XIII

THEY had been married nearly three months, and each month seemed longer to her than any year of her previous existence.

Many changes were visible at the shop. Indeed, from the back wall of the carters' yard to the sign-board over the front doors, nothing was quite as it used to be. The big white board, which told the world that the business "Established 1813" now belonged to Thompson and Marsden, was a makeshift affair; but the new partner had ordered a gigantic and artistic fascia, and this, he said, would be a real ornament to High Street.

He promised soon to inaugurate new departments, to introduce improvements in the old ones, to revolutionise old-fashioned time-wasting methods of book-keeping and all other office work; but so far he had only achieved something very like chaos.

"Don't fuss," he used to say. "I'll soon get to work; but I can't attend to it for the moment."

Thus the little realm behind the glass had been turned upside down and not yet replaced upon its feet again. The rooms were blocked with the opened and unopened packing-cases that contained the materials for Mr. Marsden's clever arrangement—innumerable desks and cabinets, immense index cupboards, racks and sideless stands, by the use of which weapons such antiquated devices as letter-presses, copying-machines, and pigeon-holes would be abolished. Every shred of paper would

be filed flat; thousands of letters would lie in the space hitherto occupied by half a dozen; each correspondent would be allotted a file to himself, letter and answer together; and this novel system would deprive clerks of the power of making mistakes; order would reign; confusion would be impossible. But at present, with the two systems inextricably mixed, the new system half started and the old system half discarded, confusion was not only possible but unavoidable.

"Let them rub along as they can *pro. tem.* I'll straighten it out for them directly I settle down to it."

Just now he could throw himself into the business only by fits and starts, but he assured everybody that it should soon secure his undivided care.

"*I*'ll wake 'em up;" and he tapped his forehead and laughed. "There's a reservoir of enterprise here—the ideas simply bubbling over." Then he would bring out his jewelled cigarette-case, light a cigarette, and swagger off to keep some pleasant appointment.

He was candidly enjoying the softer side of his new position, and postponing its arduous duties. He both looked and felt very jolly. Except when anyone accidentally made him angry, he was always ready to laugh and joke.

He had a small run-about car, and was rapidly learning to drive it while a much bigger car was being built for him. He was renewing old acquaintances and picking up fresh friends. He showed a fine catholic taste for amusement, and handsomely supported the theatre, the music-hall, the race-course. In the good company with which he was now able to surround himself he dashed to and fro all over England, to see the winter sport between the flags. He dressed grandly, drank bravely, spent

freely—in a word, he was hastily completing his education as a gentleman.

"Must have my fling, old girl." He was nearly always jolly about it to his wife. "But don't you fear that I'm turning into an idler. Not much. This is my holiday. And no one can say I haven't *earned* a holiday. Ever since I was fourteen I've been putting my back into it like a good 'un."

He was especially genial when luck had been kind to him and he had won a few bets. Returning after a couple of fortunate days at Manchester or Wolverhampton, he jingled the sovereigns in his pockets and chattered gleefully.

"Rare fun up there—and little Dick came out on top. Cheer up, Jane. Give a chap a welcome. This doesn't cost one half what you might guess. . . . Besides, anyhow, I've got to do it—for a bit—not for ever. . . . I'm young—don't forget that. Only one life to live—in this vale of tears."

He pleaded his youth, as if it must always prove a sufficient excuse for anything; but she never invited either excuses or apologies.

"Well, old girl, I'm leaving you to your own resources again—but you understand, don't you? Boys will be boys;" and he laughed. "This isn't naughtiness—only what is called the levity of youth. Ta-ta—take care of yourself."

He liked to avail himself of a spare day between two race-meetings, and run up to London, make a swift tour of the wholesale houses, and do a little of that easiest and proudest sort of business which is known as "buying for a sound firm." His vanity was flattered by the outward show of respect with which these big London

people received him. Managers fawned upon him; even principals begged him to join them at their luncheon table; and he described to his wife something of his satisfaction when he found himself seated with the bosses, at places that he used to enter a few years ago as a poor little devil trotting about the city to match a ribbon or a tape string.

He came home one night, when the rain was beating on the window-panes and sending a river down St. Saviour's Court to swell the sea of mud in High Street, and told her he had heard big news while lunching with his silk merchants.

She was waiting for him by the dining-room fire, and when he first came in he displayed anger because the cabman had wanted more than his fare.

