

ACT II

We are translated to the depths of the wood in the enchantment of a moonlight night. In some other glade a nightingale is singing, in this one, in proud motoring attire, recline two mortals whom we have known in different conditions; the second chance has converted them into husband and wife. The man, of gross muddy build, lies luxurious on his back exuding affluence, a prominent part of him heaving playfully, like some little wave that will not rest in a still sea. A handkerchief over his face conceals from us what Colossus he may be, but his mate is our Lady Caroline. The nightingale trills on, and Lady Caroline takes up its song.

LADY CAROLINE. Is it not a lovely night, Jim. Listen, my own, to Philomel; he is saying that he is lately married. So are we, you ducky thing. I feel, Jim, that I am Rosalind and that you are my Orlando.

(The handkerchief being removed MR. MATEY is revealed; and the nightingale seeks some farther tree.)

MATEY. What do you say I am, Carolyn?

LADY CAROLINE (clapping her hands). My own one, don't you think it would be fun if we were to write poems about each other and pin them on the tree trunks?

MATEY (tolerantly). Poems? I never knew such a lass for high-flown language.

LADY CAROLINE. Your lass, dearest. Jim's lass.

MATEY (pulling her ear). And don't you forget it.

LADY CAROLINE (with the curiosity of woman). What would you do if I were to forget it, great bear?

MATEY. Take a stick to you.

LADY CAROLINE (so proud of him). I love to hear you talk like that; it is so virile. I always knew that it was a master I needed.

MATEY. It's what you all need.

LADY CAROLINE. It is, it is, you knowing wretch.

MATEY. Listen, Carolyn. (He touches his money pocket, which emits a crinkly sound--the squeak of angels.) That is what gets the ladies.

LADY CAROLINE. How much have you made this week, you wonderful man?

MATEY (blandly). Another two hundred or so. That's all, just two hundred or so.

LADY CAROLINE (caressing her wedding ring). My dear golden fetter, listen to him. Kiss my fetter, Jim.

MATEY. Wait till I light this cigar.

LADY CAROLINE. Let me hold the darling match.

MATEY. Tidy-looking Petitey Corona, this. There was a time when one of that sort would have run away with two days of my screw.

LADY CAROLINE. How I should have loved, Jim, to know you when you were poor. Fancy your having once been a clerk.

MATEY (remembering Napoleon and others). We all have our beginnings. But it wouldn't have mattered how I began, Carolyn: I should have come to the top just the same. (Becoming a poet himself.) I am a climber and there are nails in my boots for the parties beneath me. Boots! I tell you if I had been a bootmaker, I should have been the first bootmaker in London.

LADY CAROLINE (a humourist at last). I am sure you would, Jim; but should you have made the best boots?

MATEY (uxoriously wishing that others could have heard this). Very good. Carolyn; that is the nearest thing I have heard you say. But it's late; we had best be strolling back to our Rolls-Royce.

LADY CAROLINE (as they rise). I do hope the ground wasn't damp.

MATEY. Don't matter if it was; I was lying on your rug.

(Indeed we notice now that he has had all the rug, and she the bare ground. JOANNA reaches the glade, now an unhappy lady who has got what she wanted. She is in country dress and is unknown to them as they are to her.) Who is the mournful party?

JOANNA (hesitating). I wonder, sir, whether you happen to have seen my husband? I have lost him in the wood.

MATEY. We are strangers in these parts ourselves, missis. Have we passed any one, Caroliny?

LADY CAROLINE (coyly). Should we have noticed, dear? Might it be that old gent over there? (After the delightful manner of those happily wed she has already picked up many of her lover's favourite words and phrases.)

JOANNA. Oh no, my husband is quite young.

(The woodlander referred to is MR COADE in gala costume; at his mouth a whistle he has made him from some friendly twig. To its ravishing music he is seen pirouetting charmingly among the trees, his new occupation.)

MATEY (signing to the unknown that he is wanted). Seems a merry old cock. Evening to you, sir. Do you happen to have seen a young gentleman in the wood lately, all by himself, and looking for his wife?

COADE (with a flourish of his legs). Can't say I have.

JOANNA (dolefully). He isn't necessarily by himself; and I don't know that he is looking for me. There may be a young lady with him.

