Farjeon Benjamin Leopold

Miser Farebrother: A Novel (vol. 2 of 3)

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
JEREMIAH PAMFLETT ASSERTS HIMSELF

The innocent fun and gaiety at the tea-table were long afterward remembered. There was an animated discussion as to who should take the head of the table. Phœbe wanted Aunt Leth to do so, but Fanny interfered, and said no one should sit there but Phœbe.

"It is Phœbe's day," persisted the light-hearted girl, "and something unlucky will happen if she doesn't pour out the tea. Mr. Cornwall, come and court me at the bottom of the table."

"Didn't you say it was Miss Farebrother's day?" said Fred, as he took his seat next to the young hostess. He was not wanting in resource, and rather enjoyed Fanny's badinage.

The table was much more plentifully supplied than Phœbe

expected, and she cast many grateful glances at Mrs. Pamflett, who had certainly taken pains to do honour to the occasion. Mrs. Pamflett received these tokens of gratitude gravely and quietly; no one would have supposed that her mind was occupied by any other consideration than the comfort of her young mistress's guests. But nothing escaped her secretly watchful eyes; every word, every look, every little attention from Fred Cornwall to Phœbe was carefully noted and treasured up.

A merrier meal was never enjoyed; the buzz of conversation was delightful to hear. Phœbe was the quietest, Fanny the noisiest. Suddenly she became quite still, and gazed pensively at Fred Cornwall.

"A penny for your thoughts," said he.

"They are yours at the price," she replied, holding out her hand for the penny. "I am feeling very sorry for you."

"Why?"

"Because I am convinced you would be much happier if you were at this moment shelling peas with a certain young lady in Switzerland."

This caused a general laugh, and Fred enlarged upon the delights of his trip, Fanny interrupting him a dozen times with some quizzical remark.

"You certainly want some one to keep you in order, Fanny," laughingly observed her mother.

"I do," replied Fanny, dolefully. "Where *is* that some one? Why *does* he not appear?"

Toward the end of the meal Mrs. Pamflett swiftly left the room. Looking out of the window she saw her son Jeremiah, and she hastened down to him.

"Well, mother?" said he.

"What has made you so late?" she asked, anxiously.

"Now, don't nag!" he exclaimed. "I couldn't get here before; had a hundred things to look after. The new clothes I ordered never came home, and I had to go and bullyrag the tailor. How do I look, mother?"

"Beautiful, Jeremiah, beautiful!" she said, enthusiastically.

On his feet were patent-leather shoes; on his head the shiniest of belltoppers; on his hands lavender-coloured kid gloves; round his neck a light blue scarf, with a great carbuncle pin stuck in it; and he wore a tourist's suit of russet-brown of a very large check pattern.

"Rather licks 'em, doesn't it?" he asked, in a tone of self-admiration and approval, turning slowly round to exhibit his points.

"That it does, Jeremiah."

"Look at this," he said, taking off his hat.

"Why, you've had your hair curled, Jeremiah!"

"Slightly! Nobby, ain't it?"

"Beautiful! My own dear boy!"

"Keep your fingers to yourself, can't you? There, you've gone and put it all out!" He drew from his pocket a small mirror, and anxiously readjusted the curls his mother had touched. "Now just

you be careful. Eyes on, hands off!"

"They must have cost a lot of money, Jeremiah."

"They did; a heap; but in for a penny, in for a pound. There's one comfort; it's all spent on myself. Catch me spending it on anybody else. They cost, altogether – Well, never mind; we're going in for a big thing, ain't we? I ain't particular to a pound or two when the stake's worth it."

"You have the heart of a lion!" said Mrs. Pamflett.

"What will she think of me, mother? Look at me well; reckon me up."

"She can't help thinking as I do, Jeremiah."

"She's a ninny if she don't. She won't get another chance like it, I'll bet."

"What is that you're carrying, my boy?"

"A bouquet. Here, I'll just lift the paper, so that you can see it. Roses, stephanotis, and maidenhair. Now, who'll say I ain't a plucky one? Just wipe this dust off my boots."

In her full-hearted admiration Mrs. Pamflett had lost sight of her conversation with Miser Farebrother, and of the presence of Fred Cornwall in the room above; but now, as she carefully wiped Jeremiah's boots, it all came back to her. Bidding him to give her his best attention, she told him everything; he listened to her attentively, and put a good many questions to her when she had done, the most important of which related to his master.

"He didn't shy at it, then?" he asked.

"No," she replied; "he seemed to take to it kindly."

"You're sure he understood you?"

"He couldn't be off understanding me; I put it to him pretty plain. All you've got to do is to play your cards well."

"I'll do that. When I've got a winning hand I know what to do with it."

"Are you pleased with me, Jeremiah?"

"Yes; it was a bold stroke; only don't do it again. Let me play my own game. I don't mind telling you something if you'll keep it dark." He paused a moment before continuing. "Do you see my thumb?" He held out his right hand, palm upward, with the thumb arched over it. "I've got the London business like this; I've got Miser Farebrother like this. He's under my thumb, mother, and he doesn't know it. If I left him he'd lose thousands, and if the worst comes to the worst I can put it to him like that in a way he can't mistake."

"Don't be rash, Jeremiah," implored Mrs. Pamflett; "be humble with him."

"Oh, yes; I'll be humble with him as long as it suits me. Do you think I've been working all these years for nothing? Do you think I've had the office all to myself for nothing? Does *he* think I didn't take his measure years and years ago, and that I didn't make up my mind what to do?"

"Jeremiah! Jeremiah!" cried Mrs. Pamflett, "be careful. He's cunning, he's clever; he can see with his eyes shut."

"I can beat him at his own game. Cunning as he is, I'm cunninger; clever as he is, I'm cleverer; I could see without any

eyes at all. Wasn't it as clear to me as daylight, if I'd been content to be his slave, taking his miserable few shillings a week, and trying to live on it, that I should be no better off at seventy years than I was at seventeen? Oh, no; not at all! I was a fool, I was, and didn't know how many beans made five! I was born yesterday, I was! There now; I've said enough. You'll live to see something that'll make you open your eyes. Oh! hanged if I wasn't forgetting. What did the governor do with that beggar, Tom Barley?"

"Discharged him. He's gone for good."

"He's gone for bad, you mean. He'll come to a nice end, and I'll help him to it if I can. So the old hunks discharged Tom Barley, did he? Well, I settled his hash for him, at all events."

"It shows what influence you have over the master," observed Mrs. Pamflett.

"I'll have more before I've done with him. Hallo! Just hear how they're laughing upstairs. I say, mother, couldn't you call Phœbe down here? I don't care about giving her the flowers with all that lot looking on and sniggering. Just you go and whisper to her that a gentleman wants very particularly to see her. Wait a minute; is my scarf right?"

"Yes, Jeremiah," said Mrs. Pamflett, and was about to leave him, when he cried again, nervously:

"Wait a minute, can't you? What a hurry you're in. What would you say to her, mother, when you give 'em to her?"

"Wish her many happy returns of the day, Jeremiah; and you

might ask if she will give you a cup of tea. That will give you an excuse for following her; she can't very well leave the people upstairs long to themselves."

