee arrived the old man had gone over several chapters of his youthful history. It was on his early youth that his mind rested, and not, as Jeremy wished, on the time of his son's married life. He did not want to talk about Bridget or Bridget's parents, and all Jeremy's tact could not lead him from his own early adventures.

Bridget, in the meanwhile, had received a pleasant surprise. There was a letter for her lying in the hall.

"Who on earth writes to me?" she asked as she looked at the envelope. The writing was dashing, it flourished vast pennons, it curled aggressive tails. Some one who was very anxious to show a masterly character had evidently addressed that envelope to Miss Bridget Joy.

She took it to the kitchen to read while she made the coffee. When the water and the milk had been set on to boil, she opened her letter.

“MY DEAR MISS JOY (it ran),

“How often and how affectionately you are in my thoughts I cannot tell you. Ever since—through the unkind calumnies of certain busybodies—I was maliciously thrust forth from the only home I ever had (and I’d have them know that, but for ill health, I’d have had the law upon them), ever since then I have been thinking of you, dear kind little friend. I dream of your sweet grey eyes, of your gentle voice; and I say ‘God bless her, my little friend, my only friend!’

“It is not, dear Miss Joy, without the greatest hesitation and regret that I appeal to you to help a deeply injured, broken-down man. A little monetary loan would be like a draught of life to a dying man. If I had £5 I could begin life again. I could only accept it from you as a loan—a temporary loan. In a year you should have it back with interest. I believe I have a chance of making my fortune if I have a little assistance now. Remembering how wisely, kindly and justly you urged me to make a new start in life, I know you will be the first to help me. Dear little friend, so kind to dogs, help the poor old lame dog over a stile, and may you be blessed.

“Ever your devoted friend,

“AMBROSE LESTER.

“P.S.—If you cannot manage the £5, any sum will be acceptable. Even 5s. would be an assistance. Please answer by return if possible.”

At this moment the milk boiled over, and the two cats rushed panic-stricken from the rug. Bridget dropped her letter and ran to the milk. She poured out the coffee, spread some bread and butter, and took them to the parlour. Her grandfather had on his grand air, and he pretended, by a complete aloofness, that he was unaware who made the repast and was at the same time its Hebe.

Bridget re-read Mr. Lester's appeal. It was of no use to show it to any of her friends. They were short-sighted to his merits and his needs.

"Of course," Bridget admitted, "he is a very shady person, but still he needs food and clothes, and, perhaps, if one seemed to trust him he might begin again. Beau, what would *you* do?"

Beau, who was, with a busy pink tongue, giving careful attention to his forepaws, took no notice except by the slight stirring of his tail-tip. Bridget went up to her room, and brought down that jewel-box of which mention has been made. She spread out the treasures on the kitchen table, the malachite ornaments, the hair chains, the scarabee necklace, the lava cameos, the mosaics, all the much-prized ornaments of her mother.

If Mr. Lester were to be helped appreciably these must go, these things whose sentimental value could never be estimated. But the bell rang, and Bridget went to the parlour.

"Your arm, my child," said Mr. Joy, and Bridget firmly tugged him to a standing position.

Sebastian Joy raised his skull-cap and bowed to Jeremy. "The card, Bridget," he whispered.

"Grandpapa, it's in the kitchen," she replied.

"Go and get it then, while I look at something."

Mr. Joy supported himself against the book-case, and drew Jeremy's attention to the collection of Dickens on one shelf, while Bridget ran for the card. It had, unfortunately, got rather soiled and was cracked across the middle; the address, too, was entirely misleading; but it was the last of the cards, the last little glory, and it was designed to impress Jeremy.

Bridget smuggled it into her grandfather's hand, and he, in a careless way, laid it on the table.

"I have much enjoyed the rare privilege of conversing with an amiable and well-informed gentleman," said Mr. Joy, and he bowed again and started on the slow progress to his room.

Bridget came bounding downstairs, and found Jeremy washing up the coffee-cups in the scullery. Her face flushed.

"You're never to do that again, Mr. Fleetwood," she said, with evident vexation.

Jeremy, girt with a dish-cloth, looked ashamed.

"Oh! I say, you don't mind, do you, Miss Joy?"

"Yes, I do. I'm your landlady, and I do all the work. Please don't make me feel that, because Grandpapa called upon you, you have to treat me like a friend—like any lady you might meet."

"If I'm never to be a friend why do you mend my things for me—you know that isn't a landlady's duty?"

"Oh, I like doing that!"

"I like washing cups, Miss Joy; don't be cross with me."

Bridget laughed.

"I was horrid to be cross," she answered, "for I know you meant it as such a nice, kind surprise, and I spoilt it by being grumpy. But I do want to be a proper landlady, and to learn to make things really nice. In fact, I'll tell you a plan I've made."

"Do; I don't mind anything if you don't look so severe again."

"No; I'm sorry. But about my plan. You see, I've bought a slate, and I thought I'd hang it up in the parlour and then you could write down any complaints. You see, you are so kind that I'm afraid you won't ever find fault. Now I've just written a specimen of what you might want to say."

Jeremy with gravity took the slate and read its legend:

Monday. Boots not polished enough, mantelpiece dusty.

Tuesday. Breakfast unpunctual. This fault *must* be remedied.

Wednesday. Shocking smell of burnt fat. Meat overdone, rice pudding too sweet.

Thursday. Beau must *not* lie on the chairs or on my bed. Shaving water not really hot.

Friday. Fish very badly cooked. Breakfast egg over-boiled.

Saturday. Not called in good time, dinner late, dust in many places, pastry very hard.

Sunday. Pudding pretty fair, but cauliflower hard, and the white sauce *vile*. Please next week be more punctual and more careful in cooking.

“That’s a good plan,” said Jeremy, “and by Monday morning am I dead and on the doorstep?”

“Oh, I’d try not to mind; I can’t say I like reproof, but I’m sure it’s very bracing. So, please, do try it. You see, you could put in some praise too, to sweeten it.”

“Why, so I could,” Jeremy answered. “But you know, Miss Joy, good landladies do let their lodgers work for them. My last used to make me turn the mangle for her, and her conversation was so amusing that I thought it worth while. But when she made me do her ironing too, while she sat in the rocking-chair, I thought I was hardly strong enough. But a little domestic work is really invaluable for all young men. Shall I make some toast for your tea, because I want to sit by the fire and nurse Dorcas?”

Bridget smiled.

“If you’d really like it, do: I think you must have a very nice nature.”

“I’m what the Scotch call a ‘douce body.’ But

you're to sit down, Miss Joy, and watch me being busy."

Bridget sat down on the fender and warmed her hands ; the young cat, Tabitha, climbed purring on to her knee. To any wandering spirit who had peeped through the window the kitchen must have looked a cheerful place : the gas was not lit, but the firelight made the room glow ; it sparkled on the pot lids and dish covers, and made gold of Bridget's sandy hair, and threw a pleasant ruddiness on her face. Is not the fire the true household god, genial and useful and kind, drawing his devotees about him ?

"Your grandfather," said Jeremy, "is a very interesting man, Miss Joy ; he belongs to a fine old school. It was a great privilege to meet him. I feel a deep interest in this book of his. Have you read it ?"

"Oh, not nearly all ! Grandpapa reads me bits. It is very—very wonderful."

"Publishers are kittle cattle—they haven't always jumped at masterpieces. I do hope there will be no disappointment in store for Mr. Joy."

"That's just what I dread," Bridget exclaimed. "Do you know, Mr. Fleetwood, I pray every day that Grandpapa may die before the book is finished. It would be so cruel if they refused it or made light of it, when his heart has been put into every line of it. I don't think either of us could bear it. He is such an old man, and he has so few pleasures, and it has comforted him so much to

feel himself a sort of minor prophet. If some one just wrote him a cold business letter, returning it, I think it would break his heart."

"I don't know ; every prophet knows that he must seem to fail, that his message must be halting and broken."

"But the terrible—terrible thing is that I don't think Grandpapa is a prophet at all."

"Then don't you think the knowledge of that may be essential to his perfect development?"

"Oh, I don't know or care! I want him to be happy and die happy."

"Miss Joy, I think you'd spoil people by saving them their due discipline."

"Perhaps, but Grandpapa is like my child. He's the eldest child, and the animals are the younger children, and I do want them all to be well fed and contented. All of them have such a little bit of life before them, and it's going to be happy if I can manage it."

"Shall you spoil your husband too, Miss Joy?" Jeremy asked, smiling at her.

"If I ever marry—no : I should not try and shield him, because, you see, he'd be on an equality with me ; we'd be fighting shoulder to shoulder, so to speak."

"That's a fine war-like notion, but I think, if you could, you'd be warding off blows from him and drawing the enemy on yourself."

"Will Miss Lucilla shield you?" Bridget inquired with deep interest.

Jeremy laughed.

"Oh no; Lucilla is made to be shielded from mouse and mammoth, and yet she's not a bit nervous, she'd face an emperor without blinking. But she has the glorious art of pretending that she needs protection. That, you know, is immensely flattering to the vanity of man. I think if a real crisis arose Lucilla *would* shield me. I suppose she is the 'Super-man' after all."

Bridget changed the subject suddenly. She produced her jewel-box with some diffidence.

"I wish," she said shyly, "that you would advise me about something. You see, I want to sell some of these necklaces and things of Mother's. If ^{you} you don't mind, I won't quite tell you why, because it's not altogether my secret, but I want to get about £5. Now, if you would value these things, I should be better able to bargain with the Jews, shouldn't I?"

Jeremy took the box, and examined its quaint collection by the firelight. The faint scent of sandalwood and of Mocha beans reminded him of old cabinets in a house he loved dearly. These trinkets, so obviously the gathering of love and remembrance, were, as he knew, worth so little money and so much sentiment.

"Isn't it an awful pity to sell them?" he asked. "I fear a dealer wouldn't give you much; they pay for gold and silver by the weight; but these charming things—I wouldn't part with them, Miss Joy."

Bridget turned a hair chain about her fingers.

"I wouldn't do it," she explained, "unless I thought that, under the circumstances, Mother would wish me to. I am sorry to have to sell them. Because, if I ever have daughters, I should of course give them these things, and in a little while they'll be almost historical—in the family sense of historical. I've really often wondered if my children would like looking at them as I did."

"In that case," said Jeremy, decisively, "I shouldn't dream of parting with them."

"Oh, but I must! I think the rings are the most valuable, and the bracelets; but perhaps I'd better keep them for a more pressing need. But these other things must go."

"Very well. Will you entrust me with the sale; I have an hereditary talent for bargaining?"

"Oh, would you? How very kind of you! I know you'll do your best."

Bridget poured her collection into Jeremy's hands, and he took them away. The following evening he brought Bridget four pounds. But he did not tell her that one pound he had himself paid for the peach-stone necklace and the cornelians, and that he was keeping them to give her in some distant time as a wedding present.

So Mr. Ambrose Lester received four pounds, and was genuinely touched, and backed a horse with them, having a strong premonition of success and fortune. However, Fortune is fickle, and the four pounds were lost.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH

A Slippery Place

DECEMBER brought snow and freezing weather to Burnton: the ponds were frozen; the snow queen tried to bewitch a manufacturing town into a semblance of beauty, and succeeded for an hour or two, until the smuts fell upon her white sheets. But wintry weather before Christmas is cheerful, and, as Mr. Horrocks often remarked, "seasonable." He himself wore a red muffler, and swept the snow from his garden; for he was of the "Grand-Old-Man" type, and thought modern young men a degenerate lot.

The Sunday before Christmas was a day of hard frost. The few friends of the sparrow threw him crumbs; and an occasional thrush or blackbird, puffed into a semblance of fatness, presented himself, a gentlemanly little pensioner among the vulgar crew of sparrows.

Sunday afternoon was Bridget's most comfortable and quiet time. She enjoyed it to the full. Her feet on the kitchen fender, herself in a basket chair, she read and re-read her favourite books. She felt, too, that slightly exalted feeling which results from Sunday clothes, a freedom from the commonplaceness of week-day affairs. Her

grandfather, having laid aside the Book in honour of the fourth commandment, gave himself up to peaceful dozing or to the perusal of William Blake and of Dr. Johnson's *Rasselas*.

Jeremy was writing to Lucilla in the parlour, and Bridget with the three animals was in the kitchen reading *Hans Andersen*, when a timid ring at the door bell was heard ; she gave a sigh of sore displeasure and got up, yawning. She went to the door and opened it. A young man stood there blowing his nose, for that is the general custom of shy people after having dared to ring a bell. The young man was very neatly dressed, and, when he turned round, Bridget recognized him. He was Mr. Miller, the reader of Ibsen, the friend of Mr. Rice. Bridget gazed at him in such surprise that she forgot to smile. She could not think of any reason that should bring Mr. Frank Miller to Scots Road. The young man blushed.

"I beg pardon, Miss Joy," he began ; "are you at home to-day, or do I hintrude?"

Bridget saw that he was nervous, and beamed upon him.

"Oh, do come in!" she said cordially. "I hope you don't mind coming to the kitchen ; it's fairly tidy. It was very kind of you to call, Mr. Miller. I hope you are well."

"Tolerably, thanks, Miss Joy. I hope you're the same."

"Yes, thanks, except for chilblains, and they're

not being ill, though they make one so bad-tempered and hot."

"Exactly," said Mr. Miller, and relapsed into shy silence.

Bridget talked steadily about Beau and the cats—to the shy, animals are the grand social resource.

The young man listened to her with attention, and after a while he forgot to be afraid of her. Bridget was as easy to please as a happy Newfoundland puppy, and she inspired as much confidence. She endeavoured to make her guest feel liked and admired, and in part she succeeded.

"Do you ever walk out?" he asked.

"Where?" Bridget inquired.

"Anywhere—to church of a Sunday evening, Miss Joy?"

"Yes, I do. Do you?"

"I do, might I—might I offer to escort you?"

This modest request evidently cost the speaker no small effort.

"Do, please," Bridget answered; "it's very kind of you to think of it, and as we're both sure to fall down we can pick each other up."

"There's no other young gentleman you walk with?" Mr. Miller asked with extreme diffidence.

Bridget laughed.

"Oh no! I don't think I know any young men at all, Mr. Miller, except Grandpapa and Mr. Horrocks, and they're not very young. And it's so thoughtful of you to think of the frosty roads and to offer to help me."

"Well, I'd always like to come out with you of a Sunday night," he answered. "I was thinking, Miss Joy, it would be a great pleasure to have you as a friend, if I don't presume: we read much the same books, and we could discuss them. I'm not a man who cares for the ordinary chit-chat of society; I'm a bit sober, I fear. I like to talk of the questions of the day, and I think you do too, Miss Joy. You see, you've enjoyed advantages with the cultivated tastes of your Grandpapa. It would be a great help to me to know you better."

Bridget blushed.

"Oh, but I fear I'm not at all polished!" she exclaimed earnestly. "I'm very badly educated, Mr. Miller. You will find me so much behind you in knowledge and in thought. I think all the benefit will be with me."

Mr. Miller waved this view aside.

"I can't but know, Miss Joy," said he, "that you're several cuts above me. But it isn't only the desire to be a bit more cultivated that brings me here, but a real esteem for yourself. I want you to take my heducation in hand,—will you?"

This earnest appeal made Bridget's face red with confusion. She had never dreamt of herself as an educator. And she was, it must be owned, but slightly educated.

"I think, don't you," she answered, smiling upon the young man, "that every one learns from everybody and everything else? That's a platitude, but I do think if one likes listening and

looking about one picks up something. And do you mind, Mr. Miller, if I make the tea? Perhaps you'd toast the tea-cakes."

Frank Miller grabbed the toasting-fork and felt himself useful and agreeable at once. He found, as others found, that one could not be afraid of Bridget. It was easy to talk to her of one's daily affairs, one's worries or successes, even to perform for her a slight solo on the trumpet. But this performance was not given by Bridget's guest. He was diffident, and he had that wide outlook on life which forbids conceit.

When tea had been taken to Sebastian Joy and to Jeremy, Bridget returned to the kitchen, and she and Frank consolidated their friendship. He told her of his boyhood, his struggles after that deeper education which a board school,—indeed any school, cannot give, and Bridget listened, the firelight illuminating the deep sympathy on her face.

The story was in its way pathetic, as every story is when it deals with a nature that is more refined than its surroundings. Frank was deep in the narrative when Jeremy suddenly came in.

"I'm just looking for my boots, Miss Joy," he said, "may I light your gas for you?"

He struck a match, and saw the young man in the basket chair. Frank rose, apologetic and friendly, nervously uncertain how Jeremy should be treated. He advanced, held out his hand, and said, "How-d'you-do? I hope I find you well."

Jeremy took the hand, and gave and received the true Lancashire grip.

"It's fine skating weather, isn't it?" he asked cheerfully. "I'm simply supplicating my favourite deity, Jack Frost, to be kind and stay till Christmas. You see, I'm spending the holiday in Westmorland by a mere two miles in length where the skating is unimaginable."

"Then I trust it will stay. I like a day's skating myself."

Bridget was hunting desperately for the boots while the two men talked to one another. Presently she found them, and gave them to Jeremy. He sat down on the fender and put them on whilst he discussed a recent football match with Frank. The subject was so engrossing that he spent a quarter of an hour in eager discussion while Bridget dressed for church.

When she returned Frank was alone, and was gazing earnestly at the fire. "Is that young gentleman the lodger?" he asked.

"Yes, he's Mr. Fleetwood."

"He seems very nice."

"Oh, he is. I suppose we should be starting, shouldn't we?"

They set off together, and found the road so slippery that Frank performed the gallant office of holding his companion by the elbow. When they both fell down ignominiously the last ice was thawed between them. It is impossible for two people who have grovelled on the pavement

to be anything but friendly. Bridget's cavalier took her elbow again.

"I do wish," he said fervently, "I was a chap like that Mr. Fleetwood. Now it's wrong, Miss Joy, but I henvy a man like that, so gentlemanly, so haffable, one that can make his way."

"But I'm sure you're as nice as Mr. Fleetwood," Bridget said consolingly; "you see, there are varieties of niceness."

"But it's the voice and haccent, Miss Joy. Now, I do try to be careful of the haspirate, Miss Joy, but if I'm excited it goes. You see it's not natural to me to talk like a gentleman. You and Mr. Fleetwood speak as most of us don't. Now, tell me, honest, do you think I'll ever learn?"

"I dare say you will. And if you don't, I wouldn't mind. I don't see why people should all have to talk alike."

"But will you correct me, Miss Joy? If I say a word wrong just stop me, and make me repeat it."

"Oh, I couldn't! Please don't ask me. I like to hear you talking so much, Mr. Miller, and I should never want to interrupt you."

Frank paused beneath a gas lamp, his face was wistful.

"But I'll never be fit to be your friend if you don't," he said.

Bridget shook his hand cordially, to the vulgar amusement of a gentleman who had just issued from a public-house.

"Please don't talk to me as if I were the

Matterhorn," she said; "if any one's to be improved let it be me. We could form a Co-operative Improvement Society, couldn't we—Joan and you and I? You know Joan, don't you? You'll find her in church, and you and she will come back to supper with me—though there's very little to eat—and then we'll improve one another. Joan is so much cleverer than I am. You'd just adore her if you knew her. We'll start the Improvement Society to-night, won't we? But please don't depreciate yourself, Mr. Miller."

The young man squeezed her hand but remained silent, and, the second bell having begun, the two entered the church, which was already full of glorious Sunday hats, among which Bridget's looked decidedly shabby.

Are there any talks quite like those we have before we are twenty? Certainly not! The discussions that take place round a schoolroom fire are unrivalled by any of the wonderful conversations of the *salons*. There is an ease, a daring, an absolute confidence, which makes those schoolroom discussions ever memorable. Opinions before we are grown up pour out hot and brilliant from the mint of the mind. And the stamp of personality is very strong. In after days the coins grow effaced and lose their value, but oh! the glitter of their early days.

A debate, somewhat of this nature, took place round the kitchen fire when Bridget and her two guests had had supper. She was eighteen and

had decided and passionate views about an ideal State of a strictly maternal type, where every unit had individual care from Government and was trusted and loved and well fed. Bridget's prisons were vast nursery gardens and farms, where the criminal learnt his lessons from Nature, and became softened and ennobled by the contemplation of seedlings, lambs and young pigs.

Her two friends listened to her with that kind and consciously superior wisdom that every one over twenty feels for those still in their teens. They, too, aired their views ; and Frank discovered himself as a deep thinker, and won even Joan to respectful admiration. Like most Lancashire people, he took a vivid interest in every side of life, and the consciousness of sympathetic interest in his listeners spurred him to the only true eloquence, the eloquence of perfect sincerity.

The debate was interrupted by the clamour of the door bell. Bridget started. "Who on earth can that be?" she said. Beau, with an indignant and bristly back, trotted after her to the hall door.

Outside there was that rare sight in Scots Road, a cab. The cabman spoke in a husky voice. "Gentleman here had a fall and sprained 'is hankle. I'm fetching 'im hinside." He went back and returned with some one limping painfully beside him. The gaslight shone on Jeremy's white face. Bridget gasped. She opened the parlour door, and her lodger limped to the sofa and threw himself down.

"It's all right," he said; "it's only a sickening twist. Some little brutes had made a slide on the pavement, and down I went. I'm afraid I didn't speak at all prettily about it. Don't look frightened, Miss Joy. Would you get me some very hot water, and the sponge and some handkerchiefs out of my room?"

Bridget hurried to the kitchen with the news, and sent the willing Mr. Miller for a doctor, while Joan put the water on to boil.

When Bridget returned to the parlour Jeremy asked if she would try and get his boot off for him. The foot had swelled already, and she had to cut the laces.

Bridget tugged, and Jeremy, who was not a Spartan, gave a howl of pain. The second tug was equally ineffectual, for the tugger had not reached that stoical charity that can boldly inflict pain. Jeremy's nerves were not in a happy state, and he spoke rather sharply.

"For Heaven's sake," said he, "pull hard enough this time!"

Bridget bit her lip and gave the third pull. It was successful, the boot came off. But two big tears rolled down her cheeks and fell upon it. Jeremy, recovered from the sudden anguish, saw them.

He caught her hand impulsively and kissed it.

"My dear Miss Joy," he said, "what a cad I am! Do forgive me. I haven't offended you, have I?"

Bridget sniffed, and then laughed.

"No—oh no! But I'm such a donkey about those sorts of things. I can never hurt people without crying. And I hurt you so much too much."

"Never mind. You were an angel. By the bye, you've never looked at the Complaint Slate. You must read my reproofs, Miss Joy."

Bridget looked at him seriously : she was never quite sure when Jeremy was laughing. She went to the Slate and took it down. On one side was the portrait of a very fat gentleman, lolling on a sofa, smoking a hookah. Underneath was written, "The Lodger." On the other side the days were duly chronicled :

Monday. Dinner too well cooked, boots unnecessarily clean.

Tuesday. Overfed.

Wednesday. Not scolded for spilling water on the floor and coming in with muddy boots.

Thursday. Too well roasted by parlour fire.

Friday. Lodger fed like boa-constrictor.

Saturday. Seriously ill through being too kindly treated.

Sunday. Lodger's death took place. Causes—too much food, too much kindness, and a terrible depression due to the absence of any cause for grumbling.

Bridget laughed delightedly.

"Oh, you're not a proper lodger!" she said, as she left him. When she reached the kitchen she spoke with an air of feigned carelessness.

"Did any one ever kiss your hand?" she asked Joan.

"Yes, I think so. Why do you ask?"

"I was just thinking that young men in books often do it, and I wondered if it was often done."

Bridget blushed guiltily, and looked at her little red hand. But she told no one of the incident till late in the evening, when Beau and she sat by the embers of the kitchen fire. Then she took the dog's paw in her hand and told him what had happened.

"Beau," she said, "some one has kissed my hand, just as if I were a girl in a romantic book. And it was red, Beau, and not too awfully clean; and oh! I do hope he never guessed that I was peeling onions this morning."

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH

Christmas in Scots Road

WHEN Sebastian Joy learnt that the lodger had sprained his ankle he desired that his card of kind inquiry and sympathy should be conveyed to the sufferer. "For," said he, "these little courtesies should not be omitted because we live in the same house."

There being no card in the house, Mr. Joy carefully cut one out of cardboard and inscribed his name upon it in a triumph of calligraphy, in which the tail of the "y" in his name ended in a swan's head.

"What does our young friend do to pass the time?" the old man asked.

"Oh, he's working, Grandpapa, and between whiles he reads Mark Twain. He's very good, for I think his ankle does hurt. Mrs. Crumb bandages it; she's not nervous, and she's so fond of young men, especially when they're ill."

"Mrs. Crumb is a kindly though a vulgar soul. But I was thinking, Bridget, that our young friend might like to peruse some part of the book. I should lend it to no mean or ignorant person, but Mr. Fleetwood is intelligent and high-

minded. Suppose you take him Part I., with my compliments?"

Bridget looked aghast for a moment. Part I. consisted of a hundred sheets of closely-written foolscap in which the lengthy thoughts and aspirations of a young man called "Hippolyte, the pilgrim" were expanded to the gentle and exhausted reader. Bridget had a saving tact.

"That *would* be kind of you," she answered; "but if he's not well could he appreciate it? I think he wants something quite light and frivolous, Grandpapa; don't you think that *Hippolyte* would be rather too serious for him at present? But suppose you let him see the pictures, darling, he would like very much to see them."

Mr. Joy's face shone.

"Ah, so he would, so he would. Take him the pictures, then. And, Bridget, what is he going to do at Christmas? I suppose this pleasant visit to his aunt has been put off?"

"Oh yes; he couldn't skate. It's very sad for him."

"Then, my compliments to Mr. Fleetwood, and would he give us the honour of his presence at dinner on Christmas night?"

Bridget assented and went downstairs to call upon her lodger, of whom she had not seen much since his accident, for Mrs. Crumb declared that young ladies would "worrit" him, and that she was thoroughly capable of attending to "our Jeremy," as she familiarly called him. But

Bridget had made him soup, soup that was greasy and arrowroot that was rather lumpy, for Bridget's heart was always ahead of her capabilities.

She went to see him now with a cautious tread suited to one who might be asleep. But Jer my, with his foot on a chair, was engrossed in a chemistry text-book, and Beau was lying on the sofa, with his beautiful brown head artistically laid on a green cushion. Jeremy looked up with a smile.

"So, Miss Joy, the skating project is off. Now may I stay at home for Christmas?" he asked.

Bridget blushed with pleasure.

"Oh, how nice of you to call it home," she said gratefully, "when you must be so disappointed too about the skating! Grandpapa has sent you the *Hippolyte* pictures to amuse you. Most of them are of the devil; Grandpapa is so fond of drawing the devil, and really I think he does him very well."

She laid the wonderful etchings beside Jeremy and delivered her invitation to the Christmas dinner.

"I shall just love to come," he said; "but mayn't I bring my own turkey—for Aunt Matilda is sending one—and samples of mince pies and puddings?"

"Mr. Horrocks gives us a turkey every Christmas," said Bridget; "with yours we shall have quite a crowd."

Having delivered her message she left him,

for this was a very busy time even in the small household at No. 8.

One of the saddest developments of an age of hurry and excitement is the growing dislike for Christmas, expressed by about nine out of the ten people one may meet during a day's shopping at Christmas time. Bridget had the good fortune to be the tenth. She and her grandfather loved Christmas, and kept it with due ceremony. In all the mysteries of Christmas time Jeremy was given a full share. His landlady was so afflicted with fears that he might be dull or lonely at this holiday time, that she made a point of sharing even her Christmas cards with him.

Jeremy, on his part, had the good fortune to be one of those quiet young men—humdrum, perhaps—who can content themselves with small things. His mother had died when he was so young that he had forgotten her, and he and his step-mother had never been congenial to one another. He had gone to school at seven, and had spent his life there. Of the little mysteries and businesses of home he knew little, and was, perhaps, proportionately regardful of them.

He was delighted when Bridget staggered in with a big bowl, that he might stir the Christmas pudding and wish. Beau and the cats, whose resisting paws were held to the spoon, did not escape from the ritual, nor did the elderly scholar engrossed in the spiritual adventures of his hero escape—he too stirred and wished. At the arrival

of cards and parcels for her lodger Bridget showed delight and a naïve curiosity. Jeremy never failed to show her what he had received, and to watch with amusement the conscientious care with which she studied the cards. The arrival of a package from India was an event of profound interest. Bridget disappeared immediately, that Jeremy might enjoy Lucilla's present in solitude.

She had vast preparations in the kitchen, those exciting preparations in which a very little money and much love have to unite in producing great effects. For Bridget gave an annual Christmas party, to which the family of Crumb and the family of Stevens were bidden. Although the guests were inclined to be a little supercilious, they really enjoyed the entertainment more than they said.

The decoration of the Christmas tree was something of a problem, the presents had to be so very inexpensive, and this year the funds were particularly low, and she found that little bright bags of sweets were her main stock-in-trade ; to these were added a few pincushions, but it seemed to the anxious hostess that the noses of her guests must surely turn up in disdain at such meagre offerings. Then the cake that was to have been the centre of the table got burnt, and when it was scraped it broke in half. Bridget surveyed it with tears of disgust, she was looking at it when Jeremy limped into the kitchen.

"Aunt Matilda," he explained, "has sent me a vast hamper. Don't you know any poor people who could help me out with it? Surely some one will be anxious to save a young man from sudden death."

Bridget turned round, the two halves of a blackened cake in her hands.

"There!" she exclaimed; "that was for my party. Isn't it maddening? And it was to be iced with chocolate, and to have chocolate animals walking round it."

Jeremy had not heard of the party, and the matter had to be explained to him. He looked very solemn.

"And you never asked me to come," he said, with assumed chagrin, "not even to meet my friend Amelia, when you know I'm dying to see her when the curling-pins are out."

"Oh, it's a children's party!"

"But I rather like children. Can't I come in as a bear, or as Bluebeard, or as the bogey man?"

Bridget gazed at him, the gleam of inspiration in her eyes.

"You could be Santa Claus," she exclaimed.

"Of course! That's a prime thought, a white wool beard, some flour, my dressing-gown, and it's done! And look here! Mayn't I subscribe to the party? I have veritable hoards of crystallized fruit and sweets, and figs and dates enough to kill the entire Crumb family. Just come and see."

Bridget gazed in wonder at the store that the

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kind Aunt Matilda had sent. Jeremy apportioned out his goods for the party and for certain poor families known to Bridget, as the poor are known to the poor. There was a cake just ready to be iced, round which the chocolate animals marched in triumphant procession, and a profusion of small cakes. And the next day a box of toys and crackers appeared in the kitchen, mysteriously marked, "For the Christmas tree."

When Jeremy's friends, Johnnie Cope and Robin Thomas, called they pronounced the tree a marvel.

Bridget thought that Mr. Cope and Mr. Thomas were the most charming young men in the world, excepting Jeremy, who occupied a sort of Nelson's pillar in her imagination. Between them they arranged Jeremy's wig and beard, and dressed him up for Bridget's approval. When they had gone the tired but happy landlady came in to clear away the late dinner things.

"May I," she asked, "keep the last two sardines?"

Jeremy looked up.

"Of course, Miss Joy. Do you like sardines?"

Bridget blushed.

"Oh, it's not for me!" she explained. "It's for the cats' stockings."

Jeremy laid down the newspaper.

"O Sibyl, explain the oracle," he said.

She laughed.

"You see, I have no children to get Christmas

stockings ready for," she answered, "so I hang up one each for Beau and Tabitha and Dorcas. I'm afraid you must think me very silly, but I did it when first Mother died and things seemed so lonely and quiet, and so I like to keep it up. I'll wrap up the sardines in silver paper, and they'll be a very nice surprise for the cats."

"Mayn't I contribute to Beau's stocking too?" Jeremy asked.

"Oh, but you have; he has three of your bones, and I've given him a butter ball in paper, and several biscuits. He'll have such a happy Christmas. Aren't you getting excited? Though indeed it's very dull for you."

"No, it's not. Are you going to decorate the house?"

"Yes, Mrs. Tapley the grocer's wife always gives me some holly and mistletoe; the shop people send me such nice presents, they are very kind. Miggs the chemist gave me some scent which will just do for Amelia, and some soap which Mrs. Crumb will like."

The house was decorated with wreaths of ivy and cheerful bunches of holly. With reverent hands Lucilla's photograph was set in a forest of mistletoe. Jeremy, unable to move without pain, watched Bridget's activity with pleasure. He wondered vaguely within himself why he did like her so much. She was no beauty, only an affectionate friend would have called her pretty; she was not clever, she made many mistakes in

cooking and in housekeeping ; and she was too frank to be fascinating (in the mysterious sense of the word). Lying back on the sofa, he watched her ; in her heels, as she stood tiptoe to decorate the chandelier, he saw holes, her hands were red, and pricked with holly, her hair was in wild disorder. But yet in some subtle way when Bridget came into the room it seemed more cheerful and home-like, and her kind grey eyes and soft voice brought a sense of comfort to him. He decided that he liked Bridget very much.

The next night, which was Christmas Eve, was the time of assembly for the Crumb and Stevens children. The Christmas tree stood screened in one corner in such a way that Jeremy in his character of Santa Claus could slip behind it when the time arrived.

Bridget always felt it a rather nervous moment when her guests trooped in. Mrs. Crumb in a Sunday bonnet was so different from the Mrs. Crumb of week-days, Amelia released from the bondage of her curling-pins had a head worthy of a Hottentot chieftainess, and the little Crumbs were particularly well soaped and well dressed, while the Stevens family were oppressively well behaved for quite ten minutes.

Mrs. Crumb and Mrs. Stevens always insisted on grace being chanted, after which tea began in a terrible silence, in which munching and swallowing were painfully apparent to the anxious mothers. When such a silence falls only a social

genius can break it. As it was, polite sentences fell into the silence.

"Mrs. Crumb, you are eating nothing."

"Sufficient, thank you, Miss," or "Wipe your mouth, Tommy," from Mrs. Stevens. "I 'aven't a 'andkerchief, Ma," in reply.

Then Mrs. Crumb, with an effort to break the solemn tea-time spell, would say, "Well, now, whatever is be'ind that screen, Miss Joy?"—this with a telling wink.

"We're expecting a very funny guest to-night," said Bridget, trying to rouse the silent munchers. "Who can guess who it is?"

"Bill Bailey," exclaimed the Stevens prodigy, in a frantic effort to be witty.

"Your young gentleman," suggested Mrs. Stevens slyly.

Bridget blushed violently.

"No—it's Santa Claus," she explained. The company looked blankly at one another, and continued to munch and swallow. Some one asked another in a hoarse whisper if there were to be "horanges," and again silence fell.

However, when the tea things were removed to the scullery the prospect brightened. Amelia was pressed to dance, it being known that she did a scarf-dance with great effect. No scarf being handy, a roller towel was substituted, and Amelia, in a solemn circle of admirers, went through her paces with the gravity of a priestess. Then Mrs. Stevens sang "What are the wild waves saying?"

in a tremulous voice, and Mrs. Crumb gave the company an excellent recitation of one of Waugh's Lancashire poems. At this the Stevens prodigy was desperately impelled to repeat "The Wreck of the 'Esperus,'" and a person called "Our Ernie" competed with "The quality of mercy is not strained."

The company gradually thawing, cheerful games were played, and the loud screams assured Jeremy that the party was being a success. On a given signal he slipped behind the screen and lit the candles up, and the little tree blazed in all its splendour.

Jeremy's strange appearance caused wild uproar among the children, though Mrs. Crumb pierced the disguise and confided to Mrs. Stevens that it was "'Our Jeremy,' a nice quiet young gentleman, very sober and regular in paying his way."

Jeremy was popular with children, and he won the hearts of the small Crumbs and Stevens, and they danced about him in jubilant frenzy.

At the end of the proceedings the tree was put on a chair in the middle of the kitchen, and the guests stood in a ring round it, with hand clasped in hand, and sang "Auld Lang Syne" in true Lancashire fashion, with immense emphasis and shaking of hands. Then the children made an inner ring about the tree, and they sang, in the sweet, rather nasal sing-song of childhood, "Hark, the herald angels sing," and though they did say "'Ark, the 'erald hangels," it was just as beautiful

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to Bridget, who listened to them with tears in her eyes and thought she really could hear those angelic choruses.

When the children had received their oranges and gone, Bridget and Jeremy sank into chairs by the fire.

"How kind you were, and what a dear Santa Claus you made," Bridget said.

"Did I? But the real little Christmas angel was yourself! Do you know that fascinating picture in *Struwel Peter*, Miss Joy, where the Christmas angel pours out gifts to the little boy? I think you were the original of that agreeable angel, and you're absolutely done up; but may I give you my Christmas present now, it's very small, just the humble offering of a lodger?"

Bridget's eyes shone; she opened the parcel and found a print of the Nativity, that most beautiful of Christmas pictures, in which the happy shepherds laugh because of the glory of what their eyes behold upon the manger bed. The print was a good one, and Bridget's joy was great. She produced her offering from the drawer of the dresser.

"This is the humble offering of your landlady," she said; "it's a seal that belonged to my great-grandfather; the stone is Achill amethyst, and the motto is Irish. I thought it might bring you luck."

Jeremy's thanks were interrupted by the distant sounds of a brass band in the full blare of

"Christians, awake." It was supported by loud and violent howls in the parlour, where Beau, having retired from the vulgar society of the kitchen, was giving himself up to that ecstatic melancholy which a brass band can so perfectly produce.

"It's twelve o'clock, and Christmas morning," said Bridget, and she took Jeremy's hand in her warm one, "and oh! many, many happy Christmases to you and lovely Miss Lucilla."

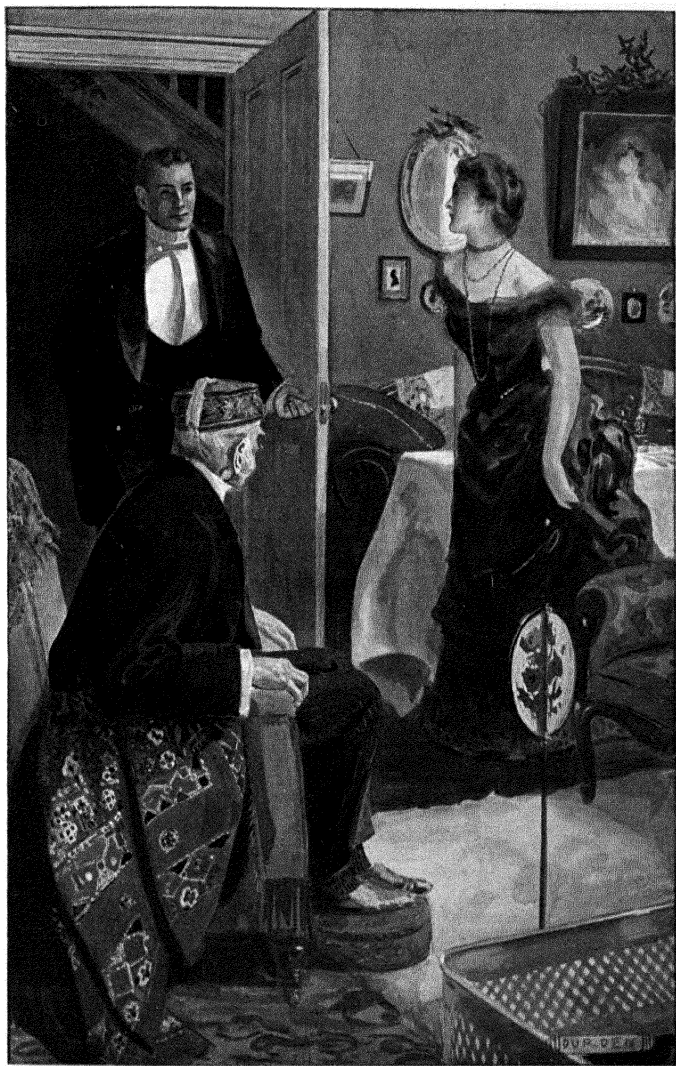
It was intimated to Jeremy the next day by Bridget that Mr. Joy would be much flattered if his guest wore his dress suit.

