XXI

LATE one evening, when Marsden was taking what he called his night-cap in the drawing-room, he began to ask questions about the Sheraton desk and cabinets.

"Those things are not at all bad—but they aren't genuine, I suppose?"

"The desk is genuine," said Mrs. Marsden; "but the other things are modern."

"They are uncommonly good imitations," said Marsden; and he knelt in front of one of the cabinets and studied it carefully. "This is an excellently made piece—tip-top workmanship. Why, it must be worth twenty or thirty guineas."

"Yes, it cost something like that."

"Where did you get it?"

"It came out of the shop."

"Ah. Exactly what I supposed;" and he got up from his knees, and stood looking at her thoughtfully. "Out of the shop. Just so. . . . I must think this out."

But his train of thought was interrupted by a timid knock at the door. It was their last new housemaid, come to ask if the master and the mistress required anything further to-night. She remained on the threshold, breathing hard, and staring shyly, while she waited for an answer—a bouncing, apple-cheeked, country bumpkin of a girl, who had accepted very modest wages for this her first place.

"No," said Marsden shortly, "I don't want anything more. What's your name?"

"Susan, sir."

"All right. Then shut the door, Susan."

"Good night, Susan," said Mrs. Marsden kindly.

"Where did you pick *her* up?" asked Marsden, when the girl had gone. "She's healthy enough and plump enough—but she looks half-baked."

"She will do very well, if you give her time to learn."

"Oh, *I'll* let her learn, if *you* can teach her. . . . But what was I saying? Oh, yes—about the furniture!"

Then he walked round the room, pointing at different things, and continuing his questions.

"Did this come out of the shop?"

"Yes."

"And this? . . . And those chairs? . . . And the sofa?"

She did not understand why he asked. But he soon explained himself. He said that all this furniture was taken out of the shop, and it therefore belonged to the firm—or at any rate could not be considered as her private property.

"A partnership is a partnership," he added sententiously.

"But it was ages before the partnership. And all the things were paid for by me."

"No, not paid for," he said quickly. "Not paid for in *cash*—just a matter of writing down a debit somewhere and a credit somewhere else, and saying it was accounted for. But from the point of view of the shop, that's a bogus transaction."

"How absurd!"

"No, *not* absurd—common sense. The shop never got a penny profit, and it seems to me that——"

"Oh, I won't dispute it with you. What is it that you want done?"

"I want the *right* thing to be done," he replied slowly, as if deliberating on a knotty point. "And it isn't easy to say off-hand what that is."

"Do you want me to send the things back into the department?"

"No. . . . No, the time has passed for doing that. It would muddle the accounts. Come into the dining-room, and show me the shop things in there."

She obeyed him; and then he asked if there were any shop things upstairs.

"Yes, several."

"Well, you can show me those to-morrow morning. . . . I begin to see my way. Yes, I think I see now what's fair and proper."

"Do you?"

He said emphatically that in justice and equity he possessed a half share of all goods taken out of his shop, no matter how long ago. And he insisted on having his share. He would obtain a valuation of the goods, and Mrs. Marsden could pay him cash for half the amount, and retain the goods. Or he would send the goods to London and sell them by auction; and they would each take half the proceeds.

Mrs. Marsden chose the second method of dealing with the problem.

"All right," said Marsden. "So be it. I dare say they'll fetch a tidy sum—and it's share and share alike, of course, for the two of us."

Two days after this the house was stripped of nearly all that had given it an air of opulent comfort and decorative luxury. Mrs. Marsden went to the department of

the firm, and bought the cheapest bedroom things she could find to fill the blank spaces and ugly gaps upstairs, and paid for everything with her private purse.

In a fortnight the furniture auctioneers wrote to inform Mr. Marsden that the goods under the hammer had brought the respectable sum of one hundred and thirty pounds. Account for commission, etc., with cheque to balance, should follow shortly. And before long he duly received the balancing cheque.