"All right; I'll do it." And Jeremiah struck an attitude, and waited for Phœbe, who had received a message, not that "a gentleman" wanted particularly to see her, but that a friend was below who was anxious to wish her many happy returns. When Phœbe heard this, she thought for a moment that it might be faithful Tom Barley, whom Mrs. Pamflett, in her good-nature, had allowed to enter, and she was startled when she saw Jeremiah Pamflett.

"It's me, miss," said that worthy. "You're not sorry, I hope?"

"No," she said, awkwardly; "not at all."

"Seeing it was your birthday," said Jeremiah, "I thought I'd give you an agreeable surprise. Just look at this." He took the blue paper off the bouquet, and held it up for her admiration.

"It is very pretty," said Phœbe.

"I should rather say it was. It cost enough, anyhow: eight and six I gave for it."

He paused for a reply, and Phœbe said, "Yes?" not knowing what else to say.

"Half a guinea they asked, but I beat 'em down. They *do* try to take you in, the shopkeepers; but I get up a little too early for them. When they try their games on me, they try 'em on the wrong party. Don't you think so?" He made a motion with his elbow, with the intention of digging it playfully into

her side; but she shrank back, and frustrated his amiable design. "I went to Covent Garden myself to pick it out." He paused again, and as she did not speak, he thought, "Hang it! why doesn't she say something?" comforting himself, however, with the reflection that his resplendent appearance had "regularly knocked her over," as he would have openly expressed it in his choice vernacular. Feeling that he was not getting along as well as he wished, he wound up with, "For you, miss; wishing you many happy returns of the day."

"You are very kind," said Phœbe, having no option but to accept the bouquet, "to spend so much money upon me."

"Oh," said Jeremiah, boastfully, "I can do a thing swell when I've a mind to. I never laid out so much on flowers before, but I wouldn't mind doing it again – for you, miss."

"Pray don't think of it," said Phœbe, not knowing whether to laugh or to cry.

"Well, I won't say whether I will or not. It all depends." He spread himself out airily in order that she might have a good view of him. He took off his hat, touched his curled hair gingerly, put his left arm akimbo, and stood at ease, with his right leg outstretched. He was rather proud of his manners, and thought he was making an impression. The question whether Phœbe should laugh or cry was determined by his attitude, and Jeremiah was somewhat confounded as a light hysterical laugh escaped her.

"What at, miss?" he asked, the smirk on his face changing to a frown.

"At that boy," said Phœbe, looking at the back of him; "he is so funny."

Jeremiah, turning, really saw a ragged little boy approaching them. It was a fortunate escape for Phœbe, who went toward the little fellow and asked him what he wanted.

"I wants to see the young lady of the 'ouse," said the boy. "Are you 'er?"

"Yes."

"I'm to give yer this, and run away."

A faithful messenger. He gave a small brown paper parcel to Phœbe, and scuttled away as fast as his little legs would carry him. Phœbe, wondering, opened the parcel, and there lay a few wild daisies, accompanied by a piece of white paper, upon which was written, "With Tom Barley's humble duty. For ever and ever." It was shocking writing, and Phœbe had some difficulty in deciphering it; but it brought the tears to her eyes. She put the paper in her pocket, and pinned the daisies at her bosom.

"I beg your pardon for leaving you," said Phœbe to Jeremiah. "And now I must go to my friends."

"You might offer me a cup of tea, miss," he said.

"Yes, I will, though I am afraid it is almost cold."

"Nothing can be cold where you are, miss," said Jeremiah, gallantly. "I'll come up with you. Why do you wear those rubbishing flowers? You can pick 'em up in the fields."

"They are from an old friend," said Phœbe, loyally. "I value them quite as much as if they had cost – " She stopped, frightened

at her rashness; she was about to add, "eight and six." Jeremiah completed the sentence for her, supplying the precise words in her mind.

"As if they cost eight and six, miss," he said, quietly. There was a venom in his voice which made her shudder. "I'll think of that."

She felt it necessary to mollify him, and though she hated herself for her duplicity, she was very gracious to him as they ascended the stairs, so that when they entered the room his equanimity was restored. It may have been the grandeur of his appearance, or perhaps it was something in Phœbe's face, that caused an awkward pause in the merriment upon their entrance. Fortunately for the situation, Mrs. Pamflett was in the room, and as Phœbe made no attempt to introduce Jeremiah to the company, Mrs. Pamflett said, in a distinct, measured voice, "My son, Mr. Pamflett, Mr. Farebrother's manager."

Mr. Lethbridge rose and offered the young man his hand.

"Glad to know you," said Jeremiah. "You're Mr. Lethbridge. How do you do, all of you?"

Mrs. Lethbridge inclined her head, perceiving that something was wrong. Fanny with difficulty repressed a giggle, Bob looked supercilious, while Fred Cornwall scarcely glanced at the new arrival.

"Will you give Mr. Pamflett a cup of tea, aunt?" said Phœbe.

"No," said Jeremiah, "not from your aunt, if you please; from you. Then I sha'n't want any sugar in it. Anything the matter with

you, miss?" He addressed this question to Fanny, from whom an uncertain sound of laughter was proceeding.

"Something in my throat," replied Miss Fanny.

"Shall I slap you on the back, miss?"

"No, no!" cried Fanny, suddenly quite sobered.

Jeremiah drank his tea quite slowly, looking alternately from one to the other. There was a dead silence in the room.

"Shall my niece pour you out another cup?" asked Mrs. Lethbridge, politely.

"If it will oblige her," said Jeremiah, with cold malignity, "she may."

Without a word Phœbe poured out the tea and handed it to him. He drank it even more slowly than he had done the first cup. When it was finished, Mrs. Lethbridge said, "There is no more in the pot."

"That is a pity," said Jeremiah, "because we are enjoying ourselves so."

"I propose," said Mrs. Lethbridge, "that we go into the open air. It is a most lovely evening."

They all rose, glad of the escape. Jeremiah pushed himself between Fred Cornwall and Phœbe, and walked by her side down the stairs. When they were in the open he said to her, "You have forgotten your bouquet. I will go and bring it to you. Shall I?"

"If you please," she answered, faintly. She could make no other reply.

His mother met him in the passage. "Miser Farebrother wishes

to see you, Jeremiah. You can join Miss Phœbe afterward."

"All right," said Jeremiah; "I will. Look here, mother. Is that Cornwall fellow sticking up to Phœbe?"

"That is for you to find out, Jeremiah. If you are my son you are not to be easily beaten."

"Easily beaten!" he echoed, with malignant emphasis. "When my back's up, I generally let people know it. Did you notice how they behaved to me at the tea-table?"

"You paid them out for it, Jeremiah," said Mrs. Pamflett, exultingly. "I am proud of you."

"You shall have more reason by-and-by. Paid them out for it! Why, they didn't have a word to say for themselves! I just looked at them, and shut them up! As for Phœbe, let her look out; that's all I say – let her look out! Did you ever see a cat play with a mouse?"

"Often, Jeremiah."

"Well, let her look out for herself. That's all I've got to say."

CHAPTER II
ARCADES AMBO

Jeremiah entered Miser Farebrother's room, holding in his hand the bouquet of flowers he had brought for Phœbe. He had debated within himself whether he should allow the miser to see them or no, and he had decided in the affirmative. "Mother commenced it," he thought, "and I'll go on with it. Strike while the iron's hot, Jeremiah."