"We're so scrubbety all the year round," she observed, "that we do like to dress up for just one night in the year."

Accordingly Jeremy retired to his bedroom, where a fire had been lit, and the parlour was given up to extensive preparations. By seven o'clock he was dressed, and when the bell rang he limped downstairs and into the parlour.

Mr. Joy was seated before the fire. He wore a velvet smoking-cap elaborately worked with butterflies and caterpillars, and an old black velvet coat and embroidered waistcoat. Then Bridget, as hostess, came forward and for a moment Jeremy did not know her.

She was dressed in a low-cut black dress, obviously her mother's, for the fashion belonged to a day twenty years past. But it suited her well, and with it she had assumed the sort of



"Then Bridget, as hostess, came forward."

gentle dignity that her mother had worn with the self-same dress. In the coils of her light brown hair were wonderful coral ornaments, and she wore coral beads round her neck. To Jeremy she was a new and wonderful Bridget who might have stepped from some old Victorian cupboard, for her dress had the scent of long-dried lavender. But the Bridget who spoke and laughed was familiar to him.

The dinner was quite stately. Mrs. Crumb waited and preserved a solemn silence except when she nudged Jeremy and asked if he took "'am to his turkey."

To the young man there was something pathetic in old Mr. Joy's evident pleasure in the dignity of the occasion. He had cast aside his dreams and had descended to earth, but he still carried himself as one who dines familiarly with the gods on Olympus. And he had so keen a relish for the little dignity and ritual of the Christmas dinner, that Jeremy found himself entering into the old man's spirit.

And then when dessert came they pulled crackers and wore absurd paper caps, and Mr. Joy proposed numerous healths which, being drunk in lemonade, were entirely harmless. "All friends round St. Paul's" was the first, and then "The medical profession," to please Jeremy, and then with reverent affection the toast of the dead, "Those across the border," and last of all Mr. Joy pledged "My absent son," though Jeremy, it

must be confessed, felt but little regard for Bridget's errant father.

When dinner was over they gathered round the fire and listened to old Mr. Joy's rambling stories and reminiscences. His own voice soon made the raconteur so sleepy, that he sank into a tranquil doze, and Jeremy and Bridget sat on the hearth-rug and looked at pictures and played cat's cradle, conversing the while in whispers for fear of waking the sleeper. But he slept happily and did not wake until eleven o'clock, when his own loud snore suddenly roused him to consciousness.

"Ah yes, yes!" he answered, and beamed upon Bridget and Jeremy; "did I go to sleep? My dear children, you must forgive me; I am an old man. Bridget, my dear, I think I should retire; please give me your arm. Good-night, Mr. Fleetwood; it has been a happy Christmas for us, and though your accident deprived your dear aunt of your society, we, at least, were the gainers."

"It's been one of the jolliest Christmases I ever remember," Jeremy answered, "and thank you, sir, and Miss Bridget, immensely. You've been kindness itself."

He spoke sincerely and looked with affection at the bent old man limping out of the room on his grand-daughter's arm.

He sat down and pulled Beau's brown velvet ears.

"You are a lucky old dog," he remarked enigmatically.

CHAPTER THE NINTH

Lucilla

Two events hung over the household at No. 8, Scots Road. The first was the arrival of Miss Lucilla, the second the completion of Mr. Joy's book. The latter event was responsible for Bridget's despondency : as the book neared its close her heart grew heavier. For what interest could Mr. Joy have in life when the great work was finished, and in what light would the publishers view this masterpiece? Bridget suggested a continuation of *Hippolyte, the Pilgrim*, but her grandfather refused. "Hippolyte" had reached the seventh heaven : Mr. Joy was already drawing the picture of his hero standing in a blazing light, the stars beneath his feet.

"He has left me, my dear," he told his granddaughter, "and indeed I shall soon myself be setting out on pilgrimage. I am a very old man, Bridget, a very old man. My hold on life loosens daily. I do not care now for fame or for riches. I leave those to you, my darling. For me the sowing, for you the reaping."

Bridget turned away and tears trickled slowly down her face. But Sebastian Joy did not see them ; he was bending over his drawing, a rapt

look on his face. Bridget left him and went down the stairs, dusting the steps and banisters as she went. Jeremy came out of his room and found her dusting, and saw, too, a very big tear rolling over her nose.

Jeremy assumed a fatherly air and sat down on the top step.

"Now," he said cheerfully, "you're going to let me help you, or give you advice or something. You know, Miss Bridget, two heads can do marvels."

Bridget looked up and tried hard to smile.

"Well, you see, the book is practically done," she said, "and that means its being sent to publishers, and we know what they'll say. And then what will Grandpapa do? They'll just decline his very life on a printed form. Oh, I can't bear it!"

Jeremy nodded.

"Never mind! Payne declined *John Inglesant*. Even Mr. Joy couldn't be out in the cold with a finer writer than Shorthouse. And you see, Miss Bridget, there are such a lot of publishing houses that before *Hippolyte* has gone to all of them we shall all be in our graves."

Bridget brightened.

"That's true," she admitted, "and as 'Hippolyte' was a pilgrim it'll seem quite right for him to be travelling for a long while."

"It'll have to be typed, you know," Jeremy said.

"Oh dear! how much will it cost do you think?"

"Three or four pounds, I should say."

"I see . . . Mr. Fleetwood, could you sell one or two of Mother's rings for me? Would you mind?"

"Of course I'd mind selling your rings. Couldn't we do anything else?"

"No, Mother would love to pay for *Hippolyte's* typing. She always tried to make Grandpapa happy. When she was dying she even tried to pretend to him that she was better, and one day she said to me, 'Oh, Bride, you'll have two men on your hands now, and I do pray God to help you with them!' So of course Mother would wish her rings to be sold."

Jeremy's eyes twinkled, and he looked like the jolliest and most intelligent of terriers.

"Miss Bridget," he said, "you are a Superman. I'll sell the rings. Perhaps if I represent myself as a starving orphan and the father of ten small children I shall get at least a third of their value for you."

Bridget got up from her knees and folded the duster.

"Thank you," said she, and looked up at her lodger with grateful eyes. "What a comfort you are to me, Mr. Fleetwood; but how selfish I am to talk of troubles when you are so happy about Miss Lucilla's return. Can you really believe you'll see her this day week?"

"I can indeed, Miss Bridget. To say the truth, I'm in a simply chattering funk about it. Do you know that I haven't seen Lucilla for three years, and then she was lonely and unhappy, and she was fond of me as one is of an old coat or pair of slippers or anything that's familiar! But now a spoilt beauty—what will she think of me?"

Jeremy read such frank and earnest admiration in two grey eyes that he blushed.

"Oh, you are Mistress Good-will-to-all-men!" he answered; "but Lucilla will be very critical, and I shall tremble. Now, do tell me, could I grow a moustache in a week, and would you admire one?"

"No, I don't think I'd quite like you in a moustache, Mr. Fleetwood."

"Well, what would you say to a flowing beard—or mutton-chop whiskers, or a Newgate frill? If one cannot be beautiful one may at least be bizarre."

"Oh, but I think she'll love you as you are!" Bridget exclaimed. "I don't think you could look nicer."

"Thank you. I was fishing for a sprat and you've given me a whale! Well! I hope Lucilla won't get too great a shock. But I'm such a humdrum, tame sort of fellow to marry a girl like that. I feel I don't know my part. I'm going to buy a collar three miles high—girls love them—and a green poplin tie and a new hat, and leave the rest to luck."

The rings were sold and the manuscript sent to the typist, though Mr. Joy was offended by the suggestion that a publisher might not wish to decipher his writing, and even Bridget's assurance that the MS. would be a family heirloom could hardly console him for the fact that a typewritten script was preferred before his own calligraphy. His great task being now completed, Mr. Joy seemed to grow suddenly feebler. He remembered that he had rheumatism, and his mind dwelt upon his weakness. He caught a cold, and the doctor had to be called. And no medicine that could be prescribed was of such avail as the adventures of "Hippolyte."

This anxiety was in Bridget's mind as she stood by the kitchen fire stirring the marmalade. It was St. Valentine's day, and the day before Lucilla's visit to Manchester. Bridget, to her great surprise and excitement, had received a valentine, a little anthology of verse; but the delightful mystery was that no name accompanied the gift. It came direct from the bookseller. Jeremy had shown frank surprise and had even said that it was "cheek," which showed that the kind thought was not his.

The present had been one of those happy incidents which give cheer to a gloomy day; for the fog of financial difficulty was again closing round the mistress of the house. The price of butter had risen, everything seemed dearer, and as prices rose Mr. Joy's income seemed to decrease.

Bridget had no money to pay the coal bill, and it was necessary for Mr. Joy to have a fire in his room night and day. Her own wardrobe too, was almost past repair. She felt that shame of the very poor, that her clothes were hardly respectable enough for church. How thankful she would have been to receive cast-off dresses or shoes, she often felt, but the poverty of a lady is of necessity silent, and Bridget filled the soles of her shoes with relays of brown paper, and wore an apron and cooking-sleeves all day long, not to save her dress but to conceal it.

But the strictest economy, even though it forbade butter on her bread and sugar in her tea, and any indulgence in second helpings, did not materially decrease expenses. Her grandfather required delicacies, and freely asked for them, and Bridget spent moments of painful thought in contemplating what would happen when everything of value in the house had been sold. Those vague investments of Mr. Joy's were paying less, and the staple source of his income was in the most precarious state, so much so that Bridget wondered within herself if the workhouse were really so unpleasant a place after all. Perhaps even its grim certainty would be less grievous than this daily anxiety about the future.

She set herself to make marmalade on Jeremy's behalf, and sat up till midnight slicing the oranges. How deep are the mysteries of marmalade! And what fair hopes end in pots of sweet orange liquid,

or in dark brown treacle! The exact time for boiling and the height of the boiling seem to differ in every brew of marmalade. What one cook finds an infallible recipe becomes a mockery with another. In fact, only a long and painful practice ever makes perfection. But Bridget, like other young and hopeful cooks, dreamt of clear golden jelly in which the deeper gold of the peel should glow richly. She dreamt of a perfect mean between liquid and toffee, and in the meanwhile she stirred, and read her anthology.

At half-past four there was a ring at the bell. As Bridget had no afternoon callers she paid scant regard to the wild disorder of her hair, or to the rent in her apron. Holding the spoon still in her hand she went to the door and opened it.

There was a hansom cab at the gate, and from it two ladies descended and entered the tiny garden. Had angels suddenly entered she could have felt scarcely less astonishment. The ladies were unlike anything usually seen in Scots Road. They had such hats as bewilder the passer-by in milliners' windows; they had French shoes and silk petticoats and beautiful furs; and the wonder and beauty of them attracted three little boys in less than two minutes, and all Scots Road rushed to its windows and looked frankly forth, and had not the door been open the three little boys would have become the nucleus of a crowd about the gate.

Bridget knew at once that the prettiest of the

two ladies was Lucilla—Jeremy's Lucilla. She was more beautiful than her photograph, and when she spoke her voice was very pleasant. She asked if Mr. Fleetwood were in, and Bridget replied that he would be in presently, and begged them to come in and wait for him.

Lucilla agreed. She always contrived to be happy and well served, and it seemed to her quite natural that the fire should be lit for her at once and tea prepared.

"What nice rooms Jeremy has," she exclaimed, "and how very lady-like they are! If it weren't for the smell of tobacco, I shouldn't believe that he lives here."

Bridget was lighting the fire, and Lucilla and her companion were looking about.

"Oh, how darling of him!—he has put violets before my photograph," said Lucilla. "I never thought Jeremy was romantic."

Bridget smiled. She knew that the violets had been her thought. She hoped that Lucilla would not question Jeremy.

The fire lit, she scurried to the kitchen to prepare tea. But instinct took her straight to the cracked little mirror on the kitchen wall. She looked into it, to confirm that terrible difference between herself and the girls who waited for tea in the parlour. Could they belong to the same world, much less to the same rank of society? Flushed, untidy and rough-handed, with no elegance or grace, what could Bridget seem

when Lucilla was near? Tears of mortification rose in her eyes, and she realized with a deeper sense of self-disgust that she was feeling jealous.

At this moment the marmalade overboiled with a terrible hissing into the fire. The cats, who should have been accustomed to overboiling by long habit, rushed to the scullery, and Bridget knew by the smell of burning that her marmalade had "caught the pot."

The angry cook moved the pot from the fire and put the kettle on to boil. Then she sat down to make toast, and the cats cautiously returned.

"Oh, cats, you're no use!" she said in vexation. "If you were as good as the *Struwwel Peter* cats which warned naughty Harriet not to play with matches, you'd stir my marmalade. And I'm angry with you, not because you're a bit nasty, but because I'm so plain and rough looking and so unlike Miss Lucilla."

Bridget contemplated her two cats, and put a question to them solemnly. "Did either of you," she asked, "ever feel cross because you are just plain Tabbies? And did you ever envy Persian cats? Because, if you did, you know just the difference between Lucilla and me. I'm a Tabby—worse, I'm a ginger cat, and she's a beautiful smoked Persian."

A little later Miss Lucilla and her friend had tea. The tea was laid on a clean cloth, and the tea-service was old Belleek china, a wedding present to Bridget's mother. There were hot

toast and cake and jam (the last two luxuries were borrowed hastily from Mr. Horrocks), and Bridget's hair was brushed and she wore a clean apron.

Lucilla expressed delight when the tea arrived. She had the supreme art of "purring when she was pleased." She was like the prettiest and pleasantest of Persian kittens, and as she always purred she was always loved.

After a little while Jeremy returned, and Lucilla ran into the hall to greet him. Bridget, who was in the kitchen, felt in honour bound to shut her eyes and put her fingers in her ears, lest eye or ear should profane the sanctity of that first meeting.

But Lucilla, holding Jeremy's arm, was chattering gaily.

"Weren't you surprised to see me?" she asked, and did not wait for an answer; "but, you see, I had to go to the Claphams earlier than I had planned, and so Nina and I thought it would be lovely to surprise you. And I'm sure you're hungry: do come in and have tea while I talk, Jeremy. What lady-like rooms you have! And you're such a dear old bear. And, you old darling, you keep flowers before my photograph."

Jeremy stemmed the tide of talk. He felt, with Washington, that he could not tell a lie.

"Lucilla, Miss Joy put the violets there. She always keeps flowers before your photograph, she admires you so much."

"Does she? Oh, how sweet of her! I

thought it wasn't like you to be so romantic. And, Jeremy dear, we've eaten all the toast ; I'm so sorry. You see we were so hungry, and the nice dirty little maid came to the door, and she lit the fire for us, and brought us such a nice tea."

"Oh, was that the fair Amelia—a child in a short dress, and curlers on her brow?"

"No, it was a nice shabby girl with sandy hair and kind grey eyes. She had on a very dirty apron and no cap. She was so untidy, the darling, but she had such a pretty smile and such good teeth."

Jeremy looked horrified.

"Lucilla, that was Miss Joy, my landlady."

Lucilla laughed.

"Oh, was it? Then I'll go and talk to her. You amuse Nina while I'm away."

So, whilst Bridget was stirring her burnt marmalade, Lucilla came into the kitchen with a great rustle of silk and jingling of bangles. She went up to Bridget and kissed her twice. "Miss Joy," she said, "I do want to thank you for all your kindness to my dear old boy. Jeremy is so happy here with you, and it is such a comfort to me to think that you take such care of him."

Bridget, flushed with delight at Lucilla's kisses and her words, spoke eagerly :

"Oh, I hope you think he is well cared for ! I do try to make things nice for him, but I make so many mistakes. But I want to please him so much. Mr. Fleetwood is so very kind to Grand-

papa and me. And, being quite a man of the world, he gives such useful advice."

"Jeremy a man of the world?" Lucilla laughed. "Is he? I always think he's rather a quixotic old dreamer."

"I think he has the wisdom of a serpent and the harmlessness of a dove!" said Bridget gravely.

Lucilla smiled at her.

"What a duck you are, Miss Joy," she exclaimed, "and what a nice little kitchen you have, and what dear cats and what a darling of a dog! Do let's sit down by the fire and talk."

They sat down by the kitchen fire, and Lucilla turned back her skirt, and showed Bridget the wonders of a frilled silk tartan petticoat. Bridget looked at her.

"You are even more beautiful than I thought," she said suddenly, "and I'm so glad. You see I admire Mr. Fleetwood so much. I don't know any young men except Mr. Miller and some of the tradesmen, but I do think Mr. Fleetwood the nicest man I could imagine. And you are just like the fairy princess out of a book; and you are so kind and good, too, that you will both be perfectly happy."

For once Lucilla's face clouded, tears rose to her eyes, and her mouth trembled. "I'm not good," she answered, "not really good in a purposeful way. And I hope we'll be happy. Jeremy and I are so different."

"But he'll be happy in making you happy,"

said Bridget: "there are so few people who let themselves be served and loved."

"One can't be happy to order," Lucilla answered with a sigh, then she changed the subject. "Do you like cooking and doing housework, Miss Joy?" she asked.

Bridget considered.

"Yes, I think I do," she said.

"And do you never want to go to dances, and play Bridge, and lie on your bed and eat chocolates while the house goes hang?"

"Well, sometimes I do want awfully to sit still by the fire. But housework has got to be such a habit that I don't really mind it. When I'm not tired I quite like it."

"But oh, you poor dear, have you never had a jolly time of being petted and waited upon?"

"No, poor people don't. But I think I've been almost more happy than most girls. I've always been amongst such kind people. When I was a little girl I did sometimes want to be lazy, but then I made stories and games to help myself."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, I used to pretend things were alive. Perhaps that seems very silly. But I think I learnt it from Hans Andersen: you know he always makes everything alive and interesting. And I found one could get quite fond of pots and kettles and brooms if one gave them names, and invented about them."

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"Oh, how funny! Did you really love your pots?"

"Yes, I really did. They all had names. Haven't you noticed that there are always names on pot-lids? My pots all have names, if you look at their lids. Their names are Baldwin, Kendrick, Stevens, and In-Victa-2 pints. One can be so much more interested in them when one knows their names. And then there is the Kobold. You know about the Kobold, don't you? He's the kitchen fairy, and at night he sits by the fire and tells stories to the cats, or frightens the black beetles away. And some Kobolds clean up the kitchen. Mine never does. But I always feel that if I leave the kitchen untidy he may go away."

"Still, I don't think I could go on dusting and cleaning and cooking every day. It would be such drudgery."

"You could do it if you had to do it," said Bridget; "and I liked it much more too when I thought of the angels."

"What angels?"

"I was reading a book of Mother's called *Blessed be Drudgery*, and I read a description of a picture in the Louvre. I should like to see it. I think it is by Murillo, and it represents angels doing all sorts of useful things in the kitchen. One is putting water on to boil, another is sweeping, others are doing other things, and a little cherub is trying to be very busy and getting into the

way of the others. When I thought of the angels being in the kitchen and helping one and being so busy I felt very happy, and did so want to have everything clean and pretty for the angels."

"What nice ideas," Lucilla exclaimed. "When Jeremy and I are married you must come and stay with us and teach me to cook and clean. Won't we have fun? We'll make cakes and sweets to surprise Jerry; and you'll be patient with me, for I am very stupid. Now I must go. Dear Miss Joy, good-bye. I do so love you, and please love me too."

"Oh, I do!" said Bridget earnestly, and kissed Lucilla warmly, and forgot that the marmalade was steadily turning to treacle.

Presently the hall door banged behind Jeremy and his guests, and it was late at night when he returned. Bridget came into the hall. She was still sticky and dishevelled.

"I've potted the marmalade," she said, "and it's like burnt treacle. And oh, I do congratulate you, Mr. Fleetwood! Miss Lucilla is lovely, she is like the heroine of a novel. And did you notice her pretty shoes and her silk petticoat?"

Jeremy laughed.

"Oh yes; Lucilla insisted that I should. Are you keen about silk petticoats, Mistress Bridget?"

"Yes. Of course I never had one. But if I were rich I think I'd get that the first thing, and rustle up the centre aisle at church. How surprised every one would be!"

CHAPTER THE TENTH

The Silk Petticoat

JEREMY in his character of man of the world was constantly consulted about the publication of *Hippolyte, the Pilgrim*. His usual advice was to begin at the top of the tree and work downwards. The book might as well go to a good publisher's, and to feel that Messrs. M. had his book even in their office gave Sebastian Joy great pride.

Long consultations took place, in which, rather previously, perhaps, the old man gave Jeremy his views on the paper, type and size of the volume.

"It is my legacy to dear Bridget," he said many times, and the young man wondered within himself of what monetary value the volumes would be. Jeremy himself had one of those small successes which put us in rare good temper with fortune. He gained a £3 prize as the winner of a competition in some weekly paper. He resolved at once to waste the money, to do no prudent thing with it, but to spend it as fancy suggested. It was during one of the lengthy consultations about *Hippolyte* that Fancy made her best suggestion. He said "yes" automatically to all Mr. Joy's suggestions and seized the first pause.

"Miss Bridget looks rather out of sorts, sir," he remarked.

"Eh? What? Bridget ill? Oh no, Bridget's never ill; she is young and vigorous like an eagle!"

"I think she has a good constitution. But she looks as if a little change would do her good. Even a day in town would freshen her up a bit."

"I don't think," Sebastian answered, "that Bridget would care to go to town. She has very quiet tastes. She is perfectly happy in her house life. She goes about singing all the day."

"Ah, but she's been singing the *Miserere* lately, and I don't think that's good. I think, Mr. Joy, if I may recommend it, that a little jaunt to Manchester would really do Miss Bridget good."

"But who would go with her? Her girl friends are in business."

Jeremy rubbed his chin and considered deeply.

"Suppose," said he, with an admirable assumption of a sudden thought, "that I took a day off and went with her. I'm an engaged old fogey—excellent chaperon, you know, sir, and I know my way about. Miss Bridget would not like to leave you, but our good Mrs. Crumb would take care of the house and attend to you, and that delightful Mr. Horrocks would enjoy a quiet chat with you in the afternoon. Miss Bridget would be back by about eight o'clock that evening, fresh and vigorous."

"Dear! dear! you have a marvellously business-like head, Mr. Fleetwood. You make your plans in one second."

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This was so far from being the case that Jeremy felt guilty.

"Then you agree, sir? We might go to-morrow in that case, if Miss Bridget likes my plan."

"Very well, Mr. Fleetwood."

When Bridget brought in the dinner Jeremy was consulting a newspaper.

"Did you ever see Bernard Shaw's *Candida*?" he asked.

"No, I've seen *Julius Cæsar* and *Richard III*. I went with Mother. But I've never seen any other plays. That was years and years and years ago."

"Then will you come and see *Candida* to-morrow?"

Bridget stared at him.

"How could I?"

"By means of locomotion, feet, and my powerful intellect."

"But Grandpapa?"

"He desires that you shall go under my escort. Mrs. Crumb and Mr. Horrocks will be on guard."

"But—oh, but—it would be so extravagant!"

"No, it wouldn't. It's to be my treat and my great privilege."

"I couldn't let you, Mr. Fleetwood. It's so very kind of you. But I think you should save your money."

"If you don't let me spend it that way I shall lay it on a horse, or play pitch-and-toss like a devil. You must come, Miss Bridget. We've

both been so good and solemn lately, do let's have one day off."

Bridget reflected. Jeremy pushed his advantage.

"Who told me that the receiver conferred a favour on the giver? Prove it now by granting my favour."

But Bridget was thinking of her wardrobe. Could she disgrace Jeremy by a shabby coat and skirt, a faded hat and down-trodden shoes? But yet she longed to go.

"May I think it over for an hour?" she asked.

"If you agree at the end."

Bridget went to the kitchen, vaguely hopeful that a fairy godmother might appear with ready-made garments of an excellent fit. But it was Joan Elphinstone who came in.

Joan heard the invitation, and smiled at Bridget's excited and eager face.

"Mr. Fleetwood has certainly not seen my coat and skirt and Sunday hat; you shall wear those, Bride—I think we're much the same height. I'll go home now and come back with them."

Joan went off immediately and returned in half-an-hour. Bridget protesting, but radiant, tried on her friend's best clothes.

"You look charming," said Joan. "Now wear them, and my blessing go with them. I shall like them more because you've worn them."

Bridget hugged her.

"Oh, dear Joan, I wish you could come too."

"Thank you, Bride; but I don't think Mr.

Fleetwood would like that. And you see I can't come, but I shall be thinking of you."

Bridget looked at herself in Joan's hat with deep interest.

"I must tell Mr. Fleetwood that I'm wearing all your clothes," she remarked.

"Bridget, you must do nothing of the kind! That would be quite a *bêtise*."

"Oh, but I must, for he'll know they're not mine, and I'd like him to know how kind you are, Joan."

"Don't trouble to say anything about your clothes; it wouldn't be at all the right thing."

When Joan was gone, Bridget gave herself up to anticipation and to work. She mended her stockings, and plaited her hair, and cleaned her shoes. For Jeremy insisted on starting in the morning. He refused to listen to Bridget's economical suggestions of an early lunch, or a packet of sandwiches.

So the start was made at twelve o'clock, after a prolonged farewell to Beau, who watched their departure with gazelle-like eyes from the parlour window, his chin resting on the sill. So intent was Jeremy on pleasing his landlady, that at a word he would have taken Beau too.

Both Jeremy and Bridget were rather shy until they were in the train. Then the comfort and quiet of a first-class carriage thawed the shyness. Bridget's face was radiant with excitement.

"Is my hat straight?" she asked. "I mean is Joan's hat straight on my head?"

Jeremy laughed.

"Yes, or should it be a shade to the northwest?"

"Joan lent me all my clothes," said the candid Bridget; "it was so kind of her, and I do hope I shall not stretch her gloves too much."

Jeremy was deeply distressed by this confession, though he treated it gaily. He only realized every now and then the extreme poverty of the Joys. But he knew that its extremity fell on Bridget, and he wondered what the end would be. But for this day anxieties were banished. The sun shone, the air was spring-like, and the streets of Manchester had a great cheerfulness about them.

"Now," said Jeremy, "you are not to mention expense to me, Miss Bridget; I have a certain sum of money that has to be spent. It came to me by a mere fluke, and it is to be flung about as a sacrifice to Fortune, who is a careless lady. You are to be the Marchioness of Burnton, and I am the Duke of Whitechapel. Let's 'act according.'"

But the Marchioness of Burnton quite forgot her *rôle* during lunch time, and looked so delighted and amazed by the magnificence of all she saw that the most uninitiated would have detected her. She found Jeremy a charming companion. He had in him that essential quality of strength—gentleness. Jeremy was always quiet, sympathetic, ready to listen, and quick to appreciate those little things that the hurried and the noisy do not

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notice. He was an ardent fisherman, and he had those virtues that belong to fishermen, who are, one fancies, Nature's quietest and best pupils.

When they had had as good a lunch as two healthy and hungry people required, Jeremy with a truly ducal air hailed a hansom, and directed the man to drive to the theatre where *Candida* was being played. When they alighted Bridget by instinct went to the Pit door.

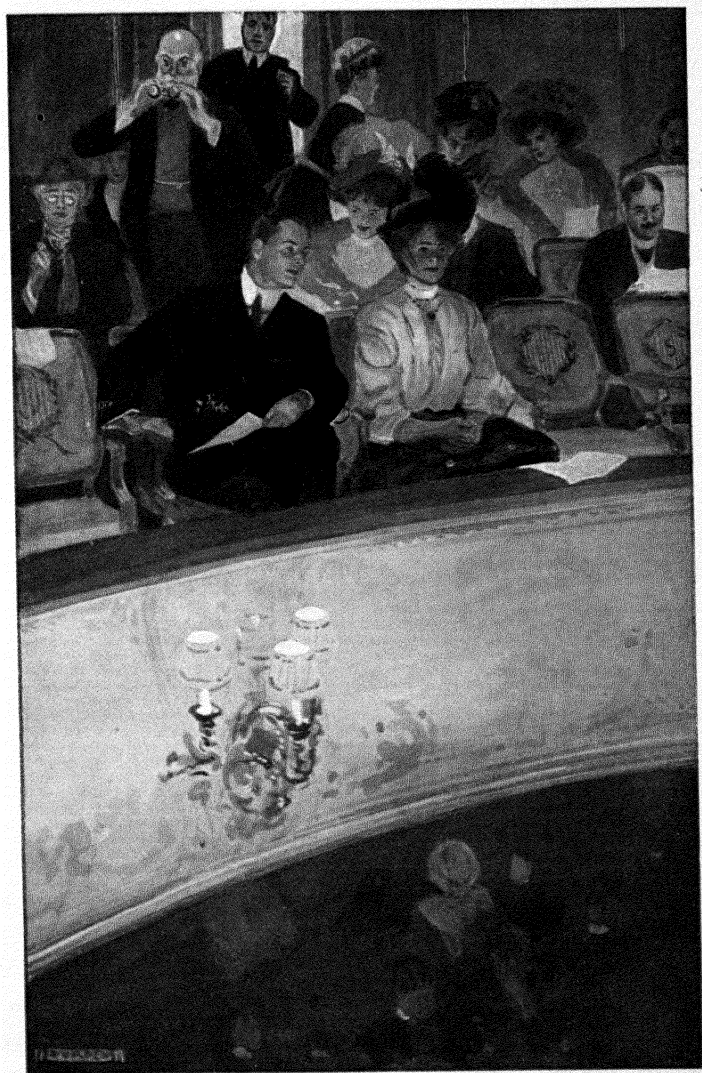
"Marchionesses and dukes never go to the Pit," said Jeremy, "they are born and die in the Dress Circle."

"Oh, not the Dress Circle! I'm not grand enough!" Bridget protested.

"You are; you look perfectly charming. Besides, I've booked the seats, so the Pit is out of the question."

With what deep and silent excitement did Bridget enter the charmed circle that is called Dress! Who can rightly, who is not used to weary queues and crushing in the Pit, appreciate the sense of dignity, of luxury, of infinite superiority that belongs to the Dress Circle? A superb and haughty individuality appertains to its members. The Pitites are a herd of intelligent sheep huddled in rows. But the Dress Circlers sit on separate seats and sun their separate entities in the electric light.

Jeremy was to the manner born, but Bridget enjoyed herself too obviously for the true Dress Circler. And then when the music began what



“‘Marchioness, a penny for your thoughts.’”

wonder and delight ! Is there any girl still under twenty who could feel quite placid and unmoved through the first chirp of tuned fiddles and through the blaze of the whole orchestra ? If there be such a girl she must have lost or squandered all her dowry of fair hopes and impossible dreams. She must by some ill fortune or through her deliberate fault have torn aside that magical flower-wrought curtain that divides youth from maturity.

Bridget found herself in a sort of spiritual Aladdin's cave, transformed from plain Bridget Joy into a lady of high degree. And it was in this Aladdin's cave that she became aware of a change in her life, a change beautiful and illuminating as sunlight in a dark room, but still prescient of a sorrow deeper than any sorrow she had known.

"Marchioness, a penny for your thoughts."

Bridget turned and looked at Jeremy.

"If you were to bid a thousand pounds I wouldn't tell you," she said gravely.

"Now, you look like the veiled Isis, and I feel inclined to offer three thousand at the least."

"Oh, hush, the curtain's going up !"

Jeremy was profoundly curious to know the effect of *Candida* on a mind so wholly unsophisticated as his companion's. He knew that Bridget, unused to the theatre, would respond to every tone in the play. He saw by her rapt face that her whole mind was absorbed in it.

When the curtain fell for the last time he asked her verdict.

"Isn't it terrible that it's over?" she said disconsolately. "I don't think I shall ever be so happy again. What do I think? Oh, I think it's wonderful; but it was very hard for Candida to choose between the two men. She must have wished she could have had them both."

"I fear the laws of England are less sympathetic than you, Miss Bridget."

"No, of course she couldn't, so I'm glad that she stuck to James. For James was the nicest, and I don't think he'll ever feel quite happy again now that he knows that Candida pays the bills and he gives the presents. And besides, he'll be wondering what the poor little poet will do. After all, love is very sad, isn't it?"

"It is indeed, quite the very saddest thing in the world."

Again Jeremy called a hansom, and directed the man to a leading draper's.

"I want to get one or two little things for Lucilla," he explained, "and then we'll have tea. It's such a chance to have you with me, for I never choose properly. Lucilla says so. She says I'm not daring enough. Now I want you to choose a daring pair of hat-pins."

"One can get cherry hat-pins at a penny each," Bridget suggested.

"I might rise to more than that. And then I want—a—a—silk petticoat. You'll have to get that, please. I'll pretend to look at something else, because the man might laugh if I asked for it. See?"

Bridget was delighted. The big shop was only some degrees less interesting than the theatre. And she thought it glorious to help Jeremy with his shopping. After a quarter of an hour of deep discussion and consideration the hat-pins were chosen.

"Now the petticoat," said Jeremy, "that's the vital thing. I want you to choose just what you like—a good rustler, mind, that would be heard a mile off."

"But Miss Lucilla has such a lot of silk petticoats—she said so. Is this to be for every day, or for dances, or for what?"

Jeremy considered.

"I'd say a sort of church petticoat," he explained, "one that would be generally useful."

Bridget, with some hesitation, approached the splendid young man of the petticoat counter. He concluded at once that this was to be her first silk petticoat, and was sympathetic and even a little paternal. He knew just what she required—good wear, a serviceable colour, but something bright that would look well with a dark dress. He produced green silks, crimson, purple, and plaid. Bridget tried to make signals to Jeremy, who was gazing solemnly at a tray of sponges. At last she went to him.

"You must help," she said, "you know Miss Lucilla's taste. And besides, you must decide the price."

"Oh, don't bother about the price, choose just what you like. There's a regular pink sporter there. What do you say to that?"

"That's quite a ball petticoat. But don't you like the scarlet ones?"

"Yes, they're daring. Choose one."

During this dialogue the paternal young man had decided that Bridget was the newly-wed wife of the gentleman who was so absorbed in a vision of sponges. So he called her "Madam."

"Pérhaps," said he, "the gentleman—your husband—would like to look at them."

Bridget stared at him with round eyes.

"Oh, he's not my husband," she said clearly; and Jeremy, who was approaching cautiously with his purse, beat a hasty retreat to the sponges, and bought one to cause a diversion.

The paternal young man changed his opinion. They were engaged. He beamed upon Bridget.

"This petticoat—thirty shillings—is just your style, Miss. It's a good colour. This is a wonderful line in petticoats, the best value in the market. Now I recommend this petticoat," he said; "you and the gentleman will both be delighted with it. A scarlet silk looks well with anything."

Bridget turned and made a sign to Jeremy.

"I think," she said distinctly, "that Lucilla would like this one."

The paternal young man saw that he had not yet rivalled Sherlock Holmes, and he pushed his wares aside, made up the parcel, and handed it to Jeremy. They retreated to their hansom and drove on.

"I'm sure Miss Lucilla will be awfully pleased with it," Bridget remarked.

"Oh, it's not for Lucilla, she has so many ; it's for——"

"I suppose it's for one of your sisters."

"Oh no, it's for a friend, a very dear friend, Miss Bridget—that is, if she'll accept the petticoat and the friendship."

Bridget started.

"Who do you mean?"

"I mean you. Now please don't refuse. I know you're going to be angry and frighten me, and spoil my day ; but don't. Listen to my excuse. You see, we're getting to the turn of the ways. I can't stay in Burnton for ever, alas ! I shall have to leave the kindest and best of landladies, and so, of course, I wanted to give her some keepsake. I wondered and wondered what she'd like, and then one day she spoke tenderly of silk petticoats ; and I said to myself how jolly it would be to think of her going to church in a silk petticoat that I had given her. And I thought she'd hear it rustling, and would perhaps think of her old lodger and say a prayer for him. What ? And I thought that when she's married she might wear it now and again, and say to the fortunate person in charge of her happiness, 'A queer sort of fellow called Jeremy Fleetwood gave me this !' Of course the person-in-charge will say, 'I like his cheek !' And then you'll say, 'Oh, he wasn't too bad ; Beau liked him !' Good Heavens ! Miss Bridget, I'm not making you cry, am I ?"

Bridget winked hard and tried to laugh.

"I'm only nearly crying because it was so kind

of you," she explained ; " and indeed I shall prize it ever so much. And, if it lasts, I'll be buried in it. Because it was so very, very kind of you to give me something much too grand for me ; it showed that you know how much nicer luxuries are than necessities. But indeed I should never forget you, or not pray for you and Lucilla. I only wish I could come and be your servant and cook and clean for you."

" You will come as often as ever you can, but as our honoured guest, Miss Bridget ; and you'll only go away because you want to go, not because we want you to."

Two tears eluded Bridget's vigilance and welled over ; but she wiped them away and smiled at Jeremy.

" Of course I'll come ; but I shall do things in the house, because when one loves people one loves to serve them."

The tea was the final act of that delightful day. Jeremy insisted on a wonderful selection of cakes, bursting with cream and crowned with icing, and muffins of the hottest and most buttery sort. And after tea they wandered about among the shops and into St. Anne's Church, where Bridget prayed fervently for the endless happiness of Jeremy and Lucilla ; and then, because, as the verse has it, " At length it ringeth to Evensong," the day ended, and they returned to the station, and so to Burnton, and to No. 8 Scots Road, where a faithful dog heard their approaching steps, and ran with a courteously-swinging tail to greet them.

CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH

Pilgrimages

AFTER that joyful day in Manchester the cheerfulness of Scots Road seemed to be eclipsed. Perhaps the gloomy days or the epidemic of colds had something to do with it. Bridget did not sing at her work, and Jeremy was silent and preoccupied.