But the loss of the cabinets and sofas made the living rooms seem bare and forlorn. The house and the shop had become alike: in each one could now see the empty, cheerless aspect of impending ruin.

Enid, when next she brought her child to call on granny, uttered an exclamation of surprise and distress.

"Mother! What has happened? Where has everything gone?"

"To London—to be sold."

"Oh, mother. Has he obliged you to do this?"

"Yes."

The barrier of reserve so long maintained by Mrs. Marsden had worn very thin. It gave small shelter now; and the brave defender seemed to be growing careless of exposure. And Enid too was losing the power to protect herself from pity and commiseration. The misery caused by both husbands could not much longer be concealed. Yet Enid's state was surely a happy one, when compared with the prevailing gloom in which her mother vainly laboured. Enid had a child to console her.

Weeks passed; but Marsden said nothing of the "share and share alike" settlement that was to clear up that little difficulty of the furniture. At last his wife asked him if he had heard from the auctioneers.

"Oh, yes. Didn't I tell you? The things went pretty well."

"What did they bring?"

"Oh, about a hundred quid."

"Then when may I have my share?"

"Oh, you shall have your share all right—but you can't have it now."

"Dick, have you spent it—have you spent what belonged to me?"

"Who says I have spent it?" And he turned on her angrily. "If it isn't convenient to me to square up at the moment, why can't you wait? What does it matter to you when you get it? Why should you pretend to be in such a deuce of a hurry?"

This again was late at night. They were alone together in the dismantled drawing-room.

"Dick," she said quietly but resolutely, "I must have my share."

"Then you'll jolly well wait for it. . . . Look here. Shut up. I'm not going to be nagged at. Be damned to your share. You don't want it."

"Yes, I do want it—I have relied on it."

"Oh, *you're* all right. You've plenty of money stowed away *somewhere*."

"On my honour, I have no money available."

"Available! That's a good word. That means funds that you don't intend to touch. Prices on change are down, are they?—and you don't care to realise just now?"

She looked at him steadily and unflinchingly. Her eyebrows were contracted; her face had hardened.

"Dick, this isn't fair. It is something that I can't allow," and she spoke slowly and significantly. "Please

pull yourself together. You can't go on doing things of this sort. They are dangerous."

"Will you shut up, and stop nagging?"

It was by no means the first time that he had stuck to money when it should have passed through his hands to hers. Indeed in all their private transactions, whenever a chance offered, he had promptly cheated her. But during the last six months it had come to her knowledge that he was not confining his trickery to transactions which could be considered as outside the business.

"Dick, I *must* go on. It is for your sake as well as mine. There is a principle at stake."

"Rot."

"What you are doing is dishonest. It is embezzlement;" and she turned from him, and looked at the empty fireplace.

With an oath he seized her arm, and swung her round till she faced him again.

"Take that back—or you'll be sorry for it. Do you dare to say that word again? Now we'll see." Holding her with one hand, he swayed her to and fro, as if to force her down to her knees; and his other hand was raised threateningly on a level with her face.

"Are you going to strike me?" And she looked at him with unflinching eyes. "Why don't you do it? Why are you hesitating? Oh, my God—it only wanted this to justify everything."

Her courage seemed to increase his hesitation. He lowered the threatening hand, but continued to hold her tightly.

"Say what you mean. Out with it."

"Dick, you know very well what I mean. . . . It must be stopped."

"What must be stopped?"

"Your dangerous irregularities."

"I don't know what you're talking about. Someone has been telling you a pack of lies. You're ready to believe any lie against *me*."

"There was a cheque of the firm—made out to bearer—on the third of last month."

"I know nothing about it."

"No more did I. They sent for me to the bank—to look at the signatures and the initials."

"Well?"

"I told them it was all right."

"Well, what about it?"