"But he didn't get it. I took his number—and threatened to report him. . . . It's infernally inconvenient not being able to drive up to your own door—it's like living in a back alley."

Then, with an air of rather surly importance, he told her his news about Bence.

"They're *afraid* of him. They gave me the straight tip that he's shaky. Mark my words, *that* bubble is going to be burst."

"But people have said so for so long." And she explained that the story of Bence's approaching destruction was really a very old one. "Year after year Mr. Prentice used to tell me the same thing—that Bence's were financially rotten, and couldn't last."

"Prentice is an old ass, and you're quite right not to believe all *he* tells you. Between you and me and the post, I reckon that Mr. P. wants a precious sharp eye kept on him—I don't trust him an inch farther than I can see

him. . . . But what was I saying? Oh, yes, Bence's. Well, it is not what Prentice says now—it's what *I* say."

Then he asked if there was anything in the house to eat. Yes, the dinner that had been ready for him three hours ago was still being kept hot for him.

"I don't want any dinner. I dined in London. . . . But I think I could do with a snack of supper."

He went over to the sideboard, unlocked a lower division of it with his private key, and drew forth a half-bottle of champagne.

"If you'll help me, I'll make it a whole bottle."

"No, thank you."

Before relocking the cupboard, he peered into it suspiciously.

"I don't think my wine is any too safe in this cellaret. How do I know how many keys there aren't knocking about the house? I may be wrong, but I thought I counted three more bottles than what's left."

Then he rang the bell, and at the same time called loudly for the parlourmaid.

"Mary! Mary! Why the devil doesn't she come in in and ask if anything's wanted?" He left the room, grumbling and fuming.

Mrs. Marsden heard his voice outside, and the voice of Yates timidly apologising.

Mary the parlourmaid had a very bad cold, and Yates had ventured to allow her to go to bed.

"Thank you for nothing. . . . Where's the cook? Cook—wake up, please;" and he went into the kitchen.

The servants feared him. They stammered and became stupid when he spoke to them crossly, but never failed to smile sycophantically when he expressed pleasure.

All that he required on this occasion from cook was

plenty of hot toast and cayenne pepper. But he sent Yates to buy some smoked salmon or herring at the restaurant in High Street.

"And sharp's the word.... What are you waiting for?"

"Oh, I don't mind going, sir—but I shall get wet to the skin."

"Take my umbreller," said the cook.

Yates went down the steep stairs, and the master looked in at the dining-room door.

"That woman is like some old cat—afraid of a drop of rain on her mangy old fur."

Then Mrs. Marsden heard his footsteps overhead in the dressing-room. When he reappeared he had taken off his tie and collar, and was wearing a crimson velvet smoking jacket.

The toast sandwiches were promptly placed before him, and he sat eating and drinking,—not really hungry, but avidly gulping the wine; and rapidly becoming jolly again.

"What was I talking about?"

"Bence's."

"Oh, yes. I tell you, he has just about got to the end of his tether. All the best people funk having him on their books. . . . I give him two years from to-day."

"I wonder."

"Mind you, he has fairly smacked us in the eye with his furniture."

And it was unfortunately but too true that there had of late been an ugly drop in the sales of Thompson's solid, well-made chairs and tables.

"But," continued Marsden, "we aren't going to take it lying down any longer. He has got a *man* to reckon with henceforth. He'll learn what tit-for-tat means. . . .

It was too late to attempt anything last Christmas. But let him wait till next December. Then it shall be, A very happy Christmas to you, Mr. Bence."

"What do you propose for Christmas?"

"You wait too."

"Yes, but, Dick, you won't begin launching out without consulting me—allowing some weight to my opinion?"

"No, of course I shan't. We're partners, aren't we? I know what a partnership is. But you won't need persuading. You'll jump at my ideas when you hear them."

"Why not let me hear them now? I could be thinking over them—I like to brood upon plans."

"Well, something is going to happen in our basement next Christmas, which will be tidings of peace and great joy to everybody but Bence;" and he laughed with riotous amusement. "Get me my pipe, old woman. I can't go into business matters now. You wait, and trust your Dickybird."

She brought him his pipe and tobacco; and he explained to her that he fancied a pipe because he had been smoking cigars ever since the morning, and the tip of his tongue felt sore.

He puffed at the pipe in silence, and luxuriously stretched his slippered feet towards the warmth of the fire.

"You best go to by-by, Jane. I'm too tired to talk. I've had a heavy day—one way and another; and a longish journey before me to-morrow. . . . Good-night. Tell 'em I must be called at eight-thirty sharp."