"He studies a lot," said Mrs. Crumb, meaning that he thought a great deal. But those cheerful young men who were Jeremy's friends found him unusually solemn, and rallied him about his love-lorn condition. Jeremy proved unresponsive and even rather ill-tempered, and his friends decided that he was working too hard.

Bridget's friends, Joan and Mr. Frank Miller, did not have to seek far for causes of her anxiety. Mr. Joy was in failing health, and his impatience about the book preyed on his mind. Every morning he asked if Messrs. M. had written, and every morning Bridget went in fearful anxiety to see whether that dreaded "declined with thanks" had arrived. Then the money difficulties grew with every expense of the household. Bridget, without consulting Jeremy, sold everything of value in the house to try and keep pace with her

expenses. And Jeremy guessed and could not help, because he was without means to help. He saw that Bridget took in sewing, and he knew that she often came upstairs at one, or even two, in the morning. He saw that her eyes were red and heavy, and her face worn with anxiety, but he could not, for her pride's sake, help her, except in small ways. When Joan offered Bridget all her savings, Bridget refused.

"I could never pay you back, Joan dear," she said, "and it would break my heart to take it as a gift. I know this won't last long. If Grandpapa can end his life in any peace, that's all that matters."

Joan put her arms round the girl. "Bridget, have you any plans for the future?" she asked.

"Oh yes, I believe there is always work for a girl who will work, even if she is untrained."

Every Sunday evening Mr. Miller escorted her to church, and then returned to the little house to read aloud or to talk on all manner of subjects. And generally Jeremy and Mr. Miller met, and the oftener they met the more they liked one another and the more glowing grew their praises, each of the other, to Bridget.

The days went on, and Easter came, and Jeremy was asked to spend his holidays with relations of Lucilla's. There was to be a dance, and theatricals, and motor-driving, all of which bright prospects left Jeremy gloomy. But at Lucilla's command he went. On the last morning

he went to see Sebastian Joy. The old man took his hand and held it long.

"Ah, my dear boy, we may never meet again!" said he: "if so, God bless you. You have a true and noble nature, though I do not think you are intellectually gifted. But I believe that earnest purpose and zeal for others are, perhaps, better than the gifts of the Muses. I may be a classic, but you, I foresee, will be a good and useful man. And I only wish that I could have commended my dear Bridget to your charge, but as you are already engaged that is not to be."

"No, but I hope your grand-daughter will always be my friend and accept me as hers. If you feel ill or in any way need me, wire for me at once, Mr. Joy. I promise I'll come."

To Bridget, Jeremy said nothing but "Good-bye": he knew that Bridget would never consent to send for him.

She watched him going down the street, then went back to the kitchen to reckon up her bills. There was no money at the bank now, and there was only the actual furniture to be sold. She herself lived on tea and bread-and-butter, but Mr. Joy had to have stimulants, and nourishing soups and jellies. Bridget, who was not methodical or inventive, saw no way out of this tangle of difficulties. She laid her head upon the kitchen table, and envied her mother who had so long laid down the web of household cares. She envied the quiet people who, through illness, must

withdraw from the activities of life. She felt like Atlas, the world upon her shoulders. Then a cold nose nuzzled into her hand, and two earnest eyes said plainly, "You have still a dog. I am always ready to stand by you."

Bridget lifted him, big as he was, on to her knee and pressed her cheek against his smooth coat.

"But if we go to the workhouse, Beau, they won't let you in," she said. Some days after this, Sebastian Joy inquired if the letter had arrived from Messrs. M. Bridget shook her head.

"Then you must write to them and ask if they have decided. And Bridget, I should like you to wire to Mr. Fleetwood. I feel myself very feeble, and I should feel better if he were here. He is a medical man. Oh, if only that letter would come, Bridget! Waiting is so hard when one is old. And surely they have not many books like mine."

"Perhaps they are all reading it, Grandpapa," Bridget suggested, trying to look hopeful; "anyway, I'll write to-day."

She went downstairs, resolved not to wire for Jeremy, however her own wishes prompted her to do so. But she wrote to the publishers. Sometimes, in the humdrum sounds of business there rings a note of passionate human feeling. It is generally futile, always pitiable, the appeal of a miserable unit against the world that is crushing it out of existence or out of happiness. Bridget

felt sure, rightly, no doubt, that in the great publishing house there were many who would feel for Sebastian Joy and offer him some sympathy and encouragement. She described the writing of the book and the fair hopes in which it had been sent to them, and she begged, humbly but passionately, that if the book were declined some message of sympathy and commendation might be sent to the old man on his death-bed.

The letter was despatched, but it was written too late. That night a bulky registered parcel arrived. It was *Hippolyte, the Pilgrim*.

Bridget took the parcel and put it in the kitchen cupboard, resolved to delay the evil news as long as possible. She made some arrowroot, and took it to her grandfather. He seemed a little better, she thought.

"Any letter yet, Bride?" he asked eagerly, as she came in. Bridget evaded the question.

"Why, Grandpapa, you haven't even given them time to get my letter yet," she said cheerfully.

"No—quite right, my pet. But time goes so slowly. Bridget, I've been thinking so much of your Mother. You are very like her. You have just her little ways. She was so kind to me, your dear Mother. She always took my part when your Papa was vexed with me."

Bridget sat down on the bed.

"Grandpapa, I wonder if Papa will ever come back to us," she said.

"Yes, yes, he will, my pet. He'll come when he's tired, and homesick, and miserable, like the Prodigal Son—I will arise and go unto my father! But he'll go to his daughter. You must be kind to poor Papa if he comes back."

"Yes, I promised Mother, so I must. But I think I hope that he won't come back. It is too late now."

For some time they talked together of the past, of Bridget's childhood, of Mrs. Joy; and they spoke of happy, tender things that made them laugh together. The old man and the girl had a treasure-house of memories, and they turned over their treasures together.

"Now," said Mr. Joy, "I am tired. I think I shall sleep well to-night, Bridget. We have been talking of the past, my life is past, but yours is all future. A golden future, my child! Good-night, and an old man's blessing be with you."

Bridget kissed him, and went to her room. She was so very tired that she lay down on her bed for a moment's rest, and fell fast asleep.

When she woke she was very cold. Her candle had burnt down in the socket, and the draught blew the flame about. Some one was speaking in a clear strong voice, chanting, as it were, some rhythmic sentences. Bridget sat up in an agony of terror, scarcely knowing whether it was dream or reality. But the voice went ringing on, and she heard the words distinctly now: "'I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord; he

that believeth in Me, though he were dead . . . though he were dead . . . though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.' ”

Bridget knew that it was her Grandfather's voice. She started up and ran to his room. The old man was sitting up in bed chanting out the words. When he saw her he paused.

“Bridget,” he said, “you have come from among the blessed to be my guide. You were always my dear kind daughter, and you have not forgotten me. I am quite ready: they have not returned my book, but we must leave that for little Bridget. Though I am dead yet shall I live—and the book will live, won't it?”

“They've not written yet, but they will write. ‘I am the resurrection and the life. . . . I am the resurrection and . . .’ ”

Sebastian Joy fell back, dead. A stage of his pilgrimage had been accomplished.

Bridget stood and looked at him. Then she glanced at the clock. It was two o'clock. No one would be awake for several hours.

She knelt down by the bedside and from a prayer-book she read the prayers at the end of the Burial Service. Their nobility and the sound of her own voice gave her courage. Her heart was full of thankfulness that the old man had died without the disappointment of the rejection of his book.

In quiet gladness and hope, Bridget arranged

the room, making of it as far as she was able a meet place for the body of one whose soul had gone on the quest of the vision of God. She put a candlestick on each side of the bed, and lit new candles. She folded Sebastian's hands upon his breast, and set at the foot of the bed Jeremy's last gift to her, a pot of Roman hyacinths.

Everything was in order by six o'clock. Bridget went to the open window and looked out at the brightening sky. Then she remembered the Book, that story of a pilgrim, and she went downstairs and brought it up and laid it by her grandfather's side. His face was so calm, so happy with that aloof happiness of the dead that she felt that no publisher's rejection could have any power to move him more. For there is a wisdom to which work is everything, success nothing.

When Stevens came with the milk, Bridget met him, and told him of Mr. Joy's death, and begged him to let Mr. Horrocks know and to send Mrs. Crumb to her.

Mrs. Crumb and Mr. Horrocks met in the parlour. Mr. Horrocks was wiping the tears from his eyes.

"Such a girl as our Bridget I never knew," said Mrs. Crumb. "There she's been all night in this house of death and she's as fresh-looking in her mother's old black dress as though it was a wedding she was going to."

Mr. Horrocks nodded.

"Miss Joy is a lady," he said gravely, "and

she realizes that death is a friend whom one meets with hope and courage."

The necessity for action supported Bridget through the next days. Her friends were the sincere friends who are the truest in trouble. Each one of them strove to help and console her.

The greengrocer sent her flowers and a basket of vegetables. The butcher's boy, who had once at Bridget's persuasion ridden his pony round the kitchen, came with a letter of sympathy and a leg of mutton from his master. The grocer's wife, a motherly woman, took Bridget in her arms and wept over her, and expressed such offence at the mere mention of an unpaid bill that the subject could not be broached again. Joan came and stayed with her, as Bridget refused to go elsewhere till after the funeral, and Frank Miller wrote her one of those beautiful letters which only very reserved people can write, and sent her a wreath whose cost had meant great self-denial. It was in her sorrow that Bridget proved the essential kindness of the world. Every one who could help came to her assistance, but Mr. Horrocks was her chief adviser.

Together they sat in the parlour trying to disentangle the confusion of Mr. Joy's account book. There were old debts it seemed, debts that would swallow every single penny and the value of every article in the house, and still Mr. Joy's name would not be clear.

Emmanuel Horrocks wiped his glasses.

"'Twill be my privilege," he said, "to set my hold friend straight. Wait a bit, Miss Joy; don't you go to forbid it. The old gentleman and me was friends, and friends in life is friends in death. I couldn't a-bear to look down on his coffin and feel there was a matter of twenty pounds or so against his name."

"But you must let me pay you back by degrees, Mr. Horrocks."

"Well, well, if you're ever richer than me, my dear, we'll mention it."

The funeral took place one bright spring day when a thrush sang in the cemetery. Bridget and all the old man's friends attended it in love and reverence. Then Bridget returned to face the stern reality of earning her daily bread.

That evening Jeremy returned. Mr. Horrocks met him and told him of Sebastian Joy's death, and invited him to stay in his house until he had found new lodgings.

Jeremy went into the familiar little house and looked for Bridget. He heard her singing, and to him that showed her courage. He waited in the hall till she came downstairs.

Bridget held out her hand.

"Have you heard?" she asked.

Jeremy took both her hands.

"Yes; have I deserved to hear it from another, and not from you? I thought once you trusted me. I was a conceited fool, wasn't I?"

"You know I trust you. But you were happy

and with Lucilla. I could never take you from her."

Jeremy looked at her. Bridget realized with surprise that her self-sacrifice in not summoning him had only given him deep and bitter offence. Jeremy had a temper that his friends called "queer." Bridget now saw the queerness.

"Please don't look at me like that," she said, "I don't think I can bear it. You do not understand or you wouldn't be offended."

"I do understand. I know that Mr. Horrocks and Miller and all of them may help you,—but I mayn't."

"No, it is not that. And you are not helping me now. Oh, do please promise not to be offended any more, Mr. Fleetwood."

Jeremy went into the parlour.

"I shall always be offended all my life, and every life afterwards," he said bitterly: "in your greatest need you didn't want me, didn't even tell me. You can't undo it, any more than I can help being offended."

CHAPTER THE TWELFTH

Chagrin d'Amour

ON the next Sunday afternoon, when Bridget was consulting a time table, Jeremy suddenly came in by the back door. He came to her side and looked down at her with a friendly smile.

"I was a brute the other day," he began ; "have you forgiven me ?"

"Yes, of course. And you're not offended now, are you ?"

Jeremy laughed.

"Oh yes, I am !" he said ; "but may I stay to tea ?"

"Do."

"Will you let me make tea whilst you sit in the rocking-chair ?"

Bridget agreed.

"Of course I will. I see you're preparing for your grave responsibilities," she said. "I know Lucilla will insist on your making tea."

Jeremy with profound solemnity put on an apron and turned back his cuffs, then he filled the kettle and laid the cloth and put out the cups.

"Is Miller coming ?" he asked.

"No, he had to go and see some friend who was ill."

"He's not taking you to church then?"

"No."

"Thank goodness. Then will you take me?"

"Certainly. He and Joan are coming back to supper. It'll be the last time, you see. Mr. Miller said he wanted to say something to me particularly. I don't know what it can be."

Jeremy looked up. Bridget, who was warming her hands, gazed at him seriously.

"You don't know what it can be? Poor old Miller!"

"Why do you say that? Has something happened to him?"

"Yes, I think so. Something that happens to all of us."

"Oh, do tell me! Is it something dreadful?"

Jeremy laughed.

"He'll tell you all about it, Miss Bridget. Now, 'tea is served,' and we won't talk about Miller, for I feel quite sure that he's going to talk about himself. But we'll talk about you. You haven't told me one of your plans."

"I'm going away this week," Bridget answered. "I have found a position in the Midlands. Mrs. Tuke found it for me, and she and the Rector kindly wrote me such good testimonials, that I had a wire at once to say that I might come. So you see I've been very lucky."

"Where is it, and what sort of position?" Jeremy asked.

For once Bridget evaded his eyes and contem-

plated her teacup. She knew that if she told Jeremy that she was going as a general servant he would do everything to frustrate her plans. At the moment she felt that she could not explain her own standpoint to him.

It was not without long thought and the advice of her friends that she had chosen work that would place her in a lower rank than that which was hers by right of birth. Perhaps, had she been less worn out by anxiety and work, she would have struggled to find some position as companion. But at the time of her grandfather's death, when work was a pressing necessity, she lacked the energy of will, the self-confidence necessary to the struggle. So dark was the present, so dark the immediate past, that the future seemed to hold no prospect. What if she did lose caste? Already in Burnton she had spent her life in society to which socially she was superior. And she had been happy and had absorbed a democratic ideal to which honest labour and independence are the true claims to rank.

There had been long consultations, in which Bridget's friends had seriously and dispassionately considered her as a candidate in the labour market. According to that pitiless standard she was hopelessly inefficient. Besides her health and her good character, she had no recommendations. She was untrained, and lacking in the elements which might have fitted her for life

behind a counter. Such gifts as she had were domestic, and the only places apparently open to her were households where these gifts would be required. Bridget herself had suggested the idea that she should be a servant. It would mean a home, regular wages, and the chances at least of improving herself in cooking and in other domestic arts. Mrs. Tuke of the draper's shop warmly approved. She had that morning heard from an old customer of hers, a Mrs. Barber, begging her to find her a good general servant. Mrs. Barber, it seemed, was well connected, and would be capable of training Bridget well. And, as Mrs. Tuke said, a period of service might fit her for some place as housekeeper. And so in time she might struggle up the ladder and end in black silk in a housekeeper's room in some old mansion. Bridget herself had no thoughts or hopes for the future. She was very miserable and tired, and ready to take the first position that was offered. When Joan objected that she might spoil her own chance of a suitable marriage, Bridget protested a fixed and earnest desire to remain single.

So those who loved her agreed to the plan; they saw that she was young and unformed, and would be safer and probably happier in a home where she would have protection and care. The Rector of Burnton was consulted, and agreed that on the whole the plan was good. And he saw that, as a general servant, Bridget would enjoy

certain advantages which she would lose among other girls. She would now have the kitchen to herself, and would, perhaps, have more liberty than is sometimes the lot of the companion or lady-help.

And, as he observed, after a little experience she might set herself to climb the ladder and try to find some other place.

Bridget, very sore at heart, only desired quiet and loneliness. She wanted to launch away on the perilous seas of independent life. The lingering days of farewell and the too trying kindness of her many friends were straining her endurance to the utmost limits.

So when Jeremy asked her what she meant to do she could not face the long argument and the protestations which would have naturally followed. She prevaricated.

"I shall help, I suppose, with the housework," she said.

"Oh, you're going as lady-help, or as white slave, or something of that sort!"

"That's silly, Mr. Fleetwood. I don't suppose I'll have to work a bit harder than I've done here, and I'll have better"—she was going to say food, but she changed it to "better chance of learning things."

"But, Bridget!—yes, I'm going to call you Bridget for these last days—you've never even been to a boarding-school. Don't you dread going among strangers?"

The girl's eyes filled with tears, and two splashed on to the cloth. Control of her tears had not yet come to her. And the strain of the last days had tried her to the uttermost. Besides, there was a bitter trouble of which Jeremy, who was not at all conceited, had no idea.

"I suppose I do dread it," she answered; "but please don't let us talk about it. I think I—I can't quite bear it to-night."

Jeremy leant his elbows on the table.

"Look here, will you go to some of my people?" he asked. "I'd have made you go to Aunt Matilda if she'd been at home, but she's gone to the Riviera with some invalid lady. But go to my sister in London. She's a nice girl, and of course she'll like you, and then we'll find some work you'll take to."

"Thank you so much. But I think I'd rather go as I have arranged. I shall like to feel independent."

"But suppose you dislike them?"

"I'd try to find some other place."

Jeremy spread brown sugar on the bread-and-butter and offered it to Bridget, who accepted it gratefully.

"Of course," he said, "you will write to me once a fortnight, or at least once a month, to let me know if you're all right."

Bridget blushed.

"No, I won't," she said very firmly. "I think

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I shall not write at all. Joan will know how I am, and if you wanted to know she would send you a postcard."

"Bridget! how dare you say that to me?" Jeremy looked so very angry that Bridget's resolution wavered.

"It is better not to write," she said.

"Why am I to be denied every privilege of a friend? If you dislike me, say so. I can understand that."

"It isn't that. I like you—oh, ever so much," Bridget explained with such earnestness that she did not fail to convince him, "but we shall probably never meet, and we'd write at first, and then the letters would grow fewer and cooler, until at last they ceased, and that would be much, much sadder than if we never wrote at all. That always happens, it is just the way of the world, but it would make me sad. So, though I shall think of you often and often, I shall not write."

"And won't you give me one single thing to do for you?"

"There is the biggest thing of all. I had meant to ask you that. But it is a big favour."

"It is granted, O Queen."

"Will you keep Beau—he loves you already? I think he will not miss me much if he's with you, and you will let him sing to barrel-organs, and you'll play on the comb to him sometimes; he adores that. Dogs do love men better than women. Beau had such an admiration for you,

and though he's not a good breed, he's a pretty dog, isn't he?"

"Yes, he is. Of course I'll keep him; I'd love to have him. But he shall remember you. I'll tell him about you every morning and evening. But who will have the cats?"

"Mr. Horrocks will take Dorcas, and Mrs. Tuke will have Tabitha. Of course it is very sad to break up the family. But I've been telling myself that that is always the sorrow of family life. The children must scatter, and I'm so glad to have settled my children so well."

Again two tears brimmed and fell. Jeremy took Bridget's hand and squeezed it hard. She returned the squeeze with affectionate little fingers.

"You are a great comfort," she said.

"Have some more bread and sugar," he suggested, "and while you eat it I'll button your boots for you. Yes, I mean to."

"It's awfully funny being waited on," Bridget remarked; but she did not really like it, for the boots were boots to blush for, so worn at the toes, so trodden at the heel, so bad in the soles were they.

Then she dressed for church. She had inherited some black clothes from her mother, and to save expense she wore these, though their fashion had long gone by: a quaint pork-pie hat, a crape-edged veil, and a small cape formed her church-going wear. And it was not strange that

many girls tittered quietly to themselves and pointed Bridget out to one another as she came into church. For undoubtedly her trappings of woe were curiously antiquated and dowdy.

When the service ended the rain began,* and the two walked home under one umbrella. They found Joan and Mr. Miller there, and they all took supper together. After this meal the feeling that Mr. Miller had something particular to say which was making him very nervous and fidgety took Joan and Jeremy out of the room. Jeremy went to the parlour to look out his papers and other possessions. Joan followed him.

"Oh, I do hope she'll accept him!" she exclaimed; "don't you, Mr. Fleetwood?" Jeremy looked at her, and was silent.

"I think she'll be wise if she does," he answered cautiously.

So two people waited anxiously for a further sign from the kitchen. Voices murmured for a long while, then there were steps in the hall, and the door was shut. Jeremy caught his breath. He felt that his only suitable course was to go back quietly to Mr. Horrocks and ask no further questions. To insist upon seeing Bridget would be tactless and inquisitive. But he felt that he must know the issue of the conversation at all costs. So he made up an absurd excuse for going to the kitchen. He wanted some string—yes, string was an excellent excuse. He went to the half-open kitchen door and began his request. But when he had

reached, "May I have——" he paused. He had through curiosity precipitated himself into a scene from which he would otherwise have fled. For Bridget was kneeling by the table sobbing hysterically.

Jeremy stood between retreat and advance. Then he came in, closing the door behind him.

"Don't cry like that," he said helplessly.

Bridget took no notice.

"Bridget, dear, don't cry so much ; you'll make yourself ill."

And still the girl sobbed with her head on her arms.

"Can't I do anything?" he asked. "I'll bring you some water."

To please him Bridget drank the water and tried to stop crying. Jeremy drew her chair before the fire and poked the coals into a blaze. When she was calmer he spoke.

"Can't any of us make it better?" he asked.

"Oh, you could have done so! If you knew you should have warned him not to ask me that. If you guessed, how could you let us both have so much pain?"

"I see. Poor old Miller! Well, I thought you might say yes. In fact, look here, Bridget, I want to talk to you like a brother. Are you quite wise in sending him off? I know he's not your equal in birth. But this is a democratic age. Miller is a gentleman in mind and soul.

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He's a clever, rising man, and he'd take care of you."

Bridget turned a face stained and swelled with tears towards him.

"Did you want me to marry him?" she asked.

"Want? No, I didn't want you to marry him. But I think it would be a very wise thing to do."

"But how could I marry him if I don't really love him immensely?"

"Well, people do get married—for various reasons."

"For a good home?"

"Yes, for a good home."

"No, I couldn't. Besides I don't think I'd really suit him. I always thought he'd fall in love with Joan—I'd planned it all. This is a terrible disappointment. And I always thought I'd like so much to have a lover. And now that I have one it seems to me the very saddest thing in all the world."

"It is," said Jeremy; "but I do want to advise you well. I dare say you'd get awfully fond of old Frank in time. He's a clever fellow, far cleverer than I am, though that's not saying much, and you'd polish him up, you see. It's a good thing to be married, you know—on the whole. I shall be married, before long, so of course I advocate it. If there's no one else in the way I think you'd better take Frank."

Bridget rose and began carrying the supper things to the scullery.

"But if there is—what then?" she asked.

"Well, then, you couldn't."

"No, I couldn't."

"I see; I'm sorry I interfered. I hope the beggar is worthy of—of the great honour you've done him."

Bridget emerged from the scullery. She looked at him with such dignity of glance and bearing that he felt a sort of awe of her.

"He is," she said; "he is the kindest and most splendid man in the world."

"Good! Then may God bless you both. Are you going to marry him, Bridget?"

"No, of course not. It is quite sufficient that I love and admire him."

Jeremy heard Joan coming, and rose.

"Thank you for telling me these things," he said. "Miller will be glad, too, to have loved you. He will never regret that. Don't pity him too much. Good-night."

Jeremy kissed her hand and hastily turned to the door as Joan came in. Joan looked at Bridget and then at Jeremy very severely.

"Good-night, Mr. Fleetwood," she said.

CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH

A Chance Acquaintance

BRIDGET was in the train on her way to her first situation. The agony of farewell was over, but there were many lions still in the way, lions of shyness, and homesickness and terror. All the troubles of her life seemed to have culminated on this terrible day. She envied the dogs in the streets of Burnton because they remained there and were not hustled into a new, strange world.

The very tenderness of her friends had in one way made her less able to bear the separation. To all a farewell had been said, and each had given her some little offering, even down to the butcher-boy, who presented a midget photograph of himself, and to Amelia, who sacrificed a six-penny paste brooch to affection. Joan had given her the necessary black dress, and Mrs. Tuke had presented caps and aprons. Laura, who thought Bridget very vulgar even to dream of service, gave a soiled feather boa and a pair of high-heeled shoes. The kind grocer's wife offered print dresses. And Mr. Miller, who was very sore in heart, presented *Peer Gynt* and Tennyson.

Mr. Horrocks and Jeremy had seen her off, the

latter holding Beau on a leash ; Mr. Horrocks had on some pretext got hold of her purse and put three sovereigns into it ; and Jeremy had given her violets, and had held up the much-agitated Beau to receive her last kiss. And then the train had moved, and she had seen those well-loved faces through a mist of tears. And she had not died of heart-break, because, as an Irish poet says, "the soul cannot live without sorrow," and this agony of regret and loneliness was quickening a new life in her, little as she knew it.

For the old light-hearted Bridget, who was careless and easy-going, had been left behind in Burnton, and the new Bridget went out to face the world for herself. The new Bridget was very different from the old. She had loved and had been loved. And that had separated her utterly from her childhood. She knew now several of the great facts of life, love and poverty and death. But at the moment she was far too sad to think of the value of what she had learnt.

She changed trains at Stoke, where she had to wait for an hour. Stoke, to its own inhabitants, may be a cheerful and kindly town ; to the casual visitor it is as dreary as Limbo. Bridget wandered up and down its streets, and wondered if she should ever be happy again for as much as a minute in her life. Then she returned to the station, and found that her train was in. She chose a carriage where an old clerygman was reading *The Church Times* in one corner. When

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she had seated herself the ticket-collector came round. Bridget fumbled for her purse. It wasn't in her dress pocket, but of course it would be in her coat pocket. It was not, but then it would be in her petticoat pocket. It was ridiculous to be frightened, but she wished that the man would not be so impatient. It was not in the petticoat pocket, but then it would certainly be on the seat beside her. It was not. Bridget's heart seemed to stand still, and then to gallop off in a panic. She groped on the floor, she peered up and down the platform. The old clergyman groped too, but the purse was not there.

"I must have dropped it in Stoke," she faltered, "shall I go back, or can't I stay? I'm going to a situation, and I must not be late. I really did have a ticket, I promise you."

"Well, you must get out, Miss, I'm afraid. We can't wait for you."

"But oh! I have no money; what can I do?"

Bridget's face was quite white with anxiety.

"Can't help that, Miss. Get out; you can speak to the station-master afterwards."

She looked at the man in hopeless appeal, and prepared to leave the carriage; but the old clergyman addressed her.

"Allow me to pay for the present," he said gently. "Where were you going?"

"To Hanbury, but——"

"Then third-class to Hanbury, please; no doubt the purse will turn up presently."

The ticket-collector wrote the form, jumped out, slammed the door, and went his way.

Bridget turned to the old man with such gratitude in her eyes that no words were needed.

"Thank you a million times," she said. "And now will you give me your address, please? I will pay you back when I get my wages. You see, I am going to my first place, and I shall not have wages for a month or even a quarter; but I do hope you will trust me, for I shall certainly never forget your kindness."

The old man smiled at her.

"My dear, I should certainly trust you," he answered. "But how much have you lost?"

"Three sovereigns that Mr. Horrocks gave me, and three shillings. I think I must have dropped it in a shop where I went for hairpins, but I don't know the name of the shop or of the street."

"I am very, very sorry for you. And are you going to some place as a governess?"

"No, as a general servant."

"Ah, what a noble name that is, a 'general servant'; and what a beautiful office yours will be! You are going to serve others, to cook, perhaps, to clean and sweep and make things beautiful."

"I hope," said Bridget, "that I shall be a good servant."

"I am sure you will if you have high ideals. When one brings romance and imagination to the meanest task it becomes as beautiful as those

embroideries which are done by Hindoo workers on the poorest materials. If you do your work beautifully, you may be sure that in heaven the angels see it as the most beautifully wrought embroidery full of flowers and gold thread."

"I shall like to think that," she said.

The old man beamed, he bent forward, rubbing his dry old hands together. "I often try to persuade the girls in my parish to be servants, because there is such honour and beauty in the very name. But they do not understand me. They are not ladies, and it seems nonsense to them. They think servants menials, whilst I know that they are workers with the angels. Now you are a lady, and for that reason you will be a true servant. You will be a lady-of-all-work, and you will make all work beautiful."

Hereyesshone. She wondered seriously whether this kind wrinkled old man were not himself some wandering angel, or kindly saint, sent to brighten the darkest day in her life.

"You have helped me so much," she said simply; "you have made things look happy again."

"Have I? Then I thank God. Perhaps you were for a moment forgetting that all life is a sacrament. What our Catechism calls sacraments are but types of the great sacrament, which is life. Our whole life, so it seems to me, is the outward visible sign of an inward spiritual life. And so nothing is ever common or mean, but every work,

whether it be sweeping roads, or cooking the dinner, or painting pictures or making music is high and worthy. But it rests with us whether our work shall have the imprint of our spiritual rank."

Bridget resolved straightway that her service should be ideal ; and though it often failed through carelessness and weariness and slackness of purpose, she never quite forgot the old man's words.

"My station will be the next," he said. "I am glad to have met you, my child. Good-bye, and God bless you." He fumbled with his purse and she begged for his address. He raised his head and looked at her with bright eyes.

"I have no name and no address. I am just an old man who claims the privilege of helping the young and brave. Here is a sovereign, my child ; take it, I beg, for the sake of One who worked for thirty years as a Carpenter. You will feel, I think, that to refuse it would pain me much, and so you will accept it with an old priest's blessing."

She took the sovereign. Then she clasped his hand.

"Thank you," she said, "I shall never forget you. I think you must be an angel in disguise."

"No, I am not. And I say to you again, dear little lady, that when your hands are rough and red you can say to yourself that the Mother of our Saviour was a peasant woman who worked with her hands. I do not think she had fine

white hands ; I think they were marred with service. To my mind a toil-worn hand is more beautiful than the whitest hand in the world."

The train slowed, and the old clergyman got out, shutting the door carefully behind him. And he stood, his hat raised, until Bridget, who leaned recklessly out of the carriage window, was to be seen no more.

This chance encounter had braced her courage. She reached Hanbury with a cheerful face and a courageous heart. Having directed that her box should be sent to Mrs. Barber's, she set out to find her way. But the road was a distant one, and she had some difficulty in reaching it. But there were many kind people ready to help her, for Bridget contrived to find kindness wherever she went.

After long wandering she espied a schoolboy who was strolling along, his books under his arm. She liked his face, and ventured to accost him.

"Can you tell me, please, the way to Belle View House, where Mr. Barber lives?" she asked.

The boy glared at her through very large round spectacles ; he looked just like a considerably surprised owl.

"Of course I can," he said, as though her request were an insult to his mental powers. "Wouldn't it be queer if I couldn't, after having been born there, and after having lived there sixteen weary years?"

"Oh, then, you're Mr. Barber?" Bridget asked.

"I'm not *the* Mr. Barber—he's poor old Pater ; and I'm not even the next Mr. Barber, for he's Walsie ; but I'm Mr. Gusty Barber. But come on now, I'm simply dying of famine. I'll show you the way."

"Thank you," said Bridget, and walked beside him.

The spectacles turned a scrutinizing glare on her face.

"Are you coming to call on the Mater ?" he asked.

"No, I'm the new servant."

"Oh, my hat ! You don't talk like one, though now I see you are dressed rather like a servant. I don't mean like a grand one on out-days, for they beat the Mater even when she's in her war-paint. Well, I'm sorry for you, if you're going to be our slavey."

Bridget's heart sank.

"Why do you say that, Mr.—Master Gusty ?" Gusty grinned.

"You've got my name all right," he said. "Well, I pity you, because we're a queer lot, always on the boil, you see. There's never any peace in our house. Whenever you think you'll have a quiet time in any place, some one heaves you out of it. Our house is too small for us, and our income is much too small. You see, we're related to a lord, and that's been the undoing of us."

"How do you mean ?"

"Well, the Pater is related to Lord Walsall, and so we try to live like Lord Walsall; and he has fourteen thousand a year, and we have four hundred, so you see it's hard work. You'll hear a lot about Lord Walsall, he's always on tap; and he spoils everything and does us no good."

"Is he a nice man?"

"Oh, bless you, we don't know him! But he's like a sort of household god to us. Pater can't hob-nob with old Jenkins, because he has a draper's shop, and Pater loves old Jenk. And I can't chum with any of the Grammar School boys because they're not up to us, the Mater says; and Walsie gives himself idiotic airs to match the Peerage. But if you ask me, I'm off lords altogether. I'd much rather have a jolly tradesman." With this republican speech Gusty seemed much gratified.

He swung open an iron gate which bore the legend "Belle View House," and remarked, "Here's the place."

Bridget saw a red brick house with bow windows, a very small garden, and an asphalt passage to the back door. She took this way, and Gusty followed her.

He opened the back door for her, and advised her to come in. Judging by the loud sounds in the kitchen they had arrived in the middle of a domestic upheaval.

Through the open kitchen door Bridget saw a slight, rather faded lady, in a soiled and much-

frilled tea-gown. She was confronted by a stout red-faced woman, who was speaking emphatically.

"Me not know how to cook for gentlefolk!" she was saying—"me, that's cooked for the honourable Mrs. Harthur Biglow! Give me the gentlefolk, and I'll know how to cook for them; but when it's them sort of 'alf-and-'alf with their airs and graces, my knowledge would be wasted."

"That's enough, Jane," cried Mrs. Barber; "leave the house or I'll have to fetch the master."

"Poor master! I've no fault to find with the master; 'e's a gentleman. But where it's slave, slave night and day, and junketing on Sundays as no Christian woman could stand, and boys messing up the house—I'm going right away, ma'am, I'm not wanting to stay; but I say I pities—yes, pities from the bottom of my 'eart—the poor young girl who's coming 'ere."

Both Mrs. Barber and Jane turned and saw Bridget in the doorway. Jane, the departing one, looked at her, sniffed, picked up some large parcels, and sailed out of the back door.

Mrs. Barber sighed.

"Drink!" she remarked shortly. "So you're Bridget Joy?" she then asked.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Well, Bridget, I hope you will give satisfaction. Now, can you be ready to cook for dinner? Two friends of Mr. Walsall's will be here to-night. I'll lay the table for once, just to show you our ways. And you'd better see your room now."

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Bridget followed her mistress up the back stairs to a very dreary little room at the top of the house. When she saw it her heart sank. In the chilly light of the spring afternoon the room looked so cold and unfriendly that the 'very blackest cloud of home-sickness settled on her spirits. She had, besides, the premonitory feelings of a bad sick headache, and the thought of cooking and of waiting at table filled her with dismay. She was glad when Mrs. Barber left her and trailed away downstairs.

Bridget washed her face and hands, and took her courage in a sturdy grip. If she could get through the first terrible day without tears and without giving way to her headache, she would have made a good start.

She went down to the kitchen where the angry Jane had let the fire out. Gusty was eating the remains of a jam tart, and a little boy was helping himself to jelly with his fingers.

"Biddy, you might make me some tea," said Gusty; "they didn't leave me any. Look here, 'Fonso, the Mater expects that jelly to come in for dinner to-night, and you've eaten it all."

'Fonso looked guilty.

"Can't she make some more?" he asked, pointing at Bridget.

"No, of course she can't. I'll read you out the *menu*, shall I, Bridget? The Mater writes it out on a slate. Ox-tail soup, Beef olives and tomatoes, Choufleur au gratin, and cold remains. The cold

remains were tart and jelly, but as 'Fonso and I have eaten them, there's nothing left."

"Perhaps I can make a blancmange instead," she suggested. She liked Gusty, although he was of the genus "Cub," and had no manners.

So she set to work and cooked as well as she could. Then her box arrived, and she scurried into her black dress, and into an apron and cap. She had to change in the kitchen, adjuring the restless 'Fonso not to come in. Then the door bell rang, and she hurried to the door. Walsie and his friends had arrived; Walsie was a handsome young man, and he admired beauty in others. He contemplated Bridget's face, then sighed slightly.

"Why didn't you get a smarter maid?" he asked his mother.

"My dear Walsie, one can't get perfection for sixteen pounds a year," she answered: "I think Bridget is rather a pretty girl."

"So do I," said Gusty.

"Oh, you don't know much about it, old goggles!"

Gusty grunted, and retired into the corner of the drawing-room. His sister Maudie observed that his hands were not clean, and drew Mrs. Barber's attention to them.

"Gusty, gentlemen wash their hands before dinner," remarked his mother severely.

"That's why Pater and I hate being gentlemen," he said, and left the room. Mr. Barber,

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who had been carpentering in an outside workshop, came in, dusty but happy.

"Pater, you and I are unclean," said his son, "and Walsie has two fellows there. Let's come and wash."

"Has the new girl come?" Mr. Barber asked in a loud whisper, which he always used when speaking of servants.

"Yes, and she's a good sort; I think she'll be kind to us."

"Oh, thank Heavens, my boy! Really, I dreaded every day when Jane was here."

Bridget came upstairs with the soup at that moment. She saw a small grey-haired man looking at her anxiously. He reminded her slightly of a worried Skye terrier. She looked at him with a soft, kind glance, and Mr. Barber was reassured. Then she struck the gong. Mrs. Barber hastened out of the drawing-room.

"Oh, Bridget, we *never* sound the gong when visitors are here; we say 'Dinner is served,' at the drawing-room door."

Bridget apologized. She was most anxious to please, but her head ached so terribly, and she felt so sick and tired that waiting was almost intolerable. It seemed to her that the room was full of eyes, eyes that plainly criticized her. She forgot many things too, and made Mrs. Barber look agitated. She took soup to Walsie before Maudie had been helped, and invariably handed vegetables from the wrong side. She wondered

if the dinner would ever be over, or whether she should be dismissed the next day.

There was much talk about "our cousin Lord Walsall," and Gusty tried hard to catch her eye and wink, but as Mrs. Barber saw the wink it was unfortunate. For it confirmed that much worried lady in the opinion that her son Augustus was a born vulgarian.

At last dessert was on the table. Bridget had forgotten to take off the crumbs, and had poured wine into the wrong glasses, but she was free to go to the kitchen.

She felt so miserably ill that she went to her bedroom and flung herself on the bed. Suddenly the bell rang violently. She started up and ran downstairs. The harassed Mrs. Barber confronted her.

"Where's the coffee?" she asked.

"Oh, ma'am," Bridget stammered, "I forgot it. I *am* so sorry. I'll make it now."

Mrs. Barber shook her head sadly.

"This is a bad beginning," she said.

CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH

Maid-of-all-Work

ALTHOUGH Bridget made a bad beginning she was not dismissed. Indeed, had she but known it, Mrs. Barber called her "my domestic treasure" in confidence to her friends. On her At-Home days, when the servant topic began, as it so invariably does, Mrs. Barber would sit proudly among her servant-ridden friends and would descant on Bridget's virtues. "I don't say that she's perfect," she would say ; "she's forgetful, and her cooking isn't perhaps first class. Of course I feel that Mr. Barber was used to really excellent service, and I should wish him to have perfection, but one can't have that. Why, even our cousin Lord Walsall has probably to put up with a good deal ! Some of my friends who have men-servants go through such terrible things. My uncle Sir Joseph Peterson had a tipsy butler who upset the soup down a lady's neck."