"There was the hundred pounds that was to be paid Osborn and Gibbs on account—to keep them quiet. It was written off in the books—you showed their acknowledgment for it. . . . But what's the use of going on? Dick, pull yourself together. I hold the *proof* of your folly."

He had let her go, and was walking about the room with his hands in his pocket. When he spoke again, it was sullenly and grumblingly.

"I know nothing whatever about it. I can keep accounts in my head just as well as in the books. . . . If I seem unbusiness-like—it is because I'm called away so often; and those fools don't understand my system. . . . I go for facts, and don't bother about all the fuss of book-keeping—which is generally in a muddle whenever I ask for plain statements. . . . No, you've got on to a wrong track. But I'll go to the bottom of the matter to-morrow—or the day after. I'm busy with other things to-morrow."

"Never mind what's past, Dick; but go into matters for the future."

"All right. Then say no more. Don't nag me. . . . And look here. Of course I fully intend to pay you your share. I admit the debt. I owe you fifty pounds."

He had been cowed for a few moments; but now he was recovering his angry bluster.

"That's enough," he went on. "I'll settle as soon as I can. But, upon my word, you *are* turning into a harpy for ready money. What have you done with all your own? How have you dribbled it away—and let yourself get so low that you have to come howling for a beggarly fifty pounds?"

Mrs. Marsden raised her hands to her forehead, with a gesture that he might interpret as expressive of hopeless despair; but she did not answer him in words.

"Oh, all right," he growled, to himself rather than to her. "The old explanation, I suppose. I'm to be the scapegoat! But I know jolly well where your money has gone. Enid and that squalling brat have pretty near cleared you out. Nothing's too much for Enid to ask. . . . If I wasn't a fool, I should forbid her the house. . . . And I will too, if you drive me to it."

It maddened him to think of all the sovereigns that might have chinked in his pocket, if Enid had not rapaciously intervened.

But in fact Mrs. Marsden had given her daughter no money. And this was not because Enid had refrained from asking for it. Compelled to do so by Kenion, she had more than once reluctantly sued for substantial assistance.

"Enid dear, don't ask me again. Truly, it is impossible."

Mrs. Marsden stood firm in the attitude that she had adopted when pestered by old Mrs. Kenion at the chris-

tening. Of course she gave presents to little Jane. The trifling aid that a young mother needs in rearing a beloved child Enid might be sure of obtaining; but the source of supply for a husband's selfish extravagance had run dry.

"Enid, my darling, I can't do it—I simply *can't*. He should not send you to me. I told his mother that it was useless to expect more from me."

Enid hugged Mrs. Marsden, said she felt a wretch, begged for forgiveness; but soon she had to confess that Charles bore these rebuffs very badly, and that it would be better for Mrs. Marsden never to come any more to the farmhouse. If she came, Charles might insult her.

And now Richard had hinted that he would not allow Enid to come to St. Saviour's Court. It seemed that soon the mother and daughter would be able to meet only by stealth and on rare occasions.

If the barrier was shattered and broken in front of Enid, it was completely down between Mrs. Marsden and Mr. Prentice. No further pretence was possible to either of them: the strenuous pressure of open facts had forced both to speak more or less plainly when they spoke of Marsden.

Although Marsden always abused the solicitor behind his back, he ran to him for help every time he got into a scrape; and during the last year one might almost say that he had kept Mr. Prentice busily employed. A horrid mess with London book-makers; two rows with the railway company, about cards in a third-class carriage, and no ticket in a first-class carriage; a fracas with the billiard-marker at his club—one after another, stupid and disgraceful scrapes. Mr. Prentice, doing his best for the culprit, each time found it necessary to obtain

Mrs. Marsden's instructions, and to put things before her plainly.

The club committee had eventually desired their obstreperous member to forward a resignation; and, on his refusal to do so, had removed his name from their list. Mr. Marsden, who in his boastful pride once considered himself eligible for the select company of the County gentlemen, had thus been ignominiously expelled from the large society of petty tradesmen, clerks, tag, rag, and bobtail, known as the Mallingbridge Conservative.

