

BARING-GOULD SABINE

**THE
PENNYCOMEQUICKS
(VOLUME 2 OF 3)**

Sabine Baring-Gould

The Pennycomequicks (Volume 2 of 3)

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Содержание

CHAPTER XVII.	5
CHAPTER XVIII.	10
CHAPTER XIX	15
CHAPTER XX.	19
CHAPTER XXI	23
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	24

The Pennycomequicks (Volume 2 of 3)

CHAPTER XVII. MISFORTUNES NEVER COME SINGLY

Next morning Salome was agreeably surprised to find her mother better, brighter, and without the expression of mingled alarm and pain that her face had worn for the last two days. She refrained from telling her about the mysterious nocturnal visitor, because it was her invariable practice to spare the old lady everything that might cause her anxiety and provoke a relapse. It could do no good to unnecessarily alarm her, and Salome knew how to refrain from speaking unnecessarily.

Before paying her mother her morning visit, Salome made an attempt to get at the bottom of the matter that puzzled her and rendered her uneasy. It was the duty of the housemaid to lock the doors at night. Salome sent for her, and inquired about that which gave admission to the garden. The girl protested that she had fastened up as usual, and had not neglected any one of the doors.

Notwithstanding this assurance, Salome remained unshaken in her conviction that the open doorway was due to the neglect of the servant. She knew that in the class of domestics, truth is esteemed too precious to be wasted by telling it, and that the asseveration of a maid charged with misdemeanour is to be read like morning dreams. She did not pursue the matter with the young woman, so as not to involve her in fresh falsehoods; she, herself, remained of the same opinion.

On her way across the hall to her mother's room, Salome noticed that the garden-door was not only locked, but that the key had been withdrawn from it. This Philip had done last night, and he had not replaced it. It now occurred to her that she had omitted taking a step which might, and probably would, have led to the detection of the trespasser. The door led into the garden, but egress from the garden could only be had through the door in the wall of the lower or vegetable garden, rarely used, generally locked, through which manure was brought, and the man occasionally employed in the garden passed when there employed. As this gate would certainly be locked, the man who had gone out of the house into the garden could only have escaped thence with difficulty. If he had been at once pursued, he might have been captured before he could scale the wall. This had not occurred to her or to Philip at the time.

'Salome, my dear,' said Mrs. Cusworth, after her daughter had kissed her and congratulated her on her improvement, 'I am thankful to say that I am better. A load that has troubled and oppressed me for some days has been lifted off my heart.'

'I am glad, mamma,' said the girl, 'that at last you are reconciled to the change. It was inevitable. I dare say you will feel better when we are settled at Redstone.'

'My dear,' answered Mrs. Cusworth, 'I must abandon the idea of going there.'

'Where? To Redstone?'

'Yes. The house is beyond my means. I cannot possibly afford it.'

'But – mamma.' Salome was startled. 'I have already secured the lodgings.'

'Only for a quarter, and it would be better to sacrifice a quarter's rent than turn out again in three months. I could not endure the shift again, so quickly following this dreadful change.'

'But – mamma!' Salome was greatly taken aback. 'This is springing a surprise on me. We have no other house into which we can go.'

'A cottage, quite a cottage, such as the artisans occupy, must content us. We shall have to cut our coat according to our cloth.'

'Mamma! You allowed me to engage Redstone.'

'I did not then know how we were circumstanced. To make both ends meet we shall have to pinch.'

'But why pinch? You told me before that we had enough on which to live quietly but comfortably.'

'I was mistaken. I have had a great and unexpected loss.'

'Loss, mamma! What loss?'

'I mean – well,' the old lady stammered, 'I mean a sore disappointment. I am not so well off as I had supposed. I had miscalculated my resources.'

'Have you only just discovered what your means really are?'

'You must not excite her,' said Janet reproachfully.

'I do not wish to do so,' explained Salome. 'But I am so surprised, so puzzled – and this is such an upset of our plans at the last moment, after I had engaged the lodgings – I do not know what to think about it.' She paused, considered, and said with a flush in her face: 'Mamma, you surely had not reckoned on poor uncle's will?'

Mrs. Cusworth hesitated, then said: 'Of course, it is a severe blow to me that no provision had been made for you and me. We might fairly have reckoned on receiving something after what was done for Janet, and you were his favourite.'

'Oh, mamma, you did not count on this?'

'Remember that you are left absolutely destitute. What little I have saved will hardly support us both. Janet can do nothing for us just now.'

'Because of the Prussians,' said Mrs. Baynes. 'Wait a bit; as soon as we have swept them from the face of fair France, I shall make you both come to me at Elboeuf.'

'Mamma,' said Salome, 'I am still puzzled. You knew very well that uncle's will was worthless when you let me make arrangements for Redstone, and now that I have settled everything you knock over my plans. If you had told me –'

'I could not tell you. I did not know,' said the widow. 'That is to say, I had misreckoned my means.'

'Then there is no help for it. I must try to get out of the agreement for Redstone, if I can. I am afraid the agent will not let me off. We shall have to pay double rent, and there is little chance of underletting Redstone at this time of the year.'

'Better pay double than have to make a double removal; it will be less expense in the end.'

'Perhaps so,' answered Salome; then she left her mother's room that she might go upstairs and think over this extraordinary change of plans. She was painfully aware that she had been treated without due consideration, subjected unnecessarily to much trouble and annoyance.

In the hall she saw Mr. Philip Pennycomequick. He beckoned to her to follow him to the garden-door, and she obeyed. He unlocked the door.

'I took away the key last night,' he said, 'and now you see my reason.'

He pointed to the turf.

A slight fall of snow, that comminuted snow that is like meal, had taken place at sundown, and it had covered the earth with a fine film of white, fine as dust. No further fall had taken place during the night.

A track of human feet was impressed on the white surface from the door to the steps that gave access to the vegetable garden.

Without exchanging a word, both followed the track, walking wide of it, one on each side. A footprint marked each step, and the track led, less distinctly, down the lower garden to the door in the wall at the bottom, through which it doubtless passed, as there were no signs of a scramble. The door was locked.

'Have you the key?' asked Philip.

'I have not. There is one on Mr. Pennycomequick's bunch, and my mother has a second.'

'It matters not,' said Philip. 'Outside is a path along which the mill people have gone this morning to their work, and have trampled out all the traces of our mysterious visitor. The prints are those of unshod feet. The shape of the impression tells me that.'

They returned to the house.

'This unpleasant incident convinces me of one thing,' said Philip. 'It will not do for me to live in this place alone. I can explain this mysterious affair in one or other way. Either one of the servants having a brother, cousin, or lover, whom she wished to favour with the pick of my uncle's clothes, that she knew were laid out for distribution, allowed him to come and choose for himself –'

'Or else –'

'Or else the gardener left the little door in the wall ajar. Some passing tramp, seeing it open, ventured in, and finding nothing worth taking in the garden, pursued his explorations to the house, where he was fortunate enough to find another door open, through which he effected his entrance and helped himself to what he first laid hands on. He would have taken more had he not been disturbed by you.'