Due exclamation of horror, then Mrs. Barber would return to Bridget's merits.

"She is good tempered, my dear." A chorus of "Oh, what a blessing for you !" would follow, from ladies worn and haggard with their servants' tempers. "Yes, she is very pleasant and oblig-

ing, and where there are boys in the house that is essential. Augustus and Alfonso are very untidy, I really must confess, but Bridget never grumbles. Mr. Barber finds her quite ready to sweep up his workshop—in fact, she sometimes helps him with his carpentry. She is a very willing girl, I will say that for her.”

Gusty and the youthful 'Fonso shared their mother's opinion. Gusty had even declared that his poor old Pater and Bridget were the only persons in the house with whom life was possible. He spent much of his time in the kitchen playing with a dog which, forbidden in the house, was constantly smuggled into the basement.

Bridget was quite happy again. Three months of Belle View house had done her good. She was too busy to be home-sick, and her work kept her cheerful. The place was unquestionably a hard one. The shade of Lord Walsall dictated a grander style of living than was really compatible with Mr. Barber's income or with his position as master at the Grammar School.

Could Mrs. Barber have persuaded herself that she was no better than her neighbours, she would have been a happier and less exhausted woman. For the necessary aloofness and social leadership proper to Lord Walsall's cousin were not easy to maintain.

Bridget's work began at about seven in the morning, by which time she was dressed. She had then to take the water to the bedrooms, to

clean the range or the flues, to sweep the hall and to prepare breakfast. The morning meant one or more rooms to be cleaned, the breakfast things to be washed up, the beds to be made, and the lunch to be got ready. After lunch came afternoon tea, and then the biggest work—dinner, and its consequent washing. These tasks were monotonous and tiring. There is a sort of futility about cooking what will be eaten, and washing what will be soiled again, that makes these tasks lack the charm of constructive work. But the steady habit of every day, and the long custom of her youth, made these labours part of her very life. Bridget had never slept in a bed that she had not made, and rarely had she eaten a meal that she had not cooked, since her childhood.

There were many little extra labours that crept into her days, but she liked these, for they were done for love. Mr. Barber would peep shyly into the kitchen, and say, "Could you help me for a minute, Bridget?" or Maudie, with ingratiating smiles, would say, "Would you wash my blouse, Biddy; I *am* so busy, and I want to wear it to-night?" But when Gusty begged the favour Bridget was in her element. Gusty was her favourite, the more so because he was a favourite with no one else: Gusty was neither a mother's pet nor a mother's pride. He was like an awkward young colt, rough in manner and clumsy in movement. He was too short-sighted to be good at games, and his scholarly short-

comings were his father's great anxiety. Walsie was a bank clerk and a distinguished tennis-player, and a comet in the social atmosphere of Hanbury ; 'Fonso was a clever little boy, adored by his mother ; but of Gusty no good thing was spoken. The boy was a burden to himself and to others. He concealed a ridiculous sensitiveness under a rough exterior, and his aspirations he hugged to himself in doubt and shyness. Gusty was convinced that he was a clown, and felt bound to behave like one. Being out of place in the drawing-room, he repaired in his spare moments to the kitchen, unknown to the genteel Mrs. Barber. To his great surprise he found admiration there. Bridget laughed at his jokes, praised his drawings, and listened to all he said with deep attention. She shared his interests and helped him in every way she could, until the project was the stuffing of a dead rat found by the roadside, and there she rebelled.

Gusty's burning desire was to go to an art school, but this idea was thought whimsical and absurd by his whole family. Mr. Barber had sunk into a certain groove as a master at the Grammar School. He had once composed excellent Latin verse, but now the classics did not interest him. His carpentry and the newspaper were his only resources. The rest of the family had more interests of a superficial and ephemeral character, but in pictures they felt no interest, and Gusty's artistic pose they considered an affectation,

a suicidal affectation, for it is quite obvious that the salary of artists must be scanty, and they never dreamed of Gusty as anything but a drawing-master.

By some freak of nature the boy had developed interests in every subject which his relations considered dull. He liked to read poetry, and when he played the piano he chose classical music, and his ideas about pictures were the very reverse of his mother's.

Gusty, finding himself by nature opposed to the strong family conventions, erected a sort of bower of taciturnity in which he sat like a sulky little bear. Then Bridget came and loved the little bear in spite of his sulkiness, and strove gently to draw him out of his lair.

She let the boy sit by the fire and teach her Euclid, in the hope that he might teach himself something; and she floundered vainly through a Latin Grammar with the uncertain support of her tutor. But Gusty did not take to Latin or to Euclid, for all her help. Certain dull scholastic duties being done, he invariably returned to his drawing. He used the paste-board as a drawing-board, and Bridget as a model. Had Mrs. Barber's maid-of-all-work been vain she might have rebelled against those impressionist portraits of her which the artist produced. "Of course," Gusty would remark many a time and oft, "it's training that I need. Now if only that silly old lord would take me up I'd prove what I was

worth. I shouldn't mind starving in a garret, if I starved for the sake of being an artist. Better a starved artist than a bloated bank clerk."

"I never saw a bloated bank clerk," Bridget observed.

"Oh, you've seen Walsie; he's an example. But, Biddy, the bitter thing is that Lord Walsall wouldn't miss the money; he chucks his money everywhere—Pater says so; building almshouses, and endowing all sorts of schools and things. And he's got a sort of craze for cripples. They say he's going to give up the Norfolk estate and make it a cripples' home."

"How nice of him!" said Bridget.

"But why should the confounded little cripples have all the fun? I have an idea! I won't tell you yet, Bid. I've thought of quite a gentlemanly plan."

Gusty beamed at her through his spectacles.

"What *are* you going to do, Master Gusty?" Bridget asked anxiously; but her further inquiries were cut short by the sound of the bell. It was the late post, and, to her delight, she found a letter for herself. It was from Joan.

"DEAREST BRIDE (said the writer),

"You will be interested to hear that Mr. Fleetwood is now Dr. Fleetwood. I believe he has graduated with honours, but I'm not sure about the technical terms. But Mr. Miller heard from some one that he was considered very clever. He seemed so quiet that I never thought of him

as a clever man. But the chief news about him is that he is going to be married at the beginning of August: he asked me to tell you the date. It is the 4th. He'll be very poor at first, but he has some temporary place, and his great friend is Lord Walsall, who will probably help him to get some good position. I do hope he'll be happy, for I certainly liked him very much. He said that Beau desired his love to be sent to you.

"You ask about Frank Miller. Yes, he always takes me to church on Sundays. I think he has a noble and beautiful nature, and the more one knows of him the more one thinks so. I wish you *could* have loved him Biddy, but we both admire you for knowing your own feelings at once. We often talk of you, always in love and admiration. Much as your refusal of him saddened him, I do not think it made him feel bitter in any way. And I think that time is softening his sorrow into a tender memory that will not keep him from loving another. And indeed I think, Bridget, that she will be a fortunate woman.

"Ever your devoted

"JOAN."

Bridget re-read this letter, and told herself how very glad she was of so much good news about Jeremy. He was to be married in August: then she must send him some little present to show her good wishes. And indeed she did wish them every possible happiness, but——. A tear splashed suddenly into the sink among the dinner things. Washing up greasy plates on a hot summer night had suddenly grown an almost intolerable task.

As she ranged them in the rack she wondered how many thousand times she would have to wash up dinner things before she died. Day after day seemed to stretch before her in a dreary dun-coloured line. And what would be the end of it? Could she save sufficient for a little annuity in her old age, or could she reconcile herself to the workhouse? And Jeremy and Lucilla would marry and have a garden full of sweet peas and roses, and after dinner they would sit in the arbour overgrown by clematis and honeysuckle, and some one else would wash up their plates and knives. And Jeremy would smoke—he looked so nice when he smoked (Bridget was being sadly sentimental); and Lucilla would wear a flowered muslin, and she would sit beside him, and talk, and he would love her all the more because she was so much more ornamental than useful. And then, perhaps, they would decide to water the garden, Jeremy doing the hard work, and Lucilla flourishing an absurd little watering-pot.

Another tear splashed upon the knives. Bridget rubbed them vigorously. She knew that she was encouraging sentimental regrets and “idle tears,” but the thought of the garden was a peculiarly harrowing one. For since the days of Adam and Eve the true toil of lovers has been gardening, and their ideal place a garden in the cool of the day.

Gusty broke in upon her thoughts.

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"Biddy, I want to draw your hands ; come to the kitchen."

"I can't," said Bridget pettishly. "I'm busy ; draw Miss Maudie's hands."

Gusty came out meekly with a dish-cloth and began to dry the silver. He looked at her furtively, and Bridget caught the look and laughed.

"I will come," she said ; "I was feeling so cross at the moment. I was very disagreeable, wasn't I, Master Gusty ? But, you know, my hands are getting very ugly ; you had really better draw some one else's."

"Oh, I don't want them beautiful. I'm doing a beggar-woman, so yours will do quite well."

"That's good ! I can give you a quarter of an hour before I go up to turn back the beds and take the master's whisky to him."

Artist and model sat down together.

Gusty drew in silence for some time. "I do like you, Biddy," he said presently. "Most servants are so cross and huffish : you're quite an exception. Really, I sometimes think I shouldn't mind marrying you some day."

"Thank you, sir. But you'd have to ask my consent."

"Don't be offended. I should ask you very nicely."

"Perhaps, but I should be much too old, and, besides, your parents would never hear of such an unsuitable match."

"I shouldn't consult them. I should need a rather common wife, you see ; for of course artists can't afford servants, and I shall live at Barbizon or down in Cornwall, and you'd be just the very thing : and I'd paint you every day, so I shouldn't have to pay a model."

"How nice for me ! Now I must go upstairs. But will you do something for me, Master Gusty ; it would be so kind of you, if you would ?"

"What is it ?"

"Will you design an afternoon-tea cloth for me to embroider ? It must be the most beautiful thing you can think of—and not too difficult."

"Who's it for ?"

"For a friend—or rather friends of mine who are going to be married."

Bridget went upstairs while Gusty stood lost in thought. When she came down again he was drawing different flowers.

"What about oranges and orange blossom ?" he asked.

"The oranges would use too much silk."

"Doves with myrtles in their beaks."

"Too difficult."

"Well, then, apple blossom—that's very emblematic : you can do them another with golden apples when they keep their golden wedding."

"Of course. Yes, that's a lovely idea. Do design it for me, please."

CHAPTER THE FIFTEENTH

Who is Augustus Barber ?

Two young men sat at breakfast in a little room that overlooked a sunny Norfolk garden. The French window stood open, and all the sounds and scents of summer time came in. The garden was walled with yew, and a great mulberry tree rose in the centre of one green lawn, whilst the other was a glory of beds—pyramids, half-moons, baskets and diamonds, all full of geraniums and speedwell.

The whirr of a mowing machine made a monotonous summer song, and from the stable-yard came the happy complaint of many pigeons.

To Jeremy this place seemed the very land of peace. When he remembered the heat and bustle of Manchester streets, the wonder and enchantment of Wood Hall seemed the more precious.

The long strain of work had made him ill, and he had come down to Norfolk to get well before his wedding day. To one who was sick of town and much learning, there could not have been a happier place than this old stone house with its long low rooms, its views over flat bosky lands, its cool paved hall, its fair garden whose old walls were rich in snapdragon and valerian, and tapestried with the little lilac-flowered toadflax.

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The house was not very large, and it had not more than forty acres of land attached to it. There was a copse and three wide fields, where haymaking had just begun. But best of all its sunny haunts Jeremy loved the orchard surrounded by hazel trees. There gnarled old branches bent towards the lush grass, where purple self-heal and bluebells grew, and great bunches of mistletoe hung from the boughs. So quiet, so haunted of romance did the orchard seem that it made Jeremy think of legendary Avallon, the isle of apple trees.

He was contemplating with keen pleasure the thought of a morning in the orchard when his companion spoke.

"Who on earth," said he, "is Augustus Barber, and why does he write to me?"

"Well, as all your letters are petitions," Jeremy suggested, "I should assume, by the methods of Mr. Sherlock Holmes, that this man wants something."

"But, Fleetwood, he signs himself my affectionate cousin."

"Then you've found a relation."

"Yes, but I haven't the faintest notion where the relationship comes in. Barber—did I ever hear of a Barber? I must ask Mrs. Blacker; as my housekeeper, she feels it a solemn duty to know all about my relations."

Lord Walsall read the letter, then he laughed and handed it to Jeremy. Jeremy read it too. It was written, in not very excellent writing, on crested paper.,

"BELLE VIEW HOUSE,
"HANBURY.

"DEAR LORD WALSALL,

"I understand from my father that you are the head of our family, and so accordingly I address myself to you. I want you to use your influence with the Pater—but especially the Mater. If you get her on your side we've won the battle.

"The thing is this: I'm a regular duffer at books and games, and I haven't the slightest desire or ability for any profession or calling that they can think of. I want to go to an Art school and learn painting. I do think I could make something at it. Our maid thinks so—she's a servant, but she's very superior. Now if you told the Mater that being an artist was respectable she'd believe you. But she just thinks I'm playing the giddy rotter whenever I mention a paint-brush. I can't stand life in Hanbury much longer unless I can have something to look forward to. Pater says one must be resigned to one's lot. But he's fifty and I'm sixteen, and he's a resigned sort of man by nature. Can't you use your influence somehow? They say you're awfully clever, and we're always quoting you here, so whatever you say will be law.

"Please answer soon.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"AUGUSTUS BARBER."

"What shall you say?" Jeremy asked.

"That depends entirely on my cousin's drawings. I am going to speak at the opening of the Hanbury Art Gallery: I'll look up the Barbers then. I suppose it's a question of money. The point is this—is the boy worth helping?"

Who is Augustus Barber? 193

"Oh, you'll find him so," Jeremy answered: "given an incorrigible philanthropist, he'll part with his money somehow."

"One meets philanthropists who haven't much money sometimes. I have a notion that I see one now. By the bye, you won't object to being left alone here for two or three days, will you? I dare say you won't mind a little private meditation under the happy circumstances."

Jeremy assented rather vaguely, and wandered out. Lord Walsall followed him. Every morning they made a lazy and delightful tour of inspection of the grounds, the stables, and the farm buildings. Wandering is the art of the country, and a person who cannot either wander far or ponder long is no true rustic.

"I never," said Jeremy, contemplating the sunny house across a stretch of smooth grass, "look at the place without wishing, Jack, that you had at least twenty children. This is the true home for that noble old lady who accommodated her family in a shoe. We elderly people may love and admire it, but to children it would be the true Land of Faery. If I were you, I'd hire or borrow a large family, several dozen puppies, lambs, calves, kittens and pigs, and turn them loose."

"But don't you think," Lord Walsall asked, "that a little discipline would be needed—at the time of green gooseberries and sour apples, for example?"

Jeremy's face twinkled.

"You'd supply the discipline," he explained. "You'd grow a long grey beard and wear horn-

rimmed spectacles ; then your appearance and a birch rod would be quite sufficient."

" Seriously, Jerry, I think you're right. I think two places and a town house too much for any man. Of course, I must keep Walsall Court, but this place was my mother's, and I have often thought of putting it to some other use. But I've always loved it, and I don't quite take to the idea of turning it into an institution. The best of institutions are not homes. But suppose it were yours, what would you do with it ? "

" You're talking seriously ? Well, I'd take in about a dozen cripples, and as a doctor I'd try and make the very most of them physically that I could. And I'd associate with myself a good schoolmaster, and as good a craftsman as I could find. It seems to me that crippled children are the very ones to love using their hands, and to use them well. I'd just prove to the world what a vast amount the halt and maimed can do. But as soon as the place became an institution, I'd—well I'd drown myself in the garden tub. Not that institutions are not useful, but the whole plan of this place would be a country home, where the children should love every nook and corner of it."

" It would need a woman."

" Yes, of course."

" I don't think Lucilla would altogether like it."

" I don't know."

Lord Walsall looked at Jeremy with interest ; then he said that he must prepare his Hanbury speech, and he went towards the house.

Who is Augustus Barber ? 195

Of the opening of the Art Gallery in Hanbury the Barbers knew but little. They were quite indifferent about it. But Gusty knew the day and knew who was to open it. His mother was much more concerned with a big At-Home which was to be given on that day at the house of a wealthy brewer. It was quite the great event of Hanbury society, and the thoughts and energies of Mrs. Barber and her daughter had long been centred upon it.

The afternoon turned out fine, and the ladies beautifully dressed in summer gowns, big hats, and armed with parasols which they held in hands glorious in white kid, set off with Mr. Barber and Walsie, who looked, in the eyes of all his relations, the pink of perfection.

When they had started, Gusty went to the top of the kitchen stairs and shouted for Bridget.

“ Biddy—Biddee—Bridg-et, come upstairs.”

Bridget had looked forward to an afternoon of quiet work on that labour of love—her wedding present to Jeremy. She had taken her chair to the yard, and was sitting with Jacko, Gusty’s dog, on her knee.

She got up unwillingly, and went upstairs. In the hot weather the stairs seemed very long and the work very hard.

“ What is it, Master Gusty ? ” she asked.

“ We’ve an afternoon to ourselves, Biddy ; come to the drawing-room, it’s so cool there. I’m going to do a Madonna. I’ll put mother’s blue shawl round you, and you’ll be just the thing.”

"But the mistress wouldn't like it, and I do want to get on with my needlework."

"So you shall, if you don't wriggle about. Bridget dear, don't look unwilling. I'm going to do something fine."

"But if some one came?" she suggested.

"What matter! You could go to the door. Put your cap beside you. Now I'll pose you. Side face, please. That's it. You know, Biddy, —don't get conceited,—but you're quite like an old master, like a Botticelli or a Fra Lippo Lippi."

Bridget, who felt too hot to be conceited, sat down and turned her face obediently: the blue shawl was draped round her, and she was permitted to go on with her work. Gusty, with some guile, continued his flattery—

"Yes, you're not half bad-looking," he remarked. "Walsie thought you plain when you first came, you looked so pale and care-worn, but now even he says that you're quite passable. And the Pater said he thought you were beautiful when you smiled. Myself, I call you picturesque. You have a good chin, you know. The Mater says she is so relieved that you have no followers. It would be sickening if you fell in love. I never can stand people in love. It seems to me such rot."

"No, it isn't," said Bridget stoutly; "it's the most lovely thing in the world, if you do it properly. When you've been in love you'll be twice the artist you are now."

"You seem to know a lot about it. Oh, hang it, I can't get your nose right! I think I'll play

Who is Augustus Barber? 197

the piano for a bit. Do you know the *Peer Gynt* music?"

"No, but I know *Peer Gynt*. I'll tell you the story if you go on drawing for a bit."

"All right, you are a funny sort of slavey, you know, to read Ibsen! But tell away."

Bridget told that most wonderful, and delightful, and unsatisfactory story to the boy. And he heard her with joy. For he and Bridget had the same romantic minds. They loved the Trolls and the Boyg, and all the strange *dramatis personæ* of the play.

When she had done Gusty was greatly pleased, and went to the piano. He played well, and Bridget listened in delight; they were too much absorbed in the Trollberg piece to hear footsteps in the hall. And as the electric bell did not ring they had no warning of their visitor. He was upon them at once. He knocked at the door and came in—a pleasant-looking, tall young man, whom neither of them knew. Bridget snatched her cap and pinned it on her head. Gusty stared.

"I did ring," said the unknown, "but it hadn't much result. What a fine thing you were playing. Are you Augustus Barber?"

"Yes. Who are you?"

Gusty was very gruff and abrupt when he was shy.

"I'm your cousin," said the young man; "you wrote to me, you know. I am opening the Art Gallery to-night, so I had a grand chance of seeing you. Do go on playing."

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"I'll get some tea," said Bridget. She pushed forward a chair for Lord Walsall, as Gusty seemed quite paralyzed.

"You're Lord Walsall!" he said, as Bridget closed the door. "You were very kind to come. I'm sorry my Mater isn't in. She *will* be sick when she hears she's missed you."

"Perhaps I shall have the pleasure of seeing her some other time. I want to knit up the family connection."

Gusty twisted on the stool.

"Oh, but it's all rot!" he explained with deadly candour. "We always talk as if you were a near relation. And you're not a bit. I made Pater tell me, and it seems that his aunt by marriage married for the second time a second cousin of yours. And that's not relationship."

"Never mind, let's call ourselves connections. Show me the drawing you have there."

"It's awfully bad," said Gusty gruffly, and he poked the board forward.

His visitor studied the sketch for several minutes.

"You have bad faults," he said.

"I know *that*," Gusty answered with great humility.

"But they're the faults of an artist."

"I say! Do you mean that—'honest Injun'?"

"Honest Injun! I do."

"Will you tell the Mater that?"

"Yes, I will. Now what do you think of yourself as a scholar?"

Who is Augustus Barber? 199

"Oh, I'm a perfect rotter!"

"Ah! do perfect rotters make good artists? If you're going to an Art school you must work hard at books first."

"Oh, I would, if I had the Art school before me!"

"I see. Show me some more sketches."

Gusty left the room, and flew with thundering steps upstairs. He thundered down again with his arms full of paper.

Bridget brought in the tea. She had not scrupled to produce the best china and silver, and she had caught 'Fonso, and sent him for a cake; and he, generally so reluctant and lazy where useful work was concerned, realized the desperate importance of this family event, and made what speed he could.

She found Gusty and the unexpected visitor sitting on the sofa, looking at pictures. Lord Walsall's arm was round the boy's neck, and they seemed perfectly at ease and full of enthusiasm. Gusty looked up as she came in.

"Oh, Biddy," he exclaimed, "he likes the one of Jacko awfully, and Maudie reading! And he says I'm a regular terror at portraits. Isn't it jolly? I may beat Sargent yet!"

"I think he'll take a lot of beating though," said the visitor.

When they had finished tea, Lord Walsall took the boy with him to have a view of the Art Gallery; and 'Fonso, in a state of aristocratic jubilation at having taken tea with a member of the peerage, came down to the kitchen.

"I say," he exclaimed, "isn't it a pity he couldn't have come in a coronet and ermine cloak? It would have made the people round here sick seein' we had a lord to tea just as a matter of course."

Bridget, always Gusty's warmest partisan, looked forward with keen delight to the return of Mrs. Barber. When she heard the family knock she hastened upstairs to open the door.

The Barbers, in their full finery, elated by the excitement of the afternoon, sailed into the hall.

"I suppose no one has called since we were away, Bridget?" Mrs. Barber asked carelessly.

"A gentlemen came, ma'am."

"Oh, who was that?"

"Lord Walsall, ma'am."

Bridget had a dramatic sense, and she enjoyed to the full the intense surprise that was written on four faces. The surprise was mingled with the keenest disappointment on Mrs. Barber's part.

"And I wasn't here! I suppose he left his card," she said mournfully.

"He stayed to tea, ma'am. I sent Master 'Fonso for a cake, and used the best things."

"Quite right, Bridget, quite right. And only Master Gusty was at home: how dreadfully awkward! for he never will or can talk to strangers. I do hope he and Master 'Fonso behaved properly."

"Yes, ma'am. Lord Walsall took Master Gusty out with him to see the Art Gallery. When I came in with the tea, they seemed to have made great friends."

Who is Augustus Barber? 201

'Fonso came downstairs and joined the conversationalists.

"Oh, you bet they did!" he remarked. "They nearly jumped down one another's throats, they got 'so thick. You should have just heard the fine talk, Mater: not a bit the way we talk here! It was all pictures and painters and rot like that. You'd never believe Gusty could put it on so fine. But he did."

"Oh, 'Fonso, how vulgarly you talk!" said his mother. "I do hope you didn't speak like that to your cousin."

"He's not a cousin—Gusty told him so; but he stuck to it that he was going to be a cousin."

"And did he ask to see me?" Mrs. Barber inquired anxiously.

"I think he came to see Master Gusty," Bridget answered, though she was sorry for the disappointment of her mistress.

"Why, on earth, should he come to see Master Gusty? Still, perhaps he'll call again."

During the evening the now very important Gusty wandered in by the back door, and up to the drawing-room. Bridget had just brought in coffee, and he winked at her elaborately.

"Mater," said he with an icy carelessness, "here's a note from Cousin Jack. He wants you and Pater and the rest of us to dine at the Hotel to-morrow night. I said I wouldn't go: you see, I'll be seeing him a lot, for he wants me to stay with him next holidays."

Lord Walsall to be called Cousin Jack!—Mrs. Barber seemed almost stunned by surprise.

Bridget went downstairs, and sat down to put the last few stitches in that beautiful tea-cloth destined for Jeremy and Lucilla. Gusty followed her. He did not pretend to be either cold or careless, his face was glowing with happiness.

“You know,” he explained, “I don’t care about his being a bally lord one bit. The thing is that he’s such a gorgeously jolly fellow. And he’s going to take me to all the Art Galleries, and to a lot of Studios, and he’ll introduce me to the big pots. Oh! isn’t it scrummy? Dear old Biddy, I feel as if it were half your doing; you *are* such a good sort, and I know you’re as glad as I am.”

“I am,” said Bridget sincerely. “You know the proverb, ‘Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, but when the desire cometh it is a tree of life’? Now you’ve got your tree of life, and I’m so very glad. For it’s so good for people to be happy.”

So Bridget went to bed feeling that all her friends were on the threshold of delight. Joan would accept Frank Miller, Jeremy would marry Lucilla, Gusty would go to an art school. And, because she was made of quite ordinary clay, she wondered if she would always wash up other people’s dishes, and clean their boots, and make their beds, and if she were quite fine enough to find true happiness in doing so.

· CHAPTER THE SIXTEENTH

‘And so, after all——’

SEPTEMBER had come, and Gusty, quite obviously improved by his London visit, had returned with real zest to his work at the Grammar School. Already the ugly duckling of the Barber family showed signs of a swan's plumage. Now that he had the approval of Lord Walsall he was not considered queer because he liked pictures and books. And the family sympathy made him natural and agreeable. Gusty's name figured almost overwhelmingly in the conversation on At-Home days. “My son, who is staying with Lord Walsall,” proved an irresistible topic, even with quiet Mr. Barber, who had always felt doubtful of the earlier boastings, when the connection was unacknowledged.

But now Lord Walsall was coming to Hanbury to lecture at the Polytechnic, and he had accepted an invitation to dinner, and had asked if he might bring a friend with him. Mrs. Barber would have welcomed a hundred friends. She was quite bewildered by her own magnificence. But many problems arose. Who should cook the dinner and who should wait? She must borrow a maid. Should she hire men-servants? Gusty emphati-

cally said No. Should any one be asked to meet their guests? Who was fit for so great an honour? Gusty said that Lord Walsall didn't mind what people were if only they were sincere, hard-working, and kind. He would as soon dine with a grocer as with a duke. Mrs. Barber was shocked, and protested that she did not know any grocers.

"What about Pringle, dear?" Mr. Barber asked. "The head-master of the Grammar School would surely be suitable, and little Tupper is a good fellow. It would please them, and please me to ask them."

"And the Mayor, he's a jolly old fellow," Gusty suggested, "and he talks well."

"But he drops his *h*'s."

"Cousin Jack can swallow that, he said he liked it. And he told me he adored the Lady Mayoress."

"Very well! Then Mr. and Mrs. Pringle, little Tupper, and the Mayor and Mayoress and their daughter. 'Fonso, darling, there won't be room for you and Gusty, even with two leaves in the table. But you shall have what you like downstairs. Don't you think we should get a page boy from somewhere?"

"No, Mater. The Pringles would lend one maid: she and Bridget, with the charwoman downstairs, could do it all," Gusty answered.

As Gusty was now supposed to have an intimate and exhaustive knowledge of the peerage, his

word was accepted. But his advice not to fuss was left unheeded. The whole house fussed frantically for two days before the dinner party. Every drawer and cupboard was turned out in the vague fear that Lord Walsall might desire to make an inspection. The family silver was cleaned with desperate energy, a new table-cloth and serviettes were bought. The air hummed with contending and authoritative voices. Bridget was so tired by the afternoon of the great occasion that she found it a weariness to stand. But Mrs. Barber summoned her upstairs that she might review her appearance. Bridget, who looked charming in her cap and apron, passed the ordeal. Gusty, whilst washing his face violently in the pantry, pronounced her “stunning.”

“ I do think nuns, servants, and hospital nurses wear the most becoming dress of any women,” he remarked. “ I think you look nicer than Maudie, though she’s got on her knock-him-down-flat black gauze.”

In spite of this praise, Bridget felt terribly nervous of the ordeal of waiting at a dinner party. To be deft, quiet and ready is no easy matter when you are feeling nearly as frightened as a candidate for a music examination. She was glad that the Pringles’ maid, who was quite a beauty, was deputed to open the door and to receive the visitors, while she herself waited in Mrs. Barber’s room to help the ladies with their wraps.

With a beating heart she heard the door bell

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ring. 'Fonso, who was leaning perilously over the banisters, acted as a watchman.

"Lord Walsall and the other man," he remarked.

"What's the other gentleman like, Master 'Fonso?"

"Oh, he's like nothing special—he's just a clean, smooth sort of person."

Again the bell rang.

"The Lord and Lady Mayoress and Miss Jenkins," announced the boy, in a would-be butler's voice.

The Lady Mayoress and her daughter came upstairs. The former was a large, delightful woman, dressed in purple satin. She said good-evening to Bridget, and smiled upon her very kindly.

"I'm quite 'ot," she observed, and looked at her charming face in the glass. "I wonder if I should powder me nose."

"I think it's very nice as it is, ma'am," Bridget ventured to remark.

"Do you? Well, perhaps I'd best leave it. But me and Lord Walsall are great friends, and I'd like to look nice."

"I think you look lovely, ma'am," said Bridget, as she patted the good lady's dress and put in a necessary pin.

"So you do, Ma," echoed Miss Jenkins fondly.

"Well, now, isn't that nice of you? Young people don't often praise old ones. Thank you, my dears, I'll go down, then, and I won't bother about myself."

She sailed downstairs, and Mrs. Pringle came up. Mrs. Pringle was small, dark and anxious-looking. She scanned a worried face in the mirror, touched her hair, put in some hairpins, and descended.

Bridget went down to the dining-room, praying that she might perform her part creditably, for she felt a deep sympathy with the Barber family on this auspicious day.

Dinner was announced, and the procession started on its way from the drawing-room to the dining-room, a distance of two yards. First came Mr. Barber, rather flushed with excitement, the blooming Lady Mayoress on his arm; then the Lord Mayor, a small affable man, with Mrs. Pringle; after them, Mr. Pringle, a very bald and intelligent person, with bonny and loquacious Miss Jenkins gripping his arm firmly; then Maudie, talking volubly to the young man who was “like nothing special.” But in spite of this description, Bridget gazed at him in amazement and horror, mingled with a vague feeling of intense delight. Yes—it was Jeremy, the familiar Jeremy of Burnton days. He was very neat, and he was listening to Maudie with his usual characteristic mingling of amusement and sympathy. He did not look at the two maids as he passed them, and Bridget drew a breath of relief. She felt that she must have a space to get self-control, for she knew that her face was crimson.

Presently Jeremy must see her, and then what

would he think? He had said good-bye to her with the vague impression that she was to be some lady's companion or help. He had had no suspicions that she was a general servant. And, except when he wrote through Joan to thank her for the tea-cloth, he had never written to her. The happy Mrs. Barber swept by on Lord Walsall's arm, and then, when all had taken their places, dinner began. Bridget determined not to look at the guests' faces. She would watch their plates and pretend that Jeremy was not there. But, in spite of brave resolutions, when she said, "Sherry, sir?" her voice trembled, and the hand that poured out the wine shook so much that some wine was spilled.

Jeremy started slightly, and he did not hear Maudie's last question. In fact he said "Yes," when she observed that he would find Hanbury a very boring place. This ungallant answer, made at random, was forgiven by his companion in the joyousness of her heart when she beheld Lord Walsall at the other side of the table.

But Bridget knew that Jeremy had seen her; that he was watching her as she went from one to the other. She determined not to look at him; but at last, as she stood by the sideboard, an irresistible feeling made her look up. Jeremy was surveying her very seriously. When he met her eyes he smiled at her, and then turned to talk to Maudie.

To Bridget the dinner party was a fantastic dream of lights and smiling faces and constantly

changing plates. Every now and then she had to wait upon Jeremy ; and those moments were terrible, because she was sure that he must hear how fast her heart was beating, and see how absurdly pink her cheeks had grown. She knew that the Pringles’ maid must think her a shocking waitress. And the confectioner’s cook remarked that she “*did* look ’ot.” Even Gusty, who was wandering about the hall, whispered, “ Keep your head on, Biddy ! ”

But at last it was over, and she could go to the kitchen. The Pringles’ Kate smiled at her kindly.

“ You’ll get used to it some time,” she said ; “ why, you’re all of a tremble. Take some coffee. I knew one girl that fainted after her first dinner party. You’ll be better when you’ve eaten something.”

But even in the kitchen Bridget had no peace. She was assailed by an absurd fear that Jeremy might come and seek her there. She was consumed by the dread of seeing him, and yet miserable lest he should leave Hanbury without speaking to her. And where was Lucilla ? She was not with him ? But it was quite likely that he had left her for a day or two. She heard the men laughing overhead in the dining-room ; she felt sure that she could hear Jeremy’s laugh.

“ Well, you har’ upset,” Kate observed. “ Have some of the custard, now do ! ”

Bridget took food and coffee, and tried to regain her composure ; but when the dining-room door

opened, and the men went to the drawing-room, her fears returned. But Jeremy did not come downstairs; he was sitting with Mrs. Barber in her "cosy corner," and talking in that level, unemphatic voice to which people always gave attention. Though Jeremy seemed so quiet, Mrs. Barber made many interjections of surprise, such as, "You do surprise me, Dr. Fleetwood!" and, "I hope you're acting wisely." But Dr. Fleetwood talked on quietly until he had said all that he meant to say, and then, at Maudie's urgent request, he sang a Somersetshire folk-song which caused great delight.

So Bridget did not see Jeremy. She was upstairs helping the Lady Mayoress into her cloak when the door closed behind Lord Walsall and his friend.

"They're gone," said Miss Jenkins, "and on their legs too. You would think they'd drive."

"Well, mother, it was a great success. Wasn't it?" Maudie asked Mrs. Barber.

"Yes, it was. But oh, Maudie! Dr. Fleetwood has given me such a surprise. I don't know what to think."

* * * * *

Bridget was sitting by the fire; she had just washed up the luncheon things, and now she was polishing the silver and meditating on the events of the previous night. Jeremy had gone away, and he had not written to her or even tried to see her. And although in one way she was relieved,

yet in another she was hurt and disappointed. She rubbed the spoons with her chamois leather, and wondered if Jeremy had gone home to Lucilla.

There was a resounding knock at the back door, and supposing it to be the milkman she went to the door with her jug. Jeremy stood before her. Bridget gazed at him in silence.

“May I not come in?” he asked.

Bridget caught her breath.

“Oh, why have you come in this way?” she asked. “I—I should not bring you in. What would Mrs. Barber say? I’m not allowed to have visitors, except on Sunday, and especially not men.”

“But I told Mrs. Barber I was coming to call on you. So please give me three minutes at least.”

Jeremy came in and held out his hand. “Oh, Bridget,” he said, “you are not a bit pleased to see me.”

“I am, but——”

The bell rang. Bridget left her unexpected visitor and ran upstairs. Mrs. Barber wanted her to go to the post, and she ran out in her cap and apron. During her absence, ‘Fonso went downstairs to inquire whether any cakes had been baked. To his intense surprise he found a strange and evidently respectable young man in the kitchen, polishing the family silver. ‘Fonso stared; but as he saw cakes on the table he walked boldly in.

“Who are you?”

"If you insist on knowing it, my name is Jeremiah."

"Jeremiah what?"

"Fleetwood."

"Oh, mine is Alfonso Barber. I'm called 'after a Spanish ancestor."

"Was he the 'Barber of Seville'?"

"I dare say," 'Fonso replied. He never betrayed ignorance if he could help it. "Could you," he asked, "put one of these cakes whole into your mouth?"

"I should like a little private preparation first," Jeremy answered.

'Fonso achieved the task; and there was silence for some minutes.

"I don't think it's worth it," Jeremy observed; "it looks to me as if you lost the value of the cake."

"Tell me," said 'Fonso, "have you come to see Bridget?"

"Yes."

"Well, the Mater doesn't allow young men, so I think you'd better be hopping."

"Ah well! I've obtained a special sanction. And here is Bridget now."

'Fonso pocketed two cakes and departed.

When Bridget came in, Jeremy pulled forward her chair before the fire, and sat down on the corner of the table near her.

"You haven't said you're glad to see me yet, Bridget."

Bridget looked up at him. Her eyes were so honest that a mingling of fear and pleasure was quite apparent in them. “I don’t know that I am—quite. We had said good-bye. I never expected to meet you again.”

“And you never told me about this place.”

She blushed. “Oh, it was not because I was ashamed of it,” she said, “but I thought you might make a fuss, and—and not understand.”

“I might have understood. At least I shouldn’t have objected because it is not honourable. Last night I thought that you were lovely—only, of course, I wanted to get up and wait on you. But, after all, angels minister to men.”

Bridget took up the forks and began to polish them.

“How is Mrs. Fleetwood?” she asked.

“What Mrs. Fleetwood?”

“Your wife, of course.”

“But I haven’t got one—yet.”

Bridget gazed at him in deep surprise. “Do you mean,” she asked, “that Lucilla hasn’t married you?”

“Lucilla did not marry me. She is now Mrs. Courtney-Edwards.”

“Oh, how could she? How could she be so cruel? And how brave you are!”

Jeremy certainly looked wonderfully happy and calm for a broken-hearted lover.

“No, it is quite fair,” he said. “Shemet Edwards at a country house, and they fell in love; she tried

to keep up for a long while—and then I guessed, so of course I set her free, poor child.”

“Oh, of course I know you’d behave heroically and sacrifice yourself, but it was too cruel!”

“No, it wasn’t, Bridget; you forget that I too had fallen in love with some one else.”

Bridget started, but she did not ask any more questions.

“Guess who,” said Jeremy; he edged along the table till he was close to her chair; then, very firmly, he took the forks away from her, and held her hands. “I’ll give you three guesses, Bridget: if you can’t guess then I’ll have to impose a forfeit.”

“Joan,” said Bridget.

“Wrong.”

At this moment ’Fonso, impelled by strong curiosity, entered the kitchen. His mother having heard of the appearance of a strange young man in the kitchen, had advised the boys to leave him alone. But her dark hints had filled ’Fonso with interest, and he strolled in to survey the land.