"You sent for me," said he, laying the bouquet on the table in full view of Miser Farebrother.

"Are those the flowers the gentleman lawyer gave my daughter?" asked Miser Farebrother.

"No," replied Jeremiah; "I didn't know he brought her any. I bought these in Covent Garden to present to Miss Phœbe."

"You are growing extravagant," said the miser; "and you are becoming quite a gay young character: first escorting my daughter home from the village, and now presenting her with expensive flowers. It rains flowers in Parksides to-day. I was never guilty of such extravagance – never."

"This is the first time *I* have ever done such a thing," said Jeremiah, apologetically; "but seeing it was Miss Phœbe's birthday, I thought the money wouldn't be exactly thrown away. Look here – that lawyer chap; he's up to no good."

"You don't like lawyers?"

"No more than you do; though, mind you, if I was married and had a son, I'd bring him up as one. Then he'd know exactly how far to go, and I should get my legal business done for nothing."

"Oh! oh!" said Miser Farebrother, with a quiet chuckle. "If you were married and had a son! That's looking ahead, Jeremiah."

"It's a good plan; it keeps one prepared. You've no objection to my giving Miss Phœbe these flowers, I suppose?"

"Not the slightest, so long as you bought them with your own money. Only don't do too much of that sort of thing. When you spend money, spend it to advantage – in something that will last, or will make more money. Spending money in flowers is folly; in two days flowers and money are gone. You can look at them in gardens and shop windows, then you get all your pleasure for nothing. That's the wise plan. Costs nothing for looking, Jeremiah."

"You are quite right. I'll bear in mind what you say, and profit by it."

"That pleases me. What I like is obedience – blind obedience – and I will have it from those in my control. So – you're thinking of marriage, eh? A wife is an expensive toy."

"Not when you've got the right one! Likely as not it keeps a man out of mischief."

"So long as you've got the right one! Your mother said something to me; has she told you of it?"

Jeremiah considered a moment, and for once in his life was candid.

"Yes," he said, "she told me of it."

"Sit down, Jeremiah."

The astute young man obeyed in silence, and inwardly congratulated himself. "Things are going on swimmingly," he thought; "the fish is as good as in my net already." While Miser Farebrother, gazing on Jeremiah, thought, "I'll bind him tight; I'll bind him tight!" Presently he spoke.

"You have been a long time in my service, and are acquainted with my business."

"I know all the ins and outs of it," said Jeremiah. "I've got it at my fingers' ends."

Miser Farebrother sighed. Humbly as Jeremiah's words were spoken, the miser felt that his managing clerk had him in his power. Well, the best plan was to put chains around him, and what chains so tight and binding as matrimony?

"If I came to grief, Jeremiah, you could set up in business for yourself?"

"Yes," said Jeremiah, boldly; "and make a fortune. But you come to grief! No, sir; not while I am with you."

"It is my misfortune," continued the miser, "and your good luck, that I am ill and weak, and unable to give the proper personal attention to my affairs."

"Why say 'misfortune,' sir? It may be your good luck as well as mine."

"But it is as I say," cried Miser Farebrother, testily.

"Very well, sir. Then what a shrewd man would do is to make the best of it." Jeremiah's cue was not to cross or vex his master; to assert himself up to a certain point, but to lead the miser to believe that in him, Jeremiah, a wily master had a suitable tool, who, for a prospective advantage, would devote himself hand and foot, body and soul, to his employer's interest.

"That is all that is left to me," groaned Miser Farebrother – "to make the best of it. Jeremiah Pamflett," he said, abruptly, "were I in your place and you in mine, how would you act?"

"Under precisely similar circumstances?"

"Yes, under precisely similar circumstances."

"I should seek an interview," said Jeremiah, keeping down his excitement, "with the young man who was managing my business in London for me, in whom I had every confidence, and say to him, 'You seem to have a liking for my daughter.'"

"Ah!" said Miser Farebrother, "Go on."

"'My object is,' I should say to this young man, 'that she shall marry a man who will serve me faithfully, to keep her out of the hands of scheming relatives, and to keep her especially out of the hands of scheming lawyers. You are the man I would select as her husband. Marry her, and continue to serve me faithfully, and then all our interests will be common interests, and I shall be safe from conspiracies, which have but one end in view: to rob me of my hard-earned money.' After that I should wait to hear what he had to say."

"Not yet, Jeremiah, not yet," said Miser Farebrother; "there is still something more to be said on my side. Supposing that the words you have put into my mouth have been spoken by me to you, I should not wind up there. I should continue thus: 'If I give you my consent to pay court to my daughter, who, when I am gone, will, if she behaves herself, inherit what little property I have, you must bind yourself to me for a term of years. No, not for a term of years, but for as long as I am alive. There shall be an agreement drawn up, a binding agreement, which, if you break, will render you liable for a heavy penalty, which I shall exact. Your salary shall be so much a week, and no more; and you are not to ask me for more. You are to be, until my last hour, my servant, amenable to me, acting under my instructions, and you are not to put yourself in opposition to my wishes,' That, as far as I can at present see, is what I should say to you, Jeremiah; and now I await your answer."

"My answer is," said Jeremiah, "that I agree to everything. It is my interest to do so. You see, sir, I don't mince matters, and don't want to take any credit to myself that I am not entitled to."

"Continue in that vein," said Miser Farebrother, "and all will be well. But don't think I am going to die yet awhile."

"I hope," cried Jeremiah, fervently, "that you will live for fifty years."

"I may believe that or not," said Miser Farebrother, dryly, "as I please. Make no mistakes with me, Jeremiah; I know what human nature is. You have my permission to pay court to my

daughter."

"Oh, thank you, sir, thank you!" exclaimed Jeremiah, attempting to take the miser's hand.

"We want none of that nonsense," said Miser Farebrother, sardonically. "We have entered into a bargain, and that is enough. Now attend to me, and follow my instructions. What has passed between us is, for the present, to be kept a secret. There is to be no hurry, no violence. Pay attention to my daughter in a quiet way: endeavour to win her favour – "

"Her love, sir, her love!" interrupted Jeremiah, enthusiastically.

"Her love, if you will; but that is between you and her. I do not propose that there shall be an immediate break between her and her relatives, the Lethbridges. Things must be allowed to go on as usual in that quarter. I have my own reasons for biding my time. When I tell you to speak openly to my daughter, you will speak openly, and not till then. You agree to this?"

"Yes, sir, yes; I agree."

"Should she offer any obstacle, I will throw upon your side the weight of my authority, and she will not dare to disobey me. Meanwhile keep a watch upon the Lethbridges and their lawyer friend, who has come here to-day uninvited. He may have some design against me; he may know something which it is necessary I should learn before I put my foot down. And further, friend Jeremiah, you are not to presume because I have given you this great chance. Everything between us is to remain as it is. I am

my own master and yours, and I submit to no dictation."

On the gray, sly face of Jeremiah Pamflett no expression was visible which could be construed into rebellion at these imperious words, but in his mind reigned the thought: "My master, are you? I will make you pipe to another tune before you are many months older. Let me but get hold of Phœbe, and I will grind you as you are grinding me!" Master and man were well matched.