At last, after a discussion concerning one of these scrapes, Mr. Prentice abandoned the slightest shadow of pretence, and gave his old client the plainest conceivable advice.

"Screw yourself up to strong measures," said Mr. Prentice, "and get rid of him."

"How could I—even if I were willing?"

"Go for a divorce."

"I shouldn't be given one."

"I think you would."

They were in Mr. Prentice's room—the fine panelled room with the two tall Queen Anne windows, and the pleasant view up Hill Street, and through the side street into Trinity Square. Mrs. Marsden sat facing the light, her back towards the big safe and the racks of tin boxes; and Mr. Prentice, seated by his table, looked at her gravely and watched her changing expression while he spoke.

"I think that you would obtain your divorce," he repeated.

Then he got up, and opened and closed the door. The passage to the clerks' office was empty. He came back to his table, and sat down again.

"Don't give him any more chances. Take it from me —he'll never reform. Get rid of him now."

"Oh, no—quite impossible."

"I had a talk the other day with Yates," said Mr. Prentice quietly. "Yates is prepared to give evidence that he knocked you about."

"But it's not true," said Mrs. Marsden hotly.

The blood rose to her cheeks, and her lips trembled; but Mr. Prentice had ceased to watch her face. He was playing with an inkless pen and some white blotting-paper.

"Yates is ready to go into the box and swear it."

"Then she would be swearing an untruth."

"Yates would be a very good witness. Really I don't see how anybody could shake her. . . . I asked her a few questions. . . . She impressed me as being just the right sort of witness."

"Please don't say any more."

"Honestly, I believe we should pull it off. And why not? If ever a woman deserved——"

But Mrs. Marsden would hear no more of this kind of advice.

"I see no reason against it," said Mr. Prentice, persisting.

"No, no," said Mrs. Marsden sadly.

"It's the only thing to do."

"You don't understand me." And as she said it, there was dignity as well as sadness in her voice. "Even if it were all easy and straightforward, I could never consent to allow the story of my married life to be told in Court —to the public. I could not bear it. I simply could not bear the shame of it."

"Oh! . . . Well, it would be like having a tooth out. Soon over."

"But that is only one reason. There are many others."

"Are there?"

"You shouldn't—you mustn't assume that he only is to blame. There are faults on both sides. And I have this on my conscience—that perhaps he would have done very well, if I hadn't married him."

"My dear—forgive my saying so—that is magnanimous, but nonsense."

"No," she said firmly, "it is the truth. He had some good qualities. He was a worker. Idleness—with more money than he was accustomed to—brought temptations; —and he was very young. If he had remained poor, he might have developed into a better man."

"I won't contradict you. . . . Only it isn't what he might have developed into, but what he has developed into; and what fresh developments we can reasonably expect. . . . I see no hope. Really, I must say it. I believe, as sure as I sit here, that he'll eat you up—he'll ruin you, if you let him—he'll land you in the workhouse before you've done with him. That's why I say, get rid of him—at all costs."

But Mrs. Marsden only shook her head sadly and wearily.

Mr. Prentice stood at his window, looking down into the street, and mournfully watching her as she walked away.

She was dressed in black—she who had been so fond of bright colours never wore anything but black now; and the black was growing shabby and rusty. She seemed taller, now that she had become so much thinner; the grey hair at the sides of her forehead and the unfashionable bonnet tied with ribbons under her chin made her appear old; the florid complexion had changed

to a dull white—as she turned her face, and hurried across the road, he thought that it showed almost a ghostly whiteness. And truly she was the ghost of the prosperous, radiant, richly-clothed woman that he remembered.

She had been so strong, and now she had become so weak—so pitiably weak; with a weakness that rendered it impossible to save her. His heart ached as he thought of her weakness.