'He was not disturbed by me.'

'He may have seen you pass down the stairs, and so have taken the alarm and decamped. My second explanation is the least probable, for it demands a double simultaneous neglect of fastening doors by two independent persons, the housemaid and the gardener.'

'The gardener has not been working for some weeks.'

'Then how this has occurred concerns me less than the prevention of a recurrence,' said Philip. 'I must have a responsible person in the house. May I see your mother?'

As he asked, he entered the hall, and Janet at the same moment came out of her mother's sitting-room with a beaming face. She slightly bowed to Philip, and said eagerly to her sister, 'Salome, the postman is coming down the road. I am sure he brings me good news. I am going to the door to meet him.'

Salome admitted Philip into the sitting-room. She would have withdrawn, but he requested her to stay.

'What I have to say to Mrs. Cusworth,' he said shortly, 'concerns you as well as your mother.'

He took a chair at the widow's request, and then, in his matter-of-fact business fashion, plunged at once into the subject of his visit.

'I dare say that you have wondered, madam, that neither Mrs. Sidebottom nor I have made any call on you lately with a proposal. The fact is that only yesterday did my aunt and I arrive at a definite and permanent settlement. You are aware that she has acted as administratrix of my uncle's property. We have, after some difference, come to an arrangement, and by that arrangement I take the factory under my management – that, however, is not a matter of interest to you. What does concern you is the agreement we have struck about the house, which is become practically mine, I shall live in it henceforth and conduct the business so successfully carried on by my uncle, and I hope and trust without allowing it to decline. You are well aware that Mrs. Sidebottom gave you formal notice to quit: this was a formality, because at the time nothing was settled relative to the firm and the house. Please not to consider for a moment that there was a slight intended. As far as I am concerned, nothing could have been more foreign to my wishes. Do not allow that notice to affect your arrangements.'

'We accepted the notice, and have made our plans to leave,' said Salome quietly.

'In the first uncertainty as to what would be done,' said Philip, 'Mrs. Sidebottom came to you, Mrs. Cusworth, and I fear spoke with haste and impetuosity. She was excited, and at the time in a state of irritation with me, who had withstood her wishes. Since then an arrangement has been concluded between us which leaves me the house. This house henceforth belongs to me, and not to my aunt, who ceases to have authority within its walls. I am going to live here. But, madam, as you may well believe, I am incapable of managing domestic affairs. I have been unused to have such duties devolve on me. I shall be engaged in mastering new responsibilities which will occupy my whole attention,

and it is imperative that I should be spared the distraction of housekeeping. The event of last night – the appearance of a man invading this house – '

Mrs. Cusworth turned deadly pale, and a look of fear came into her eyes. Salome hastily turned to Philip, and her appealing glance told him he must not touch on a subject that would alarm and agitate her mother.

'I mean,' said Philip hastily, 'that a man, inexperienced like myself, entering a large house in which there are domestics, of whose freaks and vagaries he knows nothing, and desires to know less, is like a colonist in Papua, of the natives of which nothing certain has been revealed. They may be cannibals; they may, on the other hand, be inoffensive. Of landladies in lodging-houses I have had a long and bitter experience. I have run the gamut of them, from the reduced gentlewoman to the wife of an artisan, and I believe it is one of those professions which, like vivisection, dries up the springs of moral worth. It will be essential to my happiness, I may say to my success in the business, to have a responsible person to manage the house for me. You, madam, will relieve me from grave embarrassments if you will consent to remain here on the same terms as heretofore. It will indeed be conferring on me a lasting favour, which I know I am not justified in asking.'

'It is very good of you to suggest this,' began the widow.

'On the contrary,' interrupted Philip, 'it is selfish of me to propose it – to wish to retain you in a place where you must be surrounded by sorrowful reminiscences, and tie you to work when you ought to be free from every care.'

'I thank you,' said Mrs. Cusworth. 'It so happens that I am distressed by pecuniary losses, and I am therefore glad to accept your offer.'

'I am sorry, madam, that you have met with losses. But I do not wish to force you to accept obligations for which you do not feel yourself equal without understanding exactly how matters stand. Mrs. Sidebottom and I have consulted together about the probable wishes of my deceased uncle, and we unite in thinking that he never intended to leave Miss Cusworth unprovided for. The will he had drawn out perhaps erred on the side of excessive liberality to her and disregard of the claims of his own relations. That was cancelled – how, we cannot say. Suffice it to say, it was cancelled, but without cancelling the obligation to do something for Miss Cusworth. We are quite sure that Mr. Pennycomequick intended to provide for her, and Mrs. Sidebottom and I agree in proposing for her acceptance such a sum as was invested by my late uncle for the benefit of Mrs. Baynes on her marriage a twelve month ago.'

He was the lawyer – formal, cold, stiff – as he spoke, measuring his sentences and weighing his words. Even when he endeavoured to be courteous, as when inviting the widow to stay on in his house, he spoke without ease of manner, graciousness, and softness of tone.

'Of course,' said Mrs. Cusworth, 'it has been a great disappointment to us that we received nothing from Mr. Pennycomequick – '

'Mother!' interrupted Salome, quivering, flushing to the roots of her hair, then turning white. Mrs. Cusworth was one of those ordinary women who think it becomes them not to receive a favour as a favour, but as a due. Salome at once felt the grace and kindness of the arrangement proposed for her advantage by Philip, and had little hesitation in attributing it to him, and freeing Mrs. Sidebottom from the initiative, at least, in it. But her mother supposed it due to her dignity to receive it as a concession to a legitimate claim.

Salome did not look in Philip's face. Afraid that her mother might say something further that was unsuited to the situation, she interposed:

'Mr. Pennycomequick,' she said, in a low, gentle voice, 'you said just now that you had no claim on our services. You have created such a claim. Your proposal is so generous, so kindly intentioned, and so far transcending what we had any right to ask or to expect, that you lay us under an obligation which it will be a pleasure for us to discharge. My dear mother is not herself able to do much with her hands, but she is like a general in a battlefield – on a commanding eminence she issues her directions,

and I am her orderly who fly about carrying her commands. We accept with gratitude and pleasure your offer to continue in this house, at least for a while. For that other offer that concerns me alone, will you allow me time to consider it?'

At that moment, before Philip could reply, the door was burst open, and Janet rushed in, with a face of despair, holding an open letter before her.

'Mamma! Oh, mamma! The Prussians have killed him. Albert – has been shot!'

CHAPTER XVIII.

JOHN DALE

In the cabin of the *Conquering Queen*, Mr. Pennycomequick had much time for thought before he was sufficiently recovered to leave his berth. He fell to wondering what Salome and her mother, Mrs. Sidebottom and his nephew, had thought of his disappearance.