CHAPTER III
MISER FAREBROTHER WELCOMES PHŒBE'S FRIENDS

Life is sweet and beautiful to a young and innocent girl when to her heart is conveyed the assurance that she is beloved. Then is the world in its spring-time, and all outward evidence is in harmony with the tremulous joy which stirs her being. What sorrow lies in the past fades utterly away in the light of a new-born happiness. She lives in the present, which is imbued with a solemn and sacred tenderness. Strangely beautiful are the time and scene: she loves, and is beloved.

To a pure and trustful heart no direct words are needed for such an assurance; and between Fred Cornwall and Phœbe no direct words were spoken as they walked together in a retired part of the grounds of Parksides. How they had wandered there, and how they had come to be alone, they did not know, and they did not stop to inquire. All that they felt was the sweetness and the beauty of the hour. He spoke of many things: of his tour, and the adventures he had met with; of the occasions upon which some small incident brought her to his mind, of his delight when he found himself back in London – "to be near you," he would have said, but hardly dared yet to be so outspoken; of the resolution he had formed to "get along" in spite of all the difficulties in his

path.

"No easy matter," he said: "the ranks are so crowded; but when a man is determined, and has a dear object to spur him on, he has already half gained success."

She did not ask him what the dear object was; it was for him to speak and for her to listen; and, indeed, he would have spoken more directly had he felt himself in a position to marry. But there was the home to make, and the clear prospect of being able to maintain it. He must be able to go to her father and say, "I am in such and such a position, and I love your daughter." Deeply in love as he was with the sweet girl walking by his side, there was a practical side to his character which augured well for his future. He was a proud and honourable young fellow, and he shrank from presenting himself to Miser Farebrother as a beggar. No; he must first win his spurs; must show the kind of stuff he was made of, and that he was worthy of the treasure he aspired to win. He had heard that Miser Farebrother was very rich and very grasping, and he was aware that in dealing with such a man he was treading on delicate ground. He did not dare to risk a refusal. To trade upon the prospect of living upon the money Miser Farebrother might give his daughter was, in Fred Cornwall's view, a base proceeding, and he could not lend himself to it. "I wish the old gentleman was poor," he thought; "then I would speak at once. But a few months will soon pass."

Meanwhile, this quiet hour with Phœbe assured him that he had won her love, and that she would wait for him. He may be

forgiven for being a little sentimental; it is an old fashion, as old as hearts; and that their hands should meet, and that the girl's pulses should thrill at the touch of his, is natural and good when young people commune in innocence and honour. The silence that fell upon them now and then was sweeter, perhaps, than the words that were spoken.

Fanny championed and guarded them, and kept intruders off. The principal would-be offender was Bob, and it needed all his sister's cleverness to keep him by her side. It is to be feared, however, that if he had had any suspicion of what was going on, he would have made a bold dash for it; but a very unsuspicious mortal was Bob, and the last thought in his mind was that any young gentleman would come wooing his pretty cousin. Fanny was completely in her element, fencing and parrying questions asked by her father and brother, saying: "Oh! she will be here presently. Do you think she has no one to attend to but us?" Aunt Leth was discreetly silent; she remembered the time when she herself was young, and her dear husband came courting her. Once Mrs. Pamflett came up, and asked, "Where is Miss Farebrother?"

Fanny promptly answered her: "Dear me! She was here but a moment ago! I think she must have gone in that direction." (Pointing in front of her, while Phœbe was in the rear.)

"And Mr. Cornwall," said Mrs. Pamflett, very quietly, "has he also gone in that direction?"

"Oh no!" said Fanny, unblushingly; "he has gone to have a smoke. Men are the selfishest creatures, are they not, Mrs. Pamflett?"

Mrs. Pamflett sighed a gentle endorsement of the declaration, and meekly went the way indicated by Fanny. She turned off, however, when she could no longer be seen by the Lethbridges, and by a devious path successfully tracked Phœbe and Fred Cornwall, whom, from a distance, she watched with lynx eyes, noting the manner of their association – Phœbe's head modestly bent down, and Fred gazing upon her with looks of love.

Fanny, meanwhile, talking away vivaciously, suddenly stopped in the middle of a sentence, and cried, "Oh!"

"Has a pin run into you?" asked Bob; but he too gasped as he saw Miser Farebrother, leaning upon Jeremiah's arm, standing in front. Aunt Leth was the first to speak to him.

"How do you do, Mr. Farebrother?" she said, holding out her hand.

"Weak and ill, as you see," said Miser Farebrother, shaking hands with his sister-in-law; "a martyr to rheumatism and other pains. I'm growing old, sister-in-law; I am growing old. Don't you see the change in me?"

"We are all growing old," said Mrs. Lethbridge, with a sympathizing smile.

"But some can bear it better than others," groaned Miser Farebrother. "Now, you are strong and can walk without assistance. Look at me: even with my crutch-stick I cannot walk

without human support. Don't go, Jeremiah; I shall fall to the ground if you leave me. You know my sister-in-law?"

"Yes," said Jeremiah, with a careless nod at Aunt Leth; "we had tea together – a delightful tea."

He had been searching with his eyes for Phœbe, and not seeing her or Fred Cornwall, had made a movement to leave his master.

"We have to thank you," said Aunt Leth to Miser Farebrother, "for a very pleasant evening."

"Don't speak of it. We ought to see more of each other; you ought to have been here oftener. One's flesh and blood – we are almost that, are we not, sister-in-law? – should not desert one as you have deserted me."

"Indeed! indeed!" stammered Aunt Leth, somewhat confounded by this reproach.

"Never mind, never mind," said Miser Farebrother, with a gentle air of resignation. "We must say nothing but kind things to one another. If you have deserted me, you have not deserted my dear child, who is always full of praises of you."

"We love her," said Aunt Leth, "as well as we love our own."

"It is very good of you. Is that your husband? My eyesight is shockingly weak. I'm breaking fast, I'm afraid."

Mr. Lethbridge came forward, and Miser Farebrother seized his hand and gave it a cordial grasp. The kind-hearted man could find nothing better to say than,

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Farebrother."

"Not so glad to see me as I am to see you. It is quite like old

times – quite like old times. How is the world using you? But I need not ask; I can see for myself. I am very pleased – very – very! You deserve it. I wish the world used me as well; but we can't all be so fortunate. When I was a young man, I used to hope that when I was as old as I am now I should be able to keep a carriage. Young hopes, brother-in-law – eh? Seldom realized, are they? I can hardly afford to keep a – a wheelbarrow – eh, Jeremiah?"

"Yes, sir," said Jeremiah, obsequiously.

"We can't have all we wish," pursued Miser Farebrother; and Jeremiah, although he was impatient to go in search of Phœbe, whom he now looked upon as his property, could not help taking interest and pleasure in his master's gentle and philosophic departure, which he, better than any one of the other listeners, could appreciate at its true value. "In a hundred years to come, a carriage and a wheelbarrow will be all the same to us. Still, I am glad to hear of your good fortune." (Mr. Lethbridge stared, and wondered whether he was awake or asleep, or whether he had said anything of which he was unconscious.) "How well and hale you look! Not a day older – not a day. You must tell me the secret; though I fear it is too late for me. And this young gentleman" – turning to Bob, who became suddenly very hot and uncomfortable – "your son, eh? – your bright boy?"