“I want Bridget to make me some paste for scrap-books,” he remarked.

“She can’t,” said Jeremy: “get the flour and make it yourself.”

“Mater says I mustn’t; I got the last all over the seat of my trousers.”

“Well, take a header into this brew. Paste is awfully healthy when applied outwardly.”

“But——” began ’Fonso.

Jeremy turned and looked at him severely.

“Play the game, Mr. Alfonso Barber,” he remarked.

Fonso winked, and strolled forth into the yard and round to the garden.

“Now second guess, Bridget.”

Bridget fixed her eyes on the window.

“It must be Amelia,” she said.

“No. Be careful, the forfeit is a very heavy one. And this is the last guess.”

“Oh, Jeremy, it must be Mrs. Crumb.”

“A good shot, but it’s wrong. I will tell you now. It is you. And the forfeit is that you’ve got to marry me—next month, please.”

Bridget pulled her hand from his and covered her face.

“But I can’t,” she said. “Oh no! you mustn’t ask me. What would your family say? And the Barbers—what will they say? No, I’m glad you’ve asked me, but I couldn’t marry you, Jerry dear. You had better go away. You were kind to come, but it could never, never be.”

“If you don’t love me, I’ll go.”

“Oh, but I do love you, of course. I loved you ages ago.”

“When?”

“When you sprained your ankle, I think, and I hurt you, and you kissed my hand. When did you love me?”

“From the moment I saw you, but I seriously realized it the day that Lucilla came.”

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“And I looked so grubby and horrid?”

“Did you? I thought you looked just like the woman I wanted to marry. And I think so twice as much to-day.”

But Bridget protested for long. She protested her unfitness for any social position, the displeasure of his family, the surprise of the Barbers. But yet she knew at the bottom of her mind that she was going to marry Jeremy, that she could not help it. But, and this is often the case, her happiness, now that it had come, had so big a shadow that she could not see the sunshine without the shadow.

But to Jeremy there were no doubts or fears.

“When I go,” he said, “you must give Mrs. Barber notice, or I will go and tell her myself, and then we could be married this day month.”

Fonso, who had been strolling past the kitchen windows, ran upstairs to announce his investigation to Gusty and Mrs. Barber.

“Oh,” he cried, “he kissed Biddy—well, quite three times, and then he kissed both her hands!”

Gusty rose with a face of black wrath. “You little spy!” said he. “How dare you look, and how dare you come and tell us? If I ever find you spying again I’ll give you the most famous larruping in history.”

CHAPTER THE SEVENTEENTH

Signor Sebastiano

BRIDGET'S engagement brought no pleasure to the Barbers. Mr. Barber sighed, and said it was the way of all earthly things ; but that they could never expect to have peace again. " For servants like Bridget are out of fashion," he said, " and the longer I live the more I see that the supreme virtues are good temper and cheerfulness, and those Bridget has. She may not be methodical, and she may be forgetful, but she is always pleasant. "

" Yes, " said Mrs. Barber, " I knew Bridget was too good to be true. She never minded wearing a cap or collar, and she was proud of being a servant, just because she's a lady, I suppose. And it is so nice of her to want to stay the month here, and not to go to Dr. Fleetwood's aunt. She said she would see me suited, even if she put off her marriage. Still I must own that I think the marriage is a great mistake. A doctor, and Lord Walsall's friend, should really not marry a servant, even if she is a lady by birth, as he says she is. And I do hope you boys will never do the same."

Gusty looked up with a grumpy face, and said that if he ever again met a girl like Bridget he

should marry her whatever happened. For the advent of Dr. Fleetwood had, through the spirit of rivalry, caused the youthful artist to believe himself the victim of blighted affection. Had Jeremy not appeared and thrown a sort of glamour and romance about their maid-of-all-work he would have continued to call her "Good old Biddy!" and to regard her without emotion. But now he looked at Jeremy with gloomy eyes, and vowed that, if he were not kind to Bridget, he'd "do for him somehow."

And Bridget, in this last month of her service, felt a deeper affection for the Barber family than she had ever felt before. Perhaps it was that in this May time of her life, and in the glory of love, given and returned, her every faculty was deepened and refined. Such a magic treasury has love, that the more there is given away the more there remains to be given. She seemed to see new beauties in every one and in everything. She realized how kind the Barbers were, and how little their superficial vulgarity had injured their deep good-heartedness. And she was glad that the brief period of her betrothal should be passed in service; that the kitchen should be its scene, and that her daily mundane tasks should be illuminated by the light of her great happiness.

Her out-days were spent with Jeremy when he had time to be with her, for he had a *locum tenency* not far from Hanbury, and had little time to spare, and when he was free he came round in the after-

noon or evening to see her. On the days when he did not see her he wrote to her. And Jeremy, like Mr. Miller, could write much more than he could say.

Bridget had that depth and generosity of nature which give love and trust in overflowing measure. She loved Jeremy with her whole heart, and happily for them both he was not unworthy, though he thought himself so. To Bridget's great delight, Jeremy's aunt, who lived in Westmorland, wrote to her affectionately, and suggested that the wedding should be from her house. But they both preferred that it should be from the house where she had served gladly and faithfully.

Sitting by the kitchen fire, they settled all the small details of this quiet wedding. It was to take place at the parish church, on the morning of Michaelmas Day. Together they would attend the eight o'clock service, and afterwards they would be married. The wedding breakfast which Maudie offered to prepare was to take place in the kitchen, by special request of the bridegroom. And by their own special request Gusty and 'Fonso were to attend. Lord Walsall insisted on being best man, though to Mrs. Barber the whole situation was overwhelmingly bizarre. For a real live lord to be the best man at the wedding of her maid-of-all-work savoured to her of the methods of farce. But, on the strength of it, Maudie begged that she should be an unofficial bridesmaid.

Bridget's dress was, of course, a subject of deep

importance to herself. She had not enough money to afford anything but the very slenderest and most home-made trousseau. But her friends in Burnton sent out of their warm affection offerings of blouses, gloves and scarves. So Bridget, after long consideration, chose a brown cloth coat and skirt, and a brown hat trimmed with tulle and bramble leaves, a pretty autumnal dress that suited her sandy hair. With high hopes, some fear, and great awe these possessions were stowed away in boxes in her bed-room. At this time she, like other more well-provided brides, had the pleasant excitement of presents. Mr. and Mrs. Barber summoned her one evening to behold a handsome clock and a somewhat sentimental picture of wedded bliss.

Mr. Barber, with much clearing of his throat and many ahems, spoke of faithful service and affectionate regard, and Bridget had tears in her eyes when she thanked them, and she, too, spoke of her affection for them. For on such a basis of mutual esteem and affection domestic service becomes a beautiful and possible thing.

Maudie made an elaborate satin blouse for Bridget, and gave Jeremy a pipe-rack. Walsie presented afternoon tea-spoons. Gusty gave two framed pictures of his own, and presented Jeremy with the Madonna sketch of Bridget, which was received with such gratitude that Gusty, to his own disappointment, found that he really liked the hated rival.

Many little presents, the outcome of sincere affection, arrived, and they were not less appreciated than Lord Walsall's old silver candlesticks, and amethyst and diamond pendant.

Bridget was gazing at this in its velvet case when Jeremy came in. It was her out-day, and she was ready to go for a walk with him.

"It's much too good to wear, Jeremy," she said thoughtfully.

"Then I'll wear it ; I've no false modesty, and I think men should wear jewellery to keep up the jewel trade. Why shouldn't I wear ear-rings like an Italian sailor ? You must admit they'd become me. To tell you a secret, I thought I'd wear them on my wedding day."

"Oh, Jeremy ! then I should say a ring on the hand is worth two on the ears. But now you must be serious, and tell me if you've decided where to put Mr. Barber's picture of the sentimental people ?"

"In the bath-room."

"Oh, but if they came to see us, he would be so much hurt, poor pet."

"Bridget ! I am the only pet on your horizon. And the difficulty is absurd, for if they came to see us I'd take it out of the bath-room and sit with it on my knee while I talked to them. That would be very tactful."

Bridget laughed. Jeremy was in wild spirits, and though she herself felt rather serious, she tried to enter into his mood.

"Anyway," she remarked, "as we're going for a year to that Sanatorium we shall have no need to arrange our things. Won't it be fun having a house and furnishing it?"

"Won't it? We'll live in the kitchen and let the servants have the drawing-room. For I've always loved you in kitchens, and I want to see you in my kitchen."

Bridget kissed him.

"You always shall," she said. "Now, where are we going?"

"We are going to the Menagerie, of course," he answered. "There's a grand Menagerie established on the Common. There's the smallest horse in Europe and the biggest lady, and a man-eating bear and performing lions, and a wonderful troupe of performing dogs—you know I must see the dogs, because I want to write and tell Beau about them. All my last letters have been about you. And I think he may be getting bored, so I'll give him an interlude of performing dogs. Oh, Bridget, I'm sure you adore menageries! I do."

"Yes, indeed I do. Poor 'Fonso wanted to go to this one wildly, but he has a bad cold and has to stay in bed."

"So much the better; there'll be more room for us. No, but I'm sorry for 'Fonso. I really love the sprightly 'Fonso. I'm so happy now-a-days that I simply have to love every one, even the baker and the milkman. I'm growing quite

mawkish and like very sweet rice-pudding, don't you think so, Bridget?"

"Yes, you are—just."

They left the house and set off towards the Common. After some minutes of silence Jeremy exclaimed—

"This day fortnight we shall be in the New Forest. Do you believe that?"

Bridget looked serious.

"No, I daren't believe it," she said. "Oh, Jeremy, I'm afraid to talk about it, I want it so much; and suppose—suppose we're not married, after all?"

"I can't suppose it."

"Then don't let us think of the future. I feel as if goblins might snatch it from us. When one wants anything so terribly much with all one's heart and soul it seems dangerous. So many things may happen to prevent it."

"My dearest dear, that is very morbid. And if you are morbid I shall have to kiss you under the nearest gas-lamp, and right under the nose of that terribly respectable policeman: spare him the shock. When you see the performing dogs you'll forget these gloomy fears."

They had reached the Common, a waste place in Hanbury. It was bustling with excitement. Naphtha lights flared in the dusk and lit up the fringes of the menagerie, those fringes of wistful little boys who had not the entrance money, of lounging men and laughing girls.

There is always a sort of desperate excitement about a circus, or menagerie, or fair. The excitement is, one must say, highly sensational: the mystery of the big tent, the glare of the lights, the brazen clang of the band, combine to make a strange illusive charm which has so potent a spell over little boys and over all young impressionable minds.

Jeremy and Bridget made their way into the big tent. It was hot and bright. A big lion was roaring as they came in. Bridget's chief delight was in feeding the smaller animals with biscuits, and she went from cage to cage stroking and feeding. She had something of her father's magical touch, and the little furry creatures liked her voice and her gentle rubbing fingers. The elephant came out and did his tricks, and a very evil-looking Portuguese made three unwilling wolves jump through hoops of fire.

But the whole zest of the performance was the wonderful exhibition of the Signor Sebastiano with the fierce and terrible lions. It was the thought of this that quickened the pulses of the onlookers, and made them crowd about the big cage. For is not an unacknowledged lust of horror dominant in most minds? And though, of course, no one wants to see a lion-tamer killed, the vague expectation of a thrilling scene draws many witnesses.

"I shan't look," said Bridget; "I hate to see animals hectorred and bullied. And there's that horrid Portuguese standing by the cage."

"Oh, I must look," answered Jeremy, who was quite normal.

Signor Sebastiano, a tall, grey-haired man, in an elaborate but shabby red uniform, shouldered through the crowd, ascended the steps, turned, made his bow, and went in among the lions. The crowd hustled forward. Jeremy, who was not tall, stood on tip-toe and craned to see. The Signor was evidently considered a mighty power by his irritable and grudging performers: they climbed, and stood up, and jumped as he directed them; but they snarled at him for outraging their wilful feline nature by these puppy-dog tricks. The performance was an ugly one, and Jeremy was glad when it was done.

"He's a fine-looking fellow, isn't he?" he said to Bridget, as the lion-tamer came through the awe-struck throng.

Bridget stared at him. She watched his movements with frightened eyes. How well she remembered that face with its look of half-amused contempt, and how familiar was the jaunty grace of the figure!

Bridget's father looked at her, and did not know her. He glanced at her, and passed by. He was used to an admiring stare from young girls, and the quiet girl in a plain straw hat was no more to him than another. Signor Sebastiano walked with a little swagger. He was the hero of the menagerie, almost a demi-god in the eyes of countless small boys, and he bore himself in the

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shabby uniform with an easy dignity becoming one who commanded lions. Bridget turned to a boy who was feeding the smaller animals. "The Signor," she said, "he is English, isn't he?"

"Oh, Lor, yes! 'E's as English as you are. 'E's just plain Dickie Joy. Richard Sebastian Joy, that's 'is name: leastways 'e says Sebastian is his name, but it don't seem likely. I never met no Sebastiano in this country."

"Is he very happy here?" Bridget asked eagerly.

The boy stared at her.

"'Appy?" he echoed. "I suppose he likes the job. The boss is awful set on him, thinks there's no one like him. 'E's a great draw, is Dickie Joy. Does what he likes here. But 'im and the Portuguese chap don't 'it it off, always growling at one another. There'll be trouble some day."

Jeremy joined her.

"Bridget, the dogs are beginning. Come along. I want to see this."

Bridget followed him in silence to the tent where Signor Sebastiano presided over his dogs. Jeremy was enthusiastic.

"The fellow understands them," he said; "they like him. How different the lions were—they did the tricks because they had to, and they loathed the man who humbled their dignity; these little dog chaps are in their element. Look how fussy

and important they are, just like amateur actors at a charity bazaar."

The dogs certainly were in their element, and so was the Signor Sebastiano. It was evident that he loved his gay little troupe of mongrels. And they looked up to him as to a beloved and slightly dreaded stage-manager. They did wonderful tricks and amused their audience mightily. They jumped high jumps, and skipped, and pretended to be terribly in dread of a poodle policeman. In fact, they went through a regular harlequinade, with the Signor as a sort of benevolent deity to explain and direct their actions.

Jeremy was enchanted and out-laughed all the little boys. Bridget tried to laugh, but she was too much upset by this strange encounter with her father to be really amused. Should she speak to him and tell him her identity, or should she not? He was happy, and he had voluntarily left her, but, then, did duty on her part make the recognition necessary? She wanted to consult Jeremy, yet feared to do so. She felt that the introduction of a lion-tamer into the Fleetwood circle would make her an even less popular bride than she was at present.

"Bridget, what's up?"

Jeremy spoke cheerfully. He was so cheerful himself that his voice took that tone which somehow repels the confidence of the less cheerful.

"I was only thinking of things," she said. "Do

see the time. I must not be later than ten. The mistress wouldn't like it."

"Oh, the mistress will forgive me."

"But I'm not a young lady out with her *fiancé*, I'm a maid who must be, or rather intends to be, in by ten."

"Dearest, are you in a huff?"

"Oh no, Jeremy, but I'm worried to-night."

They left the cheerful glare of the menagerie and took the homeward road.

"Now," said Jeremy, "come along and tell me what's up."

"No, I'd rather not tell you. My troubles always get worse when they're told."

"Oh, very well, if you don't want to tell, don't; I'm not going to force your confidence."

They walked home in gloomy silence. Bridget was miserable, and Jeremy was offended. And only several hours of discussing themselves and the difficulty could have set matters straight. Jeremy came to the back door, but as they arrived the drawing-room bell rang, and Bridget kissed her lover hastily and ran upstairs. And so the rift in their lute began, and there was no time to mend it; and Bridget cried herself to sleep that night, and Jeremy went home with a gloomy soul, and because his temper was, as has been said, "queer" he woke up the next morning with a soul still gloomy.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTEENTH

Bruce vindicates the Rights of Lionhood

'FONSO, who was recovering from a cold and a surfeit of cream tarts, had fallen in love with the idea of Signor Sebastiano. He loved him with that exquisite frenzy of romantic devotion which all heroes, of however Brummagem a type, inspire in those who have the heroism and gallantry of youth in their hearts.

'Fonso, who had long resolved to be a bishop, relinquished this prosaic ambition, and now resolved to be a lion-tamer. He made Bridget sit on his bed and describe to him again and again the exploits of the Signor, and the performances of Bruce, the fierce young lion who so much resented the lash and the servitude. 'Fonso's imagination was stirred deeply by these things, and he determined at all costs to be well by Saturday, the last night of the performance. By some process of faith-healing, 'Fonso quite recovered his health, and announced his unalterable intention of going to see with his own eyes Bruce the lion and Bruce's master.

Bridget hated the topic, but she concealed her hatred. She yearned for the day when the menagerie should move on, and her resolve to conceal herself from her father be confirmed by

his absence. His sudden appearance after so many years had been only terrible to her. She dreaded him now as a sort of kill-joy who appeared for her sorrow. His selfishness and forgetfulness of her had quite sapped her love for him. She knew that he was fascinating, and she felt the fascination, but she hoped earnestly that he might never cross her path again.

In the meantime he had unconsciously occasioned an estrangement between Jeremy and herself. He had brought to her mind the sense of being an unsuitable wife for a man in Jeremy's position, and made a secret between them. So she wanted to hear nothing of lions or lion-tamers ; but 'Fonso, like a little dog, pursued her about the house, begging her to take him to the menagerie. Mr. Barber could not go, Walsie would not, Gusty was away, and Maudie was engaged, and he might not go alone. Would not Bridget take him ? Bridget seemed singularly unwilling, so the persistent one lay in wait for Jeremy, and caught him at the yard-gate. " Dr. Fleetwood, oh, dear, dear Dr. Fleetwood, do take me to the menagerie—oh, do, please ! " he began with the clock-work speech which he had been repeating all day.

Jeremy had been a boy himself, and he had yearned passionately for many things that fate had denied him, so, though he wanted to spend a quiet evening with Bridget—an evening of reconciliation—he listened to 'Fonso's petition with such sympathy in his eyes that 'Fonso began a war-dance of delight in the middle of the yard.

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Jeremy went into the kitchen. It was Saturday, and Bridget was washing the kitchen floor.

"Let's go to the menagerie again and take 'Fonso," he said, and he bent down and kissed her hot face as she knelt, brush in hand, by her pail of water. Bridget was tired and dirty, and as anxious not to go as 'Fonso was to go.

"Couldn't you take him and leave me?" she said, "I don't want to go a bit."

"Not with me?"

"I don't want to go, Jeremy. Why can't Mr. Walsie take him, he's doing nothing to-night?"

"Well, poor little chap, we must get him there somehow. Children do want things so awfully, one can't disappoint them."

"Grown-up people want things and do without them. 'Fonso has worried me all day long about this hateful menagerie." Bridget felt perverse and miserable. She had expected consolation and petting, and here was her lover aiding 'Fonso in his reiterated clamour about the menagerie. And yet she was sorry for the child, and determined that he should go. But Perversity, that most troublesome little demon, was with her, and he would not let her be kind and soft-spoken.

She went on scrubbing the tiled floor in silence. She was late with the cleaning, and very tired.

"Let me do that, Bridget," said Jeremy. "I hate to see you doing it."

"No, it would spoil your clothes. Take 'Fonso to the menagerie, as you're both so keen to go."

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"Bridget, dear, you are talking very crossly to me."

Tears splashed into the pail ; Bridget wrestled with the perverse little demon, but she could not conquer him.

"May I never be cross or have a headache—or anything? Do take 'Fonso and go," she said abruptly.

Jeremy stood and watched her, but the brush went on its course, and the soiled and weary Bridget scrubbed and scrubbed and never looked round.

"Very well," Jeremy answered, and he went out. "I'll take you, 'Fonso ; Bridget is tired and busy, so she can't come," he said to the little boy, who was waiting wistfully at the door.

"Why's Bridget so cross?" 'Fonso asked in a quite audible whisper.

"Heaven knows!" said Jeremy, and shrugged his shoulders.

Tears rained into Bridget's pail ; she started up to say some gentle thing, but the door banged behind Jeremy as he and 'Fonso went out. She dried her eyes, finished the cleaning, and ran upstairs. She met Mrs. Barber in the hall.

"May I go to the menagerie again, ma'am?" she asked. "Dr. Fleetwood and Master 'Fonso have gone on."

"Oh yes, Bridget. I'm so glad you're taking Master 'Fonso ; he was so anxious to go. Do follow them."

Bridget hurried into her coat and hat, her face was tear-stained and hot, but she resolved to catch

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Jeremy up and bury the perverse little demon among flowers of good-will and cheerfulness.

Perhaps there is no effort so tiresome to the temper as that of trying to overtake some one who is always out of sight and just round the next turn. Bridget, following after her lover, felt a futile anger because he did not wait for her.

When she reached the big tent on the Common it was crowded, and she could not see Jeremy or 'Fonso ; this irritated her too. Surely they might have guessed that she was coming, and have waited for her at the turnstile. "Does Jeremy care at all?" whispered the perverse little demon. And Bridget, just because she was tired and sad, whispered "Does he?"

Bruce was roaring his wide-mouthed deep-chested roar. The Portuguese stood by the cage, teasing him with a long straw. The man looked abject enough in his security, and Bruce was too royal even to look at him. He gazed with tawny eyes across the throng of people, and roared in the contempt and anger of his heart.

The throng before the cage thickened. It was the time for the lions' performance, and Bruce's ill-temper made the scene the more exciting. The heat and bright lights and the bang of the band lent the imagination new zest. Then Signor Sebastiano came through the crowd. He was all that 'Fonso had dreamed, a hero of romance as he looked at the people with half-closed hazel eyes, and pushed through them towards the cage ; 'Fonso stretched out a timid finger, and touched

him as he passed. "Now I can say I've touched him," he whispered to Jeremy. "I see Bridget there, Dr. Fleetwood ; she did come after all."

"Well, we can't reach her yet. I say this really is a sickening show, 'Fonso : that brute is in an awful temper."

For when Bruce saw the Signor he leaped at the bars, his eyes glaring, his teeth showing. The Signor ascended the steps cracking his whip. He stared at the big lion.

"What, not pleased to see me, Bruce, old fellow?" he asked. The crowd jostled towards the cage with a murmur of excitement. The Signor turned round and faced the people.

"Any young gentleman care to go in with me?" he said. "I'll give him an introduction to Bruce, the lion-king of Central Africa. What, no one? Why, he's as gentle as a lamb." He fumbled with the fastening of the cage, opened it and went in quickly ; Bruce made a rush forward, but the whip cracked before his eyes and he slunk backwards, cowed for the moment. But he would not do his tricks, he sat snarling and sulking. The lionesses did their parts as grudgingly as ever, but Bruce would not stand up, would not leap, would, in fact, do nothing but show how he hated the Signor.

And then somehow—no one seemed quite to see how—the whip fell to the floor of the cage. Perhaps its lash caught round the bars and jerked it from the hand that held it—so, at least, 'Fonso thought. But anyway the symbol of majesty

dropped. The Signor stooped hurriedly to pick it up.

But Bruce had waited for his moment long, and now he snatchèd it. He jumped at the stooping man and knocked him flat on the ground. Insurrection was declared, the lions snarled, and tore at their fallen master.

And round the cage wild panic ensued, some crushed forward, some rushed back, a woman screamed piercingly, scream after scream. But Bridget was paralyzed by horror: she stood and stared at the terrible thing that was happening before her. Her own father was being torn to death by lions for the mere sake of a crowd's amusement. He had risked his life a hundred times in this hazardous game, and now his life was forfeit.

But two men with revolvers pushed through the people.

"It's the boss," murmured some, and they looked at a fat red-faced man who made his way boldly up the steps and went into the cage. Through the smoke of the shooting and the uproar of revolver reports the crowd could not tell what was happening. Some said the Signor was dead, others that the lions were all shot. The uproar was inconceivable.

But when the smoke cleared the lions were huddled in one corner of the cage. The boss stood in front of them with his whip raised, and two keepers were trying to get the lion-tamer out of the cage.

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"He's done," said some one, and a wave of horror, part pity and part curiosity, urged the crowd forward. Indeed it was a pitiable form that had been dragged out of the cage, something very different from the careless, gallant Signor Sebastiano, master of lions. It was a torn, bleeding man that was carried past the awe-stricken people to the inner tent.

There were only two doctors present, Jeremy and another, and they followed the procession.

"Go to Bridget, 'Fonso," said Jeremy, "and take her home."

So 'Fonso, sick and white-faced, went to Bridget and caught her hand. The trampled sawdust was stained with the unfortunate man's blood.

"Oh, Bridget, he's killed! Let's go home, let's go home," 'Fonso sobbed.

But Bridget was moving towards the inner tent.

"It's my father," she said.

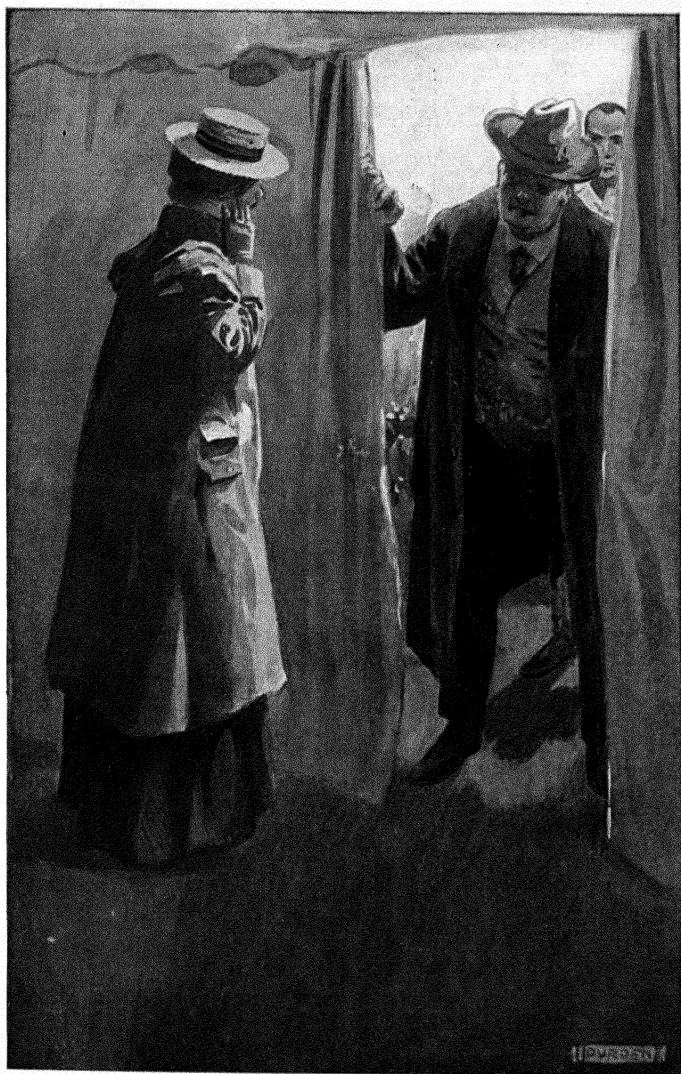
'Fonso stared at her.

"It couldn't be!"

"Yes, it is; and, Master 'Fonso, do be a good boy and go home and tell the mistress I must stay. If he's dying I ought to stay. I haven't seen him since I was thirteen, but I knew him at once. But do go home."

'Fonso nodded, and went sobbing towards the door. The people were being hurried off. A keeper came up to Bridget.

"You'd best go, please, Miss; we're clearing the place," he said.



“‘What’s this about your father?’ he asked irritably.”

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"Signor Sebastiano is my father. I must stay."

The man stared at her: he disappeared and returned with the boss, rather pale-faced now, and incredulous.

"What's this about your father?" he asked irritably.

"I'm Bridget Joy, the Signor is my father; I haven't seen him since I was a child. But I am his daughter, and I must know the worst."

"I never knew Dickie Joy had a daughter," said the boss; "he's a close one, isn't he? The domestic isn't his line. Well, I'm afraid you won't have a father much longer, my dear; he's awfully mauled. That devil Bruce has nearly torn his shoulder off. Poor fellow! poor fellow! We're sending him to the 'ospital. But I don't think he'll get over this."

"Can I see Dr. Fleetwood for just one moment?" Bridget asked.

"Very well," said the boss, and he went into the far tent.

In a little while Jeremy came out.

"Oh, I say," he exclaimed, "I told 'Fonso to take you home. You should never have come. And I tried to bring you. I'm sorry now."

"Jeremy, he's my father."

Jeremy stared at her as 'Fonso had done.

"Oh, rats!" he said; "you fancied it."

"No. I knew him when we came before."

"And you never told me, Bridget."

"No, I——"

"You didn't trust me," said Jeremy abruptly;

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"well, I can't stay, I must go back to him. He may get over it, or he mayn't. Anyway, you go home for the present."

"Is he suffering much?"

"No—not now. You must go home, Bridget. I'll come to-morrow."

Jeremy turned away and went back to his patient, and Bridget, sick at heart, took the homeward way. Before she reached Belle View House, 'Fonso, trembling, sobbing and incoherent, had told his bewildering story to the home circle.

"Bridget the daughter of a lion-tamer!" Mrs. Barber exclaimed. "Oh, how shocking! I always felt that the poor girl had something queer in her past. Really Dr. Fleetwood must not marry her. It would be a fearful *mésalliance*."

"She'd better stay on here," said Mr. Barber. "I'm sure *we* don't care if her father does tame lions."

"But oh," said the pale 'Fonso, "just think how glorious it must be to have a father like that! How proud Bridget must feel! And if Dr. Fleetwood won't marry her I will, just to have him for a father-in-law."

"There," exclaimed Maudie, "I hear a knock. Poor old Bridget, I'll give her some coffee."

Mrs. Barber and Maudie went out to receive the lion-tamer's daughter. "Oh, you poor girl!" said the former. "I suppose this will put an end to your marriage. You really *should* set Dr. Fleetwood free, Bridget."

"Yes," said Bridget, "I think I should."

CHAPTER THE NINETEENTH

The End of the Matter

THE next morning, Bridget woke up with the sense that trouble waited for her ; and the happiness which had been so close, seemed to have gone a long way off.

She got up, and saw a pale and heavy-eyed face in the little glass. Why should Jeremy love her? That was her first foolish question, and the next was more foolish, "Did he?" She was unsuitable. Every one said so. Mrs. Barber had told her so, and though Aunt Matilda had written kindly, had she not done so only to please Jeremy?

Bridget dressed. This was the morning to clean the flues. She put on a coarse sacking apron, and went to the dark, cold kitchen. Oh, how she hated flues, how she hated everything this morning! But she was a thorough worker, and she did not scamp this most necessary of all domestic duties : she poked, and raked, and swept with a will. She remembered her old friend, the clergyman, who had given her the sovereign. Would he, she wondered, have any romantic thoughts about flues? Yes, surely he would! He would make some allegory about those hidden

dark places, which, if they are not clean, prevent all the glorious work of light and heat. Certainly, such a fanciful old man would have made many conceits out of the cleaning of his kitchen flues.

Bridget had just done this part of her work, when she heard the postman's rattle at the letter-box. She was seized by a passionate hope, that Jeremy might have written to her. She ran upstairs, and picked up the letters from the hall floor. There was one for her, an envelope of thick cream paper with a crest on the back.

Bridget went to the dining-room and opened it. Her hands were black with soot, so she held it gingerly, as she read :

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"10, KING'S MANSIONS,
"CROMWELL ROAD.

"DEAR MISS JOY,

"I have heard lately of your engagement to my step-brother, Dr. Fleetwood. Now, perhaps you think I am unkind not to congratulate you both, most heartily. But believe me, I am thinking of you both, when I say that I cannot do so. You are, I hear, from various sources, a general servant to Mrs. Barber, and I consider this an honourable post. But I cannot think that it fits you to be the wife of a doctor, and of a man who has the bright prospects that Dr. Fleetwood certainly has.

"He would always be welcome in the best society, as his great friendship with Lord Walsall, and with others whose names are held in honour, will show you.

"Frankly, now, do you feel that you can hold your own in a society of which you know nothing? And if you cannot, can you be happy? To my mind, there is no woman so miserable as she who is obviously not her husband's equal. He knows it, and she knows it, and she knows that, with the best will in the world, his friends cannot place her on her husband's footing. She knows that she drags him backward, instead of walking by his side along the road of success.

"My dear girl, I am a married woman, I know the world, and I warn you not to marry Jeremy—for your sake, and for his. We, his near relations, disapprove *strongly* of this match, and we cannot pretend to welcome you in our midst. We will tolerate you, for his sake, but more than this we cannot do.

"Jeremy's godfather, Sir Joseph Maunsell, has warned him that, if he insists on this marriage, he will cut him out of his will. This will be a serious matter to my brother. Some private means are invaluable for a young and rising doctor, let alone the personal influence which Sir Joseph could use on his behalf.

"My brother, who is easily led away by sympathy and pity, has already been entangled in one unfortunate engagement, as you probably know. When that was broken off, we all set our hopes on a very different match. There was nothing to hinder this, until some chivalrous, or hasty notion, led him into this engagement to you.

"Again, let me say to you, as one woman to another, that you will be happier in keeping to your own sphere. And you will certainly win our esteem and gratitude if you set Jeremy free.

"The marriage we have wished for him is with a lady whose beauty, culture and social position will be of the greatest value in his career.

"If you are the good and high-minded girl that I think you must be to have temporarily won my brother's regard, I beg you to consider what I have said, and to release yourself and him from this engagement.

"Yours truly,

"BEATRICE DELAHAYE."

Bridget looked up. She was standing by the sideboard, and the mirror reflected her from her soiled cap to the bib of her coarse apron. She was a very dirty, pale-looking girl, with straight, sandy hair loose about her ears, a smut on her forehead, and a long smudge across her cheek. Her print dress was faded and fastened with a safety-pin. Ah! if Mrs. Delahaye could see her now! Bridget turned and faced the mirror, boldly taking in every detail of her own forlorn appearance. "It is true," she said, and then she laughed hysterically, for her smudged face was comical in its distress. "Oh," she cried, "you ugly, dirty, wretched-looking creature, how could you ever dream of marrying Jeremy? You never shall. His sister is right; she wants to save him because she loves him. And I love him, so I will save him too."

With a loud sob, but still with resolution, Bridget ran down to the scullery, washed her face and hands, tidied her hair, put on a clean

apron, and set about her preparations for breakfast.

Shortly after that meal, when Bridget was making the boys' beds, 'Fonso came up to tell her that Jeremy was waiting to speak to her in the kitchen. Her heart sank. She went downstairs almost trembling.

Jeremy was standing by the fire warming his hands. He turned round with a smile when Bridget came in. She realized then how much she loved him, and how proportionately great her sacrifice must be.

Jeremy kissed her. He intended to ignore the quarrel of the previous night. "You shall always wear a cap when we're married," he said cheerfully, "because you know you're adorable in a cap."

"Tell me about father," said Bridget hastily.

"Don't look so anxious, dear; he's been awfully hurt, but I think myself he's going to pull through. They may have to amputate the left arm, but that's not so bad as the right."

"But he can never go back to the Show?"

"Not for a long time certainly. I don't think he'll have much to do with lions again. But old Hoskins, the boss, seems awfully fond of him; he was there last night, weeping over your father. And he vowed he'd kill the Portuguese fellow, who seemed to have stirred up the lion for some motive of revenge. Your father thrashed him once."

"I think I ought to go and see him now," said

Bridget ; "when he leaves the hospital he must come to me."

"Yes, he can come to us at the Convalescent Home. It'll be a fine place. Your father is mine, Bridget, and we'll nurse him between us. Though I think he's treated you abominably, he has a fine pluck, that's certain."

Bridget walked round the kitchen-table and gathered some spoons together in a bowl. She was trying to be calm and firm.

"Oh no!" she answered, "that won't do, Jeremy. I'm going to take care of him ; it's my duty, of course. But it would never do for you. I had meant to say to you that our engagement must end. I see how unsuitable our marriage would be——"

Jeremy was quite silent. At last he spoke.

"Put those spoons down and look at me." Bridget looked up, but Jeremy's face of bitter resentment did not reassure her. All the kindly gaiety that made Jeremy's friends count his ugliness as more attractive than beauty had gone. Bridget caught her breath.

"Oh, don't look like that !" she said ; "it is no use : I do not mean to marry you. It is no good discussing it. You'll be glad some day."

"What on earth are you talking about ?" Jeremy asked. "Have you gone mad since yesterday ? Go and put on your hat and coat, and I'll take you to your father."

Bridget went, but she was angry now. Jeremy had spoken without sympathy or gentleness. She

would not tell him of his sister's letter, as what could he do but deny its advice? Any man must do so, whatever the cost. She choked down her tears, and came back to him ready to go out.

They went some way in silence ; Bridget could not trust herself to speak.

" I quite see," said Jeremy abruptly, " that you don't trust or love me any more. If you did you would of course have told me that the Signor was your father. You concealed that from me, just as you're concealing something else that would show why you're treating me in this disgraceful way."

Bridget looked steadily before her. Had ever the streets of Hanbury looked so dreary?

" If you mean to think *that*, you must," she said ; " and I see, what indeed I half suspected, that you don't love me very much, or you could never speak so unkindly."

" I'm sorry, but I can't mince matters. You know I haven't an easy temper, and you're trying it to the utmost. If there's anything on earth that I've thoroughly prized it was your trust in me. This last week—the very week before our wedding day—you have shown me that I was a deluded fool. You don't trust me, and as that's the case we'd better not marry. A marriage without absolutely unflinching trust on both sides is a fool's marriage. I don't want a wife who can't tell me her troubles."

" Very well," said Bridget, trying vainly to steady her voice, " you agree with me that we

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had better not marry ; that's all right. I suppose it ends the matter. I'll send back your presents and the ring to-night."

They had reached the grey Greek portico of the hospital.

"Oh, think about it, Bridget! We can't spoil our lives at a minute's notice," he said.

"But I have thought, Jeremy. Oh, you don't understand! I've known I was weak to agree from the minute that you proposed to me. But if I'd only known what I know now, I'd have never consented."

"What do you know now?"

"I can't tell you."

"Ah! it is as I thought, you have no confidence in me, and love without confidence is not worth having. Well, we can't hold a public meeting on the hospital steps. Come along in."

Considering her father's condition, Bridget's agitation was not surprising to the nurses. Her tears were natural and dutiful, but in reality Bridget had scarcely thought of her father until she stood by the bed where he lay.

"Who are you?" Richard Joy asked, looking at the pale, tear-stained girl who knelt beside him ; "you're just like my wife."

"Oh, of course I am, father."

Bridget laid her hand on her father's uninjured one. She looked at him appealingly. Her quarrel with Jeremy had made her long for some response and sympathy from her only near relation.

Richard Joy smiled at her and then groaned, because he was in great pain. "Are you my little Bride?" he said; "and you've grown a woman, quite a tall woman too. You're like your mother. And how did you know that your poor old Dad had been bitten up by the lions?"