'Can you get me a back newspaper, or some account of the flood?' he asked of Ann Dewis. 'I am interested to hear what happened, and whether I am among those accounted to have fallen victims.'

After several trials, Mrs. Dewis procured what was required in pamphlet form – a reprint from one of the West Riding papers of its narrative of the inundation, of the appearance of the country after it had subsided, from its special correspondent, and full lists of the lost and drowned. Mr. Pennycomequick read this account by the light that descended from the hatchway; read about the havoc effected in Keld-dale, the walls thrown down, the cottages inundated, the roads and the embankments torn up, and then among the names of those lost he read his own, with the surprising information that the body had been recovered, and though frightfully mutilated, had been identified.

This was news indeed. That he was esteemed dead did not surprise Mr. Pennycomequick when he learned how long he had been ill, but that some other body should have been mistaken for his was indeed inexplicable.

'By this time,' said he to himself, 'Salome will have proved my will and Louisa will have exhausted her vituperation of my memory.'

It took him two days to digest what he had learned. As he recovered, his mind recurred to those thoughts which had engaged him on the night of the flood, as he walked on the towpath by the canal.

If he were to return to Mergatroyd when supposed to be dead, he was confident that Salome and her mother would receive him with unfeigned delight, and without reluctance surrender to him what they had received through his bequest. But he was by no means sure of himself, that in the joy of his return he would be able to control his feelings so as not to show to Salome what their real nature was.

He recalled his prayer to Heaven, that he might have the way pointed out to him which he should go, and startlingly, in a manner unexpected, in a direction not anticipated, the hand of Providence had flashed out of the sky and had pointed out his course. It had snapped his tie to Mergatroyd – at all events temporarily; had separated him from Salome, and set him where he had leisure and isolation in which to determine his conduct. Jeremiah was a man of religious mind, and this consideration profoundly affected him. He had been carried from his home, and his name blotted out of the book of the living.

What would be the probable consequences were he to return to Mergatroyd as soon as he was recovered? The very desire he felt to be back, to see Salome again, was so strong within him that it constituted evidence to his mind that if he were at home, in the exuberant joy of meeting her again he would let drop those words which his judgment told him ought not to be spoken. Other thoughts besides these exercised his mind.

He turned to the past, to his dead brother Nicholas, and his conscience reproached him for having maintained the feud so persistently and so remorselessly. Nicholas had suffered for what he had done, and by suffering had expiated his fault. He, Jeremiah, had, moreover, visited on the guiltless son the resentment he bore to the father. He endeavoured to pacify his conscience by the reflection that he had made a provision for Philip in his will; but this reflection did not satisfy him. Philip was the representative of the family, and Jeremiah had no right to exclude him from the firm without a trial of his worth.

Then he turned to another train of ideas connected with his present condition.

Was his health likely to be sufficiently restored to enable him to resume the old routine of work? Would a resumption of his duties conduce to the re-edification of his health? Would it not retard, if not prevent, complete recovery? Would it not be a better course for him to shake himself free from every care – keep his mind disengaged from business till his impaired constitution had been given time to recover? He knew that rheumatic fever often seriously affected the heart, and he asked himself whether he dare return to the conflict of feeling, the inner struggle, sure to attend a recurrence to the same condition as before. Would it not be the wisest course for him to go abroad for a twelvemonth or more, to some place where his mind might recover its balance, his health be re-established – and he might acquire that perfect mastery over his feelings which he had desired, but which he had lost.

What did he care about the fortune he had amassed – by no means a large one, but respectable? He was a man of simple habits and of no ambition. He was interested in his business, proud of the good name the firm had ever borne. He would be sorry to think that Pennycomequick should cease to be known in Yorkshire as the title of an old-established reliable business associated with figured linen damasks. But was his presence in the factory essential to its continuance?

He looked at Ann Dewis squatted by the fire smoking. For seventeen years she had kept Earle Schofield's pipe going, which he had put into her mouth, and she had been faithful to a simple request. He had put his mill into Salome's hands, and had said, 'Keep it going.' Was she less likely to fulfil his wish than had been Ann Dewis to the desire of Earle Schofield?

He was not concerned as to his means of subsistence should he determine to remain as one dead. He had an old friend, one John Dale, at Bridlington, the only man to whom he was not reserved and suspicious – the only man of whom he took counsel when in doubt and difficulty.

John Dale had a robust common-sense, and to him Jeremiah resolved to apply. When John Dale first went to Bridlington he had been lent a considerable sum of money by his friend, which had not been repaid, but which, now that Dale had established a good practice as a surgeon, he was ready and willing to repay. John Dale had been constituted trustee on the occasion of Janet's marriage. He had paid visits to Mergatroyd, and Jeremiah had visited Bridlington; but as both were busy men, such visits had been short and few. Though, however, they saw little of each other, their mutual friendship remained unimpaired.

As soon as Mr. Pennycomequick was sufficiently recovered to leave the barge, he provided himself with a suit of clothes at a slop-shop, and settled into an inn in the town of Hull, whence he wrote to Dale to come to him. He had his purse in his pocket when he was carried away from Mergatroyd, and the purse contained a few sovereigns, sufficient to satisfy his immediate necessities.

'Pon my word, never was so astonished in my life!' shouted John Dale, as he burst into the room occupied by his friend, then stood back, looked at him from head to foot, and roared.

Mr. Pennycomequick was strangely altered. He had been accustomed to shave his face, with the exception of a pair of cutlets that reached no lower than the lobe of his ears. Now his face was frouzy with hair: lips, jaws, cheeks, chin, throat, were overgrown, and the hair had got beyond the primary stage of stubbledom. He had been wont to attire himself in black or Oxford mixture of a dark hue, to wear a suit of formal cut, and chiefly to affect a double-breasted frock coat that gave a specially substantial mercantile look to the man. The suit in which he was now invested was snuff-coloured and cut away in stable fashion.

'Upon my word, this is a regeneration! Dead as a manufacturer, alive as a man on the turf. Is the moral transformation as radical? What is the meaning of this? I saw your death in the papers. I wrote to Salome about it, a letter of condolence, and had her reply. How came you to life again, you impostor, and in this guise?'

The doctor – he was really a surgeon – but everyone called him Dr. Dale, was a stout, florid man, with his hair cut short as that of a Frenchman, like the fur on the back of a mole. He was fresh, boisterous in manner when out of the sick-room, but when engaged on a patient, laid aside his

roughness and noise. His cheeriness, his refusal to take a gloomy view of a case, made him popular, and perhaps went some way towards encouraging nature to make an effort to throw off disease.

Jeremiah told him the story of his escape.

'And now,' said Dale, 'I suppose you are going back. By Jove, I should like to see the faces when you reappear in the family circle thus dressed and behaved.'