(The more happily married lady smiles, and Joanna is quick to take offence.)

JOANNA. What do you mean by that? LADY CAROLINE (neatly). Oho--if you like that better.

MATEY. Now, now, now--your manners, Caroliny.

COADE. Would he be singing or dancing?

JOANNA. Oh no--at least, I hope not.

COADE (an artist to the tips). Hope not? Odd! If he is doing neither I am not likely to notice him, but if I do, what name shall I say?

JOANNA (gloating not). Purdie; I am Mrs. Purdie.

COADE. I will try to keep a look-out, and if I see him ... but I am rather occupied at present ... (The reference is to his legs and a new step they

are acquiring. He sways this way and that, and, whistle to lips, minuets off in the direction of Paradise.)

JOANNA (looking elsewhere). I am sorry I troubled you. I see him now.

LADY CAROLINE. Is he alone?

(JOANNA glares at her.)

Ah, I see from your face that he isn't.

MATEY (who has his wench in training). Caroliny, no awkward questions. Evening, missis, and I hope you will get him to go along with you quietly. (Looking after COADE.) Watch the old codger dancing.

(Light-hearted as children they dance after him, while JOANNA behind a tree awaits her lord. PURDIE in knickerbockers approaches with misgivings to make sure that his JOANNA is not in hiding, and then he gambols joyously with a charming confection whose name is MABEL. They chase each other from tree to tree, but fortunately not round JOANNA'S tree.)

MABEL (as he catches her). No, and no, and no. I don't know you nearly well enough for that. Besides, what would your wife say! I shall begin to think you are a very dreadful man, Mr. Purdie.

PURDIE (whose sincerity is not to be questioned). Surely you might call me Jack by this time.

MABEL (heaving). Perhaps, if you are very good, Jack.

PURDIE (of noble thoughts compact). If only Joanna were more like you.

MABEL. Like me? You mean her face? It is a--well, if it is not precisely pretty, it is a good face. (Handsomely.) I don't mind her face at all. I am glad you have got such a dependable little wife, Jack.

PURDIE (gloomily). Thanks.

MABEL (seated with a moonbeam in her lap). What would Joanna have said if she had seen you just now?

PURDIE. A wife should be incapable of jealousy.

MABEL Joanna jealous? But has she any reason? Jack, tell me, who is the woman?

PURDIE (restraining himself by a mighty effort, for he wishes always to be true to JOANNA). Shall I, Mabel, shall I?

MABEL (faltering, yet not wholly giving up the chase). I can't think who she is. Have I ever seen her?

PURDIE. Every time you look in a mirror.

MABEL (with her head on one side). How odd, Jack, that can't be; when I look in a mirror I see only myself.

PURDIE (gloating). How adorably innocent you are, Mabel. Joanna would have guessed at once.

(Slowly his meaning comes to her, and she is appalled.)

MABEL. Not that!

PURDIE (aflame). Shall I tell you now?

MABEL (palpitating exquisitely). I don't know, I am not sure. Jack, try not to say it, but if you feel you must, say it in such a way that it would not hurt the feelings of Joanna if she happened to be passing by, as she nearly always is.

(A little moan from JOANNA'S tree is unnoticed.)

PURDIE. I would rather not say it at all than that way. (He is touchingly anxious that she should know him as he really is.) I don't know, Mabel, whether you have noticed that I am not like other men. (He goes deeply into the very structure of his being.) All my life I have been a soul that has had to walk alone. Even as a child I had no hope that it would be otherwise. I distinctly remember when I was six thinking how unlike other children I was. Before I was twelve I suffered from terrible self-depreciation; I do so still. I suppose there never was a man who had a more lowly opinion of himself.

MABEL. Jack, you who are so universally admired.

PURDIE. That doesn't help; I remain my own judge. I am afraid I am a dark spirit, Mabel. Yes, yes, my dear, let me leave nothing untold however it may damage me in your eyes. Your eyes! I cannot remember a

time when I did not think of Love as a great consuming passion; I visualised it, Mabel, as perhaps few have done, but always as the abounding joy that could come to others but never to me. I expected too much of women: I suppose I was touched to finer issues than most. That has been my tragedy.