"I was there, Daddy."

"And you knew me?"

"Yes, I knew you. Dr. Fleetwood brought me to see you."

"But where's your grandfather?"

"He's dead. He died more than a year ago."

"I suppose he left you plenty of money?"

"He had none to leave."

"I thought he had plenty. But how do you live?"

"I'm Mrs. Barber's servant."

"You a servant, Bride! But you're a lady."

"Yes, so I had to work for myself. I wasn't trained for anything else."

"My child, you shouldn't have lost your place in society. And now I'm afraid I can't support you or myself either."

Richard Joy had been utterly unnerved by the accident of the past night, and he burst into tears which were very pitiable in a man so gallant and so much the cynosure of all eyes as he had been not twenty-four hours ago.

"I'll take care of you," Bridget whispered, her protective instinct waking up. She kissed his grey hair and tear-wet face, and felt the old fascination that she and her mother had always

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known all through this man's life with them. Richard Joy had his own code, and he had decided from the days of his childhood that he was not to be judged by other men's standards. He had always had an "Open Sesame" which unlocked the doors even of severe hearts.

He lay and looked at his daughter with pathetic hazel eyes.

"Now, if only Mother were here, how kind she'd be to me, wouldn't she?" he said. "Mother would say I was silly to play with lions, but she'd praise me because I did it so cleverly. And then she'd make tea and come and sit beside me and tell me a story, and I should go to sleep."

"Shall I tell you a story, Daddy?"

"No, darling; don't bother. When I'm better—if I get better—I'll tell you lovely stories, just like the ones I told you when you were a little girl and wouldn't go to bed because there was a lion hiding behind the valances. I was a nice old Daddy to you then, wasn't I, Bridget?"

"Oh yes, you were; we had lovely times."

"And you think me a bold bad step-father of a man to have gone away, don't you? And so I was, so I was, Bridget; but then my heart was broken. And you don't know what restlessness is. I always was a vagabond. They never clipped my wings when I was young, and I have a sort of hunger for the roads. But don't you bother about me, child. I'm not going to be a drag on you."

"Daddy, when you're better I'll support you."

We might hire a tiny house, and I could go out charing or doing anything by the day, and you could care for the house."

"So I could, Bridget, and you wouldn't have to be a little lonely Cinderella, for I'd be a grand housewife and make everything nice for you, and we'd have lovely times together."

"Well, think about that while you're getting better."

Richard Joy stroked her hand.

"What a dear little daughter you are," he said, "and so comforting and cheerful. I was lonely and frightened and sad before you came, and now I'll have nice thoughts of settling down and being a good old barn-yard fowl."

"Oh, Daddy, you'd never be a good barn-yard fowl. You'd always be wanting to explore outside your run."

"Perhaps I should, Bridget, but then we'd explore together; and I'm too tired and weak and frightened of lions to want to go a yard farther than my darling's apron-strings. We'll have a little garden, Bridget, and grow flowers—not dull old vegetables, but tiger lilies and poppies."

"And we'll have dogs, Daddy, and you shall train them."

"And a parrot, Bridget—oh yes, a naughty parrot who swears whenever the clergy come to call!"

"And a black cat."

"No, no, I don't want even the third cousin of a lion, Bridget; he'd bite me while you were out."

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"Then we'll have rabbits, perhaps, or white mice. You won't be too dull with me, will you, Daddy?"

"No, darling. I shall have peace. And I'll say my prayers and sit in the sunshine and read *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and other garrulous old men will come and chatter to me, and we'll nod our grey heads together, and be as happy as old jackdaws."

The nurse came forward and advised Bridget to go, as her father was growing tired.

"Come again soon, Bridget," he said; "you're just like your mother, and you'll make me well again."

Bridget kissed him and went away.

Jeremy ^{was} waiting for her outside. They went down the stairs in silence.

"Don't bother to see me home," she said; "I can quite go alone."

This happened to be quite the wrong thing to say. Jeremy might have set matters right during the walk home, and, indeed, Bridget hoped that he would insist on going home with her. How terrible it is to be taken at one's word!

"Very well; I'll leave you at the corner. I'm very busy this morning."

They walked to the corner.

"Good-bye," he said.

"Good-bye, Jeremy; I'll send back the things to-night."

"Very well. I shall take this as final. I do not like being played with."

"That is unfair. I never played with you."

"You have treated me abominably. A policeman is listening. 'Lord, what fools these mortals be,' he's thinking! Good-bye."

And so, with a very thin jest and a very unamused laugh, Jeremy raised his hat, and retreated into the nearest chemist's shop.

Bridget stood by the lamp-post and watched him. To most of the passers-by there could have been nothing romantic in the sturdy commonplace figure of the young man who went into the druggist's. There is something so prosaic about a bowler hat, something prosaic about all every-day attire, and Jeremy, to those who did not know him, might have stood for a type of the commonplace. Yet to Bridget, love and romance and happiness went with him and vanished at the closing of the glass doors.

Bridget trudged home, took off her out-door things, got into her print dress, and went upstairs to turn out a room.

Mrs. Barber, impelled by curiosity, sought her out and heard a slight statement of affairs.

"Well, you're a very good, wise girl," she said, "and of course your engagement to Dr. Fleetwood *was* a mistake. And I'm so glad that you've had the courage to end it. And you must stay here till your father's quite well, and then we can decide what you shall do. I'm glad you're so sensible, Bridget, and I'm sure we're all glad you can stay."

So nothing was said to Bridget, but every

member of the household made some little kind speech to her about any indifferent topic, and Maudie gave her a scarf of which she had tired, and 'Fonso presented a withered orange and some toffee, whilst Mr. Barber during that afternoon came down the kitchen stairs, his heels clacking behind him, for he always did carpentry in his carpet slippers. He came in with a small pot of geranium in his hand and smiled nervously.

"Ah, Bridget," he said, "I just—I—er—well, I thought you liked flowers and might like to keep this pot in the window. There is something very pleasant in tending pot flowers. You never read *Picciola*, did you? That's all about a prisoner and the flower he tended; a charming story it is."

"Thank you, sir; that's very kind of you. I shall love it."

Bridget smiled at her master and he felt encouraged.

"This is a great anxiety about your father, my poor girl," he said. "When you think he can see me I will call upon him."

"That would be very kind of you, sir."

"I should be glad to do it, Bridget. You have been kind and faithful to us, and as I said to your mistress, I shall take pains to see that you are comfortably established when your father leaves the hospital."

Again Bridget thanked him. He patted her shoulder.

"Your father must be an interesting and daring

person," he observed. "In my youth I used to be greatly attracted by lion-taming. However, I never pursued it." Mr. Barber laughed mildly and shuffled away.

But Gusty sympathized with a fiery zeal. He came home that afternoon and listened as well as he could to his mother and 'Fonso, who both talked at the same time, 'Fonso with his mouth full of toffee. He made no comments, but ran down to the kitchen. Bridget was sitting sewing by the table. Her eyes were red with crying, and she tried to avoid looking at Gusty; but he sat down on the kitchen table near her, and spoke breathlessly, with an eager sympathy which comforted her in no small degree.

"Oh, Bridget, is your heart broken?" he asked with profound interest.

"Yes, I think it is."

"Well, I hate Fleetwood."

"Oh, don't say that, Master Gusty—I've done it all. But I had to do it. I know his family hate the match; that's natural, isn't it?"

"No; they're proud pigs. I'd like to spurn them with my heel. I think it's no end toney to be daughter to a lion-tamer."

"I don't think they'd have that view. And they know that I'm a general servant."

"Well, you're a jolly good one."

"But that doesn't fit one for society. I have always felt that I shouldn't do Jeremy credit. I'm not good-looking."

"Yes, you are; you're 'Old Masterish.'"

"But that's not half so valuable as being smart-looking. And I haven't the gift of dress. And I don't look a woman of the world. No, no, it would never do. And I must be firm."

"Can't I do anything for you, Bridget dear? Do tell me to do anything—to stand on my head, or to kick some one, the harder the better."

"You can do something. Will you take this packet to Dr. Fleetwood?"

"I shall scowl at him all the time; but I'll take it."

"Thank you. But don't scowl."

Gusty took the small packet and went off on his bicycle to Jeremy's house. He was shown into a study, where the object of his search was sitting looking very busy and glum.

"Oh, it's you, Barber!" he said. "How are you?"

Gusty ignored the proffered hand, and put the packet down on the table.

"For you," he said gruffly. "Any answer?"

Jeremy opened the packet and read the short note.

"Your presents, Jeremy, and thank you always and always for your kindness to me. God bless you," so it ran.

"Yes, there's an answer," he said. "I've got it here."

At this moment the telephone bell rang violently.

"That bell will drive me mad!" Jeremy said. He went to it, listened, and made some replies. "All right, I'll come at once," he answered to the distant speaker.

He returned to the table, took up what he thought was his letter to Bridget, hastily folded it round a small silver match-box, Bridget's gift to him, and wrote on the blank outer side, "Thanks for package and note."

He pushed it into an envelope and gave it to the grim and silent Gusty, who left the room at once. There were several pieces of paper on the desk, and Jeremy, thinking them waste-paper, threw them into the fire. In his hurry he did not know that he had burnt that letter to Bridget which was to have ended their quarrel, or at least have made parting in some way a sweet sorrow. For Jeremy had conquered pride and resentment and written, with all the deep affection that he felt, an appeal to Bridget's love for him. And this letter was, unknown to him, blazing in the fire, whilst two blank sheets of paper were on their way to Bridget.

Gusty cycled with desperate speed to Belle View House and handed Bridget the letter, then with consummate tact he left her alone.

With hands that trembled very much, and with a desperate hope, she opened the envelope. There was the silver match-box, once given and accepted with so much love, and round it were two sheets of blank paper, but across the back of one was written, "Thanks for package and note." And that was all! No message to answer her own—no answering God-speed. Bridget hid her face in her apron, and felt that joy had finally taken to his heels and left her disconsolate.

CHAPTER THE TWENTIETH

“And to Jeremiah Fleetwood I
bequeath——”

THE sudden illness of Lord Walsall quite eclipsed, as far as the Barbers were concerned, the events which had given Bridget a father and deprived her of a husband. “Our dear friend and cousin Lord Walsall” entirely ousted other matters from Mrs. Barber’s vision. It must be admitted that she looked reflectively into her wardrobe and wondered if she had a black dress in case Lord Walsall should die.

It was known very soon that Jeremy, whose *locum tenency* had now terminated, had been sent for to take care of his friend. No one was at all clear as to what was the matter with the invalid; some called it “nervous breakdown,” others “brain trouble.” Whatever it was the results were very serious. Lord Walsall had always been delicate, and his super-active brain had practically exhausted his strength.

After a fortnight, in which our “dear cousin’s case” had been an endless topic of conversation in Mrs. Barber’s circle, she received the news that he had gone on a tour round the world in a friend’s yacht, and that Jeremy had gone with him.

Bridget heard this too, and it seemed to her to be the key that locked the gates of Paradise and left her outside. For Jeremy had gone without a word of farewell to her, and he might be drowned at sea, or die of some Oriental fever, and then the quarrel between them could never be made up. Or—and this seemed to her more likely—he would marry this charming and beautiful lady of whom Mrs. Delahaye had spoken.

Bridget, who was too young to be practically philosophical, let her mind contemplate every terrible accident that could befall her lover. During the dark days of November she let the trouble grow upon her, and she decided that happiness was never to be hers again.

That she might have grown morbid, bitter and selfish is more than likely but for the kind, stern interference of circumstances which forced practical thoughts and plans upon her.

Richard Joy was much better. His arm had not been amputated, and he had made a wonderful recovery.

Mr. Barber, Gusto and 'Fonso had made several calls upon the lion-tamer, and though the visitors were actuated by charity, they thoroughly enjoyed the results of their virtue; for Mr. Joy was a sort of masculine Scheherezade, and he held his listeners spellbound with the wonders of his stories. 'Fonso would sit on his bed, mouth open, and absolutely soak his mind in adventures. That any one could not gladly exchange Jeremy

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as a husband for a father like Richard Joy was inconceivable to him.

The show had, of course, moved on, but Hoskins, its generous master, offered his former lion-tamer three shillings a week for one year, in the hopes that he might have by that time regained his nerve. It turned out that Mr. Joy had, through sheer fascination, been remembered in some old lady's will to the extent of a sum that gave him five shillings a week.

Mrs. Barber, who had found a small hand-maiden of fourteen, offered Bridget five shillings a week if she would help with the cleaning, do the family mending, and spend three days a week working in the house.

Accordingly, a small house was found not far from the Barbers'. It was really a disused gate lodge, and Bridget was able to get it for four and sixpence a week. She found a lodger too, a girl who worked in a laundry, and was away through the middle of the day. Mr. Joy objected keenly to the lodger's presence, but as it meant seven shillings a week, he was obliged to agree.

The gate lodge was a tiny place, the lodger had to share Bridget's room, and the kitchen was the general sitting-room. But the little house, overgrown with ivy, and with its bowery porch and miniature garden, had a sort of romantic charm rare in Hanbury.

Bridget tried to be interested in it; she wanted to sit and look sorrow in the face all day long; her faculties seemed to be numb, and there was a

sort of consolation in letting herself be dull and miserable. But the supreme discipline of enforced cheerfulness was to be hers. She had to make happiness out of little things, out of window curtains made of art muslin, out of the carpet stitched in innumerable patches cut from the Barbers' discarded dining-room Brussels. Gusty and 'Fonso helped and hindered her house arrangement with such affectionate zeal that she had to be gay with them. Then Mr. Barber took such innocent pleasure in his marvels of carpentry on her behalf that Bridget had to see what a fortunate well-befriended girl she was. Her father too, with an eagerness of nature which was characteristic of him, took a keen interest in the little house and its management. He set himself to literary labour, and wrote some accounts of his experiences which were sensational enough to find a market at once.

So at last Bridget settled down into a new life, a life that was harder and more responsible than her service at the Barbers', but still had the charm of her home life. Her father, born egoist though he was, was affectionate, and for the time the novelty of his new home occupied his restless mind. He was, beside, too weak and unnerved to have any vagrant desires. He talked affectionately of the joys of home, as he sat smoking by the fire in the evening whilst Bridget worked at the Barbers' mending.

By constant unflagging work she was able to make both ends just meet; but once again, as in

her grandfather's lifetime, the maintenance of the household rested entirely upon her, and she realized keenly that such as she could not afford to be ill, or tired or discouraged ; the bowstring must never be relaxed.

Jeremy's life was very different at this time. To a superficial observer it would have seemed the most perfect luxury and laziness. He dawdled about in one country and another, seeing beautiful things, hearing music, talking to pleasant people, and taking his ease in great hotels. Or he was on the yacht, with nothing to do but read, and play games, and watch the sea. But to Jeremy's active mind, laziness was very trying ; and even as he surveyed the fair beauty of Fuji, he wished passionately that he were back in London.

The voyage was, moreover, a sad one for him. There was a sort of agony in watching the physical and mental wreckage of a man who was, not only his dearest friend, but his ideal of fine activity. Month by month he had to realize that Lord Walsall was no better, that the final wreck was inevitable. They pretended each to the other that he was stronger, able to do more, on the very threshold of new health, but the poor little fiction grew thinner and thinner. And it finally died one spring day when the two men were sitting in a garden in the Riviera, before them innumerable flowering shrubs, and, behind these, orange trees in fruit, wonderful in their glory of gold and green. It was a morning when

spring seems in every thicket, and so nearly a visible form that one half expects to see the flash of her dress among the trees. And with the coming of spring, there was that hope and joy in physical life which makes all young and healthy things rejoice.

Jeremy had been reading poetry aloud in a rather matter-of-fact tone of voice, when Lord Walsall took the book away from him.

“I can’t stand poetry to-day,” he said; “I want to talk.”

Jeremy laughed.

“Talk away then, old Philistine. I don’t believe you half appreciate Keats as rendered by me,” he answered.

“Yes, but I can’t stand Keats this morning. I don’t know whether I’m ‘half in love with easeful death.’ But my feelings don’t matter, for I’m certainly dying.”

Jeremy winced, but he tried to seem cheerful.

“That’s not at all the right thing to say to your medical man,” he answered. “It’s telling him in plain English that he’s a fraud.”

“Jeremy, don’t let’s rot: it’s not your fault, not anybody’s. Don’t let us think of cures, but bring our minds round to face death. I knew that the end was coming when spring began. I don’t know what it was, but something in the feeling of the spring wind, and in the sight of flowers in the garden, brought home to me how much I was losing hold on life; and I knew then, that though had been miserable through the struggle for life,

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I was quite happy now that I had given up hope, and brought myself to face this last adventure."

Jeremy was silent for a minute. "I don't think," he said slowly, "that there's any need for preparation with you. You have always had this in view as a rider has a bad fence in his mind. You've done as much already as most men have done when they're sixty. But when it has to be faced, we'll face it together, Jack."

Lord Walsall nodded.

"Yes, I know," he said, "I often think I'm selfish to keep you idling here, but if it's not for long, I know you're willing. It's just my belief in your love for me that braces me up. But look here, I want to talk business."

"Very well."

"Jeremy, I've left you the Norfolk Estate, to you and your heirs for ever."

"I almost wish you hadn't."

"But listen. During your life at least, I want that plan of the cripples' home carried out, if you're still keen about it. I've left you enough money to keep up the place, but I couldn't leave you much more; and if you took many children you'd have to depend on outside subscriptions. I think you'd get them easily enough, but, as you see, it isn't plain sailing."

"Never mind. It will be all the better. I'm glad the place should be used that way, for I shall feel all the time that you're working it too, Jack. I shall be under your command. It's going to be a joint-stock affair."

“Thank you,—then you won’t mind my ghost appearing in the garden, or looking at you through the window on a winter night?”

“Wherever I am you will be the most welcome of all men, however you come.”

“Then I shall come, please God. But, Jeremy, I wish we could have Bridget as matron.”

Jeremy surveyed the orange trees, and then he surveyed his boots with a rather gloomy interest. He disliked talking about painful subjects, but he braced his mind to it as he saw that his friend wanted to discuss this one.

“It would be rather awkward for her, wouldn’t it?” he asked.

“Possibly, but from her face and from what I have heard of her she is precisely the woman for the place. I never quite knew what you quarrelled about—was it very serious?”

Jeremy frowned: his wrongs were still fresh in his mind.

“Well, she just jilted me,” he said, “and she gave no adequate reason, except that she had always thought the engagement imprudent, and that now she must make a home for this old lion-taming father of hers.”

“And she never wrote?”

“No, that was just the thing that proved how little she cared after all. I returned a match-box she’d given me by Gusty Barber, and with it, I sent a letter. Now if she’d liked me one bit she’d have answered that letter. You know I’m a sort of tortoise-like person, and I can’t always open out

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my mind to people. If I've got to show my feelings it means a lot of grovelling in a dark cellar and getting out boxes, and then unlocking them. Well, I did all that, and Bridget simply took no notice."

"Do you think," Lord Walsall asked, "that she ever got the letter?"

"Of course she did. Gusty would certainly give it to her. And he was in such a state of intense fury with me that he'd never have forgotten it."

Lord Walsall got up, and they wandered down through the trees, towards the sea.

"I wonder," he said at last, "if quarrelling with people we love is ever worth while? Of course I don't know whether you do love Bridget—that would make all the difference."

"Oh yes, I do!" Jeremy answered; "that's why I can't forgive her."

"And so you'll be miserable and make her miserable all your lives long?"

"Oh, rubbish! Gusty will grow up and marry her, and they'll be happy as the day is long."

"Jeremy, sometimes you remind me astonishingly of a mule."

Jeremy laughed, and agreed that the likeness was excellent. But in his heart he wished that the old painful subject of the rupture with Bridget had been left in the dark. He was surprised to find how very much it hurt him still, and how bitterly he resented the fact that she had never even acknowledged his letter. He was sure that

Bridget was perfectly happy in the little cottage, which Gusty had described to Lord Walsall. And now the bright sea gleaming through the shining leaves of shrubs and orange groves made him realize sharply his wounded pride, and the better feeling, his steady and unchanging love for Bridget.

“Perhaps,” said Lord Walsall presently, “Bridget knew that your people didn’t like the match. To a proud girl, that would be enough to end the engagement.”

“That’s a silly reason. Why should she spoil my life to please my relations?”

“She’d think that you could find a more suitable wife. What about that old godfather of yours, didn’t he make objections?”

“Oh yes, rather. He’d offered to leave me twopence halfpenny in his will, and he said if I married Bridget he wouldn’t; so I replied that I did not see my way to altering my plans, and that he had better alter his will. I suppose he did, but then, when Bridget threw me over, he had the impertinence to write to me and say that he would overlook my folly and reinstate me in his will.”

“And what did you say?”

“I said that I desired him to find some more deserving and amenable object for his charities, as I intended to manage my affairs according to my own ideas, and so on. It was worth while, even if I lose fifty pounds a year.”

Lord Walsall nodded.

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"But I'm sorry about Bridget," he said. "I should like her to have been the mistress of Wood Hall, but I suppose that can't be, and I dare say that you'll marry some other very nice girl before long."

Jeremy looked doggedly at the sea, and kicked a pebble away.

"No, I won't. I'm not going to marry at all."

"Then why not ask Bridget to be the matron at Wood Hall?"

"She's too young, Jack; it would never do, unless there were some older woman in charge of her."

"It's a pity. I wonder what will happen to her, poor girl! I suppose she'll stick to the old father while he lives—but then? By-the-bye, talking of my will, Jeremy, I've left Bridget two hundred pounds. It's a very small sum, but it would give her a training if she chose to go in for some other sort of work. And when I die, I want you to send her back that wedding-present necklace which she returned to me. Tell her, please, that I send it with my love, and will she wear it in memory of me sometimes?"

"I will."

They walked on along the white, hot road, and Jeremy tried to make cheerful conversation and failed hopelessly. So, in spite of the orange trees and the glory of southern sunshine, he was not more happy than Bridget in her dark ivy-grown lodge.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIRST

Flight

"Do you know, Daddy, that we have been a year together to-day!" said Bridget, one bright autumn morning. Mr. Joy had just strolled down to a ten o'clock breakfast. He looked visibly annoyed to find his daughter washing the floor under his feet.

"And how many times have you washed the floor during that year?" he asked irritably.

"About a hundred and four times."

"You under-estimate, Bridget; I'd say a thousand times. Look here, my dear, I want you to bring me a daily paper."

"I'll bring it in the evening. I shall be at the Barbers' all day; they're cleaning out the dining-room."

"Oh, bother the Barbers; you might be their slave! Well, send young 'Fonso with it."

"I'll ask him to bring it. Had you heard that Lord Walsall is worse?"

"Oh yes, Gusty told me so; he was genuinely upset."

"Yes, they all *are* very sorry. Lord Walsall is such a nice man."

"I dare say. Wasn't that Dr. Fleetwood with him? I mean the plain jolly-looking young fellow who attended me that night?"

Bridget scrubbed with great energy.

"Oh yes, he was."

Mr. Joy felt quite bad-tempered this morning. The bacon was burnt and the tea was stewed, and the table looked rather forlorn, and it always spoilt his comfort to see Bridget employed in vigorous work. He was really fond of his daughter, but he wished that she had been much more like himself. Had she defied him, lolled about in an easy-chair, spent money on fine clothes, been passionate, he could have better understood her. But this dutiful, patient, consistently cheerful Bridget seemed like a vague reproach to himself. He felt, although he knew he was wrong, that Bridget might be trying to be superior to himself. He might be the cross which she bore cheerfully. As he thought of these things he felt a bitter sense of weariness and disgust. He hated the little poky house with its cheap furniture, its little makeshifts. Was he really to live and die here? The thought was intolerable. He could not be content to hobble out in the morning, then come home to a meagre dinner, then smoke or read till bedtime. It seemed to him that his soul had no room in this little house. When he thought of the changing life of the menagerie, the crowds, the excitement, the pleasure in going on and on, he hungered for the old life.

"Wasn't there something between you and Fleetwood?" he asked suddenly.

Bridget started.

"There was once, but it came to an end. It's all dead and buried now," she answered.

"You silly girl, didn't you know your own mind, or why did you let the fellow go?"

"His sister wrote to me, and said how much she disapproved. I couldn't marry him after that, could I, Daddy?"

Mr. Joy looked at his daughter.

"Of course, that was just the reason why you should have married him. If you'd had pluck you'd have been married at once, and set yourself to out-dress, out-talk, out-shine the sister. Why, you're a lady every bit as much as she is. How could you let yourself be put down so easily?"

Bridget raised her face and looked at him with frank eyes, and he saw how like her mother she had grown.

"But, Daddy, I'm not that sort of person at all. I'm just a homely, plain sort of girl, and I really couldn't out-dress or out-talk any one. I shouldn't even want to. I should just fail, and then how silly I should look."

She glanced apologetically at her father. "I know," she said, "that you think that very tame for your daughter. But I never was a fighter. And I'm afraid one can't change one's nature: if you're just a black slug you can't be a butterfly, however hard you try. In fact, you only wind up

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by being a silly affected slug, and finding all the butterflies laughing at you."

Richard Joy smiled ; but still he felt vexed and bored.

"You were a very, very silly girl," he said, "to let Fleetwood go. Can't you get him back again?"

Bridget stood up, her attitude was quite uncompromising.

"No, I couldn't and I wouldn't," she said firmly. She put on her hat and coat, kissed her father, and went out.

"When do you get home?" he asked.

"Not till eight, I'm afraid, Daddy. But there's cold beef, and some tarts in the cupboard, and I'll ask 'Fonso to bring you a paper."

Bridget went out and hurried to the Barbers'. A friend of Walsie's was staying with them, and this meant much additional work, as the visitor was, according to his friend's accounts, used to that magical thing called "style."

When Bridget entered the back door, she was at once conscious of the electrical conditions which attend domestic disturbance. Belinda, who had succeeded Bridget as general servant, was, to use her own description, "flouncing around" the kitchen.

Bridget went upstairs at once, and found no beds made, so she set to work to make them. Maudie came and helped her.

"Oh, Bridget," she exclaimed, "we've had such a scene this morning! Belinda is leading an

insurrection downstairs, and she's told us all such dreadful things about ourselves that it's given Mamma neuralgia. Belinda says there is not one lady or gentleman in the house except Walsie, and she's not even sure of him. It was all because 'Fonso was late for school, and he found his boots weren't cleaned, so he threw them down the back stairs to Belinda. I do think it was very rude of him, and, as Papa says, gentlemen never do things like that."

"And what happened then?" Bridget asked, laughing.

"Oh, Belinda charged upstairs, with flashing eyes and minus her cap, and she brought up so many things against us that we all sat round her in bewildered silence. Papa had left his soup one day, and that had cut her to the quick; and Gusty had said his potato was hard, that was a fortnight ago; and I had written 'dusty' in the dust on the lower part of the sideboard, and Mamma had simply done everything shocking and unkind. So Belinda said she'd go, and she cried and said she was an orphan—and we just stared at one another with faces aghast, and then Mamma said she must certainly go. Oh, dear Bridget, I wish you could have stayed with us!"

"Well, I'll come every day and help, Miss Maudie, if my father can spare me," said Bridget. She understood and liked the Barbers, and, in spite of many things, she had been as happy there as in any place since her mother's death.

'Fonso came home from school in time for lunch, and Bridget sought him out, and begged him to go to her father with a paper. 'Fonso was always ready to visit the ex-lion-tamer, and, besides, having been the bomb that had caused the domestic disturbance, he felt his popularity was clouded for the day, so he got the paper and set 'off towards Bridget's house. He found Richard Joy sitting by the fire smoking. The elder man smiled at the boy, and held out his hand.

"Well, Mr. 'Fonso," he said, "you've brought me a paper. God bless you for that. I was feeling greatly bored, and I want to see what's happening in the big world. Would you like a cigarette?"

"Oh, I don't mind if I do," 'Fonso answered, with elaborate carelessness. He took the cigarette between his fingers, struck a match on his heel, and proceeded to inhale rather violently. To his great confusion, he choked. When he had got his breath, he said, "Egyptian?" in the tone of a veteran smoker.

"No, I fear not; I fancy West Indian. And what have you been doing, Mr. 'Fonso, since we met last?"

'Fonso leant back, and tried to blow smoke through his eye. This time he choked very badly, and confessed between the spasms that he wasn't in form to-day.

Mr. Joy gave an exhibition of what a champion smoker could do, to 'Fonso's exquisite delight.

"Oh, I do wish I were like you, Mr. Joy!" the little boy exclaimed.

"Do you?" the elder man asked, laughing. "Well, if I were a boy like you again, I'd be a different sort of man next time. But now I'm utterly done up, a poor old dog. Still, like every dog, I've had a fine day."

'Fonso bent forward in his chair, and let the cigarette go out. Not being Julius Cæsar, he could not even do two things at once, and smoking required concentrated attention. Now he wanted to talk.

"I say, Mr. Joy," he began, "did you know that Hoskins' Menagerie is at Little Bursted, not three miles from Hanbury?"

Joy's figure stiffened, and his face lost its indolent expression. He stared at the boy.

"Have you been there?" he asked eagerly.

"I went yesterday."

"Well, what did you think of it? What sort of man had they put in my place?"

"Oh, a regular rotter! He cowed the dogs, and the lions looked as if they were drugged. They called him Captain Jim, but he wasn't up to you, Signor, you bet."

"Ah!" said Richard Joy. He sat up, and twirled his moustache jauntily.

"Tell me more," he said.

'Fonso related all that he had seen and heard, and either he was eloquent, or old memories were awakened, for his listener heard him with shining eyes.

"You've done me good," he said at last, "but I never knew how caravan-sick I had grown. It was a fine life, rough and hard as it was." He looked at his watch.

"Don't let me keep you, Mr. 'Fonso," he said.

'Fonso rose reluctantly, pocketed the end of his cigarette as a manly trophy, shook the lion-tamer's hand with fervour, and wandered off.

Richard Joy sat down, and stared at the fire.

"Captain Jim," he repeated, "a regular rotter! And he was bullying the dogs. That won't do."

He got up, put on his overcoat, went to a little desk in the corner, took out some silver from Bridget's small treasury, and put it in his pocket. Then he found a piece of paper, and wrote, "Don't wait for me," on it, and put this on the table.

Having done this, he left the house and took a train to Little Burstled. He soon found the menagerie and made his way in. No one seemed to know him. But to him there was an exquisite familiarity about the gaudy caravans, the big tent, the brazen band, and all the sensational trappings of the place. This was a home-coming to him, and he almost sang with joy as he pushed into the tent.

He arrived at the time when Captain Jim was putting the dogs through their performance in a side tent. Richard Joy paid his penny and went in. His heart was beating fast; he had loved the dogs, and the thought of seeing them again excited

him profoundly. Captain Jim, a surly looking fellow, appeared, and bowed before them. After him came the troupe. Ponto and Gyp and Sally, Boxer, Trick, and a new dog he had not seen. The performance began, but the dogs were half-hearted and timid; it was obvious that they did not understand Captain Jim, nor he them. He had a harsh loud voice, which he used very freely, especially to the new dog, which was frightened out of its senses every time he shouted. Mr. Joy moved to a front seat; he watched the performance with rising anger and disgust. At last he could bear it no longer, and he rose in his place and whistled. Then he called the dogs' names—Ponto, Gyp, Sally, Boxer, Trick.

There was a pause in which ears were pricked, and eyes turned upon him. Then came a flurry and hustle of rushing dogs. They were on him in a whirlwind of wagging tails and eager paws; they were on his knees, yelping, licking his face; they were round him jumping, barking, almost frantic with delight. The older dogs had known him at once, and the younger ones had followed their lead and had then remembered for themselves. Richard Joy was nearly crying with pleasure in the midst of this storm of joyful little dogs, but Captain Jim came forward in deep anger.

"'Ere now! 'Ere now!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean, stopping the performance? Let my dogs alone, will you. Come back, Ponto; come the lot of you, or I'll make you."

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Captain Jim raised his whip ; but before he could use it the old lion-tamer caught it from his hand.

"They are not your dogs," he said, "and I advise you not to touch one of them. I'll put them through their tricks, and these ladies and gentlemen shall judge whose they are."

"No, I won't 'ave it. You're drunk—that's what you are ; and I'll have you put out."

But some interested spectators interfered. "Let him try, let him try," they shouted.

Captain Jim glared at his audience.

"Well, I'll call the boss," he said, and retreated.

Richard Joy went forward with the dogs. They were now eager to perform. At his word of command they obeyed joyfully. Another and most sprightly performance began. The audience was enchanted. Loud applause and laughter drew new spectators. Mr. Joy, besides his charm of voice and manner, had the glib speech and ready wit of a true showman. He talked to and about the dogs so fluently and funnily that he seemed like some benevolent deity taking part in a canine revel. He was utterly in sympathy with his little troupe, and he knew how to cover their mistakes, to make their characters apparent to his audience. There was a storm of applause at every joke and trick. And the boss stood at the door, frowning silence at the indignant Captain Jim, and clapping his hands and laughing with the others. At the end of the performance Mr. Joy put a question to the assembled people.

"Are these dogs mine, or the other fellow's?" he asked.

"Yours, yours!" they shouted.

He laughed; then he saw the round shining face of Hoskins, and he went to him and took his hands.

"Oh, Dickie, Dickie! Ain't this like you?" exclaimed Mr. Hoskins. "Come to the caravan with me; the old Missus will be out of her mind. 'It's Dick Joy we want back,' she says, every day nearly. And them little dogs knew you at once. Why, here they are at our heels; well, bring 'em along. We'll have the lions following you next."

Arm in arm the two men went to the Hoskins' caravan and found Mrs. Hoskins. In her delight she kissed the ex-lion-tamer on both cheeks.

"Take some tea, love," she said; "I've just made it."

Richard Joy sat down.

"Home at last," said he; "and isn't it just like home!"

"You've got to stay with us on the old terms, or better if you like," said Hoskins. "What do you say to a partnership?"

"Oh, but I have a daughter! I can't leave her after she's taken care of me, poor girl," the other replied regretfully.

"She'll be as right now as she was before you came," said Mr. Hoskins. "She'll marry, Dick; don't you fret. A nice girl like that will marry.

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Stay here to-night at least, and we'll talk it over," Mr. Hoskins urged.

"Well, one night; but I must send her a telegram."

"All right, our Tom will take it."

When Bridget got home that night, very hungry and tired, she found to her great surprise that the house was quite dark. She went in and lit the lamp. A telegram lay on the floor. She opened it, and saw that it was from her father.

"Staying with old friends to-night. Don't expect me."

Bridget gazed at it. She wondered what friends her father had met, and where he had met them. But her bewilderment was not enlightened until the next day, when a letter came for her, addressed in his writing. She read it eagerly.

"HOSKINS' MENAGERIE,
"LITTLE BURSTED.

"MY DARLING BRIDGET, best of daughters,

"Have you been wondering where that old Dad of yours has been wandering? Well, here he is, in his old haunts, being treated like a king by men and dogs. There's a great bully of a fellow, who has been frightening my dogs. Oh, Biddy, you can't think how glad they were to see me! I think they'll never let me go again. And Hoskins has offered me a partnership, but of course, though the position is excellent and just to my mind, I won't leave you. I told him that in

honour bound I'd stick to you. But you can imagine that your old Dad has been sorely tempted: he never was a barn-yard fowl, as you said; he's a seagull, or a hawk, or one of the wild birds.

"Still, no wandering instinct shall come between my good little homely Bridget and her father. At whatever cost, I shall come back; but it'll be a wrench to leave the old place and the dogs. Expect me when you see me.

"Your devoted father,

"RICHARD JOY."

Bridget went to the post office, and asked for a telegraph form. She directed it to her father.

"Accept partnership. I go back to Mrs. Barber.—BRIDGET."

That was the message; and she knew it would be quite enough to ease her father's conscience. Then she went to the Barbers', and sought for the mistress of the house.

"Will you take me in Belinda's place, ma'am?" she asked. "My father has gone back to the menagerie."

"Oh, thank God!" said Mrs. Barber. Then she got up, and kissed her former maid.

"Come back on any terms you like," she said impulsively.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SECOND

Bad News

ANOTHER year had passed, a year entirely uneventful, a year of little things, in which every one had grown rather older, and, in many cases, wiser. Bridget had easily and cheerfully taken her old place among the Barbers, had fallen into the regular routine of cleaning, and cooking, and washing up, and had found herself happier than she had expected.

Perhaps she was a little disappointed to find how happy she could be, in spite of the sad end of her brief love story. To die of heart-break is always romantic, and the quiet cheerfulness of humdrum things seems rather a dun-coloured virtue. Had Bridget been a fine lady with little to do and long thoughts to think, like another Mariana of the Moated Grange, she would have been very miserable. But as it was, she found herself quite cheerful, and obliged to confess that the little everyday things of life are astonishingly pleasant when you look at them closely. And she found, too, that she had grown to love the Barbers, and to take a really genuine interest in their fortunes. When she felt that they were her people, a fine old feudal sentiment woke in her,

and she determined that the Barbers' doorstep should be the whitest, and their window-curtains the cleanest in Hanbury.

She grew rather masterful, as good servants do, and insisted on deciding the *menu* when they gave luncheon or dinner parties. The news that any one had had an incomparable pudding or entrée filled her with so fierce a rivalry that she had no peace until she had equalled it. To this end she attended evening cookery classes at the Hanbury Technical School, and came back full of new knowledge and zeal. A refrigerator was bought, and the Barbers had ices at their summer tea parties, though a noise like thunder in the kitchen proclaimed the vigorous rolling of the refrigerator, which 'Fonso had been employed to manage.

Now that Jeremy had vanished, as it seemed, from her life, she saw no prospect but domestic service before her. She found that there are two sorts of work in the world, drudgery and art. Drudgery she knew to be hateful, but art she saw to be the greatest joy that human beings know. Now, household work is either an intolerable drudgery or a beautiful art which adorns every act of daily life.

This was a discovery to Bridget, one that she could not, perhaps, have made but for the chastening effects of sorrow, disappointment, and privation. But she made the discovery, and with it found happiness. That she managed the Barber family

was undeniable. No one knew what was for dinner but Bridget, and no one dared to do any work for himself when she was there. Occasionally she employed members of the family to help her, and to share the high mysteries of household crafts. Gusty was allowed to criticize the table decoration before dinner parties, and even to suggest schemes of colour. Maudie was employed in the working of tea-cloths and cosies fit for the tea parties which were so successful at Belle View House. Maudie was even allowed to make cakes, for Bridget knew that cakes were her weak point, and she knew that she had found there a successful rival.

Under Bridget's régime, Jacko, Gusty's dog, became an authorized house-dog. It is hard to say how she conveyed to Mrs. Barber's mind the feeling that the presence of a dog gave a house a certain distinction. But she did. And as Bridget studied the weekly fashion papers in the Barbers' interest, her opinions were accepted as typical of the *dernier cri*.