"Yes," said Mr. Lethbridge; "our son Robert."

"How do you do, nephew?" said Miser Farebrother, giving Bob two fingers, which, when Bob got them, he did not know

what to do with. "And how is the world using *you*?"

"Extremely well, sir, thank you," Bob blurted out, without in the least knowing what he was saying; for, instead of the world using him extremely well, it was not using him at all.

"How pleasant to hear!" exclaimed Miser Farebrother. "I feel like rubbing my hands, but one has my crutch-stick in it, and the other is leaning on Jeremiah. You come of a lucky stock; go on and prosper, nephew. And this – " He turned to Fanny, who, in a feverish state, was awaiting recognition. She was so confused that it was not until hours afterward that her indignation was excited at being referred to as "this" – as though she were a chattel.

"Our daughter Fanny," said Aunt Leth, observing that her husband was incapable of speech.

"Kiss me, niece," said Miser Farebrother. He raised his wrinkled face, and Fanny put her lips to it. He called a joyous look into his eyes, and in a kind of rapture murmured: "The kiss of beauty! But don't be too lavish of them, niece." He peered around as though he suddenly missed somebody. "Where is your young gentleman, niece?"

Jeremiah chuckled quietly.

"*My* young gentleman!" cried Fanny, flushing up.

Her mother gave her a warning look.

"Yes, your young gentleman. There is one here, isn't there? or did Phœbe make a mistake?"

"You mean Mr. Cornwall," said Aunt Leth, in a gentle tone.

"I think that is the name Phœbe mentioned. A lawyer, isn't

he?"

"Yes," replied Fanny, before her mother could speak, "and a very clever one."

"Bravo! bravo!" exclaimed Miser Farebrother. "That is as it should be. I am sure he is a very clever one; I hope we are not wrong in our opinion of him – for your sake, niece, for your sake. Sister-in-law, brother-in-law, I congratulate you. Niece, kiss me again."

Fanny held back, but her mother murmured, "Fanny!" and the girl kissed the miser's wrinkled face again, upon which he smacked his lips and cast up his eyes languishingly.

"And now," he said, "I must really go and find my dear Phœbe and the very clever lawyer. *We* must go; mustn't we, Jeremiah? See, sister-in-law, Jeremiah brought some flowers for my dear child, and happening to forget them when she left the table, she sent him back for them. I am ashamed of myself for having detained him. Do you know where Phœbe is? – this way – or that? That way? Thank you; I shall easily find her. Remember what I said to you – we must really see more of each other; you must come here oftener. And you, brother-in-law, and you, niece. And hark you, nephew: when I asked you how the world was using you, you answered, 'Extremely well, sir.' You did, did you not?"

"Yes, sir," said Bob, not knowing what was coming.

"You were wrong, and you are wrong again. Sister-in-law, too: you called me 'Mr. Farebrother?'"

"Yes," said Aunt Leth, faintly.

"But why? why? Why 'sir' and why 'Mr.'? Everybody else calls me Miser Farebrother. I like it; it tickles me. Pray call me that for the future, like good-natured souls, as you are. Come, Jeremiah, come. Phœbe will be impatient for your flowers."

He hobbled away, clinging to Jeremiah's arm, and presently said,

"Well, Jeremiah?"

"Thank you," said Jeremiah.

"Keep faith with me," said Miser Farebrother, fiercely, taking his hand from Jeremiah's arm, and standing erect, "and I'll keep faith with you. Trick me, deceive me, rob me, and I'll make England too hot to hold you!"

"Why do you speak to me like that?" asked Jeremiah, in an injured tone.

"Because I know the world," retorted the miser; "because I know human nature. Did I show it to them just now, or did I not? Did I compel them to be honey to my face, while they hated me in their hearts? Play tricks with me, and I'll serve you worse!"

"We have made a bargain," said Jeremiah, submissively, "and I will keep to it, and be grateful to you all my life."

"That is what I want," said Miser Farebrother. "While I am alive I am master. When I am gone, you will have your turn."

After that they walked on in silence; but Jeremiah's thoughts, fashioned into words, may be thus construed: "When you are gone! You think I will wait till then, do you? You old fool! you're not in it with me!"

For a few moments after Miser Farebrother left the Lethbridges they gazed at each other in silence. Then said Fanny:

"Would you like to know what I think of Uncle – no – Miser Farebrother? Well, I think he's a brute!"

"Hush, hush, Fanny!" said Mrs. Lethbridge. "For Phœbe's sake!"

CHAPTER IV
A SACRED PROMISE – WON BY GUILE

Upon the happy musings of the lovers came a harsh interruption. They turned and saw Miser Farebrother and Jeremiah.

"I have been looking for you, Phœbe," said the miser; "and so has Jeremiah."

"Your flowers, miss," said Jeremiah, offering them.

With her father's eye upon her, she could not choose but take them.

"You sent me back for them, you know," said Jeremiah. "I should have brought them before, but for – "

"But for my calling to him," interrupted Miser Farebrother, "upon a matter of business. I am pleased that your friends have enjoyed themselves. You have had a pleasant birthday, Phœbe?"

"Very pleasant, father; I shall never forget it. Father, this is Mr. Cornwall, who brought me the presents I showed you."

"I trust you will excuse me," said Fred, gazing with interest at Phœbe's father, "for intruding myself. But Miss Farebrother and I have met so often at Mrs. Lethbridge's house that I thought I might venture."

"All my daughter's friends," said Miser Farebrother, in his

blandest tone, "are welcome here. A very charming family, the Lethbridges."

"Indeed they are," said Fred, warmly.

"We have met but seldom," said Miser Farebrother, "and I was just expressing my regret that we did not see each other oftener."

"Oh, father!" said Phœbe, in a grateful voice, gliding to his side. There was no discordant note in his speech; he looked kindly upon her; and he had met Fred Cornwall in a spirit of friendliness. Her cup of happiness was full to overflowing.

"Perhaps Mr. Cornwall will give me his address," said Miser Farebrother. "I may ask him to decide some knotty point of law for me."

Fred Cornwall drew forth his card-case with alacrity, and handed a card to the miser.

"You will excuse me now," said Miser Farebrother; "I am by no means well, and I must go in-doors and rest. Remain with your friends, Phœbe; Jeremiah will assist me to my room. Come in and wish me good-night, Phœbe, before you retire."

"Yes, father, I will."

He smiled amiably, and saying "Good evening, Mr. Cornwall," departed, clinging to Jeremiah's arm. Jeremiah was not at all in a good humour; he would have preferred to be left behind with Phœbe, and he said as much to his master.

"Be wise, be wise, Jeremiah," said Miser Farebrother, in response to this complaint. "You are but a novice with these people. Take a lesson from me, and learn to wait with patience.