MABEL. Then you met Joanna.

PURDIE. Then I met Joanna. Yes! Foolishly, as I now see, I thought she would understand that I was far too deep a nature really to mean the little things I sometimes said to her. I suppose a man was never placed in such a position before. What was I to do? Remember, I was always certain that the ideal love could never come to me. Whatever the circumstances, I was convinced that my soul must walk alone.

MABEL. Joanna, how could you.

PURDIE (firmly). Not a word against her, Mabel; if blame there is the blame is mine.

MABEL. And so you married her.

PURDIE. And so I married her.

MABEL. Out of pity.

PURDIE. I felt it was a man's part. I was such a child in worldly matters that it was pleasant to me to have the right to pay a woman's bills; I enjoyed seeing her garments lying about on my chairs. In time that exultation wore off. But I was not unhappy, I didn't expect much, I was always so sure that no woman could ever plumb the well of my emotions.

MABEL. Then you met me.

PURDIE. Then I met you.

MABEL. Too late--never--forever--forever--never. They are the saddest words in the English tongue.

PURDIE. At the time I thought a still sadder word was Joanna.

MABEL. What was it you saw in me that made you love me?

PURDIE (plumbing the well of his emotions). I think it was the feeling that you are so like myself.

MABEL (with great eyes). Have you noticed that, Jack? Sometimes it has almost terrified me.

PURDIE. We think the same thoughts; we are not two, Mabel; we are one. Your hair--

MABEL. Joanna knows you admire it, and for a week she did hers in the same way.

PURDIE. I never noticed.

MABEL. That was why she gave it up. And it didn't really suit her. (Ruminating.) I can't think of a good way of doing dear Joanna's hair. What is that you are muttering to yourself, Jack? Don't keep anything from me.

PURDIE. I was repeating a poem I have written: it is in two words, 'Mabel Purdie.' May I teach it to you, sweet: say 'Mabel Purdie' to me.

MABEL (timidly covering his mouth with her little hand). If I were to say it, Jack, I should be false to Joanna: never ask me to be that. Let us go on.

PURDIE (merciless in his passion). Say it, Mabel, say it. See I write it on the ground with your sunshade.

MABEL. If it could be! Jack, I'll whisper it to you.

(She is whispering it as they wander, not two but one, farther into the forest, ardently believing in themselves; they are not hypocrites. The somewhat bedraggled figure of Joanna follows them, and the nightingale resumes his love-song. 'That's all you know, you bird!' thinks Joanna cynically. The nightingale, however, is not singing for them nor for her, but for another pair he has espied below. They are racing, the prize to be for the one who first finds the spot where the easel was put up last night. The hobbledehoy is sure to be the winner, for she is less laden, and the father loses time by singing as he comes. Also she is all legs and she started ahead. Brambles adhere to her, one boot has been in the water and she has as many freckles as there are stars in heaven. She is as lovely as you think she is, and she is aged the moment when you like your daughter best. A hoot of triumph from her brings her father to the spot.)

MARGARET. Daddy, Daddy. I have won. Here is the place. Crack-in-my-eye-Tommy!

(He comes. Crack-in-my-eye-Tommy, this engaging fellow in tweeds is MR. DEARTH, ablaze in happiness and health and a daughter. He finishes his song, picked up in the Latin Quarter.)

DEARTH. Yes, that is the tree I stuck my easel under last night, and behold the blessed moon behaving more gorgeously than ever. I am sorry to have kept you waiting, old moon; but you ought to know by now how time passes. Now, keep still, while I hand you down to posterity.

(The easel is erected, MARGARET helping by getting in the way.)

MARGARET (critical, as an artist's daughter should be.) The moon is rather pale to-night, isn't she?

DEARTH. Comes of keeping late hours.

MARGARET (showing off). Daddy, watch me, look at me. Please, sweet moon, a pleasant expression. No, no, not as if you were sitting or it; that is too professional. That is better; thank you. Now keep it. That is the sort of thing you say to them, Dad.

DEARTH (quickly at work). I oughtn't to have brought you out so late; you should be tucked up in your cosy bed at home.

MARGARET (pursuing a squirrel that isn't there). With the pillow anyhow.

DEARTH. Except in its proper place.