She would be eaten up—soul and body. Secret information made him aware that she had sold the various stocks that she held at her marriage. The manager of the bank had regretfully told him so, at a meeting of the masonic lodge—a secret between tried friends and trusted masons, to go no further. She had employed the bank to sell these securities for her. In the old days she would have come to him for advice, and he would have sent the order direct to the stock-brokers; but now she was weakly afraid of his knowing anything about her suicidal transactions.

He was looking out from the same window one afternoon a few weeks later, and he saw something that really horrified him. He could scarcely believe his eyes.

Mrs. Marsden had gone swiftly down the side street, and had vanished through the front door of those shady, wicked solicitors, Hyde and Collins.

He felt so greatly discomposed that he snatched up his hat, ran down into the side street, and stood waiting for her outside the hated and ominous doorway.

When after half an hour she emerged from the clutch of his unworthy confrères, he took her arm and led her into Trinity Square; and, walking with her round and

round the small enclosure, reproached her for deserting him in favour of such people.

"But I haven't deserted you," she said, meekly bearing the reproaches. "This is only some private business that they are attending to."

"But is it kind to me? You know what I think of them. I ask you, is it kind to me?"

"I meant no unkindness," she said earnestly.

And she offered apologies based on vague generalities. Life is complex and difficult. One is forced out of one's path by unusual circumstances. Sometimes one is driven to do things of so private a nature that one cannot speak about them to one's oldest and best friends.

"Very well. But if you feel disinclined to confide everything to me, there are other men that you could depend on. Go to Dickinson—he's a thorough good sort. Or Loder—or Selby! Go to any one of them. But don't—for mercy's sake—mix yourself up with these brutes."

In order to defend herself, Mrs. Marsden was obliged to defend Hyde and Collins.

"They are quick to understand one. Really they seem sharp——"

"*Sharp!* Yes—too sharp—a thousand times too sharp. But ask anybody's opinion of them. Look at their clients. They haven't got a single solid client."

"But they still act for Bence's—they do everything for Mr. Bence."

"Yes," said Mr. Prentice contemptuously, "but who's Bence, when all's said and done?"

"Ah!" And Mrs. Marsden drew in her breath, as if she felt incapable of continuing the conversation.

"I grant you that Bence has done wonders—and

proved me a bad prophet. But we haven't got to the last chapter of Bence yet. I don't believe Bence is really solid—and I never shall do, while I see him going in and out of Hyde and Collins's."

Mrs. Marsden meekly bore all reproaches; but she showed a stubbornness that no warnings could shake. She met direct questions with generalised vagueness. What is unwise in some circumstances may be not unwise in other circumstances. Life is complex—and so on.

When Mr. Prentice left her, he went back to his office full of the most dismal forebodings. She had placed herself in the hands of Hyde and Collins. She was indisputably done for.

XXII

TIME was passing. One Sunday morning in November, while the vicar of St. Saviour's preached a sermon about immortality, she looked at the familiar faces of the congregation and thought sadly of the impermanence of all earthly things.

So many of the people she had known were gone; so few remained, and these each showed so plainly the havoc and the change wrought by the flying years. She glanced at the card in the metal frame that was half hidden by her prayer-books—"Mrs. Marsden, two seats," Once the writing on the card read "Mr. and Mrs. Thompson, three seats," and she had sat here with her husband and mother. Then the writing changed again—"Mrs. Thompson, two seats." How many years she and Enid had been here together!

And the other people in the pew—a man and a wife, with little children who had slowly grown into men and women; two elderly ladies; a widower and his sister—all had gone. She glanced across the side aisle at a white-haired feeble old man, and a wizened monkey-like old dame who nodded and shook unceasingly—Mr. Bennett, the High Street butcher, and his palsied helpmate;—and she thought of what they were when first she came to St. Saviour's: a hearty vigorous couple in the prime of life, the man seeming big enough to knock

down one of his bullocks, and the woman singing the hymns so loudly that her neighbours could not hear the choir. Now they had dwindled and shrunk to this—nerveless arms, bloodless hues, and frozen silence.