Bridget had now but one ambition, and that was to follow Gusty's fortunes, and to end her days as housekeeper to Augustus Barber, R.A.

"Of course you will need a good servant, Master Gusty," she observed, as Gusty sat drawing by his bedroom window, and she dusted what he called his "Bibelots."

"My dear Biddy, I shall be starving in a garret."

"But I've saved some money, and I can help. And besides, you are going to make your fame. You're sure to do that, of course ; I know it."

"I'm going to have a try."

"Yes, and then you'll marry and set up a small pretty house and studio at Richmond or Wimbledon, or somewhere near London. And then you'll need me to look after the house—wages won't matter for the first years."

"Bridget, the Mater would never let you go : she'd massacre me first. Do you know what you're called in Hanbury? 'Mrs. Barber's Jewel,'—yes, you are."

Bridget flushed with pleasure.

"I'm so glad," she said, "but when you marry I must go to your house."

"Have you chosen Mrs. Augustus yet?"

"I have, Master Gusty ; but I won't tell you yet, you're too young to think about it. By the time you have come back from Paris or Rome she'll be just the right age."

"Oh ! she's a youngster now ? I bet it's Daisy Pringle you're driving at. But I'm going to be a hermit and live on acorns."

"Then I shall roast them for you, and serve them with beech-nut sauce."

"Well," said Gusty, "I dare say Fleetwood will come back before then, and cart you off to manage his house."

"Oh no, please don't talk about it. That is all over."

To avoid further discussion Bridget went downstairs. But as she went she wondered if Jeremy ever thought of her. He and Lord Walsall had gone to the West Indies, and report said that the latter was very much worse. Had she but known it, he was at that time dead, and Jeremy was in the darkest place of shadows.

The next day the papers had heard the news, and there were accounts of Lord Walsall's short and very active life.

Mr. Barber read these aloud at the breakfast-table, and there was genuine sorrow in his heart. For his aristocratic connection had proved more pleasant than his dreams had ever supposed.

"I hope it isn't too horrid to hope that he's remembered Gusty in his will," Mrs. Barber remarked, after a moment. Gusty rose in anger.

"I hope he hasn't," he said. "I liked him, and I don't care about his money or his peerage either."

Gusty left the room, and Mrs. Barber waited until she thought he was out of hearing.

"That's very noble and dear of Gusty," she remarked, "but still one cannot quite free one's mind from earthly considerations. And it *would* be an advantage to the dear boy to have some tangible remembrance of his cousin. And, dear me, what a strange coincidence that I should have bought a black tea-gown yesterday! And my new hat is black too; I can easily take out the white feathers. It seemed like a premonition, didn't it? I had

just the same before my uncle Sir Joseph Peterson died. I got a black silk petticoat on the very day. Some people are quite sensitive to coming events."

"But don't you think, my dear," Mr. Barber remarked mildly, "that it would be rather pretentious of us to wear mourning for Lord Walsall?"

"No, dear, it would be absolutely *comme il faut*. Every one in Hanbury knows that we are related to him. Besides, as you know, if one doesn't value oneself in a place like this, no one else does value one a bit. I shall certainly wear black, and if we can't afford the boys black suits, I have some bits of black in my bit-drawer, and I'll sew them on their sleeves."

The will caused, as wills must and always do, endless disputes and vexation. There were so many legacies that every one could object to nearly a score of other legatees who plainly had no claim on Lord Walsall.

Many people, these were near relations of the deceased, saw very plainly why Dr. Fleetwood had been so devoted, certainly for no very altruistic motives. His services had been worth while when he earned Wood Hall and two thousand a year for them. And though the place was to be a Cripples' Home, that was a mere nothing. Jeremy would be a rich man at the expense of the next-of-kin.

Even the Barbers were discontented. For

though Lord Walsall had left Gusty enough for the most thorough artistic training that he could desire, it was evident that he might have left him a little more. And even they, much as they liked her, thought it unsuitable in the utmost degree that Bridget should have two hundred pounds. For what could Bridget do with such a sum? And how useful it would have been to Mrs. Barber herself. Mr. Barber was to receive three hundred pounds. "And really, my dear, I should have never expected threepence from him some years ago," he observed. "Still, I wish it had been five hundred," said Mrs. Barber discontentedly. So, though many people were pleased and surprised by the bequests, many more were indignant.

Mrs. Barber and Maudie wore elaborate mourning, but Gusty, though he protested even against the band on his sleeve, mourned truly and faithfully, with many high resolves to be worthy of the trust of the cousin who was really no cousin except by his own kindness. Jeremy wrote to Mrs. Barber a dry little letter, telling her of the bequests, and enclosing the necklace for Bridget and studs for Gusty.

Bridget wept over the necklace, and wore it under her dress on Sundays and out-days, in memory of this kind friend; but she wept, too, because Jeremy had not written to her at all.

Although like other girls she had often planned what she should do if some unexpected treasure-

ship came home to her, she was in reality rather bewildered by the legacy. Two hundred pounds seemed to her a vast sum. And she felt affluent, for her father, stirred at last by some paternal instinct, sent her a pound a month. Perhaps he valued his freedom at this price; for he had followed the menagerie and had not even returned to Hanbury to make his adieux. Bridget had written to Hoskins to beg that her father might have no more to do with the lions, and it was agreed that he should train nothing more savage than leopards. To this Richard Joy assented; he thanked his darling Bridget for her care of him, and begged her, in a postscript, to marry Dr. Fleetwood, "for," he wrote, "man is woman's natural protector. And you have a gentle, trusting nature which needs defence and shelter, and that only a man can give. As your father, I shall feel anxious about you until I can see you leaning on a husband's strong and tender arm."

Bridget, who had a sense of humour, laughed over the postscript. As her youth had been spent in taking care of her nearest masculine relations, and as they had never dreamt of supporting or protecting her, she had grown up with the feeling that woman was essentially man's nurse and guardian. She consulted Mr. Barber about the legacy and begged his advice. Mr. Barber was making an ottoman for the drawing-room, but he gave the matter grave consideration.

"Well Bridget," he said, "if I'm to speak

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honestly, I will treat you as I would my own daughter—yes, cut the cretonne at the fold, it really will look charming with these brass-headed nails, one has rolled under the bench,—however, what was I saying? Ah! that I would speak to you as to a daughter. Well, then, I think you should be trained for some really remunerative work. ‘You are, I can see it without any outside witness, a lady; you are just the sort of servant that a true lady would be. I have a little axiom about service. It is this: ‘A truly good servant becomes a lady, and a cultured lady becomes an excellent servant.’ But, at the same time, I think our Heavenly Master requires us to follow the customs of the rank in which we are.”

“Yes—I’ve thought that, sir. Do you want the nails two inches apart?”

“Yes—no, an inch apart is better. Really, I’m quite proud of my ottoman; I must ask Mr. and Mrs. Pringle in to see it. Well, we were talking of rank, Bridget, and I want to say to you that I think we should live up to the intellectual demands of our rank. The higher ranks make higher demands on the brain, and the lower ranks make more demands on the body. Now, your grandfather was a man of letters, and you have his memory to live up to. I do feel that you should be trained in some capacity which would give you an *entrée* into the society to which you rightly belong.”

“But what could I do, sir?” Bridget asked.

"Somehow I dread starting out on a new career. I am so happy here with you and the mistress."

"Thank you, Bridget, thank you. I can say most heartily that we have no wish to part from you. We have never enjoyed such—well such—er—tranquillity as we have since your advent. But still one must climb upwards if the opportunity is clearly offered. Now could you not be trained in the Domestic Sciences as a lecturer or housekeeper, so that you could take some good post?"

"I might," said Bridget doubtfully, "but I should be afraid to lecture."

"But you would gain confidence in time. I will make inquiries for you, and find the terms, and so on. Or would you prefer agricultural work as a gardener or poultry-keeper?"

Bridget was doubtful about these things. She had found her niche, and she dreaded leaving it. The legacy threatened to give her as much pain as pleasure. She wished she could consult Jeremy, but that was out of the question; Jeremy did not care what she did, that was evident, for he had not written to her.

He had gone out of her life altogether and she out of his. He would be the master of Wood Hall and she would be an obscure housekeeper or lecturer in some corner of the world.

These thoughts came while she was cooking the dinner, and she had to concentrate her mind severely on the economical soup to which she had

given the name of "Consommé au Nothing," and which consisted of potato water, a little milk, some grated cheese, a handful of sago and cornflour to thicken it.

But of one thing Bridget was conscious, though she knew not even the rudiments of philosophy. She knew that her life would have to be a happy one if it was to be truly serviceable in the sense which service now assumed for her, and she knew that it was in her power to make it painstakingly, carefully happy. For, after all, a certain very useful durable sort of happiness can be made in much the way that Bridget made the "Nothing Soup," by such a receipt as this: "A great deal of hard work, a well-exercised sense of humour, a daily expanded power of observation, and the whole stirred with a definite purpose of some or any sort."

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-THIRD

Jeremy Dying?

SUMMER had come to town, poor summer who goes bravely through the streets, with a smut on her face, and dust on her gown. She came to Hanbury and strewed treasures from her dowry, pansies and rather forlorn mignonette and lupins and cornflowers; and she went here and there like an invisible Pied Piper, calling those who could to come out of the town and away, away to the Land of the Young, where laziness is virtue, and where poetry is not so unpractical as account books. Walsie, through the open window of the Bank, heard the call and saw—although he did not know this, being a sensible young man—the alluring sunburnt face of summer peeping in at him; but he dreamt of the splash of sea waves, and of the glory of the buoyant water to the diver as he shoots into the green depths. So Walsie wondered if he could afford to go to Boulogne, and he thought of summer suits, and felt rather pleasantly that a Panama hat suited him.

And Mr. Barber in the hot class-room, surveying restless little boys who felt no more interest in Latin Grammar than he did himself, thought of the exquisite idleness of one who wanders on the sands, and hears the cheerful strains of a band,

and though he felt that the days of artistic enthusiasm were over, he reflected that a few weeks in Switzerland would be very pleasant. Mrs. Barber, too, and Maudie, looked at the summer splendour of the shops, and thought of garden parties and ices.

To Bridget summer came too, peeping in at the kitchen window and piping the music of Arcady. Summer the witch had brought the magic of wind-ruffled grass, and leafy places; and so potent was she that Bridget heard the call and went out of doors to shell the peas and peel the potatoes for dinner.

The yard was now called Bridget's garden, for it was adorned with butter boxes painted green, and filled with wall-flowers. In the broken places among the tiles nasturtium seeds were sown for later flowering.

In this place Bridget sat enjoying the sunshine, and the scent of wall-flowers. Gusty joined her and begged for some raw peas which he chewed with a meditative air.

"I wonder," he said, "that people don't thread peas and wear them as necklaces. Just think of a coronal of green peas on a head of red hair; it would be ripping, and then you could eat them as soon as you were hungry."

"They are pretty," Bridget answered, "and they always remind me of Hans Andersen's story. I think the fairies must store green peas for their dowries, don't you, Master Gusty?"

"Oh, Bridget, I wish you hadn't to call me

'master,'” Gusty remarked, sitting down on an upturned flower-pot.

“But of course I must whilst I’m servant here. And why should you mind?”

“Because, Biddy, I always think of you as a friend.”

“And are you really so unwise as to think that Master or Miss or Ma’am or Sir, can alter friendship? Do you know, I sometimes wonder why people worry about such very trivial things? And you are just the same delightful friend to me whether I call you Master or Prince, or give you no title at all.”

Gusty considered this.

“Yes,” he answered, “I think we do lose our wool about a lot of small things, who goes into a room first, and who our great-grandpapas were, and that sort of thing.”

“What were you reading?” Bridget asked, for Gusty had a book under his arm.

“*Where the Forest Murmurs*, by Fiona Macleod,” Gusty answered. “I wanted to feel like summer, and to forget that I was in a place where ‘Fonso’s murmuring was the most audible sound. And there’s a lovely part about St. Bridget. St. Bridget was really very nice for a saint, you know. As a rule saints are not in my line very much, but St. Bridget had a notion of how to do it.”

“Why, how did she do it?” Bridget asked.

“Well, she liked dandelions for one thing. And she was simply nuts on little babies; she

goes round from cottage to cottage looking in the cradles. I call that decent of her, don't you? And then in spring she comes over the hills with all the new lambs following her. That's picturesque. Some day I'll paint you as St. Bridget."

Bridget demurred, but as Gusty had new ideas for pictures every day, the ultimate achievement of any of them seemed unlikely.

But the joy of summer was upon the whole family. They dined with the windows open, and Maudie wore white muslin, and Walsie was in flannels, because he was going out to play tennis at the club. There was among them that sense of jubilant carelessness which only summer can bring to those who are used to cold grey days. Perhaps even the most prudent and puritanic are bewitched into a feeling that life is a riotous festival. Mr. Barber, grown grey with careful thought, had donned a white waistcoat on this evening, and during dessert he produced a paper which looked very much like one of Cook's *Tourist Guides*. Switzerland was printed boldly on the back.

"You're not going to Switzerland, are you, Pater?" Walsie asked with a laugh, for the idea struck him as ludicrous.

Mr. Barber looked up boldly.

"Why not, my son? I have some money, why not use it?"

"Go to Switzerland, Papa, all by yourself!" Maudie exclaimed; "why, you'd fall down a

crevasse, and we shouldn't find you till fifty years afterwards."

"But suppose you and your mother came too, Maudie?"

"Oh, what a lovely extravagant idea—wouldn't it be glorious!"

Maudie's eyes shone.

"But what about 'Fonso and Gusty?" Mrs. Barber asked.

"A fellow I know asked me to come down to Cornwall," Gusty remarked; "and 'Fonso could come if he agrees to behave soberly and righteously."

The idea of Switzerland fell into the Barber family like a meteor. Mr. Barber found an ancient alpenstock in the attic, and felt himself equipped. The very idea of it gave this simple family a cosmopolitan feeling, and they talked together of the "Continent" with the ease of seasoned travellers.

Before he went to bed Mr. Barber had made out three different routes, and had conversed with Maudie in the French language, just for practice, as he said.

But when all the family went away on their several journeys, what was to become of Bridget? This practical question was left to Mrs. Barber. She reviewed it for some time. Bridget could go away if she liked, or she could stay on in the house. She might decide for herself.

Bridget, asked to choose, thought of her friends in Burnton, and determined to visit them for a

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while. So she wrote to Mr. Horrocks and proposed to come and see him. The old man sent her a cordial invitation. And though she was only going from one town to another, the thought of seeing Burnton was pleasant.

After several weeks of anxious preparation, in which Bridget took an active share in dress-making, starching and ironing, the summer wardrobes of the travellers were complete, and Mrs. Barber and her daughter set off with Mr. Barber, who was armed with his alpenstock and provided with blue spectacles. Then Gusty and 'Fonso, wrangling fiercely with one another, drove off, and only called a truce at the corner of the street to wave to their faithful maid-servant.

Walsie, in an immaculate suit, went last, and Bridget was alone in the house. She slept there that night, as the house had to be tidied and Jacko seen to his summer quarters. But the next day she went back to Burnton. There were changes there, though there was no change in the hearty kindness of her friends. Mr. Horrocks seemed much older, and No. 8 was under excellent management and seemed a different place. And a change had taken place, too, in the feelings of Mr. Frank Miller. He had proved that second love may be best, and so had proposed to Joan and been accepted. However, the glow of their mutual enthusiasm did not prevent their plans for Bridget's pleasure.

On their first Saturday afternoon they took her to the Upper Circle to see *Romeo and Juliet*.

Bridget manœuvred not to sit between them, for Mr. Miller took a guileless pleasure in squeezing Joan's hand whenever the words were appropriate to themselves. And though Bridget had no desire to have her hand squeezed, she felt unreasonably lonely because it was not.

During the interval before the last act Mr. Miller came across a friend of his and entered into conversation with him. After some talk he rejoined his companions. He was visibly agitated.

The orchestra had struck up *Carmen*. In after years Bridget was conscious of every little trivial detail of that moment. The sudden agony of it seemed to have thrown them into clear relief. She remembered that the girl behind her was eating an orange, whilst she had just bitten a chocolate cream—it was crescent-shaped, and had green cream. Bridget never liked crescent chocolates again.

"What's the matter, Frank?" Joan asked, seeing that her lover was evidently distressed.

"Oh, I've just met a fellow who tells me that Dr. Fleetwood is dying! Isn't it sad?"

Joan looked at Bridget.

"Perhaps it's not true," she said.

"I'm afraid it is. He said that Dr. Fleetwood is with his aunt at Foxmere, in Westmorland. He was evidently quite overdone by Lord Walsall's long illness."

Some one behind them said "'Ush, there!" loudly, for the music had stopped and the curtain risen on the last act of the tragedy.

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But what did Bridget care about the fate of Romeo and Juliet? Jeremy was dying—dying—dying. How could any one act whilst that sorrow impended? Why did not the audience get up and go? Oh, how little people seemed to realize the great spectres that are going here and there through the world! Now that one of them had seized Bridget it seemed to her that she had never been really awake before. She had not known what pain and love could mean.

Shakespeare had written a play about love and death and sorrow. But how futile it seemed to Bridget at this moment. She only longed for the lovers to die and let her get away. When at last the curtain fell she had made her resolution. She met Joan's eyes, which turned upon her anxiously.

"Oh, Joan," she said, "I must see him before he dies! That's the only thing that matters in the world. I must see him. Help me, for God's sake!"

"Shall Frank take you to Foxmere?" Joan asked.

"No, I'll go alone. I have enough money with me, I think. Will you explain to Mr. Horrocks, and will Mr. Miller find me a train?"

"Why, certainly I will," said the young man; "but you must really take some tea first, Miss Bridget."

"I can't. I must get there at once. Oh, how do I know I am not too late already— isn't it torture not to know?"

They called a cab at the theatre door, and went

at once to the station, but there was no train for two hours.

Joan insisted that Bridget should have tea, and the latter was sensible enough to make herself eat and drink. But the two hours went on leaden feet. They tried to pass them by walking about the streets, but they were all too anxious to feel the least interest in what they saw.

"You'll get there very late, won't you?" Joan asked, "and if you miss that last train to Foxmere what shall you do?"

"I suppose I'll walk. I'll get there somehow, that's all that matters."

"But Bridget dear, won't Miss Matthews, Dr. Fleetwood's aunt, be surprised to see you late at night?"

Bridget looked at her.

"If she loves him she will be too miserable to be surprised at anything," she said; "when some one is dying, one can't help being natural. I shall just tell her that I love him, and so I had to come. I think she will understand."

"Of course she will," said Joan.

They wandered back to the station, which seemed to Bridget so careless about the main issues of life, and so intent on excursion trains, and the transit of goods.

Then at last her train came in. Her friends found her a corner, pressed little paper bags into her hands, and said "God speed" with all the sincerity of their very sincere hearts.

Bridget had to change at Preston, and it was

quite dusk by the time she reached Windermere. She knew that she had not a minute to spare if she were to catch the Foxmere train, and when she saw the clock she feared that she had lost it. She clutched her little bags and rushed. The train was just moving as she dashed on to the platform.

She turned the handle of a third-class carriage and tried to scramble in. But it is neither safe nor easy to get into a train which is in motion, and two irate porters caught her skirt and pulled her back. Bridget turned upon them like a little tigress. She felt that she could have struck the men who held her. But they, for their part, rated her severely on the suicidal folly of her conduct.

Bridget knew that she must be calm, that she must not cry. So she drew a long breath, and went to consult the station-master as to her best plan of procedure.

"You'll never get to Foxmere to-night, Miss," he said decisively; "you'd best stay the night here, and go to-morrow."

But Bridget was not defeated; she saw a friendly-looking porter, and asked him. After some thought, he advised her to catch a train that went to a little place called Blackdale, and walk from there to Foxmere; it was a distance of eight miles, but perhaps she could find it if she knew the country. Bridget would not admit that she did not. She thanked the man, and went to the waiting-room. She had to wait an hour for the Blackdale train, and it was nearly dark already.

She sat down in the waiting-room and looked despairingly into the empty fire-place. She could bear the fatigue of the journey, but these times of waiting were unbearable.

The woman in charge, a stern, grey-haired person, looked at her keenly. She saw a girl, tidily and plainly dressed, whose face was white and haggard with anxiety. And having been in many sorrows herself, her heart went out to Bridget.

"See," she said abruptly, "I'm making some tea for myself. I'll give you a cup. You look fair done."

Bridget started at the sudden voice, but she thanked the woman. "I am going to see some one who is dying and I—I—I'm afraid I shall never get there in time."

"Pray to God," said the woman in her severe tone, as she bustled about her tea-making. But she made Bridget the tea, and brought it to her, and she insisted on her lying down till the train came in. Then Bridget got up and impulsively kissed her.

"Oh! you have helped me to go on," she said.

"Well! I'm sorry for all women," was the answer.

Bridget tried to feel hopeful and courageous all the way from Windermere to Blackdale, but she found herself in a carriage with a man who was far from sober, and who tried to engage her attention by grandiloquent but rather indistinct remarks.

Then Bridget was frightened. It came upon her forcibly that she was going to walk eight miles in the dark, through a country she did not know. How should she find the way? A sort of despair seized her. The train stopped, and she found herself at Blackdale.

It was a little station, and the lonely roads went from it along the hills and by the meres and into the valleys. The moon was young, and it was very dark. She heard a man who walked before her say to his friend that there would be rain soon.

Bridget ran after them, and touched the speaker's arm. "Will you tell me the way to Foxmere, please?" she said, in a voice which she strove to keep calm.

The two men stared at her. Then both declared with one accord that she had better not go. But Bridget answered that she must go that night.

It seemed that the way was fairly direct until she came to four cross-roads near a wood; there she had to take a path through a wood and up the hill until she reached the Foxmere Road, and then she could go on to the village. But still, in the darkness, and with the prospect of heavy rain, nothing could be more foolish, so her guides informed her, than this lonely walk. Bridget knew that they were right, and she dreaded it as Christian dreaded the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

Once she hesitated and decided to try and find shelter in Blackdale village, but then the thought

of Jeremy came back to her. Perhaps he would die at dawn : she had heard that that was often the time when soul and body parted. If she could see him and speak to him for but one minute all this terror would be worth while.

She turned her back on the village and walked bravely along the road at a quick, even pace. The road went upwards, and she heard below her the gurgle and splash of a stream. All the summer scents of the countryside were in the night air. Some feeling that sat aloof from her fear and anxiety told her that this was a magical world in which she trespassed.

By wooded banks she passed, and heard the rustling of little night creatures that were abroad. Sometimes she saw the gleam of water, and the shimmer of white daisies in the grass, and white roses on the hedges. Every now and then she ran, but she was tired and hungry. The little paper bags were empty, and she could have wished them full. It seemed to her that she should never reach the four cross-roads. But at last she came upon them. The woods rose steeply up the hill on her left. There was a path that led straight into the dark heart of them. Bridget hesitated. She dreaded the darkness and silence that lay before her. A loud cry rang out just behind her.

She started in terror, her heart beating wildly, but it was an owl that had cried, and it sailed away over the grass, and she took the wood path.

Deeper and deeper through the woods it went.

There seemed strange stirrings and cracklings about her ; sometimes some creature hurried across her path and disappeared among the bracken. Bridget was romantic rather than superstitious, and her fear was the poetical fear which has a sort of glory about it.

But the paths wound here and there, and in the darkness she had no guide to the right one. She knew that she was caught in the maze of the wood and had no clue to follow. She determined to go downhill and to try and reach some road. So she took the downward paths, and at last reached a steep bank above the road. She tried to scramble down the bank, but it was slippery and she fell, ~~rolling~~ rolling among the stones and fox-gloves by the roadside. She was cut and bruised when she got up ; but, worse than this, the heel of her right shoe had been wrenched off. The shoes were flimsy ones, and the fall had deprived her of a heel.

Bridget sat among the stones and wrestled with her desire to cry. She took off both her shoes and left them on the grass. But where was the use of walking on when she had no idea of her right direction ? So she sat down again and rested. At last, faintly and far off, she heard a sound like singing. She rose and ran towards it. Next she saw a light at the turn of the road. It was evidently the light of some vehicle that was coming in zigzagging style down the road.

The words became audible to her now. It was " John Peel," trolled out in stentorian tones :

"D'ye ken John Peel at the break of day,
"D'ye ken John Peel in his——"

Are you going to shoot me into the hedge, you little beast? I believe you're intoxicated——"

In shoeless feet Bridget ran forward, and stood by the pony's head.

"Oh, gracious goodness, what on this earth are you?" the driver asked in a terrified voice.

Bridget went nearer.

"I've lost my way," she said. "Oh, do, for mercy's sake, tell me the way to Foxmere!"

The man in the trap struck a match and looked at her.

Bridget tried breathlessly to explain that she had lost her way and must reach Foxmere that night. The driver of the trap, whose wits were muddled by intoxication, required a long explanation. When he had grasped the state of affairs he became loquaciously courteous, and offered his trap and his services with tears in his eyes. Bridget thanked him and hoped for the best.

"Miss, you have only to command me," he remarked rather grandiloquently. Then he gave her his hand, and pulled her up beside him. Bridget offered to take the reins, but he scorned the request. Surprise seemed to have sobered him, and he turned the pony and drove off at a smart trot.

But when they reached the iron gates of Foxmere House a new difficulty arose, the gates were locked and the lodge people were certainly asleep. Bridget felt that she could not wake them.

"I must climb the wall somehow," she said. Her companion was tactful enough to refrain from questions. But he was surprised.

"By standing up in the trap," he said, "you might get hold of that chestnut bough and swing yourself over—that is, if you dare."

"Oh yes, I dare."

Bridget stood up, gripped the bough, and scrambled on to the wall. She stood there for a second. "Good-bye, and God bless you for this," she said, then she disappeared. She had dropped on to the grass at the far side of the wall. She ran through the long wet grass till she reached the avenue. The gravel hurt her shoeless feet, so she kept to the grass border. In a few minutes she stood before the old house. There were no lights in the windows. She walked all round it, but every window was a dark eye. The house seemed sound asleep.

So Jeremy was dead. Had he been living, there would have been some light in his room. The nurse would have had a lamp or candle. It was certain that she had come too late.

There was no use in rousing any one. She had come to see Jeremy, and Jeremy had not waited for her, but had gone on his way into new strange worlds. Bridget stood for a second crushed by the agony of loss, and by the weight of that silence which gives no chance for farewells or words of forgiveness. She threw herself down on the grass. It was soft wet turf, scented with the wild fresh scent of earth. In the border near

her the Madonna lilies shone dimly, and she knew that stocks grew there, and great clumps of white pinks.

And so, as she lay with her face against the grass, a great peace came to her suddenly and inexplicably. And she knew that whether Jeremy were dead or alive, it was well with them both.

She sat up and looked around her at the pale flower faces that seemed to lean towards her. The night was fading into twilight, and she heard cocks crowing in some far-off place. The leaves of a great sycamore stirred with a little wind, and she saw two rabbits browsing under a rose-covered arch.

The world was so still, so dim and quiet, so grey in the dew and faint light, that it seemed like a garden of the dead, in which the spirits of the blessed might wander for a little while before they left the world.

To Bridget the barrier between death and life seemed thin, as thin as mountain mist, and she saw, as some do once or twice in their lives, the perspective of eternity, in which death is but an incident of the way, the casting aside of a cloak that is after all an impediment.

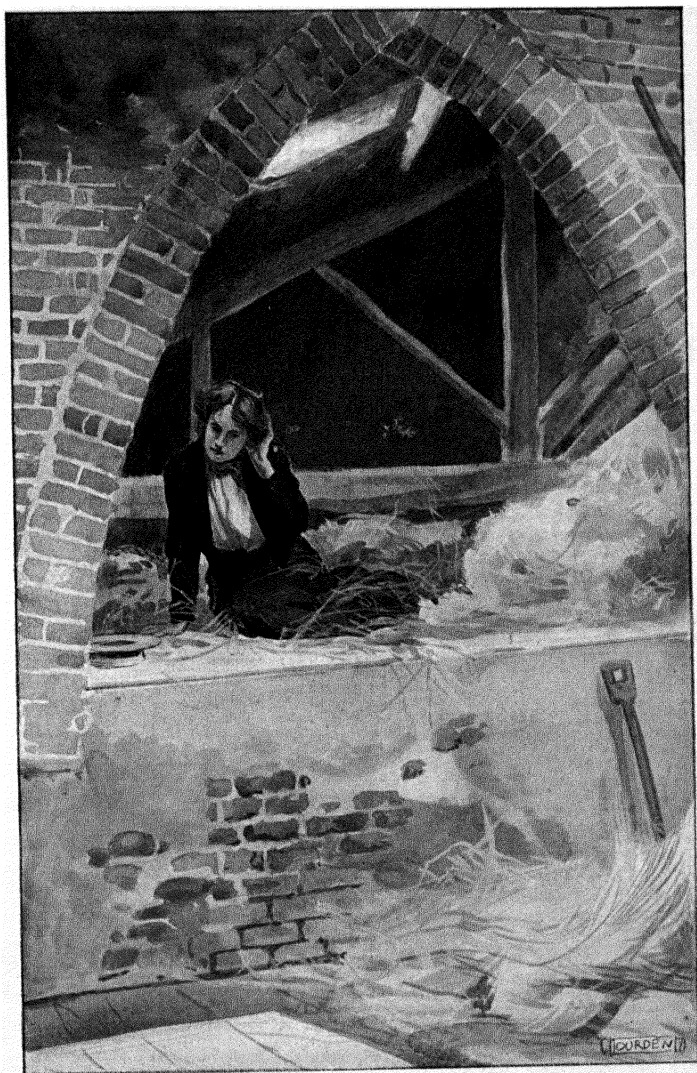
But she was shivering and tired. She felt that she must go somewhere for the rest of the night. She saw some buildings and went towards them. She found herself in the coach-yard, and saw to her joy that the loft door was open. She climbed the ladder, and crept to the back of the loft, among the hay. She nestled down, pulling it round her. And there she fell asleep.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FOURTH

Aunt Matilda

BRIDGET woke up, hearing a man moving about the loft. For some moments she could not imagine where she was, but then she knew. The sunshine was streaming through the open door, and a man who was whistling was tramping about. Bridget scarcely breathed, until he had gone down the ladder again. Then she sat up and tried to do her hair. It was full of hay; and her hat was faded and limp with the rain that had fallen during the night. When she looked at her shoeless feet, her torn skirt, her scratched and dirty hands, her wretched hat, she felt that no beggar-woman could look more miserable and unkempt. But if Jeremy's aunt were mourning the loss of her nephew, surely she would not refuse even a beggar-woman the right to mourn with her. And surely she, in her sorrow, would pity another woman's sorrow, and let her look for the last time on the face she loved.

Bridget crept to the edge of the loft and looked down. There was nobody about. The coachman was evidently busy in the stable. So she seized the moment, and clambered down from the loft.



"Then she sat up and tried to do her hair."

She ran through the yard and into the back avenue. The gardens now were sparkling in the sunshine. The house was covered with creepers, and all its window eyes were open. It looked so cheerful and sunny, that Bridget found it hard to believe that death could ever come to it. The little porch was full of geraniums; on either side of the door, bushes of escallonia shone glossily in the morning light. An Aberdeen terrier lay before the door, and when he caught sight of her he growled. "Beggar," was in the contemptuous glance of his eye. He rose and looked at her. But her whole appearance stamped her as one of a class which his Tory principles had taught him to abhor. He was sure that she had come to steal umbrellas from the hall, and he sounded a furious warning to those within as he waddled forward, with stern determination written on his grey, hairy face. When Bridget spoke and held out her hand, his theories were slightly confused. She spoke like his mistress, but her appearance belied her voice. He gave the riddle up, and waddled fussily into the hall to meet the maid. Mary, the housemaid, agreed with his first opinion.

"What do you want?" she inquired sharply.

"Can I see Miss Matthews?" Bridget asked, rather timidly.

"No, you can't; she's at breakfast."

"May I not wait till after breakfast?"

"No, we know your kind, and we don't want you. Be off now."

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"But I—I have come from so far. Oh, please let me wait till Miss Matthews is ready. I am so unhappy and tired."

Tears rolled down Bridget's pale, dirty face. She was utterly worn out, and the tears would come. But the maid was obdurate.

"I'll give you a penny," she said, holding one out, "and now go off with yourself."

Bridget laughed hysterically.

"But I don't want a penny," she said. The maid shut the door. Bridget sat down on the doorstep and buried her face in her hands. She was too hungry, and tired, and miserable, to have any shame. She sat and sobbed, and the sound of the sobbing was audible in the cheerful breakfast-room, where Miss Matthews was taking her coffee and bacon. She got up, went to the window and leaned out.

"Young woman," she called. But Bridget did not hear.

"Young woman—young woman—stop crying. I will speak to you if you wish it," she said. Then she rang the bell and directed the unwilling maid to bring Bridget into the hall, and leave her there for a minute or two.

"Let her wait, mum," said the girl; "she's putting it on. It's just a common beggar she is."

So Miss Matthews took some more coffee, whilst Bridget sat on a chair in the hall. The chair was a hard straight one, but comfortable enough. But a strange thing happened. She

felt, suddenly, that her soul and body were being separated to the great discomfort of her body, which was sick and cold, and wrapped about in darkness. As she had never fainted before, she was quite certain that she was going to die. But when she rolled over on to the floor and knocked her head against a flower-pot, she regained a sick and wretched consciousness. She knew vaguely, that a door opened and some one bustled out. And an insistent hand tried to push her head downwards, towards her knees. She wished that the hand would leave her alone, for she longed to die, and to escape from the horrible sense of sickness and helplessness that was upon her. Then another hand held a cup to her lips, and she tried to drink, and choked. Then consciousness grew clearer, and she said, "I'm all right, thank you," and tried to stand up.

"There, there, poor dear, poor dear," said Miss Matthews. "Why, how scratched and bruised you are! I'd have come sooner, but God forgive me, I thought you were an impostor. The last stole my umbrella and a sirloin of beef. But you're not strong enough to steal a feather, you poor thing."

"I'm better now," Bridget answered, trying with a great effort to sit up and look intelligent, "I'm so sorry to have bothered you. Do go back to your breakfast. I will not steal anything, truly."

Miss Matthews stood and looked at her. And Bridget looked at Miss Matthews. She saw an

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old lady, whose ample matronly figure was clad in black and white foulard silk, and whose head was adorned with a large white cap. Miss Matthews wore for morning use an alpaca apron, and for ornament a gold chain and a vast pebble brooch.

She had keen brown eyes that searched the girl's face kindly but critically. "You're a lady," she said; "is it hunger, or what, that brings you to me this morning?"

"No," said Bridget, "I came to see Jeremy. I heard that he was dying, and I came from Manchester last night. Please tell me, is he dead?"

"Bless my soul; no, child. He's better than you are in your present condition. But pray what are you to my nephew, or he to you?"

"Nothing; but I love him. We were engaged once, and then we quarrelled, and I wanted to ask him to forgive me."

"What is your name?"

"Bridget Joy."

"Well, my dear, why didn't you say so ages ago, before the door was shut on your nose by that hussy, who should know a lady's voice by now? Come into the breakfast-room at once. You're Jeremy's Bridget, you dear, silly girl, and you look as if you'd been sleeping in my hay loft."

"So I have," said Bridget meekly.

Miss Matthews laughed.

"I like your spirit," she said. "There now, sit down and have a good breakfast. I'm going to leave you for a little while as I'm busy, but I hope you have a good appetite. I always trust people whose appetites are large. As for Jeremy, don't worry about him. He was very ill when he came back to England, and he took it into his head to have an operation. You know, people now-a-days must always insist on being operated on—it's a sort of self-consciousness. I don't agree with it myself, but, of course, Jeremy couldn't resist it. So he went to Leeds and had an operation and then got well again, and now he's down in Norfolk settling up Wood Hall."

Miss Matthews left the room; she had a soft, padding walk which was due to her heel-less slippers. Bridget was glad to be alone; she was ashamed to be so very hungry. But when her hostess returned her look of approval was genuine.

"There! you're better, I can see," she said, "and they've got your room ready for you, and you're to go straight to bed for the rest of the day."

"But I must go back to Manchester," Bridget protested. "I can't intrude upon you like this. As it is, I have behaved very badly in coming here in this untidy state and then fainting."

Miss Matthews took her hand and kissed her on both cheeks.

"Nonsense," she said, "we'll send a telegram to your friends. You're to stay here at least

till you get new shoes. Now come upstairs with me."

Bridget followed the old lady up the shallow stairs to a little bedroom which looked out upon the garden, and beyond the garden towards the mere that glinted through the veil of trees that surrounded it.

The wall-paper was apple-green with a pattern of pear blossom, and all the furniture was green and white. A great bunch of sweet peas stood in a vase on the table by the open window. The room was as cool and fresh as some little enchanted bedroom of a fairy tale. Bridget found a nightdress—a little short, it must be owned—laid out for her use, and a brush and comb. A big can of hot water stood beside the bath.

After the journey, with its anxieties and tribulations, this physical rest and luxury were exquisite. Bridget lay in bed listening to the long whirr of a mowing machine, and the cooing of pigeons on the stable roof. She did not wake up till the evening, when a maid stood by her bed with a tea-tray.

"You can remain here, Miss, if you prefer," she said, "but the mistress will let you get up if you are rested. She hopes you will make use of this blouse and these shoes: they only came from the village shop, but perhaps they'll do."

Bridget got up and dressed. The muslin blouse was pretty though the fit was not perfect, and the

shoes were rather large. But that did not matter. There was such a sense of peace and kindness about the whole place that a loose shoe or a short sleeve was of no account. She ran downstairs and made friends with the Aberdeen terrier, who accepted her graciously as a new member of his household. Then she went out, and found Miss Matthews in her broad garden hat with her skirt tucked up well about her.

"Ah, my dear," she said, "how nice and young and healthy you look! Let us come to the kitchen garden and pick raspberries."

Whilst they were picking raspberries the elder woman watched the younger one keenly. Presently she spoke.

"Why wouldn't you marry Jeremy?" she asked, so abruptly that Bridget spoke out the bare truth before she could consider expediency.

"Because Mrs. Delahaye didn't want me to marry him. She said it would spoil his career, and I think it would."

Miss Matthews sniffed. There was a militant air about her sometimes. It enveloped her now.

"I wish," she said, "that Beatrice Delahaye would understand that I am more competent to manage men and things than she is. When I approved of the marriage it was for her to follow my leadership."

"But," Bridget objected, "I'm sure she wanted to save Jeremy from a *mésalliance*."

"A *mésalliance* is an ill-assorted marriage.

Yours would not have been that. Mrs. Delahaye has made herself miserable by marrying for ambitious reasons a man who does not suit her. I strongly advised her to reject him—even on the morning of her wedding. And I am deeply annoyed that she should have interfered between you and Jerry.”