'Before I consider about going back, I want you to overhaul me,' said Jeremiah, 'and please to tell me plainly what you find. I'm not a woman to be frightened at bad news.'

'At once, old man. Off with those togs,' shouted the surgeon.

When the medical examination was over, Dale told Mr. Pennycomequick that his heart was weak, but that there was no organic derangement. He must be careful of himself for some time to come. He must avoid climbing hills, ascending many stairs.

'As, for instance, the several flights of my factory.'

'Yes – you must content yourself with the office.'

'I might as well give up at once the entire management if I may not go to the several departments and see what is going on there.'

'You must economize the pulsations of your heart for awhile. You will find yourself breathless at every ascent. Your heart is at fault, not your lungs. The machine is weak, and you must not make an engine of one-horse power undertake work that requires one of five. If you could manage to knock off work altogether –'

'For how long?'

'That depends. You are not a boy with super-abundant vitality and any amount of recuperative power. After the age of fifty we have to husband our strength; we get well slowly, not with a leap. A child is down to-day and up to-morrow. An old man who is down to-day is up perhaps that day month. The thing of all others for you would be to go abroad for a bit, to – let us say, the South of France or Sicily, or better still, Cairo, lead a *dolce far niente* life, forget worries, neglect duties, disregard responsibilities, and let Nature unassisted be your doctor and nurse.'

'Now look here, Dale,' said Mr. Pennycomequick, 'your advice jumps with my own opinion. I have been considering whilst convalescent what was the good of my drudging on at Mergatroyd. I have made a fortune – a moderate one, but one that contents me – and have no need to toil through the last years of life, to fag out the final straws of existence.'

'Fag out!' exclaimed Dale, 'you dog, you – why, you have gone into the Caldron of Pelias, and have come forth rejuvenated.'

'If I remember the story aright,' retorted Jeremiah, 'Pelias never came out of the caldron. I am like Pelias in this, that I have gone into the waters of Lethe.'

'Now, Jeremiah, old boy,' said the surgeon, 'let this be a settled thing, you husband your strength for a twelvemonth at least, and you will then be vigorous as ever. If you insist on going into harness at once, in two years I shall be attending your funeral.'

'Very well,' said Jeremiah, 'if things are in order at Mergatroyd, I will go, but I cannot allow the business to fall into confusion. To tell you the truth, I have reasons which make me wish not to go back there till I am quite restored, but I should like to know what is going on there.'

'That I can perhaps tell you. I have had a letter from Salome. Do you know, my friend, when I have been away from Bridlington, on a holiday, I have been on thorns, thinking that everything must be going out of gear on account of my absence, that my *locum tenens* has let patients slip and mismanaged difficult cases; yet when I have returned I have found that I was not missed – all has gone on swimmingly without me. You will find that it has been the same at Mergatroyd.'

'But what says Salome?'

'In the first place that cricket, Janet, is back. She was sent home lest an Uhlan should fall in love with her or she fall in love with an Uhlan, and now her husband is dead. Like a fool he served as a volunteer, uncalled for, as he was an Englishman.'

'Albert Baynes dead! Then you will have some work on your hands as trustee.'

'So I shall. Now about your affairs. It seems that the will you drew up against my advice, without taking legal opinion, was so much waste-paper; Salome says merely that it proved invalid, so Mrs. Sidebottom had to take out letters of administration, and divide your property between her and your nephew Philip.'

'What! – Salome get nothing! I shall go back at once and send those two vultures to the right about.'

'Have patience; they came out better than you might have expected. It has been arranged that Philip shall live in your house and undertake the management of the factory, and he has asked Mrs. Cusworth to remain on in the old place in the same position as she occupied before.'

'I am glad they have had the grace not to turn her out.'

'That is not all. As it was clearly your wish that Salome should be liberally provided for, your sister and nephew have agreed to fund for her the same amount that was invested for her sister Janet. Now I do not know what your will was, but it seems to me that nothing could have been better, even if you had the disposing of it. Your natural heirs get their rights, and your pet Salome is honourably and even handsomely treated by them.'

Jeremiah said nothing; his chin fell on his breast. He had not thought that Mrs. Sidebottom would do a generous thing. Of Philip he knew nothing; but what he had just heard predisposed him in his favour.

'Now take my advice, Jeremiah,' continued Dr. Dale. 'Let Philip go on where he is. He has thrown up his place in a solicitor's office at Nottingham, and, as Salome writes, is devoting himself energetically to the work of the mill, and learning all the ramifications of the business. You wanted someone to relieve you, and you have the man – the right man, already in the place.'

'He may get everything wrong.'

'I do not believe it. You have an aversion to lawyers, but let me tell you that a lawyer's office is an excellent school; there men learn to know human nature, how to deal with men, and get business habits. The fellow must have a good heart, or he would not have come to an arrangement with his aunt to part with a large sum of money for Salome. Besides, Salome is no fool, and she writes of him in high praise for his diligence, his regular habits, and his kindness and consideration for her mother.'

John Dale paused for Jeremiah to say something; but his friend remained silent, with his head down, thinking.

'If you go back,' said the doctor, 'you will throw everything wrong. You will worry yourself and will take the spirit out of Philip. Trust him. He is on his mettle. If he makes a blunder, that is natural, and he will suffer for it; but he will commit none that is fatal; he is too shrewd for that.'

'Dale,' said Mr. Pennycomequick, 'if I make up my mind not to return to Mergatroyd, I make up my mind at the same time to leave those there in ignorance that I am still alive.'

'As you like. It would not be amiss. Then Philip would work with better energy. If things go wrong I can always drop you a line and recall you, and you can appear as *Deus ex machinâ*, and set all to rights. I have often thought that half the aggravation of leaving this world must be the seeing things going to sixes and sevens without being able to right them, a business we have got together being scattered, a reputation we have built up being pulled down; to have to see things going contrary to our intentions, and be unable to put out a finger to mend them; to hear ourselves criticised, and ill-natured, and false stories told of us, and be incapable of saying a word in our own defence. I will tell you a story. At one time when I went to dinner-parties I was the first to go. But on one occasion I stayed, and Mr. and Mrs. Smith left before me. No sooner were their backs turned than the company fell to criticising the Smiths, their pretensions, the airs they gave themselves, till the Brownes departed, whereupon the conversation became scandalous about the Brownes: then the Jones family departed. Thereupon I learned that the Joneses were living beyond their means, and were on the verge of bankruptcy. So on till the last was gone. After that I have never been the first to leave; I try to be last, so as to leave only

my host and hostess behind to discuss and blacken me. Now, Jeremiah, you have gone out quickly and unexpectedly, and if you could steal back to Mergatroyd unperceived, then you will find that the maxim *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* is not being observed. You are fortunate; you can return at will and correct false estimates. That is not given save to the exceptionally privileged.'

'You will go to Mergatroyd for me,' said Mr. Pennycomequick, 'and see with your own eyes how things are?'