MARGARET (wetting the other foot). And the sheet over my face.

DEARTH. Where it oughtn't to be.

MARGARET (more or less upside down). And Daddy tiptoeing in to take it off.

DEARTH. Which is more than you deserve.

MARGARET (in a tree). Then why does he stand so long at the door? And before he has gone she bursts out laughing, for she has been awake all the time.

DEARTH. That's about it. What a life! But I oughtn't to have brought you here. Best to have the sheet over you when the moon is about; moonlight is bad for little daughters.

MARGARET (pelting him with nuts). I can't sleep when the moon's at the full; she keeps calling to me to get up. Perhaps I am her daughter too.

DEARTH. Gad, you look it to-night.

MARGARET. Do I? Then can't you paint me into the picture as well as Mamma? You could call it 'A Mother and Daughter' or simply 'Two ladies.' if the moon thinks that calling me her daughter would make her seem too old.

DEARTH. O matre pulchra filia pulchrior. That means, 'O Moon--more beautiful than any twopenny-halfpenny daughter.'

MARGARET (emerging in an unexpected place). Daddy, do you really prefer her?

DEARTH. 'Sh! She's not a patch on you; it's the sort of thing we say to our sitters to keep them in good humour. (He surveys ruefully a great stain on her frock.) I wish to heaven, Margaret, we were not both so fond of apple-tart. And what's this? (Catching hold of her skirt.)

MARGARET (unnecessarily). It's a tear.

DEARTH. I should think it is a tear.

MARGARET. That boy at the farm did it. He kept calling Snubs after me, but I got him down and kicked him in the stomach. He is rather a jolly boy.

DEARTH. He sounds it. Ye Gods, what a night!

MARGARET (considering the picture). And what a moon! Dad, she is not quite so fine as that.

DEARTH. 'Sh! I have touched her up.

MARGARET. Dad, Dad--what a funny man!

(She has seen MR. COADE with whistle, enlivening the wood. He pirouettes round them and departs to add to the happiness of others. MARGARET gives an excellent imitation of him at which her father

shakes his head, then reprehensibly joins in the dance. Her mood changes, she clings to him.)

MARGARET. Hold me tight, Daddy, I 'm frightened. I think they want to take you away from me.

DEARTH. Who, gosling?

MARGARET. I don't know. It's too lovely, Daddy; I won't be able to keep hold of it.

DEARTH. What is?

MARGARET. The world--everything--and you, Daddy, most of all. Things that are too beautiful can't last.

DEARTH (who knows it). Now, how did you find that out?

MARGARET (still in his arms). I don't know, Daddy, am I sometimes stranger than other people's daughters?

DEARTH. More of a madcap, perhaps.

MARGARET (solemnly). Do you think I am sometimes too full of gladness?

DEARTH. My sweetheart, you do sometimes run over with it. (He is at his easel again.)

MARGARET (persisting). To be very gay, dearest dear, is so near to being very sad.

DEARTH (who knows it). How did you find that out, child?

MARGARET. I don't know. From something in me that's afraid. (Unexpectedly.) Daddy, what is a 'might-have-been?'

DEARTH. A might-have-been? They are ghosts, Margaret. I daresay I 'might have been' a great swell of a painter, instead of just this uncommonly happy nobody. Or again, I might have been a worthless idle waster of a fellow.

MARGARET (laughing). You!

DEARTH. Who knows? Some little kink in me might have set me off on the wrong road. And that poor soul I might so easily have been might have had no Margaret. My word, I'm sorry for him.

MARGARET. So am I. (She conceives a funny picture.) The poor old Daddy, wandering about the world without me!

DEARTH. And there are other 'might-have-beens'--lovely ones, but intangible. Shades, Margaret, made of sad folk's thoughts.

MARGARET (jigging about). I am so glad I am not a shade. How awful it would be, Daddy, to wake up and find one wasn't alive.

DEARTH. It would, dear.

MARGARET. Daddy, wouldn't it be awful. I think men need daughters.

DEARTH. They do.

MARGARET. Especially artists.

DEARTH. Yes, especially artists.

MARGARET. Especially artists.

DEARTH. Especially artists.

MARGARET (covering herself with leaves and kicking them off). Fame is not everything.