Wherever she turned her eyes, she saw the same signs and could read the same story—bowed backs, bald heads, blue-veined hands. Everyone had grown old, everyone had grown feeble, of those who had seen her as a young bride, as a young mother. And no new faces seemed to have replaced the faces that had vanished. Fashion in recent years had leaned steadily towards the other church. Holy Trinity possessed lighted candles on its altars, embroidered copes on its priests, stringed instruments in its organ loft: it was there that all the young people went—to be thrilled with strange music, to be charmed with smart hats, to be set throbbing with irrelevant dreams of courtship and love. Only the old and the worn out had been true to quiet peaceful St. Saviour's.

She herself was absolutely faithful to the church that she had used and loved for so long. It had become her place of rest, her harbour of refuge. It was only here that she ever felt quite at peace. She knew that here she was safe for an hour at least; while the service lasted no one could molest her; no one could even speak to her: during this brief hour she belonged to herself.

She could not forget the outside world, but she resolutely tried not to think of it. Just now she had driven away a thought of Marsden. He was lying in bed; perhaps he would sleep till late afternoon; perhaps he would be lazily getting ready for his food when she returned to the house;—but she need not think of him. He would not join her here.

She folded her hands, and listened to the kind old

vicar as he told her of things that are incomprehensible, immutable, and everlasting.

A man had come up the side aisle, and was stupidly staring at the people in the pews. Mrs. Marsden, glancing at him inattentively, vaguely wondered why he didn't take one of the many empty seats and sit down. She knew him very well. He was a loafer of the better class; and on Sundays he regularly made his beat up and down St. Saviour's Court, picking up odd sixpences by running off to fetch cabs, bringing forgotten umbrellas, or retailing second-hand newspapers to laggards who had missed the paper-boy.

Presently he discovered Mrs. Marsden's pew, entered it, and whispered hoarsely.

"You're wanted at the house. The gentleman said you was to come at once."

Followed by this seedy messenger, she hastened from the church.

"What is it?" she asked him when they got outside.

"I dunno. The gentleman hollered to me from the door, and sent me to fetch you."

The house door stood ajar; and her husband, in his dressing-gown and slippers, was anxiously waiting for her and guarding the foot of the stairs.

"All right," he said to the loafer. "I'll remember you another time;" and he shut the door and bolted it.

From the top of the stairs there came a sound of wailing and lamentation.

"Jane, look here. I want you to stop this fool's mouth—what's her name—Susan. I've somehow upset her. And that infernal cook is encouraging her to squall the house down."

Without a word Mrs. Marsden hurried upstairs. The cook, a sour-visaged woman of thirty-five, was on the threshold of the kitchen; and Susan, the apple-cheeked housemaid, was clinging to cook's arm, and sobbing and howling.

"Emily—Susan," said Mrs. Marsden quietly, "what *is* all this noise and fuss about?"

"The master frightened her," said the cook, very sourly, "and she wishes to go to the police."

"The police! What nonsense! Why?"

"The master rang, and she took up his shaving water—and what happened frightened her."

"Where's father and mother?" cried Susan. "I want my mother. Take me home to tell father. Or let me go to the police station, and I'll tell them."

Marsden had followed his wife upstairs, and he showed himself at the kitchen door. At sight of him, Susan ceased talking and began to howl again.

"She's frightened to death," said the cook.

Mrs. Marsden was patting the girl's shoulder, studying her tear-stained face eagerly and intently.

"There, there," she said gently, as if reassured by all that the red cheeks and streaming eyes had told her. "I think this is a great noise about nothing at all."

"Of course it is," said Marsden, at the door.

"Don't leave me alone with him," bellowed Susan. "I won't be kep' a prisoner. I want to see my mother—and my father."