'Certainly I will. Do you know, old fellow,' said Dale, with a twinkle in his eye, 'I have sometimes feared for you, feared lest you should make a ghastly fool of yourself, and make that dear little piece of goods, Salome, your wife. It would not do, old boy; if you had done it I would have ceased to respect you; you would have lost the regard and provoked the ridicule of everyone in Mergatroyd. Old boy, it would never have done.'

'No,' said Mr. Pennycomequick, 'it would never have done; you are right, it would never have done.'

'It would have been a cruelty to her,' pursued Dale, 'for Nature never designed Winter to mate with Spring, to bring a frost on all the sweet blossoms of youth, and in checking the rising sap, perhaps to kill the plant.'

'No,' said Jeremiah, 'it would never have done.'

CHAPTER XIX

BACKING OUT

'You will dine with us to-night, Philip,' said Mrs. Sidebottom. 'Now that we have settled our business, it will be quite fascinating to have a bright and cheerful evening together. We will take the crape off our heads and hearts. Lamb shall sing us some of his comic songs, and I will play you any music you like on the piano. You shall listen, and the *motif* of our entertainment shall be "Begone, dull care." I wish there were anyone invitable in this place, but there is not, and, moreover, though I do not care for the opinion of these barbarians, it is too soon after the funeral to have a dinner-party; we must mind the proprieties wherever we are.'

Mrs. Sidebottom was in good spirits. She had managed for herself well. The estate of Mr. Pennycomequick had been divided between herself and Philip, but as the business was already charged with her jointure, he deducted this from the total before dividing. She still retained her hold on the factory, remained as a sleeping partner in the firm, though, as Philip found to his cost before long, she was a sleeping partner given to walking in her sleep. Philip was to be the active member of the firm. It was by no means her wish that the mill should be sold and the business pass away, because it was prosperous. If it had fallen into Lambert's hands it would have been different, for she knew well that her son would have been incompetent to conduct it. She was cheerful now that all was concluded, perfectly satisfied with herself, for the terms she had made with her nephew did not err on the side of generosity.

'And now,' said Mrs. Sidebottom, 'I really do intend to get Lamb to insert a hyphen in his name, and spell the final syllable with a capital Q. I have ascertained from a really learned man that our name is most respectful; and, like all good names, is territorial. It is of ancient British origin, and means the Wick or settlement as the head of a Combe, that is a valley. When you know this you feel that it has an aristocratic flavour, and that is older than trade. I think that when written Penycombe-Quick it will have an air, Philip, an air of such exalted respectability as will entitle us to look on those who were entered on the Roll of Battle Abbey as parvenus. I intend to have Lamb's cards printed thus. I like the American way of combining the paternal name with that acquired at marriage. If I call myself Mrs. Penycombe-Quick-Sidebottom I flatter myself I shall carry weight.'

There is a characteristic of some persons, not so rare as might be supposed, but subdued in England as a token of ill-breeding, yet one which among foreigners, judging from our experience, is not forbidden by the social code. This characteristic is the sudden transformation of manner and behaviour at the touch of money. We meet with and enjoy ready hospitality, suavity of manner, that lasts till some difference arises about a coin, when all at once the graces we admired give place to roughness, a coarseness and greed quite out of proportion to the amount under dispute. In England we may feel aggrieved, but we strive to conceal our chagrin; not so the foreigner, who will fall into a paroxysm of fury over a sou or a kreutzer.

Mrs. Sidebottom was a lady of this calibre. Chatty, cordial with those who did not cross her, she was transformed, when her interests were touched, into a woman pugnacious, unscrupulous and greedy. A phenomenon observed in certain religious revivals is the impatience of wearing clothes that takes those seized by spiritual frenzy. In the ecstasy of devotion or hysteria, they tear off their garments and scatter them on the ground. So, when Mrs. Sidebottom was possessed by the spirit of greed, she lost control over herself, she flung aside ordinary courtesy, divested herself of every shred of politeness, stripped off every affectation of disinterestedness, and showed herself in bald, unblushing rapacity. In dealing with Philip about the inheritance of Jeremiah, her masterful pursuit of her own advantage, her overbearing manner, her persistency, had gained for her notable advantages. She had used the privileges of her age, relationship, sex, to get the better of her nephew, and only

when her ends were gained did she smilingly, without an apology, resume those trappings of culture and good breeding which she had flung aside.

Now that all was settled, as she supposed, she was again the woman of the world, and the agreeable, social companion.

'Yes, aunt,' said Philip, 'I am glad we have come to a settlement. If it be not all that I could have desired, it at all events leaves me vastly better off than I was before the death of my uncle. With the help of Providence, and a good heart, I trust that the respectable old house of Pennycomequick will maintain its character and thrive continuously.'

'You like trade,' said his aunt. 'Lambert never could have accustomed himself to it. By the way, there will be no necessity for you to change the spelling of your name.'

'I have not an intention to do so.'

'Right. Of course it is as well to keep on the name of the firm unaltered. With us, moving in a higher and better sphere, it is other.'

'There is one matter, aunt, that has not yet been definitely arranged, and that is the last about which I need trouble you.'

'What matter? I thought all was done.'

'That relative to Miss Cusworth.'

'What about Miss Cusworth?'

'You surely have not forgotten our compact.'

'Compact? Compact?'

'The agreement we came to that she was to receive acknowledgment from us.'

'Acknowledgment! Fiddlesticks!'

'I am sorry to have to refresh your memory,' said Philip harshly, 'but you may perhaps recall, now that I speak of it, that I threatened to enter a *caveat* against your taking out powers of administration, unless you agreed to my proposition that the young lady should be given the same sum as was invested for her sister, which was the least that Uncle Jeremiah intended to do for her.'

'Now – what nonsense, Philip! I never heard such stuff. I refused to listen to your proposal. I distinctly recall my words, and I can swear to them. I told you emphatically that nothing in the world would induce me to consent.'

'The threat I used did, however, dispose you to alter your note and yield.'

'My dear Philip,' said Mrs. Sidebottom, assuming an air of solemnity, 'I have taken out administrative authority and have administered, or am in the process of administering.'

'Exactly. You have acted, but you were only enabled to act because I held back from barring your way. You know that very well, aunt, and you know on what terms I withdrew my opposition. You accepted my terms, and I look to you to fulfil your part of the compact.'

'I do not find it in the bond,' said Mrs. Sidebottom. 'I can quote Shakespeare. Come, Phil, I thought we had done with wrangling over sordid mammon. Let us enjoy ourselves. I did not ask you to stay for dinner that we might renew our disputes. The tomahawk is buried and the calumet drawn forth.'

'It was a bond, not, indeed, drawn up in writing, between us, because I relied on your honour.'