“But, Miss Matthews, she knew I was a servant.”

“Well, were you a good servant?”

“I tried to be.”

“Then you’ll be a good wife. Tut, tut! you should have come to me. If I say that our family is to accept you and welcome you, I shall see that it is done. I am³ much surprised that Mrs. Delahaye should so far forget herself as to question my judgment. Had I known this before, I should have insisted on your marriage.”

“But suppose I had only been a drag on Jeremy?” Bridget began.

“I shall not suppose it. The question is, Do you love him? I know you do by the insane journey you took to see him. Love means courage, and very hard work, and a sense of humour, and, above all, quiet confidence. If you love him you could not be a drag on him. Besides, you look to me a good-tempered, healthy young woman, and you would not be going into high flights nor introspecting your mind all day. If Jeremy had not such an odious temper you’d have made up your quarrel more than a year ago.”

Bridget laughed.

"My raspberry bowl is full," she said presently.

"Good. We might make raspberry jam whilst you're here. But we'll talk about it to-morrow. Come and help me to water my garden."

Under Miss Matthews' direction, Bridget worked hard that night. She weeded and watered and hunted out snails and tied up carnations. She mounted a ladder and nailed creepers to the wall, and at nightfall covered jam-pots.

After supper they had family prayers, and then Miss Matthews said that her guest must go to bed. She lit a candle for her, and led her upstairs.

"Well," she said, as she put the candle on the dressing-table, "you can work, thank God for that. You were tired to-night, and I think you have a headache, but I let you work to try your mettle. For I like mettle in a woman. Oh yes, my dear, I know these flimsy young women who can only pose and look pretty. The Lord preserve me from them, for I always want to box their ears. And poor, silly men are deceived by them—the minxes!"

Bridget laughed at the severe face and voice of her hostess.

"But isn't it a virtue to look pretty and unflustered, and isn't it a virtue just to be waited on? What would the busy bees do without the drones?" she asked. "If we all worked no one would look pleased and say 'Thank you.'"

"Oh, my dear, you're talking Political Economy.

I just take one narrow-minded view and stick to it. It makes one happier. Some one said 'white hands cannot offend.' I'm sure that a man said that. He'd think so, poor, silly fellow, until he wanted something done that would spoil the white hands. If a white hand cannot do something useful I'd rather have a monkey's paw."

Bridget kissed her.

"Miss Matthews," she said, "you are trying to be severe. And all the time I know you're the very kindest person in the world! Why, haven't you taken in a ragged tramp, and fed and clothed her?"

"No, my child; I have taken in my dear nephew's future wife? And I must say, Bridget, though he is ugly and possibly unattractive, I wouldn't refuse Jeremy if I were a young girl."

"Jeremy ugly and unattractive—oh! but he isn't," Bridget exclaimed hotly; "he has the most charming face, and he has quite a fascinating manner."

"Why, of course he has," said Miss Matthews gleefully; "and you were a silly girl to let him go. But 'All's well that ends well.'"

"But," said Bridget, "it has ended, you know. We have said good-bye. I wrote him a little note when I sent back my ring, and he took no notice of it. He never said, 'God bless you too,' or seemed to care a bit. I thought it was unkind of him to have parted without any kind words, but it showed that he didn't care, didn't it?"

"But you never answered his letter," Miss Matthews observed rather sharply; "and he told me that he wrote to you when he returned some present of yours. He said if you had loved him even the least little bit in the world you would have answered that."

Bridget gazed at her with bright, surprised eyes.

"He never wrote to me," she said; "there was a blank sheet of paper round the matchbox, and a few words across it."

"Then he mislaid the letter. What a stupid fellow. A married man could never be so silly. I wonder I didn't suggest that to him."

"I wish I had that letter," said Bridget; "I think I'd let two of my teeth be pulled out if I could get it." She paused and went into the open window and spoke with her face turned to the dusky, leafy garden.

"Then you think he cared?" she asked very quietly.

"I know he cares," said Miss Matthews, and she went out and closed the door behind her.

Bridget leaned out and let the scents of the stocks and mignonette blow upon her face. A bat flitted past her, and she heard far off the churring of a nightjar. It was again a spirit garden, but not as on the previous night, a garden of the dead, but the enchanted garden of youth, the very land of Heart's Desire.

"Thank God, thank God," said Bridget softly,

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and there came into her mind verses from a poem
which is very old—

“ My beloved spake, and said unto me,
Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.
For lo, the winter is past,
The rain is over and gone,
The flowers appear on the earth,
The time of the singing of birds is come,
And the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.”

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIFTH

An Unfashionable Wedding

BRIDGET woke early and looked upon a morning world. She got up at once, dressed, and went out to the garden. She had spent so little of her life in the country that everything was wonderful to her. This was a morning when leaves sparkled and when one must think how wonderful a colour is green, which Nature can use so well and man so ill.

The young green of the oaks, and the dark green of the laurels and escallonia bushes, the blue-green of the cedars and arbor vitæ, the grey of the carnation leaves in the beds, filled her with delight. She left the garden and wandered through the shrubbery down to the stream. A kingfisher flashed past her,—surely that was a sign of halcyon days. She sat on a log and saw squirrels playing hide-and-seek round a beech tree. How remote sorrow and disappointment seemed at this moment from this glad young morning world. Then she became mindful of breakfast-time and sauntered up the hill into the garden.

Some one had come in at the top gate under the arch of crimson rambler, some one who

sang cheerfully but unmusically a song from *Pinafore* :

“I’m called little Buttercup, poor little Buttercup,
Though I could never tell why ;
But still I’m called Buttercup, dear little Buttercup,
Sweet little Buttercup—I.”

During the last note the singer gave a splendid leap and cleared a bed of petunias.

Bridget stood quite still behind an apple tree. She was overwhelmed by shyness. Instead of doing all that she had dreamed she would do if Jeremy came back, she did what had never occurred to her mind—she hid.

Jeremy jumped two other beds, but missed his last jump and spoilt some snapdragons. He began a new song from the same operetta :

“A many years ago,
When I was young and charming,
As some of you may know,
I practised baby farming.”

Jeremy stood still.

“Chorus !” he said. “Oh, Bridget, you must be the chorus ; you’ve got to say—

‘Now this is most alarming :
When he was young and charming
He practised baby farming,
A many years ago.’

And as I know you’re hiding I shall simply say ‘I spy,’ and proceed to catch you.”

Shyness and the undying spirit of sport spurred Bridget’s heels. She made a dash down the path

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and doubled across the grass. Jeremy followed, giving her time, but at the end of a frantic five minutes Bridget caught her foot in a hoop and fell on the grass.

Then Jeremy lifted her up and kissed her. And he kissed her hands, which were muddy. He had suddenly become very serious.

"Bridget, do you think you could like me even a little bit?" he asked, as they walked along the peach walk by the sunny southern wall; "because if you do I'll begin from the beginning and try and win you back. Aunt Matilda has told me things. She says I'm a silly worm. She didn't put it like that, but she meant it. She said, 'There, Jerry, it's that ugly little black dog, your temper, that's given you both all this sorrow,' and she's right: I have a stupid, sullen temper, and I'm quite unworthy of you."

"No, you're not. I don't think Aunt Matilda understands you. And oh! Jerry, I thought you were dead, and I walked from Blackdale at night, and got lost in a wood, and a heel came off my shoe, and then some man turned up like an angel from heaven, and drove me here, and I climbed your wall and all the house was dark, so I thought you were dead."

"And did you mind that, Bridget?" he asked.

"Yes, at first it was agony, and then I knew that I loved you so much that even death didn't matter. I knew that somehow, some time, I should find you."

Jeremy, who was not eloquent, said nothing at all, but he squeezed Bridget's finger. Then he laughed. "What would you do?" he asked, "if I burst into tears?"

"I should send for a Fire Brigade."

"How practical you are! Well, if we talk seriously I *shall* burst into tears. I travelled all night, and trains make me feel seasick. Then I found Aunt Matilda and she talked to me. You've quite won her heart, Bridget, but I knew you would."

Bridget paused.

"Did she—did she send for you?" she asked.

"No, she simply wired 'Bridget Joy is here.' And I didn't get the telegram for some time, as I was out. When I found it I started right away. I had meant to go to Hanbury next week and ask you to forgive me. But it's better being here. Oh, isn't it gorgeous, and I'm so hungry! Being happy makes one awfully hungry. Bridget, some one is coming; don't hold my hand."

Bridget, whose hand was firmly gripped, looked embarrassed. But it was Miss Matilda Matthews in a fresh white cap and a white Indian shawl about her. She kissed them both.

"Come to breakfast," she said; "I have just opened a pot of my best pineapple marmalade, and breakfast is laid under the sycamore."

When the meal was over, and it took some time, Miss Matilda proceeded to explain her plans.

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"You, Jeremy," she said, "are to go to the Rector and find out just how soon you can be married, and he will explain the legalities to you. Bridget and I will lay our plans for going to Manchester for a day or two to get her trousseau."

"But," said Bridget, "Jeremy hasn't said that he wants to be married."

"No, I don't," Jeremy answered. "But I shall do it for self-denial. Go on, Aunt Matilda, what am I to wear? Rainbow socks and chocolatey buttons are my fancy, and a strawberry coloured tie to tone with my eyes."

Jeremy flung himself down on the grass and waited for his aunt to speak.

"No, Jeremy, you *must* wear a frock-coat. It's a pity you're not taller, but, after all, *you* won't matter. The bride is the only person who counts. I've never given a wedding before, and this is to be a great success. Bridget must wear white—it needn't be satin, we'll choose something simple—and a wreath of white roses and syringa, and a veil. And you can both ask any one you like, and we'll put them up in the village."

Bridget laid her hand on the old lady's knee.

"Oh! but I don't want you to have so much bother and expense," she said; "and Jeremy and I can just walk to church and be married in our ordinary clothes."

"No, my child," Miss Matthews answered. "I mean this to be a pretty wedding, something

that you can describe to your grandchildren. Besides, I want Mrs. Delahaye to understand that I have a sense of the honour and dignity of our family. And, Bridget, I know that you can work well, but I want you to play well too. Remember that Cinderella went to the ball and danced till twelve."

"Here! here!" said Jeremy; "let's dance till twelve too. Bridget used to say, Aunt Matilda, that she and I were like two quiet black slugs going happily about our business among the larkspurs. I'd rather be a snail than a slug. But still, remember that we're not butterflies, and we don't know how to 'act accordin'."

"Bridget has not tried yet. Just wait till I have dressed her up," said Miss Matthews.

Then she padded away towards the house, and her very back seemed intent on happy business.

Bridget determined to spend fifty pounds on a small trousseau, and she took that sum from her legacy. She and Miss Matthews went to Manchester and spent long and rapturous hours in shopping.

To Bridget, who had never bought anything but strictly necessary, serviceable garments, the choice of pretty and elegant clothes was an untried pleasure. She was quite afraid to buy what she wanted.

"Isn't it almost Babylonish?" she asked her self-constituted aunt, as they sat at tea in a brief interval of the business.

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"Nonsense! you have only got necessities, after all. Now what about a silk petticoat?"

"Oh! I have a lovely one that Jeremy gave me years ago, when first I knew him."

"Jeremy! whatever made him do that?"

Bridget explained the circumstances.

Miss Matthews smiled.

"How like Jeremy! But no one would ever give him credit for such an indiscretion," she remarked.

Besides her trousseau, Bridget celebrated her happiness by getting presents for her family, as she called the Barbers, and a wedding present for Joan and Mr. Miller, and a Wedgewood tobacco jar for Mr. Horrocks, and a box of gifts for the Crumbs.

They returned in the cool of the evening to Foxmere. Jeremy had brought the trap to meet them. After supper he and Bridget strolled down by the fields to listen to the corncrakes. He handed her a box.

"That's one thing for you," he said. "I'm going to give you presents one by one, as too many presents make people fractious. This I bought for you soon after we first met."

Bridget opened the box.

"Oh, Jeremy—it's my peach-stones!" she exclaimed, "and the cornelians too. You darling, and you never sold them!"

"No, I wanted to buy them all back, but I kept these to give you as a wedding present when

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you married the unknown. I didn't know who the unknown was going to be. I always thought I should rather hate him, you know."

* * * * *

Of the wedding at Foxmere a lengthy account was given to Mr. Frank Miller by Miss Joan Elphinstone, who acted as bridesmaid.

"They have just gone," she wrote, "and Miss Matthews and I have been tidying up. I'm going to begin at the beginning and tell you everything. I woke up at seven o'clock in the morning. It was such a lovely day, and after yesterday's rain we never even hoped for fine weather. But everything glittered and sparkled, and the scent of wet leaves and flowers came through the window. I dressed quickly and put on my bridesmaid's dress, which I showed you. The white muslin seemed to suit the house and the whole atmosphere of the place—and, of course, I expect you to say that it suited me. Then I went to Bridget's room. Miss Matthews was there: she was fastening the back of the wedding dress. It was a white net, trimmed all over with narrow lace, and it looked lovely. Bridget insisted on wearing a most curious old necklace of peach-stones, which had belonged to her mother, but which Dr. Fleetwood had given her. I couldn't make out why he gave her what had been her own necklace, but we were too excited to discuss it.

"Bridget was very nervous. She was quite white, and I could feel her trembling whilst I did

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her hair ; but then she looked out of the window and saw Dr. Fleetwood in the garden, throwing a stone for the dog ; he looked up and waved to her, and I think that restored her courage a little bit.

“ Then Mr. Gusty Barber insisted on coming in to see the bride. He is a very nice ugly big boy, and he came all the way from Cornwall with his little brother 'Fonso to attend the wedding. He was to be best man, and, though he is only just eighteen, he's taller than Dr. Fleetwood. He and I arranged the flowers in Bridget's hair, whilst she sat before the glass looking very unhappy and trying to pull on her gloves. Gusty tried to comfort her.

“ ‘ After all,’ he said, ‘ it's not so bad as being tried for murder. It's pretty bad certainly, but it's just a case for bucking hard. If I see you giving way I'll whisper ‘ Buck up.’

“ ‘ But,’ Bridget observed, ‘ suppose I can't find my voice to say “ I will,” I shall not be married, shall I ?’

“ ‘ I suppose you could nod. Besides, if Fleetwood says his say all right, he'll be married at least.’

“ Then Miss Matthews bustled in. She was quite in her element. And we all recognized her as our commanding officer. But she was on the brink of tears herself.

“ ‘ I smacked Jeremy in this room once,’ she said, ‘ and now I am dressing his bride here.’

“ Bridget looked lovely in her veil. You know she is not pretty, but she looks so good and so reliable. And in her white dress I thought that ‘ lovely ’ was just the word for her.

“‘Take Jerry to church at once,’ said Miss Matthews to Gusty, ‘and get your little brother out of the way. Tell Jerry to stand straight, not on one leg, and not to cry. Now start. We follow in five minutes.’

“In five minutes we did start. We walked through the garden and on to the road, and up the Church Lane. Miss Matthews wore lavender silk in her bonnet, and a shawl of most wonderful old Limerick lace. She gave Bridget away.

“The church was decorated with wild flowers picked by the village children. A wedding here is a rare event, and Miss Matthews is the great lady of Foxmere, so the church, even at this early hour, was full.

“Bridget said her part somehow, though her voice trembled. I was relieved when that part was over. There was Celebration, as this is a Saint’s day, and then we walked home. It reminded me of a picture, I forget whose, of a village wedding. We walked in a little procession with flowers scattered before us by the children. The wedding breakfast was laid under the sycamore. Fonso Barber ate a terrible amount of wedding cake, but he said that if he determined that a thing shouldn’t make him ill, it didn’t, which sounds like Christian Science.

“We all were very hungry and very happy, and Bridget was quite calm again.

“After breakfast she took off her dress and put on a plain muslin, and we all prepared for the afternoon’s festivities. Oh, Frank, I don’t think that there was ever such a jolly wedding. After all one cannot, and I am glad of it, make a fine lady of Bridget. As I watched her, I said to

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myself, 'You are a servant and you will be a servant all your life, however rich you may be. And I thought of the old motto, 'Feythfullie serve.' For I think that will be the rule of both their lives. Bridget has been made physically and morally for hard work, and I believe that if you surrounded her with servants and deprived her of any excuse to work, she would die. However, from what Dr. Fleetwood told me, she will have no easy place as mistress of Wood Hall when it's full of crippled children.

"So we all worked very hard, and the bride and bridegroom worked the hardest; and then we had early dinner, and after that the village arrived.

"Dr. Fleetwood is splendid with children. He understands them, and they understand him. He and Bridget organized the sports and led the games. They had the most glorious game of fox-and-geese that ever was. I think I never saw two people so hot and so happy.

"I found Bridget cantering round the shrubbery with a little lame boy on her back, and I tried to advise her to rest, but she said, 'Oh, don't you see I'm so frightfully happy that I have to canter it off?' And she went on full pace up the hill.

"We danced Sir Roger de Coverley on the lawn—poor Miss Matthews' smooth lawn. And then there were cheers, cheers for every one, in which I thought Gusty and 'Fonso would injure their throats for life.

"Then we had a private little tea in the drawing-room, and Bridget went upstairs to put on a coat and skirt and hat. The trap came round and off they drove. They were sitting on the back seat

as Gusty and 'Fonso were taking turns to drive, so we saw their happy faces.

"The sun was just shining, as the sun only does on a summer evening, level across the grass and among the tree trunks. They seemed to drive into the heart of the golden light.

"I must end this long letter now. I have been too much excited to say all that I meant to say. Bridget said last night, 'I used to dread being old, but now Jeremy and I will grow old together, and we shall be so wise and so happy that every one will say, "They are still lovers, so they are not afraid to be old or to die,"' and then Bridget added, 'If I did not feel that, I should never dare to be married.'

"This has been a day when one sees the things that matter, and the things that don't matter at all. I'm so glad that people can be so very happy in this rather sad world.

"I will tell you more to-morrow night.

"Ever your

JOAN."

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SIXTH

Bridget gains a Subscriber

BRIDGET and Jeremy went to London to spend money. But they went to a small hotel, and kept their money for shopping and for amusements. The preparations for Wood Hall occupied their mornings. For its expected denizens were not to be strong and healthy children, but the halt and the maimed, for whom all sorts of things were needed.

Jeremy had sought with infinite pains for his "staff." This consisted of a hospital nurse, who was a middle-aged woman, a Swiss maid, cheerful and pretty, a competent governess, and a young Tyrolese carver, who could teach any child to do almost anything with its fingers. That many doubts assailed the master of Wood Hall as to the success of his venture cannot be denied. Although he had a considerable amount of dogged perseverance he had not too much self-confidence. And there were times when his task weighed upon his mind, almost unbearably.

At present he was his own committee. The home was to begin with six children, but if it grew a committee would become a necessity. But before the children could arrive, vast overhauls

of drains, and painting and papering, had to go on. Jeremy came down to breakfast rather late one morning. He found Bridget waiting for him at the small table.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said, "but, as I told you, I dreamt that an estimate came and sat upon me, and swelled, and swelled, and swelled until I was utterly flat, and that made me late, because, after having become flat, I had to get round again."

"Never mind! But I know those estimates are worrying you. If we haven't enough chairs we can sit on flower-pots, and if we can't have new papers what matter? |Jeremy, I am going to buy my present to the children to-day. What do you think it is?"

"A mouse-trap."

"No, rather bigger."

"A pet hippopotamus."

"No; but that's nearer. I'll tell you. It's to be a rocking-horse. I think every house should have a rocking-horse. When I was little, Daddy said he'd buy me one some day. I was always waiting for some day, but it never arrived till to-day. And now I can get it for Wood Hall."

"That's a lovely plan. And we're going to get a simply scrumptious nursery paper, with the Ark and the animals for a frieze. Aren't we?"

"Yes. Jeremy, we must model ourselves on Mr. and Mrs. Noah. They're such nice, substantial people, and they never lose their hats, so of course they can't lose their hair. If half the

children fall out of the window and the other half into the fire, I shall just say, 'Let us be Mr. and Mrs. Noah.'"

Jeremy opened his letters.

"I've heard from Carson, about three of the children. You know he's a parson in an awful parish, where the children get rickets as a matter of course. Good Heavens, what cases! Just read his letter. But he seems to think we're taking children on a wholesale system. I wish we could."

Bridget read the letter.

"Oh, thank God that we have money and a country house and each other to help," she said. "Of course, they must come as soon as possible. And they're going to be happy, Jeremy. I know you're worrying, my dear, but worrying is to be forbidden at Woodhall. It mayn't be the most orderly place in the world, but it's going to be happy. And it's to be the home of the arts. In twenty years we shall be known as a centre for carving, lace-making, and every sort of craft, and royalties will arrive in motors to look at us and our works."

Jeremy smiled.

"Still," he said, "I often wonder if I had any right to let you in for such a big thing as this. It isn't only the mere work, it's the responsibility. We shall hardly have a clear day or any time to ourselves."

"Well, we shall be doing it together, and it will be work that's worth doing."

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"Bridget, you're a sporter. Oh, I say! Beatrice has written to me. I wonder what she's got to say?"

"Is that Mrs. Delahaye?"

"Yes."

Jeremy read the letter twice, then he looked up.

"Oh, what do you think!" he said; "she's in an awful fix! Delahaye has gone smash. I thought he'd go too far, and he has. He won't come out of this with any money, or any honour left. Poor Beatrice, I'm awfully sorry for her, and she never even cared for him much. It wasn't quite worth while, was it?"

"What shall you do?" Bridget asked.

"Well, I suppose I'll go and see her. She is my half-sister, and, though I'll never forgive her for interfering about you, I'm really sorry for this."

Bridget got up, and they went into the hall together.

"But of course you'll forgive her," she said, "because there's nothing to forgive when she interfered for your sake. And besides, we're so happy, and she's not. Will you take me round to see her?"

Jeremy looked at her in surprise.

"But—but after what she said, you don't want to go, do you?" he asked. "Wouldn't it seem rather like 'coals of fire,' or something of that sort?"

"No, it wouldn't. I don't want to go in a way, but perhaps I could comfort her a little; any way I

shall try. You see I've been very hard up and lonely once or twice, so I shall know how she feels."

They went together to the big town-house, and were admitted at once. But Bridget was shown to the drawing-room, and Jeremy went upstairs to see his sister.

The splendour of the long room, its soft carpet and beautiful things, quite awed Bridget, and she walked on tip-toe and suddenly found herself face to face with an old gentleman who was looking at a big album of book-plates.

He looked up at her

"Ah! Good-morning," he said politely; "what excellent weather we're having. There! The glass has fallen out of my eye-glass again."

The glass had disappeared as though possessed by wicked little heels. Bridget went down on her knees and hunted.

"My dear young lady," said the old gentleman, "pray don't mind; you are much too kind."

Bridget found the glass and restored it, and they sat down to the study of book-plates. The study, though fraught with interest to one, was rather tedious to the other, but she tried to be interested with might and main.

"You must be a collector yourself," said the enthusiast; "now there's a fine plate, that's an Irish one."

"Oh, I know it," said Bridget; "it's in several of our books. It was my grandfather's."

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"And who was your grandfather?"

"He was John Byrne Kavanagh, and he lived in West Meath."

"Then I knew him."

The enthusiast gripped her hand. "A delightful man. I have stayed with him many a time for the shooting. Ah! how we used to ride and shoot and fish together. Then, can you be the daughter of Bridget Kavanagh?"

"Yes, I'm her only daughter."

"My dear young lady, I am delighted to meet you; delighted, indeed. Is your mother alive now?"

"No; she died when I was thirteen."

"Ah! didn't she marry the son of some old scholar?"

"Yes."

"And what do you do, then?" he asked. "How like your mother you are; and what a charming girl she was!"

"I'm going to be the matron of a Cripples' Home," said Bridget, some vague impulse making her withhold any information.

"That is hard work; you should be married. Now, I have a fine grandson you shall marry. What do you say? He'll be a baronet some day. I'll arrange it all. Bridget Kavanagh's daughter! I'm sure you'd be a good wife."

"Oh, but a baronet would be much too grand."

"Oh, well, if you won't have him I'll find you some one else. But young people are so wilful; I

have a precious young fool for a godson. He's just kicked up his heels and married a servant girl. What do you think of that?"

"Have you met her?" Bridget asked gravely.

"No—nor want to. I shouldn't speak to her if I did meet her, the designing hussy."

Bridget turned on him with a flash in her eyes.

"But, you know, you shouldn't judge her until you have met her. Suppose she loved him with all her heart and mind, and he loved her. Do you mean that she should refuse him?"

"Well, he should never have asked her. It was most ungentlemanly."

"No, on the contrary, it may have been that he had the courage to marry the woman he really loved, and to offend you."

"You are an ardent advocate, my dear young lady. So are all your sex, and Portia is your patron saint. But still, my foolish godson has thrown away a lot of money for the sake of his love affair, for I've cut him out of my will."

"Happiness is worth it," Bridget said decidedly.

"Ah, you have a lover, and you know."

"Yes, I have a lover, and I know."

The old gentleman got up and bowed to her solemnly.

"Congratulate your lover from me," he said.

Then he sat down again, and regarded her with amusement and pleasure.

"Now tell me about your Cripples' Home," he said; "of course it is in debt."

"Oh no, it's not begun yet." Bridget told him all Jeremy's theories, suppressing the fact that they were Jeremy's; and she told him all the facts that she knew about the first inmates.

Her listener wiped his eyes.

"Piteous cases," he said. "Come, write me down as a subscriber on your books. And here's a sovereign to begin with. Get toys with it. By the bye, I don't know your name or the name of this Home——"

Jeremy looked in at this moment. "Will you come and see Beatrice?" he said.

Bridget bade good-bye to her companion, and left the room.

In a little while Jeremy came into the drawing-room.

"Oh, Sir Joseph, how are you?" he asked. "Beatrice told me you were staying here."

Sir Joseph took the outstretched hand.

"Well," he said, "I think you're a young fool, and I haven't changed my mind. And I'm not going to congratulate you, so that's flat."

"Oh, I don't mind," said Jeremy; "don't, if you'd rather not. But why should we discuss it any further? Let's talk about something else."

"By all means. I have just been conversing with a most charming young lady. She was the daughter of a dear little friend of mine whom I knew in bye-gone days. I don't know what the girl's name is, but I thought her most attractive. There was something so natural and so refined

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about her, very different from some of these loud-voiced, self-assertive young women of the present day."

"I think I can tell you who she is," said Jeremy.

"Who?"

"As a matter of fact she's my wife."

"Your wife! Why, your wife is a servant girl."

"She was. Bridget Joy was a servant, and a very excellent one. You could easily get her reference from Mrs. Barber if you cared to write to her. She was quite heart-broken at losing Bridget."

Sir Joseph Maunsell considered this for several minutes, then he laughed.

"Jeremy," he said, "I gave her a sovereign for this silly Home of yours. I didn't know it was yours or I wouldn't. But I liked her. I can't revoke that. Allow me to congratulate you."

"Thank you, sir."

The two men shook hands solemnly.

When Bridget went upstairs to the little boudoir where Beatrice sat she felt terribly nervous and shy; she had not the faintest idea, now, what she was going to say. She felt that Jeremy's sister would be a fine lady, and she did not know what to say to her.

Beatrice, who was a beautiful woman, came forward and shook hands rather coldly. Jeremy had left them alone.

"Are you having a good time in London?" she asked carelessly.

"Oh yes, thank you."

Bridget was frozen with shyness. She sat helplessly on the edge of a big cushioned chair, and played with her gloves. How rash and conceited she had been to think she could offer any comfort to this fine lady, who seemed to belong almost to another world than hers.

"It's 'awfully hot, isn't it?" asked Mrs. Delahaye. "London is horrid now; I wish we could get away. The children ought to go; I must try and send them somewhere. I suppose you'll be going to Norfolk soon. Do you play golf?"

The question was put with a cold indifference that froze Bridget more. Mrs. Delahaye was making conversation for her would-be comforter.

She sat opposite to her with hands folded in her lap, her pretty, discontented face half turned away. Her mind was quite obviously engrossed by other and very painful matters, and after her last question her eyes suddenly filled with tears.

The tears were a surprise to Bridget, who thought, because she knew very little of the world, that so well-dressed and beautiful a woman could have absolute control. But the tears made her shyness vanish. She herself could cry, and she knew painfully well what it was to cry against her will. Here was a very unhappy woman. That was all that mattered. She got up and put her arms round Mrs. Delahaye.

"Oh, don't let's talk about golf!" she said, "because I came here to tell you how very, very

sorry I am that you're unhappy. And wouldn't you like to come with the children to Wood Hall? Do let me try to comfort you, because I know what it is to be worried and sad."

Mrs. Delahaye sat rigid for a moment, then she put her arms round Bridget's neck, and burst into a storm of tears.

These two women, who had only been acquainted for three minutes, clung together, and Bridget kissed and soothed her sister-in-law with all the art of comfort that she knew.

"Why, you have your children, haven't you?" she suggested, "and after all, one can't be quite unhappy with children."

"I don't know them very well," sobbed Mrs. Delahaye.

"Oh, then, of course you're unhappy," said Bridget; "but when you know them more, you will get happy—I know you will. They're like puppies, and one can't be awfully sad with a puppy in the room. But you said that the children needed a change. Won't you send them to Jeremy and me at Wood Hall? We will be ever so careful of them. And then you can come and see us all whenever you like."

Mrs. Delahaye dried her eyes.

"Bridget, I can't! Have you forgotten my letter?"

"No, but I respect you for it. You were quite right to try and prevent our marriage."

"Oh, but I didn't know you then! And now

you, who are a stranger whom I once despised, have come and comforted me more than any one, because you are really sorry, and you know how sore and lonely and awfully human I am."

Jeremy knocked at the door and came in. He pretended not to see that his sister had been crying.

"Perhaps," said his wife, "Beatrice will let us have the children at Wood Hall for a bit, if you ask her, and she may come too."

"Oh yes, do, Beatrice. And send the children next week. Bridget is already horribly dull, and her nieces will prove a distraction. I'm afraid we've got to go now. Good-bye, Beatrice, and send for me any time."

"Thank you, Jeremy."

Beatrice shook his hand, but she pulled Bridget's face down to hers and kissed her twice.

"I'm glad you're my sister," she said.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SEVENTH

Christmas Eve

WOOD HALL was white with snow, and the big trees that stood near it bore snow on their branches ; sometimes they let it fall with a thud on the grass. The old cedars on the lawns were covered with it, and snow lay in drifts in the ditches. Gusty came stamping up the avenue laden with holly and ivy : it was dusk, the mysterious wintry dusk of the country. The sky was a clear evening blue, and the quaint high chimneys and roofs of the hall were outlined darkly against it.

After the silence and loneliness of the copse where he had been, there was a peculiar joy in coming into the warm firelit hall. Nearly a dozen children were sitting round the fire : Gusty saw the glow of the light on their upturned faces. They were all looking at Jeremy, who was sitting in the easy-chair, with a child on each arm of the chair, and another one behind him, this one only visible by its heels.

Jeremy was reading Hans Andersen's *Snow Queen*, one of the most perfect stories ever written for children or their elders.

" Oh, 'ave you seen the tree, Mr. Barber ? " a

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little cockney asked, as Gusty went through the hall.

"No, but I'm going to see it now. You see, I'm privileged. But Mrs. Fleetwood won't let in any one else till eight o'clock."

"By which time," said Jeremy, "we shall have died of hope deferred!"

Gusty ran up the wide, shallow stairs, and then up a little winding stair till he came to the octagon room at the top of the house.

In the midst of it stood a glorious Christmas tree, all adorned with candles and spangles and stars, a tree whose fruit consisted of toys of all sorts. It was a glorious tree, one that must have come straight from the Forest of Youth. Beside it stood Bridget on a ladder. She was just fixing an angel, crowned and adorned with fine white goose wings, at the very top.

"There, Gusty! Isn't that like the Christmas angel in *Struwwel Peter*?" she asked.

"Yes, and you are just like the dear 'Mamma' in the magenta shawl and green skirt."

"I think I'm a very neglectful Mamma. Just see if my own son is asleep on the sofa."

"Yes, he is."

"What a convenient baby he is. Gusty, you must help Anton to fill the stockings."

Gusty sat down in one of the four windows near a young man who was filling stockings with a variety of edible and non-edible articles.

By the fire sat Beau, a little grey about the muzzle, a little stouter, but enjoying to the full his

elderly years. Every now and then he raised his head and looked at his mistress, and then he sighed contentedly, and lay back with one ear over the fender.

As they worked in peaceful silence the light grew dim and a star shone in upon them.

"That's the Christmas star," said Bridget. "Is this like a real Christmas Eve, Anton, or are you homesick for the Tyrol?"

Anton looked up and laughed. "Oh, I have content," he said.

"And you, Gusty?"

"Bridget, can't you hear me snoring with happiness?"

She descended from her ladder. "As you've answered so nicely I shall go and get you tea," she said; "the maids are all too busy."

Jeremy came in at the moment.

"I'll help," he said; "come along and we'll find a tray."

They went downstairs together and into the still-room, where a gorgeous Christmas cake stood in white majesty on a shelf.

"What a happy smell!" said Jeremy; "let's sit and absorb it for a while."

"Oh, but they must have tea!"

"They can wait, Bridget. This is the first lucid minute we've had together. Certainly you and I have no chance of boring one another by much *solitude à deux*, have we?"

Bridget sat down on the small window-seat.

"This is our second Christmas here," she

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observed, "but I count it the first regular Christmas—I mean now we're in working order, Oh, Jeremy, I never meant to ask you, because questions are so unfair, but are you satisfied with me—I mean as your fellow-worker?"

Jeremy had never many words at command.

"Yes, I'm satisfied," he said; "it's a fine word that—'satisfaction.' And if it means that you're worth two or three of me, and that I'd be absolutely lost without your judgment—well, then, I'm satisfied."

"Thank you—that's everything. Jerry, look out at the stars, how bright they are: this is going to be the most Christmasy Christmas. And won't it be fun when they see the tree and when they look at their stockings."

"It will! This *is* a happy Christmas Eve. I wish I were a cat, and I'd sit and purr. It seems hard that men can't purr, because it would be such fun. Fancy, if we all purred while we smoked, what a fine noise there'd be! By the bye, the next time we have a breathing space I'll show you Aunt Matilda's letter."

"Yes, she wrote to me too," Bridget said, "and Beatrice wrote, and the children sent me cards. And I had books from Mr. and Mrs. Frank Miller, and a most elegant scented card from Mr. Ambrose Lester, and he asked me to lend him at least five pounds."

Jeremy laughed.

"Well, I'll give him a sovereign," he said.

Bridget screamed.

"Jeremy, you've knocked the camel off the cake," she exclaimed; "I do declare you're absolutely leaning against my *chef d'œuvre*."

She paused, then said suddenly, "I do wish Lord Walsall were here."

"Yes, I often wish that. I always like to leave one chair empty for him. To my mind he is always the master of Wood Hall, and we are working for him. I like to think of him going about here just as he used to."

Bridget put her hand sympathetically on her husband's.

"Oh! I know," she said.

Then she remembered the hungry Anton and Gusty.

"Jerry, we must get those two their tea," she said; "we have come down under false pretences."

"Bother tea. I'm going to look at the stars and talk, Bridget. You asked me a question; now I'm going to ask you another. It's a quite unfair question, but you needn't answer it."

"Go on," said Bridget.

"Well, now, at the end of a year and a half are you happy? In the fine optimistic old stories married people were always happy ever afterwards. But sometimes I think that marriage is just the hardest, difficultest part of all. Aunt Matilda says that it's the most trying profession in which any woman can engage. And she said that I overwork you and that your youth is being spoilt by too much anxiety. I've thought about

that all day, and perhaps she's right. I'm afraid she is. I've brought you to Wood Hall and put you in charge of a dozen crippled children besides our own boy. And you have no time for the laziness and carelessness which Aunt Matilda says are the right of young women. And you have no gaieties except what we get up ourselves, and you have a taciturn sort of bear for a husband, who never pays you compliments or gives you diamonds and——"

Bridget interrupted at this point.

"Jeremy, what a long turn of talking you've had," she said, "and I've been dying to talk too. Now, I'm going to begin and say my say. As we're fortunately not in church, I can preach a sermon as well as you. First point then—Am I happy? Yes, dear, I am happy, if you mean happiness in the comprehensive sense."

"Oh, stop!" said Jeremy; "that's got to be explained. All technical terms are beyond me. What do you mean by comprehensive happiness?"

"Well, I mean a happiness that is outside of everything. The lesser happiness is inside, and so trouble and anxiety can squash it. But the real happiness includes all the anxiety and pain, and fear of death, and loss, and everything that frightens one. It is like a big tent over us. Do you see what I mean?"

"I'm seeing. But give me a concrete example."

"Very well. Take our married life so far. It has, as you say, been full of anxiety for us

both. We have, and must have, a constant sense of watchfulness and apprehension. We must be always active and cheerful and capable—that's hard. And we both feel that we are getting wrinkled and that our hair will soon be grey. And you feel, I know, that the daily care of children who are, most of them, incurably crippled, does sometimes depress one. We both long to see a healthy child that can run and jump. There are all the disabilities of their physical state to deal with. We are dealing with failures from Nature's standpoint—though not from God's. All these are troubles. Then there was Jacky Luttrell's death last summer. That was a great sorrow to us both. And that sorrow may come again. In this big family of ours we cannot escape from the shadow of death."

"No, but I have brought the shadow upon you."

"Yes, you have, because you knew I loved you, and that I was going to share things with you. That's just what I want you to see, that I am happy. Beyond and above all the anxieties and fears and little everyday worries and duties, I am happy. And whatever happens, I think it will be the same, Jeremy. And I believe that you feel that too. We trust each other and we are both working for the same end, and so we *are* like the people in fairy tales who lived happily ever afterwards. Some one is coming. You can kiss me if you're quick."

"Oh, thank you!" said Jeremy.

"Oh!" exclaimed Gusty, "are you in here? Anton and I thought perhaps you'd been drowned in the teapot coming upstairs, so I came down to see. And now I'm afraid I interrupted you."

"No, you didn't, at least not much," Jeremy answered; "Bridget doesn't agree with St. Paul on many points, and she thinks that wives should instruct their husbands. She was instructing me, and I was listening humbly and gratefully. But if you and Anton are really hungry we'll give you tea."

Bridget got down from the window-seat and took up her tray.

"Jeremy and I," she explained, "were having a twenty minutes' interval—now we're going on with the next act, which is tea. And then the Christmas tree. Oh, just think of the Christmas tree when it's lit up and all the children come in! I do hope we'll live till then, don't you, Gusty? How happy we all shall be. Isn't it grand to belong to such a big family? By next Christmas I am going to start a big cap, just like Aunt Matilda's, and Jeremy is to grow a long grey beard that waves in the wind."

"Invite me for next Christmas, then," Gusty answered.

THE END

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