This was a typical evening. There were many evenings like it.

Frequently two or three days passed without her once entering the shop. Sometimes she could not brace her-

self sufficiently to go down and face the staff. They all saw her subjection to her husband; and although they endeavoured not to betray their thoughts, it was obvious that to almost all of them she appeared as the once absolute princess who had, in abdicating, sunk to a state of ignominious dependence. She walked among them with downcast eyes; for too often she had surprised their glances of pity.

But she saw that in the street also—pity or contempt. One or other each citizen's face seemed to show her plainly. She knew exactly what shop and town said and thought of her new partner.

At dusk on these winter afternoons, when she had not lately used the door of communication, Miss Woolfrey or Mr. Mears would come through it and inform her of the day's affairs. Miss Woolfrey's reports consisted merely of vapid and irresponsible gossip, but Mrs. Marsden seemed to have discovered fresh merits in this sandy, freckled, commonplace chatter-box—perhaps for no other reason than because she belonged so entirely to the old regime and was intellectually incapable of absorbing unfamiliar ideas. But it was Mears who supplied any real instruction, and it was with him that Mrs. Marsden talked seriously.

One afternoon when he was about to leave her, she detained him.

"Mr. Mears—I've something to ask you."

"Yes, ma'am."

She had laid her hand upon his great fore-arm; she was gazing at him very earnestly; but she hesitated, with lips trembling nervously, and seemed for a few moments unable to say any more.

"Yes, ma'am?"

Then she spoke quickly and eagerly.

"Stick to me, Mr. Mears. Whatever happens, don't give me up. I should be truly lost without you. Even if it's difficult, stick to me."

"As long as he lets me," said Mears huskily.

"He is going to talk to you. Humour him. He has a great respect for you, really."

"He hasn't shown it so far."

"Make allowances. It's his way. He has such notions about the new style—which we—which you and I mayn't always approve. But he knows your value. He has said so again and again."

It was not long after this secret appeal—one morning that Marsden spent in Mallingbridge—when the shop heard "the guv'nor begin on Mr. M."

"Look here, my friend," said Mr. Marsden loudly, "it's about time that we took each other's measure. Is it you or I who is to be cock of the walk? Just step in here, please."

This was said outside the counting-house. The proprietor and the manager at once disappeared; and the news flew far and wide, downstairs and upstairs. "He has got old Mears behind the glass. . . . He is giving old Mears a dressing-down." All had known that the thing was infallibly coming; the encounter between the greater and the lesser force had been unaccountably delayed; every man and woman in the building now trembled for the result.

"You want to put your authority up against mine. That won't do. One boss is enough in a larger establishment than this."

But behind the glass old Mears was very firm. He made himself as big as possible, standing at his full

height, seeming to imitate Marsden's trick of squaring the shoulders and throwing back the head.

"*I* am the boss. And what I say *goes*."

"And your partner, sir? Mrs. Thompson, I should say Mrs. Marsden—are we to disregard her?"

"No. But I speak for self and partner. Please make a note of that."

"Very good, sir."

"Then that's all right. It was a case of *Twiggez-vous?* But I think you twig now that I don't stand nonsense—or go on paying salaries in exchange for bounce and impudence."

"May I ask if you think I am not earning my salary, sir?"

"I haven't said you aren't."

"Or do you think, sir, if you hunted the country, you'd find a man who'd give the same service for the same money?"

"Oh, if you want to blow your trumpet——"

"No, sir, I want to find my bearings—to learn where I am—if I *can*. It isn't boasting, it's only business. I've a value here, or I haven't. I've been under the impression I was valuable. You know that, don't you, sir?"

"Oh, I've no quarrel with you—if you'll go on serving me faithfully."

"I'll serve the firm faithfully, sir—with the uttermost best that's in me."

"All right then."

"Because that's *my* way, sir—the old-fashioned style I took up as a boy—and couldn't change now, sir, if I wanted to."

When Mears came from behind the glass, his face was flushed; he breathed stertorously; and he held his hands beneath the wide skirts of his frock-coat to conceal the fact that they were shaking. But he kept the coat-tails

swishing bravely, and he marched up and down between two counters with so grand a tramp that no one dared look at him closely.

Then, after a few minutes, Marsden came swaggering, with his hat cocked and a lighted cigar in his mouth. Before going out into the street, he ostentatiously paused; and spoke to Mr. Mears amicably, even jovially.