'My dear Phil, I gave no definite promise, but I had to swear before the man at the Probate Court that I would administer faithfully and justly according to law, and the law was plain. Not a word in it about Cusworths. I am in conscience bound to stand by my oath. I cannot forswear myself. If there is one thing in the world I pride myself on, it is my strict conscientiousness.'

'The cow that lows loudest yields least milk,' muttered Philip. He was greatly incensed. 'Aunt,' he said angrily, 'this is a quibble unworthy of you. A perfectly clear understanding was come to between us, by the terms of which you were to go halves with me in raising four or five thousand pounds to fund, or otherwise dispose of for the benefit of Miss Cusworth.'

'Four or five thousand fiddlesticks!'

'If I had opposed you,' said Philip grimly, 'some awkward questions might have been asked relative to the cancelled will.'

'What questions?' asked Mrs. Sidebottom, looking him straight in the face with defiance.

'As to how that will came to have the signature torn off.'

'They were perfectly welcome to ask that question, but I defy you to find anyone who could answer it.'

She was right, and Philip knew it. Whatever his suspicions might be, he was without a grain of evidence to substantiate an accusation against anyone. Moreover, much as he mistrusted his aunt, he could not bring himself to believe her capable of committing so daring and wicked an act.

'I wish that the old witch-drowning days were back,' said Mrs. Sidebottom. 'It is clear to me that Salome has been exercising her fascinations upon you. Oh, that she could be pitched into a pool – that one of scalding water, swarming with gold-fish, would suit admirably, because of the colour of her hair. Then sink or swim would be all one – sink for innocence, swim for guilt – clear of her anyway.'

'Do you seriously mean to evade the arrangement come to between us?' asked Philip. He would not be drawn from his point to side issues.

'I never went into it.'

'I beg your pardon, you did agree to what I proposed.'

'Upon compulsion. No, were I at the strappado, or all the racks in the world, I would not yield on compulsion. There you have Shakspeare again, Phil. I wonder whether you can tell me from what play I quote. If you were a man of letters, you would cap my quotations.'

'There can be no question as to what were the intentions of Uncle Jeremiah.'

'Ah, there I agree with you. Having made a preposterous will, he tore it up, to show that he did not intend to constitute Salome his heiress.'

What was Philip to say? How bring his aunt to her terms of agreement? He remained silent, with closed lips and contracted brows.

'Now, look here, Philip,' said Mrs. Sidebottom good-humouredly, 'I have ordered shoulder of mutton and onion sauce: also quenilles of macaroni and forced-meat, and marmalade pudding. Come and discuss these good things with us, instead of mauling these dry bones of business.'

'I have already spoken to Mrs. and Miss Cusworth. Relying on your word, I told them what we purposed doing for them.'

'Then you made a mistake, and must eat your words. What a pity it is, Philip, that we are continually floundering into errors of judgment, or acts that our common-sense reproves, so that we come out scratched and full of thorns! You will be wiser in the future. Never make promises – that is, in money matters. If you persist in paying the hussy the four or five thousand pounds, I have no objection to the sum coming out of your own pocket. Excuse me, I must laugh, to think how you, a lawyer, have allowed yourself to be bitten.'

'I do not see how I am to pay the sum you mention without jeopardizing the business. I must have money in hand wherewith to carry it on. If you draw back –'

'There is no *if* in the case. I do draw back. Do me the justice to admit that I never rushed into it. You did, dazzled by the girl's eyes, drawn by her hair.'

Philip rose.

'What – are you going, Phil? Lamb will be here directly. He is at the White Hart, I believe, playing billiards. It is disgusting that he can find no proper gentlemen to play with, and no good players either. Come, sit down again. You are going to dine with us. Some of your uncle's old port and Amontillado sherry. It must be drunk – we shall hardly move it to York.'

'I cannot dine with you now.'

'Why not?'

'Under the circumstances I cannot,' he said coldly. 'I trusted to your honour – I trusted to you as a lady, and,' he raised his head, 'as a Pennycomequick –'

'How spelled?' asked Mrs. Sidebottom laughingly.

'I cannot sit down with you now, with my respect and confidence shaken. I trust that you have spoken in jest, and that to-morrow you will tell me so; but I am not fond of jokes – such jokes as these leave a scar. I could not accept my share of Uncle Jeremiah's property without making recognition of the claims of the Cusworth family. The father died in my uncle's service; the mother and daughters have devoted themselves to making uncle's life easy – and now to be cast out! If you hold back, and refuse to pay your share of two thousand pounds, I must pay the entire amount; and if the business suffers, well, it suffers. The responsibility will be yours, and the loss yours also, in part.'

'Nonsense, Phil; you will not run any risk.'

'If you had taken your part, and I mine, we could have borne the loss easily; but if I have the whole thrown on me, the consequences may be serious. Ready money is as necessary as steam to make the mill run.'

'I don't believe – I cannot believe – that you, a man of reason – you, a man with legal training – can act such a quixotish part?' exclaimed Mrs. Sidebottom, becoming for the moment alarmed. Then she calmed down again. 'I see through you, Philip,' she said. 'Having failed to persuade me, you seek to terrify me. It will not do. I do not believe so badly of humanity as to think that you will act so wickedly. Come, think no more of this. I hope you like sirloin?'

'I refuse to sit down with you,' said Philip angrily.

'Then go!' exclaimed his aunt, with an explosion of spleen. 'Go as an impracticable lout to your housekeeper's room, to sup on a bowl of gruel and cottage-pie!'

CHAPTER XX.

A FACE IN THE DARK

Mrs. Sidebottom was not at ease in her mind after the suggestion thrown out by Philip that the business might suffer if so much capital were suddenly withdrawn from it. She recalled how it had been when her brother Nicholas had insisted on taking out of it his share – how angry Jeremiah had been; how, for awhile, the stability of the firm had been shaken, and how crippled it had been for some years. She remembered how that her share of the profits had been reduced, and she had no desire to meet with a recurrence of this shrinkage. When Nicholas made that great call on the resources of the firm, there was Jeremiah in the office, thoroughly experienced, and he was able, through his ability and knowledge, to pull through; but it was another matter now with Philip, a raw hand, in authority.

Then, again, Mrs. Sidebottom knew her brother Jeremiah had contemplated a large outlay in new and improved machinery. To keep up with the times, abreast with other competitors, it was necessary that this costly alteration should be made. But could it be done if four or five thousand pounds were sacrificed to a caprice?

'Philip is such a fool!' she muttered. 'He inherits some of his father's obstinacy, as well as his carelessness about money. Nicholas no sooner got money in his hands than he played ducks and drakes with it; and Philip is bent on doing the same. Four thousand pounds to that minx, Salome! There goes the church bell. When will Lamb be in?'