"Hush—Susan," said Mrs. Marsden, soothingly. "Compose yourself. There is no need to cry any more."

"No need to have cried at all," said Marsden.

Obviously he was afraid: he alternately blustered and cringed.

"You silly girl," he said cringingly, "what rubbish have you got into your head? I pass a few chaffing remarks—and you suddenly behave like a raving lunatic." And then he went on blusteringly. "Talk about going! It's *us* who ought to dismiss you for your impudence, and your disrespect."

"You did something to frighten her, sir," said the cook.

"It's a lie—a damned lie."

"If so," said the cook, with concentrated sourness, "why not let her go to the police, as she wishes?"

"No," shouted Marsden. "I can't have my servants libelling and scandalising me. I've a public position in this town—and I won't have people sneaking out of my house to spread a lot of innuendos against their employers."

Then he beckoned his wife, and spoke to her in a whisper. "For God's sake, shut her up. Give her a present—square her. Shut her mouth somehow. . . . It's all right, you know—but we mustn't give her the chance of slandering me;" and he went out of the kitchen.

But he returned almost immediately, to beckon and whisper again.

"Jane. Don't let her out of your sight."

So this was her task for the remainder of the day of rest—to sit and chat with a blubbering housemaid until a pacification of nerves and mind had been achieved.

She performed the task, but found it a fatiguing one. Susan made her labours arduous by returning to the starting point every time that any progress had been made.

"I'd sooner go back 'ome at once, ma'am"

"I think that would be a pity, Susan. If you leave me like this, I may not be able to get you another place. Why should you throw up a comfortable situation?"

"It isn't comfortable."

"Susan, you shouldn't say that. Haven't I treated you kindly?"

"Yes, *you* have."

"And haven't I taken trouble in teaching you your duties? You are getting on very nicely; and if you stay with me a little longer, I shall be able to recommend you as competent."

But this servant said what all other servants had said to Mrs. Marsden. Susan had no fault to find with her mistress.

"I should be comfortable, if it wasn't for *him*. But I've never been comfortable with him."

And then she went back to her starting point.

"I'd rather go 'ome. I must ask mother's advice—and tell father too. I don't believe father would wish it 'ushed up."

However, Mrs. Marsden finally succeeded. By bed-time Susan was pacified.

"Yes, I'll stay, ma'am. I'd like to stay with you—but may I sleep in Em'ly's room?"

"Of course you may."

Next morning no one came to call Mrs. Marsden; no fires were lighted; no breakfast was being prepared. Both the servants had gone. In the night cook had persuaded the girl to change her mind.

A letter from cook, conspicuously displayed on the dining-room mantelpiece, explained matters.

"Dear Madame, We are sorry to leave you but feel

we cannot stay in this house, I have advise Susan to go to her Home and she has gone there, Yours respectfully

"MISS EMILY HOWARD."

Mrs. Marsden went to her husband's room, woke him, and repeated the substance of Miss Howard's note.

He was dreadful to see, in the cold morning light—unshaven, white and puffy; sitting up in bed, biting his coarse fingers and looking at her with cowardly blood-shot eyes.

"Where is her home?"

Mrs. Marsden said that Susan's parents lived somewhere on the other side of Linkfield.

"Twelve miles away! She's gone out by the train. She has got there by now. What are we to do?"

"I scarcely know."

"Let me think a minute. . . . Yes, look here. Get hold of old Prentice—He's a man of the world. He'll help you. He'll be able to shut them up."

And with terrified haste he gave her his directions. She was to run to Mr. Prentice's private house, and catch him before he started for his office. Then she was to run to Cartwright's garage and hire a motor-car for the day; and then she and Mr. Prentice were to go scouring out into the country, to silence Susan and all her relatives.

"Tell Prentice to take plenty of money with him. And don't forget—ask for Cartwright's open car. It's faster. And don't waste a minute—don't wait for breakfast or anything—and don't let Prentice wait either."