And the shop comprehended that the battle was over, and that there was to be a truce between the two men.

On some days when Mrs. Marsden would probably have come down from the house into the counting-house she was prevented from doing so by a grievous headache.

These headaches attacked her suddenly and with appalling force. At first the pain was like toothache; then it was like earache, and then the whole head seemed to be rent as if struck with an axe—and afterwards for several hours there was a dull numbing discomfort, with occasional neuralgic twinges and throbbings.

Resting in her bedroom after such an attack, she was surprised by receiving a visit from Enid. She was lying on a sofa that Yates had pushed before the fire, and at the sound of voices outside the door she started up and hastily scrambled to her feet.

"Mother dear, may I come in? I'm so sorry you're ill."

Since their parting last autumn they had not set eyes on each other, and for a little while they talked almost as strangers.

"Yates, bring up the tea."

"Oh, but isn't it too early for tea?"

"No. Get it as quickly as you can, Yates. Mrs. Kenion must be ready for tea—after her long drive."

"I came by train. Thank you—I own I should like a cup, if it isn't really troubling you."

"Of course not . . . Do take the easy chair."

"This is very comfortable . . . But won't you lie down again? I have disturbed you."

"Not in the least. I think it will do me good to sit up. Won't you take off your coat?"

Enid let the fur boa fall back from her slender neck, and undid two buttons of her long grey coat.

"Really," she said, with a little laugh, "it's so cold that I haven't properly thawed yet."

She was charmingly dressed, and she looked very graceful and well-bred—but not at all plump; in fact rather too thin. While they drank their tea, she told her mother of the kindness of her husband's relatives—a sister-in-law was a particular favourite; but everybody was nice and kind; there were many pleasant neighbours, and all had called and paid friendly attentions to the young couple.

"I am so glad to hear that," said Mrs. Marsden. "My only fear of the country was that you might sometimes feel yourself too much isolated."

"Oh, I'm never in the least lonely. There's so much to do—and even if there weren't people coming in and out perpetually, the house would take up all my time."

"Ah yes . . . I suppose you are quite settled down by now."

"No, I wish we were. Things are still rather at sixes and sevens. Otherwise I should have begged you to come and see for yourself. We are both so anxious to get you out there."

"I shall be delighted to come, my dear. But I myself have been rather rushed of late."

"Of course you have. . . . Er—Mr. Marsden is away, Yates told me."

"Yes, but only for a few days. I get him back to-morrow night;" and Mrs. Marsden laughed cheerfully. "Do you know, he has taken a leaf out of Mr. Kenion's book. He is quite mad about racing."

"Is he? How amusing!"

"These violent delights have violent ends. He says it is only a passing fancy; and I suppose he'll be taking up something else directly—golf perhaps—and going mad about that."

"No doubt. Men all seem alike, don't they?" And Enid smiled and nodded her head. "Though I must say, Charles is very true to his hunting. I mean to wean him from steeplechasing; but I like him to hunt. It keeps him in such splendid health."

"Yes, dear. It must be tremendous exercise. Do you ride to the meets with him?"

"No, I never seem to have time—and for the moment, though we've six horses in the stable, there's not one that I quite see myself on." And Enid laughed again, gaily. "Good enough for Charles, you know—but *he* can ride anything. He wants to get me a pony-cart, and I shall be safer in that."

The constraint was wearing off. While they talked, each availed herself of any chance of investigating the other's face—a shy swift glance, instantaneously deflected to the teacups or the mantelpiece, if a head turned to meet it. At first there had been difficulty in speaking of the husbands, but now it was quite easy; and it all sounded fairly natural.

"Oh, but that is just the sort of thing Charlie says." The daughter helped the mother. "Men always think they can manage things better than we can— and they're *always* troublesome about the servants. The only occasions

on which Charles makes me *really* angry is when he upsets the servants."

And Mrs. Marsden helped Enid.

"You must employ all your tact—men are so easily led, though they won't be driven."

"No, they must be led," said Enid, with a return to complete artificiality of manner. "How true that is!"

But there was a very subtle alteration in Enid. Beneath the artificial manner gradually there became perceptible something altogether new and strange. This was another Enid—not the old Enid. She had evidently caught the peculiar tone of bucolic gentility and covert-side fashion common to most of her new associates, and this had slightly altered her; but deeper than the surface change lay the changes slowly manifesting themselves to the instinctive penetration of her mother. Enid was softer, more gentle, a thousand times more capable of sympathy.