Mrs. Sidebottom lit a bedroom candle, and went upstairs to dress for dinner. Whilst ascending, she was immersed in thought, and suddenly an idea occurred to her which made her quicken her steps. Instead of dressing for dinner, she put on her bonnet. The church bell had diverted her thoughts into a new channel. When dressed to go out, she rang for the parlourmaid. 'Susan,' she said, 'I had forgotten. This is a holy day. I believe, I am morally certain, it is a saint's day, and appointed by the Church to make us holy. We must deny ourselves. So put off dinner half an hour. I am going to church – to set an example.'

Mrs. Sidebottom was not an assiduous church-goer. She attended on Sundays to do the civil to the parson, but was rarely or never seen within the sacred walls on week days. Consequently her announcement to Susan, that she was about to assist at divine worship that evening, and that dinner was to be postponed accordingly, surprised the domestic and surprised and angered the cook, who did not object to unpunctuality in herself, but resented it in her master and mistress.

'If Salome is not at church,' said Mrs. Sidebottom to herself, 'I shall be taken with faintness; fan myself with my pocket-handkerchief, to let the congregation see I am poorly, and will come away at the *Nunc Dimittis*.'

But Mrs. Sidebottom tarried in church through the *Nunc Dimittis*, professed her adhesion to the Creed, and declared her transgressions. As she listened to the lessons, her mind reverted to the quenilles. 'They will be done to chips!' she sighed, and then forgetting herself, intoned, 'A – men.' At the prayers she thought of the shoulder of mutton, and in the hymn hovered in soul over the marmalade-pudding. Probably, if the hearts of other worshippers that evening had been revealed, they would not have been discovered more wrapped in devotion than that of Mrs. Sidebottom. In the life of St. Modwenna, Abbess of Stoke-on-Trent, we read that this holy woman had the faculty of seeing the prayers of her nuns dancing like midges under the choir roof; they could not pierce the vault, being deficient in the boring organ, which is true devotion. It is perhaps fortunate we have not the same gift. On that evening a row of tittering girls sought to attract the attention and engross the admiration of the choristers. Five young ladies, hating each other as rivals, sought by their attendance to catch the curate, who was unmarried. Old Bankes was there, because he hoped to sell two bags of potatoes to the parson. Mary Saunders was there, because some unpleasant stories had circulated

concerning her character, and she hoped to smother them by appearing at church on week days. Mr. Gruff was there, to find fault with the parson's conduct of the service, and Mrs. Tomkins attended to see who were present.

When the service was concluded, Mrs. Sidebottom came out of church beside Salome, who had been seated in front of her. She at once addressed her.

'My dear Miss Cusworth, how soothing it is to have week-day prayer. I have had so much of the world forced on me of late, that I felt I must for the good of my soul to fly to the sanctuary.'

'There is always service on Thursday evening.'

'My goodness! – is this not a saint's day? I thought it was, and I have been so devout, too. You don't mean to tell me there is no special call for it? – and these saints – they are perfectly fascinating creatures.'

Mrs. Sidebottom could talk what she called 'goody' when there was need for it; she generally talked it when chance led her into a poor man's cottage. As children are given lollipops by their elders, so the poor, she thought, must be given 'goody talk' by their superiors. She put on her various suits of talk as occasion offered. She had her scandal suit and her pious suit, and her domestic-worry suit and her political suit – just like those picture-books children have, whose one face does for any number of transformation garments, and the same head figures now as a bronze, then as Nell Gwynne, as a Quakeress, or as a tight-rope dancer.

The author at one time knew a bedridden man who had two suits of conversation – the one profane, abusive, brutal, the other pious, sanctified, and seasoned with salt. When his cottage-door was open, the passer heard some such exclamations as these as he approached, addressed to the wife: 'Now then, you – toad!' Then a reference to her eyes best left unquoted. 'If I could only get at you, I'd skin you!' Then a change. 'Fetch me my Boible; O my soul, be joyful, raise the sacred hanthem! Bah! I thought 'twas the parson's step, and he'd give me a shilling! Now then, you galloping kangaroo!' This, of course, was an extreme case, and Mrs. Sidebottom was far too well-bred to go to extremities.

'I was so glad you came in when you did,' said Mrs. Sidebottom. 'I was really feeling somewhat faint. I feared I would have been forced to leave at the *Nunc Dimittis*, and I was just fanning myself with my handkerchief, on which was a drop of eau de Cologne, when you came in, and a whiff of cool air from the door revived me, so I was able to remain. I am so thankful! The hymn afforded me such elevating thoughts! I felt as if I had wings of angels, which I could spread, and upward fly!'

'I was late – I could not get away earlier.'

'And I am grateful to be able to walk back with you. You will allow me to take your arm. I am still shaken with my temporary faintness. I have, I fear, been overdone. I have had so much to try me of late. But when the bell rang, I was drawn towards the sacred building. Upon my word, I thought it was a saint's day, and it was a duty as well as a pleasure to be there. I am so glad I went; and now I am able to walk back with you, and after public worship – though the congregation was rather thin – the mind is turned to devotion, and the thoughts are framed, are, in fact, just what they ought to be, you know. I have wanted for some time to speak to you, and tell you how grieved I was that I was forced to give your mother notice to leave. I had no thought of being inconsiderate and unkind.'

'I am aware of that,' answered Salome quietly. 'Mr. Philip Pennycomequick has already told mamma that the notice was a mere formality. The explanation was a relief to us, as mamma was somewhat hurt. She had tried to do her best for dear Mr. Pennycomequick.'

'You will have to induce her to forgive me. What is religion for, and churches built, and organs, and hot-water apparatus, and all that sort of thing, but to cultivate in us the forgiving spirit. I am, myself, the most placable person in the world, and after singing such a hymn as that in which I have just joined, I could forgive Susan if she dropped the silver spoons on the floor and dented them.'

No one would have been more astonished than Mrs. Sidebottom if told that she was artificial, that she affected interests, sympathies, to which she was strange. At the time that she talked she felt what she said, but the feeling followed the expression, did not originate it.

'My dear Miss Cusworth,' she went on, 'I am not one to bear a grudge. I never could. When my poor Sidebottom was alive, if there had been any unpleasantness between us during the day – and all married people have their tiffs – when you are married you will have tiffs. As I was saying, if there had been any unpleasantness between us, I have shaken him at night to wake him up, that he might receive my pardon for an incivility said or done.'

'We had made our preparations to leave Mergatroyd,' said Salome, 'but my mother has been ill again, and my poor sister has heard of the death of her husband, who fell in a skirmish with the Germans. So when Mr. Philip Pennycomequick was so kind as to ask my mother to remain on in the house, in the same capacity as heretofore, we were too thankful –'

'What! You stay?'

'Yes, my mother is not in a condition to move just now, and my sister is broken down with grief. But, of course, this is only a temporary arrangement.'