Before a good general strikes a blow, he lays his plans, and satisfies himself that everything is in order. Do I know how to act, eh? Have I already entangled and confused them, or have I not? I shall be a subject of discussion among them. 'He was flinging stones at us all the time he was speaking,' the Lethbridges will say. 'He said the most sarcastic things.' Who will defend me? The sharp lawyer, Mr. Cornwall, and, better than all, my daughter Phœbe. 'You are mistaken,' she will say; 'I am sure you are mistaken. He has been kindness itself; you do not understand him.' Then she will appeal to Mr. Cornwall, and ask him whether I did not speak in the most beautiful way of her aunt and uncle, and he will be able to make but one answer. That will silence them; they won't have a word to say for themselves. Ha, ha! I am really enjoying the game."

He kept Jeremiah with him until the Lethbridges and Fred Cornwall were gone, and then sent him back to London, bidding him not to take the same train as Phœbe's relatives.

It was between ten and eleven o'clock when Phœbe received a message from her father, through Mrs. Pamflett, bidding her come to him and wish him good-night. Phœbe had been sitting at the open window of her bedroom, musing upon the happy day fast drawing to an end. A tender light bathed the grounds of Parksides, and seemed to the happy girl to be an omen of the future – a future of love and peace. The soft breeze kissed her, and whispered to her of love; the silence of nature was eloquent with the immortal song; a tremulous joy possessed her soul. "He

loves me! he loves me! he loves me!" This was the song sung by her heart, bringing light to her eyes, blushes to her cheeks, and causing her, from a very excess of joy, to hide her face in her hands. "How sweet, how beautiful is the world!" she said only to herself. "How good everybody is to me!" She rose from these musings to attend her father. Mrs. Pamflett accompanied her to the door of his apartment.

"Good-night," she said to the young girl.

"Good-night, Mrs. Pamflett," said Phœbe; "and thank you for all you have done to-day."

"I am glad you are pleased with me. May I call you Phœbe?"

"Yes, if you like."

"May I kiss you?"

"Yes," said Phœbe, with a bright look; and she received and returned the kiss.

"This is the commencement of a happy time for you, Phœbe." She had heard from her son all the particulars of the agreement entered into by him and Miser Farebrother.

Phœbe glanced shyly at her, and thought, "Does she know about Mr. Cornwall? Does everybody know?" She answered Mrs. Pamflett's remark aloud: "I am sure it is. Oh, Mrs. Pamflett, I *am* happy – very, very happy!"

"I am delighted to hear you say so. Good-night again, Phœbe."

"Good-night, Mrs. Pamflett."

When she was in her father's room, with the door closed, what reason had Phœbe to suppose that Mrs. Pamflett was crouching

down outside, to catch what passed between Miser Farebrother and his daughter?

"Come and sit beside me, Phœbe," said Miser Farebrother. "So – the birthday is over?"

"Nearly over, father."

"And your friends have gone away contented?"

"Yes, father."

"Those flowers look well in your dress. What flowers are they? Ah, I see – white daisies and roses. Who gave you the daisies?"

"A poor friend in the village sent them to me." Knowing that her father was incensed against Tom Barley, she did not dare to mention his name.

"And the roses, Phœbe?"

"Mr. Cornwall gave them to me," said Phœbe, timidly.

"Can you spare me one?"

She gave it to him gladly, and he stuck it in his coat. Phœbe's heart beat quick. Every sign that came to her was in harmony with its throbbing.

"I am sorry for your sake, Phœbe, that I am not younger and stronger."

"Dear father! I grieve that you suffer so! If I only knew what to do to make you well!"

"That is spoken like a dutiful child. All that you can do is not to worry me – not to give me pain."

"Indeed, indeed, father," said Phœbe, earnestly, "I will never do that!"

"You are a good girl. It is strange that it was only the other day I suddenly discovered you were a woman. The change brings other changes; and I, your father, must not be blind to the fact. Why, Phœbe," he said, gaily, "it is more than likely that one day you will marry!" Phœbe hung her head. "You blush! – as your dear mother used to blush when she and I were talking of love. I did my best to make her happy. She died too soon for you and me!" He sighed, and paused a moment. "And now, Phœbe, I am both mother and father to you."

"Yes, dear father."

"I have only one wish in life, Phœbe – your happiness: and we must bring it about. It has happened sometimes that you have not seen me in a right light; I have said things which may have laid me open to misconstruction. They have not really come from my heart; I have been so tortured with pain that I scarcely knew what I was saying. Will you forgive me, Phœbe?"

"Dear father, I love you!"

"You are my own child, your sainted mother's child! Before she died she spoke to me of the time when you would be a woman, and when changes were before you. The duty you owed to her, you owe also to me."

"I shall never be wanting in it, father."

"You will marry – of course you will marry. You will ask for my consent, like a dutiful, loving child?"

"I could not be happy without it, father," said Phœbe, in a low tone. His voice was so benevolent, so imbued with concern for

her happiness, that her heart went out to him.

"That is a promise, my dear child?"

"Yes, dear father, it is a promise."

"That you will not marry without my consent. Phœbe, this loving conversation is doing me good; it is better than all the doctors in the world: I am feeling almost well." He folded her in his arms and kissed her. "Why, what is this? A Prayer-book. Your mother's, my dear, which we read together when we went to church. She is looking down upon us now; she will guard you in your dreams to-night. Kiss this sacred book, my child, and repeat what you have promised – that you will not marry without my consent."

Without hesitation Phœbe took the book in her hand and kissed it, saying, as she did so, "Dear father, I will never marry without your consent." She laid the book upon the table, and burst into a flood of happy tears.

"Good child, good child!" said Miser Farebrother – "your sainted mother's child. Now go; I am exhausted. Good-night, Phœbe. May you have happy dreams."

Phœbe tenderly embraced him, and went to her room, the happiest of happy girls. While Miser Farebrother rubbed his hands, and muttered gleefully, "Mr. Cornwall, my cunning lawyer, and my dear sister and brother-in-law, I think I have scotched your little scheme." He went to bed in a perfectly happy frame of mind. He had done a good night's work.

On a little table by Phœbe's bed were Fred Cornwall's and

Tom Barley's flowers. She kissed Fred's flowers before she blew out the light, and even in the dark she drew them to her lips, and so fell asleep with the roses at her breast.

CHAPTER V
TOM BARLEY COMMENCES A NEW LIFE

"It's going to be performed to-morrow night, and master and missis and all the family 'll be there. I 'eerd it read. It was beautiful. It give me the creeps, and it made me laugh just as if I was being tickled to death!"