"Dick," Mrs. Marsden was saying, "is fearfully ambitious."

"That's a good fault, mother."

"He even talks of—of going into Parliament."

"And why not?"

"He belongs to the Conservative Club here—but he wants"—and Mrs. Marsden showed embarrassment,—"he would like to join the County Club."

"Oh!"

"Do you think Mr. Charles—or his family—would be kind enough to use influence?"

"Yes, mother dear, I'll make them—if possible." Enid had leant forward; and she shyly took her mother's hand, and gently squeezed it. "But now I must go. I do hope I haven't increased your headache."

"No, my dear, you have done me good."

Enid rose, buttoned her coat, and began to pull on her grey reindeer gloves.

"Mother! My old room—is it empty, or are you using it for anything?"

"Oh, Dick uses that, dear."

"And the dressing-room?"

"He uses that too."

"Would you mind—would he mind if I went in and looked round?"

"No. . . . Of course not."

"Only for a peep. Then I'll come back—and say good-bye."

But she was a long time in the other rooms; and when she returned, Mrs. Marsden saw and affected not to see that she had been crying.

The warmth of the fire after the cold of the street, or the sight of her old home after a few months in her new one, had properly thawed elegant, long-nosed Enid. She sank on her knees by the sofa, flung her arms round the neck of her mother, and kissed her again and again; and Mrs. Marsden felt what in vain she had waited for during so many years—her child's heart beating with expansive sympathy against her breast.

"Mother, how good you were—oh, how good you were to me!" And she clung and pressed and kissed as in all her life she had never done till now.

"Enid—my darling."

When she had gone, Mrs. Marsden lay musing by the fire. It was impossible not to divine the very simple cause of this immense alteration in Enid. Already poor Enid had learnt her lesson—she knew what it was to have a rotten bad husband.

XIV

BUT not so bad as her own husband. No, that would be an impossibility.

She did not want to think about it; but just now her control over her thoughts had weakened, while the thoughts themselves were growing stronger. She was subject to rapid ups and downs of health, the victim of an astounding crisis of nerves, so that one hour she experienced a queer longing for muscular. fatigue, and the next hour laughed and wept in full hysteria. At other times she felt so weak that she believed she might sink fainting to the ground if she attempted to go for the shortest walk.

Generally on days when Marsden was away from Mallingbridge she crept to bed at dusk. Yates used to aid her as of old, sit by the bedside talking to her; and then leave her in the fire-glow, to watch the dancing shadows or listen to the whispering wind.

She did not wish to think; but in spite of all efforts to forget facts and to hold firmly to delusions, her old power of logical thought was remorselessly returning to her. In defiance of her enfeebled will, the past reconstituted itself; events grouped themselves in sequence; hitherto undetected connections linked up, and made the solid chain that dragged her from vague surmise to definite conclusions. Then, with the full vigour of the old penetrative faculties, she thought of her mistake.

He did not care for her. He had never cared for her. It was all acting. All that she relied on was false; all that had been real was the steadfast sordid purpose sustaining him throughout his odious dissimulation.

His marriage was a brutal male prostitution, in which he had sold his favours for her gold. And shame overwhelmed her as she thought of how easily she had been trapped. While he was coldly calculating, she was endowing him with every attribute of warm-blooded generosity; when her fine protective instincts made her yearn over him, longing to give him happiness, comfort, security, he was in truth playing with her as a cat plays with a wounded mouse—no hurry, no excitement, but steel-bright eyes watching, retracted claws waiting. And she remembered his studied phrases that rang so true to the ear, till too late she discovered their miserable falsity. With what art he had prepared the way for the final disclosure of his effrontery! He could not brook the sense of dependence, his manly spirit would not allow him to pose as the pensioner of a rich wife, and so on—and then, even at the last, how he waited until she had completely betrayed her secret, and he could be certain that her pride as a woman would infallibly prevent her from drawing back! Not till then, when she had taken the world unto her confidence, when escape had become impossible, did he drive his bargain.

While the honey-moon was not yet over, she imagined, she could understand the pain that lay before her. But in these three months she had suffered more than she had conceived to be endurable by any living creature. If pain can kill, she should be dead.

Her punishment had been like the fabled torture of the Chinese—hundreds of small lacerations, a thousand slicing cuts of the executioner's sword, and the kind death-stroke craftily withheld. But the swordsman of the East does not laugh while he mutilates. And *he* struck at her with a smiling face.