Mrs. Sidebottom said nothing for a moment. Presently, however, she observed: 'No doubt this is best, and I am very, very pleased to hear it. Philip did not mention it – I mean Mr. Pennycomequick. I must not any longer call him Philip, as he is now head of the family, unless the captain be regarded also as a head, then the family will be like the Austrian eagle – one body with two heads. But, my dear Miss Cusworth, tell me, did Mr. Pennycomequick say some foolish nonsense about three or four thousand pounds?'

'He mentioned something of the sort to mamma.'

'It is all fiddlesticks,' said Mrs. Sidebottom confidentially. 'He is the most inconsiderate and generous fellow in the world. His father was so before him. But it won't do. The mill will suffer, the business fall to the ground; we shall all go into the bankruptcy court. I respect the memory of my darling brother too highly to wish that the firm he managed should collapse like a house of cards. Philip is generous and all that sort of thing, and he will try to press money on you. You must not consent to receive it, for two reasons – first, because it would smash the whole concern, and next, because people would talk in a way you would not like about you. Do you understand – you could not receive a large allowance from a young unmarried man. However,' continued Mrs. Sidebottom, 'do not suppose I wish you to waive all expectations of getting anything. I ask you only to trust me. Lean on me and wait; I have your interests at heart as much as my own. I dare say you have heard my brother say he would be driven to adopt improved machinery?'

'Yes, I heard him say that.'

'Very well. My nephew, Philip, must reconstruct the mechanism of the factory at the cost of several thousands. Now, my dear brother did not leave enough money to be used both on this and on satisfying your just claims. If you will wait, say till your marriage – then you may be sure I and my son and nephew will strain every nerve to make you comfortable.'

'Mrs. Sidebottom,' said Salome calmly, 'you are very kind. When Mr. Philip Pennycomequick made the request to my mother that she should stay in the house, she consented, but only temporarily, till he is settled, and has had time to look about him for someone who will be a more active housekeeper than my mother can be; and at the same time it will be a convenience to us, giving us breathing-time in which to recover from the shock of Mr. Albert Baynes' death, and consider in what manner my sister Janet's future will be tied up with our own. As for that other very generous offer – we had no time to give it a thought, as it came to us simultaneously with the crushing news from France.' Salome halted. 'You have passed your door, Mrs. Sidebottom.'

'Bless me! So I have – I was so interested in what you were saying, and so charmed with your noble sentiments. Can I persuade you to enter and dine with us – only shoulder of mutton, quenilles, and marmalade-pudding.'

Salome declined: she must return immediately to her mother.

'Why!' exclaimed Mrs. Sidebottom, 'bless my soul, here is my nephew come to meet us – I cannot, however, take the compliment as paid to me, for we have parted in dudgeon.'

Philip had left his aunt's house in boiling indignation. She had led him into a trap, from which escape was difficult. He felt himself in honour bound by the proposal he had made to Miss Cusworth; he could not withdraw from it, and yet at that time to have to find the entire sum mentioned would severely embarrass him. He could not tell Salome that he had been precipitate in making the offer, and crave her indulgence to allow him to put off the fulfilment to a convenient season. The only way out of the difficulty that commended itself to him was to offer Salome an annual sum, charged on the profit of the mill, till such time as it suited her to withdraw her four thousand pounds and invest it elsewhere; in a word, to take her into partnership.

Having come to this decision, he resolved on preparing it for her acceptance at once, and he descended to the rooms occupied by the Cusworths, there to learn that she had gone to church. He at once took his hat and walked to meet her.

He was ill-pleased to see her returning with his aunt hanging on her arm; he mistrusted this exhibition of sudden affection in Mrs. Sidebottom for one whom he knew she disliked.

'You see, Philip,' said his aunt, 'I thought it was a saint's day, and the saints want encouragement; so I went to the parish church. I put dinner off – now can I induce you and Miss Cusworth to come in and pick a little meat with me? – not bones, Philip, these we have pulled already together. I was taken with a little faintness in church, and Miss Cusworth has kindly lent me support on my way home.'

The little group stood near the doorstep to the house occupied by Mrs. Sidebottom. A gaslight was at the edge of the footway, a few paces lower down the road. Mrs. Sidebottom disengaged her hand from the arm of Salome – then the girl started, shrank back, and uttered an exclamation of terror.

'What is the matter?' asked Mrs. Sidebottom.

'I have seen it again,' said the girl, in a low tone.

'Seen what?' asked the lady.

'Never mind what,' interrupted Philip, divining immediately from Salome's alarm and agitation what she meant. 'We must not keep my aunt waiting in the street. The ground is damp and the wind cold. Good-night, Aunt Louisa. I will escort Miss Cusworth home.'

When Philip was alone with Salome, he said: 'What was it? – what did you see?'

'I saw that same man, standing by the lamp-post, looking at us. He wore *his* hat and overcoat. Again I was unable to see any face, because the strong light fell from above, and it was in shadow. You had your back to the lamp, and the figure was in your rear. When you turned – it was gone.'

CHAPTER XXI

HYACINTH BULBS

The figure seen in the dark had diverted Philip from his purpose of speaking to Salome about money. He was not particularly eager to make his proposal, because that proposition had in it a smack of evasion of an offer already made; as though he had speedily repented of the liberality of the first. In this there was some moral cowardice, such as is found in all but blunt natures, and induces them to catch at excuses for deferring an unpleasant duty. There exists a wide gulf between two sorts of persons – the one shrinks and shivers at the obligations to say or do anything that may pain another; the other rushes at the chance with avidity, like a hornet impatient to sting. On this occasion Philip had a real excuse for postponing what he had come out to say, for Salome was not in a frame of mind to attend to it; she was alarmed and bewildered by this second encounter with a man whose face she had not seen, and who was so mysterious in his proceedings.

Accordingly Philip went to bed that night without having discharged the unpleasant task, and with the burden still weighing on him.

Next day, when he returned from the factory, in ascending the stairs he met Salome descending with her hands full of hyacinth glasses, purple, yellow and green, and a pair tucked under her arms.

She smiled recognition, and the faintest tinge of colour mounted to her face. Her foot halted, held suspended for a moment on the step, and Philip flattered himself that she desired to speak to him, yet lacked the courage to address him.

Accordingly he spoke first, volunteering his assistance.

'Oh, thank you,' she replied, 'I am merely taking the glasses and bulbs to the Pummy cupboard again.'

'Thank you in English is the equivalent for *s'il vous plait* and not of *merci*,' he said, 'so I shall carry some of the glasses. But – what is the Pummy cupboard?'

'You do not know the names of the nooks and corners of your own house,' said Salome, laughing. 'My sister and I gave foolish names to different rooms and closets when we were children, and they have retained them, or we have not altered them. I had put the bulbs in a closet under the staircase till we thought of changing quarters, and then I removed them so as to pack them. It was whilst I was thus engaged that I saw that strange, inexplicable figure for the first time. Now that I know we are to remain here, I have put them in glasses to taste water, and am replacing them in the dark, in the cupboard.'

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