In an hour she and her old friend were spinning along the Linkfield road in the hired motor-car. The east

wind cut their faces; dirt sprinkled their arms; gloomy thoughts filled their minds.

This, then, was her Monday's task—to begin Sunday's toil, on a larger scale, all over again.

With some difficulty they found the cottage for which they were seeking. Susan's mother opened the door in response to prolonged tappings. Susan had safely reached home.

"Oh, come inside," said the mother; and she pretended to shed tears. "Oh dear, oh dear. Who could of believed such a thing 'appening?"

"Nothing has happened," said Mr. Prentice, confidently and jovially; "except that your daughter has left her situation without warning, and we want to know what she means by it."

"Oh she's told me everything," said the mother, dolefully shaking her head. "Everything."

"There was nothing to tell," said Mr. Prentice; "beyond the fact that she has behaved in a very stupid manner. Where is she?"

The mother indicated a door behind her. "Poor dear, she's so exhausted, I've been trying to persuade her to eat a morsel of something."

Mr. Prentice lifted a latch, opened the inner door, and disclosed the humble home-picture—Susan, with her mouth full of bacon and bread, stretching a hearty hand towards the metal tea-pot.

"Ah, thank goodness," said the mother, "she *'as* bin able to pick a bit. Don't be afraid, Susan—you're 'ome now, along of your own mother and father;" and she addressed Mrs. Marsden. "'Er father 'as 'eard everything too."

Mr. Prentice was laughing gaily.

"Well done, Susan. Don't be afraid of another slice of bacon. Don't be afraid of a fourth cup of tea."

"No, sir," said Susan shyly.

"Where *is* her father?" asked Mr. Prentice. "I'd like to have a few words with him."

But father, having heard his daughter's tale, had started on a long journey with an empty waggon. He would return with it full of manure any time this afternoon. And going, and loading, and returning, he would be thinking over everything, and deciding what he and Susan should next do.

Mr. Prentice, considering that even a hired motor-car ought to be able to overtake a manure waggon though empty, started in pursuit of father; and Mrs. Marsden was left to conduct the pacific negotiations at the cottage.

It was a long and weary day, full of small difficulties—father, when recovered, not a free man, unable to talk, compelled to attend to his master's business; mother unable to express any opinion without previous discussion with father; empty fruitless hours slowly dragging away; meals at a public-house; a walk with Susan;—then darkness, and father talking to Mr. Prentice in the parlour; and, finally, mother and Mrs. Marsden summoned from the kitchen to assist at ratification of peace proposals.

It was late at night when Mrs. Marsden got back to St. Saviour's Court. Her husband had not been out all day. He was sitting by the dining-room fire, with his slippered feet on the fender, and a nearly emptied whisky bottle on the corner of the table near his elbow.

"Well?" He looked round anxiously and apprehensively.

"It is over. There will be no trouble—not even a scandal."

She was blue with cold; her hands were numbed, and hung limply at her sides; her voice had become husky.

"Bravo! Well done!" He stood up, and stretched and straightened himself, as if throwing off the heavy load that had kept him crouched and bent in the arm-chair. "Excellent! I knew you'd do it all right;" and he drew a deep breath, and then began to chuckle. "And, by Jove, old girl, I'm grateful to you. . . . Look here. Have you had your grub? Don't you want some supper?"

"No."

"Well, understand—my best thanks;" and really he seemed to feel some little gratitude, as well as great satisfaction. "Jane, you're a brick. You never show malice. You've a large heart."

"No," she said huskily; and with a curious slow gesture, she raised her numbed hands and pressed them against her breast. "I had a large heart once; but it has grown smaller and smaller, and harder and harder—till now it is a lump of stone."

"No, no. Rot."

"Yes. And that's lucky—or before this you would have broken it."

He stood staring at the door when it had closed behind her. Then he shrugged his shoulders, turned to the table, and replenished his glass with whisky.