The speaker was 'Melia Jane; the person she was addressing was Tom Barley; the place was the kitchen of Mrs. Lethbridge's house in Camden Town; and the subject of 'Melia Jane's remarks was Mr. Linton's comedy-drama *A Heart of Gold*, the first representation of which was to take place on the following evening at the Star Theatre. The whole house was in a flutter of excitement about it; the cousins were in the sitting-room above, busy over their frocks; Fred Cornwall was there, and was to accompany them to the theatre; the ticket for the stage-box was placed in a conspicuous position on the mantel-shelf, so that it should not escape the attention of any chance visitor; the conversation was animated, and full of hopeful anticipations of a great success for the poor dramatic author; and what was perhaps of greater importance than all else, Bob was in the cast. He had taken the fatal plunge, and through Kiss's influence had obtained an engagement for the run of *A Heart of Gold*. The

"screw," as he called it, was small – ten shillings a week – but so were the parts for which, to his great disgust, he was cast. The more distinguished of the two characters he was to enact was a footman, who had to make three announcements of visitors of two words each – "Mrs. Portarlington" (a long name, that was lucky; almost as good as two or three words rolled into one), "Mr. Praxis," "Lord Fouracres." That was the extent of his part. He was greatly disappointed, having had an idea that he would be called upon to play one of the leading characters; but he was taken to task for his presumption by Kiss, who told him he might think himself lucky at being allowed to open his mouth on the stage for the first twelve months. The other character was a "guest," in which he was restricted to dumb-show, and very little of that. He unfortunately took it into his head to ask the stage-manager how he should play this dumb guest, and the answer he received, to the effect that he was to "look as little like an idiot as possible," somewhat dashed his budding aspirations. However, Kiss gave him some very good advice, and he took heart of grace, and rehearsed his six words on the stage, and also at home in the bosom of his family. Twenty times in the course of the night he would arrange the scene in which he was to appear and speak his lines, and when all was ready, would throw open the door and call "Mrs. Portarlington," upon which Fanny, as the audience, would burst into applause, which she kept up until Bob acknowledged the reception by a bow. It was perhaps fortunate that Kiss, breaking in upon the family rehearsal one

evening, took the nonsense out of Bob by showing him how the thing should be done. "Make the announcements quite quietly, my lad," said Kiss; "and don't attempt to spoil the picture by thrusting yourself forward. Time enough for that when you have something to do. Remember that 'modesty is young ambition's ladder.'" "Of course I shall do as he tells me," said Bob, in confidence to Phœbe; "but did you ever know a profession in which there was so much jealousy?" Kiss found an opportunity to speak privately to the Lethbridges upon the subject of giving Bob a reception when he appeared. "For Heaven's sake," he said, "don't attempt it. Don't so much as wag your head. You don't know what a first-night audience is. Injudicious applause has ruined many a promising piece." Aunt Leth, sweet-natured as she was, was a little inclined to agree with Bob as to the dreadful amount of jealousy in the dramatic calling.

Tom Barley had not yet achieved his ambition of becoming a policeman, but he had great hopes that in a short time he would be pacing a beat, and in the vicinity of Camden Town, too. Uncle Leth was much respected, and had some influence, which he was exerting on Tom's behalf. It was 'Melia Jane who had put the idea into Tom's head. Between these two humble persons a confidence had been long since established. There was no idea of love-making – it had not entered either of their heads – but when Tom had been in attendance on Phœbe in London, he naturally found his way to the kitchen. 'Melia Jane "took to him," as she said; and he "took to her," and a mutual liking sprang up. When

Tom left Miser Farebrother's service and Parksides, he came to London and asked advice of Mr. and Mrs. Lethbridge, and they succeeded in obtaining for him a few hours' employment a day in a friend's garden. The remuneration was small; but Tom managed to rub along, and was always welcome to a meal in the kitchen with 'Melia Jane. This worthy creature, the invariable cleanliness and brightness of whose kitchen crowned her with glory, rather looked upon Tom as a kind of son, whom it was her pleasure to protect, to advise, and occasionally to scold. It mattered not that she was rather younger than he, and that intellectually she was in no way his superior. It was her pleasure to adopt him, and she adopted him accordingly; it was a pleasure to him to be adopted, and he submitted with complete satisfaction. It came to be a custom with him to spend his evenings with 'Melia Jane, and he gave a good return for the hospitality extended to him. He proved himself a perfect marvel in all practical matters relating to a house. If a window were broken, no need for a glazier; Tom took the measure of the glass, purchased it for a trifle, and the repair was made in less than no time. No need either for locksmiths so long as Tom Barley was about; he put locks and handles to rights in a trice. Did a drain want looking to, there was Tom; a tile off the roof, there was Tom; a ceiling to whitewash, there was Tom; a bit of painting to do, there was Tom. Indeed, with respect to painting, he made it his special business that the house should be bright and clean inside and out: all the neighbours remarked what a deal the Lethbridges were

doing to their house, and how nice and fresh it looked. Then there was the garden; Tom worked a miracle. A little care and pains, the expenditure of a few pence now and then, and a large amount of zeal and earnestness, converted the hitherto rather shabby patches of ground in the front and rear of the house into a perfect paradise. It was impossible that such a handy, grateful, willing fellow should be otherwise than welcome. "Upon my word, my dear," said Uncle Leth to his wife, "that Tom Barley is a wonder. There is nothing he cannot do." A few bits of deal, which would have been chopped up for fire-wood had not Tom put them to a better use, a few nails, a pound of paint, and half a pint of varnish, and there, presto! were flower boxes for all the windows, looking as sweet and fresh as the best in Mayfair. He had a knack of making friends and of getting himself liked. There was the greengrocer, the proud possessor of a pony and cart. Tom so ingratiated himself into the favour of this tradesman by his cheerful ways, and by doing for *him*, also, an odd job or two, very neatly and expeditiously, that early one morning, there was Tom rattling away with the pony and trap into the country, making for some ripe woods of his acquaintance, wherefrom he unlawfully plucked roots and rich soil to beautify the garden of his friends; bringing back, of course, some acceptable offerings to the greengrocer, to insure the loan of the pony and trap the next time he required them. For one who aspired to be a policeman a transaction so nefarious cannot well be defended; but, after all, no one was the worse for the innocent abstraction. 'Melia Jane,

be sure, was not forgotten. He helped her to brighten her pots and pans; the little bit of electro-plate the Lethbridges possessed twinkled with light as it lay upon the table-cloth; the carving-knives, for sharpness, were a treat to handle; and for polishing boots and shoes there was not Tom's equal in the city of London. Heaven only knows where he got the sweetness of his nature from; its quality was so fine and prompt, doing the exact thing that was required to be done at exactly the right moment (which adds enormously to the value of a service), that it could not fail to win friends for him wherever kind hearts were to be found. And these, as my experience goes, are beating multitudinously whichever way you turn your face.

He had led a rough and happy life, but he had never been so happy as at this time. The few clothes he possessed were kept in order by 'Melia Jane, who washed and mended for him, and who, upon Sundays, made him so resplendent that he was almost ashamed to be seen. A smile or a friendly nod or greeting was always ready for him from the Lethbridges and their friends, with whom Tom was quite an institution, and Aunt Leth grew into the habit of consulting him and asking his advice when anything inside or outside of the house was required to be done. Sweetest of all was Phœbe's greeting upon her visits to her aunt. "Well, Tom, how are you?" "Getting along splendidly, miss." Simple words, but pearls of price, nevertheless, to Tom, who went about his work more blithely the whole day afterward. Of girls in her own station in life 'Melia Jane might have been jealous had Tom

championed them, but she entirely approved of his devotion to Fanny and his worship of Phœbe.

"She's a angel, Tom," said 'Melia Jane.

"She is, 'Melia Jane," responded Tom; "and I'd lay down my life for her."

He was not neglected either in the way of education. Ambitious as he was to become a public official, Mr. Lethbridge knew how important it was that he should be able to read and write fairly. He provided Tom with copy-books, and made the young man go through a regular course of pot-hooks and hangers; and Aunt Leth gave him reading lessons three times a week; so that he made capital progress, and was "gitting quite a scholard," according to 'Melia Jane.