She thought of how in every hour of their companionship he had wounded her; with what unutterable baseness he had used his power over her—the power given to him by her love. The love stripped her of every weapon of defence; she was tied, naked, with not a guarding rag to shelter her against the blows—and the pitiless blows fell upon her from her gagged mouth to her pinioned feet.

Daily he attacked her pride, her self-respect, her bodily health and her mental equipoise; but most of all she suffered in her love—that terrible flower of passion that refuses to die. Torn up by its bleeding roots, it replants itself—and will thrive on the barren rock as well as in life's richest garden. Robbed of light, air, sustenance, it will cling to the dungeon wall, and bud and burst again for the prisoner to touch its blossoms in his darkness. Its flame petals can be seen by the glazing eyes that have lost sight of all else, and its burning poisonous fruit is still tasted in the earth of our graves.

She thought of what he had said to her when they first came back to the house that she had decorated and made luxurious for him. A laugh, a nudge of the elbow—"This is the beginning of Chapter Two, Janey. We can't be honeymooning for ever, old girl;" and then some unforgettable words, to formulate the request that they might occupy different rooms; and so, in the home-coming hour, he had struck a deadly blow at her pride by the brutally direct implication that what she most de-

sired was that which every pure woman craves for least. As if the grosser manifestations could satisfy, when all the spiritual joys are denied!

But he judged her nature by his own. He was common as dirt. He was savage as a beast of the forest, a creature of fierce strong appetites that believes the appeasement of any physical craving—to drink deeply, to eat greedily, to sleep heavily—is the highest pleasure open to the animal kingdom; and that man the king is no higher than the dog his servant.

He knew only worthless women, and he supposed that all women were alike. Undoubtedly he remembered the innumerable conquests won simply by his handsome face, the ready and absolute surrender to a sensual thraldom that had made other women his abject slaves; and he dared to think that his wife was as impotent as they to resist the viler impulses of the ungoverned flesh.

He dared to think it. . . . But was he wrong? And she recalled the episodic renewal of their embraces during these last months. Once after high words; once after he had found her weeping; once for no reason at all that she knew of—except a carelessly systematic desire on his part to keep her in good temper—or perhaps merely because he had the prostitute's point of honour. A bargain is a bargain. He had been paid his price without haggling, and he intended to fulfil the conditions of the contract—so far as certain limits fixed by himself.

Horrible scenes to look back at—when the cruelly bright light of reason flashes upon the decorously obscured past, and shows the ignominious secrets of a life: blind instincts moving us, all that is high beaten down by all that is low, the soul held in fetters by the flesh.

Much of her slow agony had come from the stinging pricks of jealousy. He was unfaithful—he was notoriously unfaithful. Already, after three months, every one in the shop knew that he frequently broke the marriage vow. She would have known it anyhow—even if one of his vulgar friends, turning to a more vulgar enemy, had not troubled to tell her in an ill-spelt series of anonymous letters. She remembered how he once used to look at her, and she saw how in her presence he now looked at other women. Each look was an insult to her. Each word was an outrage. "There's a pert little minx;" and he would smile as he watched some passer-by. "Young hussy! Dressed up to the nines—wasn't she?" And he swelled out his chest, and swaggered more arrogantly by the side of his wife, unconscious of the swift completeness with which she could interpret the thoughts behind his bold eyes and his lazily lascivious smile.

And she thought of how he harped upon the over-tightened string of youth, making every fibre of her tired brain vibrate to the discord of the jarring note. It was melody to him. Youth was his own paramount merit, and he praised it as the only merit that he could admit of in others. He had forgotten half the lies of his courtship. Age was contemptible—the thing one should hide, or excuse, or ransom. "Only one life! Remember, I'm young—I am not old." But her friends, the people she trusted, were shamefully old, even a few years older than herself.—Old Prentice, Old Yates, Old Mears; and he never spoke of them without the scornful epithet.

But the jingling coin that she had put in his pockets would procure him the solace to be derived from youthful companions. With the money she had paid for all the love that he could give, he bought from loose women all

the love that he cared for. Of course when he stayed in London he was carrying on his promiscuous amours. . . . Perhaps, too, here in Mallingbridge.