This young lady attended to his education in other ways. She was great in superstitions, which were to her a kind of religion; and instead of pious exordiums in frames to remind her of her duty, she had scraps of card-board hanging in sacred corners in her bedroom and kitchen, upon which were written extracts from fortune-telling and dream books, which, if they did not form for her the whole duty of woman, went a long way towards it. She had an apt pupil in Tom, whom she inoculated with her precautions to woo good fortune and avert disaster.

As to cutting your nails, now. From her bedroom 'Melia Jane brought into the kitchen the written magic formula, which Tom soon learnt by heart:

"Cut your nails on Monday, cut them for wealth.
Cut them on Tuesday, cut them for health.
Cut them on Wednesday, cut them for news.
Cut them on Thursday, a new pair of shoes.
Cut them on Friday, cut them for sorrow.
Cut them on Saturday, see sweetheart to-morrow.
Cut them on Sunday, cut them for evil:
The whole of the week you'll be ruled by the – "

What could be simpler and more direct? And in the matter of nails, Tom abided by it.

"Wot day in the week was you born?" asked 'Melia Jane.

"Blessed if I know," answered Tom.

"'Ow could you be so careless," said 'Melia Jane, severely, "as not to get to know? Then we could settle it?"

"Settle what, 'Melia Jane?"

"Why, don't you know?" she replied.

"'Monday's child is fair of face.
Tuesday's child is full of grace.
Wednesday's child is loving and giving.
Thursday's child works hard for a living.
Friday's child is full of woe.
Saturday's child has far to go.
But the child that is born on Sabbath-day
Is bonnie and happy, and wise and gay.'"

"I say Thursday," said Tom, good-humouredly. "That's the

most likely day for me."

"I say Sabbath-day," said 'Melia Jane.

"That won't fit," said Tom. "Happy? Yes. And gay, sometimes. But wise? No, no, 'Melia Jane; not a bit of it."

But in argument Tom was a child in the hands of 'Melia Jane, and she generally succeeded in compelling him to subscribe to her views. She had a very effective method of punishment if he persisted in holding out. She was, in Tom's eyes, a very wonderful fortune-teller with the cards, and to have his fortune told half a dozen times a week became a perfect passion with him. Nothing pleased 'Melia Jane more than the opportunity of laying out the cards; but she could successfully resist the temptation when Tom was obstinate. It was in vain for him to implore; she was adamant. At length he would say, "I give in, 'Melia Jane; I give in." And out would come a very old and terribly thumbed pack, and with a solemn face Tom settled down to the onerous task of cutting the cards again and again, in accordance with 'Melia Jane's complicated instructions. It was not at all material that last night's fortune was diametrically opposite to the fortune of to-night; nor that last night it was a fair woman, and to-night a dark one; nor that last night Tom was to be greeted by a coffin, and to-night by a baby. The point was that the fortune was to be told, and that being done, no reference was made to inconsistencies and contradictions. 'Melia Jane and Tom would sit staring, open-mouthed, at the finger of fate, whose smudgy impress was to be found on every card in the pack. She was telling his fortune now,

on the night before the production of *A Heart of Gold*.

"The four of clubs, Tom. A strange bed."

"Ah," said Tom. "I wonder where?"

"The eight of spades. That's trouble, Tom."

He pulled a long face.

"And there's that dark woman, agin. Who *can* she be?"

"I wonder, now!" said Tom, turning over in his mind every dark woman whom he could call to remembrance.

"Well!" cried 'Melia Jane. "Did you ever? Jest look, Tom. The ten of 'earts and the four of 'earts next door to each other. A wedding and a marriage bed. And if there ain't the seven and the six of spades! A doctor and a birth!"

"Never!" exclaimed Tom, aghast.

"Here it is. There's no going agin it. Oh, Tom! here's tears; and here's disappointment and sickness. Take care of that dark woman; she's up to no good."

"Ain't she?" cried Tom, energetically. "I'll keep a sharp eye on her."

The fortune being ended, the cards were put away in a drawer in the dresser, and 'Melia Jane proceeded to discuss lighter and less important matters.

CHAPTER VI
THE FIRST NIGHT OF "A HEART OF GOLD."

Three-quarters of an hour before it was time to start for the Star Theatre, Fred Cornwall with a cab was at the Lethbridges' door. There was no one but 'Melia Jane to receive him. Everybody was dressing, and 'Melia Jane, with a jug of hot water in her hand, informed Fred Cornwall that "Miss Phœbe, sir, she do look most lovely," for which she received a sixpenny bit.

"Take these flowers up to the ladies, 'Melia Jane," said Fred, "and be careful you don't mix them. These are for Mrs. Lethbridge; these are for Miss Lethbridge; these for Miss Farebrother; and ask them how long they will be."

"Lor', sir!" exclaimed 'Melia Jane, "now you're 'ere they'll be down in no time."

"That foolish boy," observed Fanny, when the flowers were brought into the girls' bedroom, "will ruin himself. You will have to check him, Phœbe. But what taste he has! Did you ever see anything more exquisite? I knew he would bring us flowers. And of course he has the cab at the door, waiting; he hasn't the least idea of the value of money. I shall have to give him a good talking to, the foolish, extravagant boy!"

This was a new fashion of Fanny's – to put on matronly airs

and to talk of Fred Cornwall as a foolish boy. He was greatly amused by it, and he listened to her lectures with a mock-penitential air, which caused her to deliver her counsels with greater severity.

"You are a model of punctuality," he said, as Fanny sailed into the room.

"And you're a modeller," retorted Fanny gaily. "How do I look?" turning slowly round.

"Beautiful!" exclaimed Fred, advancing eagerly as Phœbe entered.

"Oh, of course," cried Fanny. "Come here, Phœbe," taking her cousin's hand. "He sha'n't admire one without the other."

With looks and words of genuine admiration, Fred scanned and criticised the girls, who, truly, for loveliness, would take the palm presently in the Star Theatre.

"That's very sweet of you," said Fanny, when he came to the end of an eloquent speech, "and you may kiss my hand. But don't come too near me; I mustn't be crushed; and Phœbe mustn't, either. Oh, my dear, beautiful mother!" And the light-hearted girl ran to her mother, who at this moment entered the room.

Aunt Leth was the picture of a refined, gentle-hearted sweet-mannered lady. She had her best gown on, of course; and so cleverly had she managed that it looked, if not quite new, at least almost as good as new. She gazed with wistful tenderness at her daughter and niece, and kissed them affectionately; then she greeted Fred, and thanked him for the flowers.

Phœbe and Fanny had already thanked him, and when he gave Uncle Leth a rose for his coat (he himself wearing one), Fanny whispered to Phœbe that she had not a fault to find with him.

"What I like especially about Fred," said Fanny, "is that when he does a thing he does it thoroughly. Did you notice how pleased dear mamma was when he gave papa the rose? He could not have delighted her more. You lucky girl!"

Altogether Fred's position in that affectionate family was an enviable one, and if he was not a proud and happy young fellow as he rattled away with them to the Star Theatre, he ought to have been. Any gentleman in London would have been happy to be in his shoes.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.