Yet when he came back to her, she had failed to resist him. She knew the reflective air with which he considered her face when he proposed to exercise his sway. She trembled when he lightly slapped her on the shoulder, or took her chin in his hand, and spoke with caressing tones. He was beginning to act the lover. He had made up his mind to wipe out the past, to subjugate her afresh, to assure himself that his poor slave was not slipping away.

"Janey—dear old Janey. . . I leave you alone, don't I?" And with an arm round her waist, he would pull her to him, and hold her closer and closer. "Have you missed me? Eh? Have you missed your Dickybird?"

And she could not resist him. There was the abominable basis of the tragedy—worse, infinitely worse than the imagined horrors that had troubled her before the marriage. Love dies so slowly.

But the night spent in the same room with him was like a fatal abandonment to some degrading habit—as if in despair she had taken a heavy dose of laudanum,—knowing that the drug is deadly, yet seeking once more to stupefy herself, impelled at all hazards to pass again through the gates of delirium into the vast blank halls of unconsciousness. Next day she felt sick, broken, shattered—like the drug-taker after his debauch. Each relapse seemed now an immeasurably lower fall. Each awakening brought with it a sharper pang of despair: as when a wrecked man on a raft, who in his madness of thirst has drunk at the salt spray, wakes from frenzied dreams to see the wide immensity of ocean

mocking him with space great enough to hold all things except one—hope.

Such thoughts as these came sweeping upon her like waves of light, illuminating the darkest recesses of her mind, showing the innermost meaning of every cruel mystery, forcing her to see and to know herself as she was, and not as she wished to be.

Then the light would suddenly fade. The stress of emotion had relaxed, and she could consider her circumstances calmly—could try to make the best of him.

A difficult task—a poor best.

She thought of his varied meannesses. In only one direction was he ever really generous. He grudged nothing to himself—he could be lavish when pandering to his own inclinations, reckless when gratifying the moment's whim, and retrospectively liberal when counting the cost of past amusements; but in his dealings with the rest of the world he was cautious, watchful, tenaciously close-fisted. She felt a vicarious humilation in hearing him thank instead of tip; or seeing him, when he had failed to dodge the necessity of a gift, make the gift so small as to be ludicrous. Not since he carried her purse at the London restaurants had he ever exhibited a large-handed kindness to subordinates.

He never alluded to the household expenses—had accepted as quite natural the fact that the female partner should defray the expenses of the household. Without a Please or a Thank-you, he took board and lodging free of charge; but he bought for himself cigars, liqueurs, and wine, and he always spoke of My brandy, My champagne, etc. It was *our* house, but *my* wine. Nevertheless, the habitual use in the singular of the personal pronoun did

not render him egoistically anxious to pay his own bills.

Once, when after delay a tobacconist addressed an account to her care, and she timidly reproached the cigar-smoker for a lapse of memory that might almost seem undignified, she was answered with chaffing, laughing joviality.

"Well, my dear, if you're so afraid of our credit going down, there's an easy way out of the difficulty. Write a cheque yourself, and clean the slate for me."

But one must make allowances. This was a favourite phrase of hers, and it helped the drift of her calmer thoughts. As he said so often, youth has its characteristic faults. Want of thought is not necessarily want of heart.

Perhaps when he began to work, he might improve. There was no doubt that he possessed the capacity for work. He *had* worked, hard and well. Many a good horse that has not shied or swerved when kept into its collar will, if given too much stable and too many beans, show unsuspected vice and kick the cart to pieces. And the cure for your horse, the medicine for your man, is work.

Of course he had many redeeming traits. One was his jollity—not often disturbed, if people would humour him. Comfort, too, in the recollection that he treated her with respect—never consciously insulted her—in public.

Sometimes when the shadows and the flickering glow drowsily slackened in their dance, and sleep with soft yet heavy fingers at last pressed upon her eyelids, she was willing to believe that all her fiery thought and shadowy dread was but morbid nonsense occasioned by the queer state of her nerves, and by nothing else.

Truly, during this period of her extreme weakness, she

was physically incapable of standing up to him; there was no fight left in her. For a time at least, she could not attempt to protect herself, or anyone else who looked to her for protection.

It pained her, but she was unable to interfere, when he roughly repulsed Gordon Thompson.

They were sitting at luncheon, with the servant going in and out of the room; she heard the street door open and shut; there was a sound of hob-nailed boots, and then came the familiar whistle—like a ghostly echo from the past.

"Who the devil's that?"

"I—I think it must be my Linkfield cousin."

"Oh, is it?" And Marsden jumped up, and went out to the landing.

"Jen-ny! Jen-ny! You up there?"

The farmer stood at the bottom of the steep stairs, and Marsden was at the top, looking down at him. Mrs. Marsden heard nearly the whole of the conversation, but dared not, could not interfere.

"Any dinner for a hungry wayfarer?"

Gordon Thompson, furious at the marriage, had missed many mid-day meals; but now he came to pick up the severed thread of kindness. However, he was not confident; his whistle had been feeble, tentative, and the ascending note of his voice quavered. In order to propitiate, he had brought from Linkfield a market-gardener's basket with celery and winter cabbages. The present would surely make them glad to see him.

"What do you want here? No orders are given at the door. We buy our vegetables at Rogers's in High Street. Don't come cadging here. Get out."

Marsden wickedly pretended to mistake him for an itinerant greengrocer.

"Mayn't I go up? . . . Is it to be cuts? Am I not to call on my cousin?"

"Who's your cousin, I'd like to know."

"Jen-ny Thompson."

"No one of that name lives here."

"Jen-ny Marsden then. I say—it's all right. You're him, I suppose. Well, I'm Gordon Thompson—your wife's cousin."

"My wife never had a cousin of that name. Before she married me, she married a man called Thompson—though she didn't marry all his humbugging beggarly relations."

"Oh, I say—don't go on like that. Don't make it cuts."

"Thompson—your cousin—is in the cemetery, if you wish to call on him. He has been there a long time—waiting for you;" and Marsden laughed. "The sexton will tell you where to find him. . . . Go and plant your cabbages out there. We don't want 'em here."

He returned to the luncheon table in the highest good-humour.

"There, old girl, I've ridded you of *that* nuisance. You won't be bothered with *him* any more."

Mrs. Marsden could not answer. She could not even raise her eyes from the table-cloth. But when her husband offered to give her a rare afternoon treat by taking her for a run in his small two-seated car, she looked up; and, meekly thanking him, accepted the invitation.

As the car bore them slowly through the market-place, neatly threading its way among laden carts and emptied stalls, she saw cousin Gordon standing, rueful and disconsolate, outside the humble tavern at which it

was the custom of the lesser sort of farmers to dine together on market-day. Had Gordon dined, or had anger and resentment deprived him of appetite and spared his ill-filled purse?

She would not think of it. She turned, and watched her husband's face. It was hard as granite while with concentrated attention he manipulated the steering-wheel, moved a lever, or sounded his brazen-tongued horn—the signal of danger to anyone who refused to get out of his road.

Almost immediately, they were in the open country, whirling past bare fields and leafless copses, leaping fiercely at each hill that opposed them, and swooping with a shrill, buzzing triumph down the long slopes of the valleys.

"Now we are travelling," said Marsden joyously.

She nodded her head, although she had not caught the words; and presently he shouted close to her ear.

"Moving now, aren't we? Doesn't she run smooth?"

"Yes, yes. Capital."

The wind, breaking on the glass screen, sang as it swept over them; hedge-rows, telegraph poles, and way-side cottages hurried towards them, rising and growing as they came; long stretches of straight road, along which Mr. Young's horses used to plod for half an hour, were snatched at, conquered, and contemptuously thrown behind, almost before one could recognise them.

That pretty country-house which she had always admired passed her; and, passing, seemed like a faintly tinted picture in a book whose pages are turned too fast by careless hands. Naked branches of high trees, broad eaves and nestling windows, weak sunlight upon latticed glass, and pale smoke rising from clustered chimneys—

that was all she saw. A few dead leaves pretended to be live things, and scampered beside the long wall; a few dead thoughts revived in her mind, and swiftly she recalled her old fancies, the dream of the future, Enid and herself living together so quietly beneath the grey roof;—and then the pretty house with its pretty grounds had been left far behind. It had lost its brief aspect of reality as completely as a half-forgotten dream.

"There, we'll go easy now." They were approaching a village, and he reduced the speed. "You're a good plucked 'un, Jane;" and he glanced at her approvingly. "You don't funk a little bit of pace."

They stopped at an inn, thirty miles from Mallingbridge, and drank tea—that is to say, Mrs. Marsden drank tea and Mr. Marsden drank something else, for the good of the house.

Then, after a cigar, he lighted his lamps, and drove her home through the greyness, the dusk, and the dark. And for the three hours or so that she was with him, for the whole time that this outing lasted, she was almost happy.