DEARTH. Fame is rot; daughters are the thing.

MARGARET. Daughters are the thing.

DEARTH. Daughters are the thing.

MARGARET. I wonder if sons would be even nicer?

DEARTH. Not a patch on daughters. The awful thing about a son is that never, never--at least, from the day he goes to school--can you tell him that you rather like him. By the time he is ten you can't even take him on your knee. Sons are not worth having, Margaret. Signed W. Dearth.

MARGARET. But if you were a mother, Dad, I daresay he would let you do it.

DEARTH. Think so?

MARGARET. I mean when no one was looking. Sons are not so bad. Signed, M. Dearth. But I'm glad you prefer daughters. (She works her way toward him on her knees, making the tear larger.) At what age are we nicest, Daddy? (She has constantly to repeat her questions, he is so engaged with his moon.) Hie, Daddy, at what age are we nicest? Daddy, hie, hie, at what age are we nicest?

DEARTH. Eh? That's a poser. I think you were nicest when you were two and knew your alphabet up to G but fell over at H. No, you were best when you were half-past three; or just before you struck six; or in the mumps year, when I asked you in the early morning how you were and you said solemnly 'I haven't tried yet.'

MARGARET (awestruck). Did I?

DEARTH. Such was your answer. (Struggling with the momentous question.) But I am not sure that chicken-pox doesn't beat mumps. Oh Lord, I'm all wrong. The nicest time in a father's life is the year before she puts up her hair.

MARGARET (topheavy with pride in herself). I suppose that is a splendid time. But there's a nicer year coming to you. Daddy, there is a nicer year coming to you.

DEARTH. Is there, darling?

MARGARET. Daddy, the year she does put up her hair!

DEARTH. (with arrested brush). Puts it up for ever? You know, I am afraid that when the day for that comes I shan't be able to stand it. It will be too exciting. My poor heart, Margaret.

MARGARET (rushing at him). No, no, it will be lucky you, for it isn't to be a bit like that. I am to be a girl and woman day about for the first year. You will never know which I am till you look at my hair. And even then you won't know, for if it is down I shall put it up, and if it is up I shall put it down. And so my Daddy will gradually get used to the idea.

DEARTH. (wryly). I see you have been thinking it out.

MARGARET (gleaming). I have been doing more than that. Shut your eyes, Dad, and I shall give you a glimpse into the future.

DEARTH. I don't know that I want that: the present is so good.

MARGARET. Shut your eyes, please.

DEARTH. No, Margaret.

MARGARET. Please, Daddy. DEARTH.

Oh, all right. They are shut.

MARGARET. Don't open them till I tell you. What finger is that?

DEARTH. The dirty one.

MARGARET (on her knees among the leaves). Daddy, now I am putting up my hair. I have got such a darling of a mirror. It is such a darling mirror I 've got, Dad. Dad, don't look. I shall tell you about it. It is a little pool of water. I wish we could take it home and hang it up. Of course the moment my hair is up there will be other changes also; for instance, I shall talk quite differently.

DEARTH. Pooh. Where are my matches, dear?

MARGARET, Top pocket, waistcoat.

DEARTH (trying to light his pipe in darkness). You were meaning to frighten me just now.

MARGARET. No. I am just preparing you. You see, darling, I can't call you Dad when my hair is up. I think I shall call you Parent. (He growls.) Parent dear, do you remember the days when your Margaret was a slip of a girl, and sat on your knee? How foolish we were, Parent, in those distant days.

DEARTH. Shut up, Margaret.

MARGARET. Now I must be more distant to you; more like a boy who could not sit on your knee any more.

DEARTH. See here, I want to go on painting. Shall I look now?

MARGARET. I am not quite sure whether I want you to. It makes such a difference. Perhaps you won't know me. Even the pool is looking a little scared. (The change in her voice makes him open his eyes quickly. She confronts him shyly.) What do you think? Will I do?

DEARTH. Stand still, dear, and let me look my fill. The Margaret that is to be.

MARGARET (the change in his voice falling clammy on her). You'll see me often enough, Daddy, like this, so you don't need to look your fill. You are looking as long as if this were to be the only time.

DEARTH. (with an odd tremor). Was I? Surely it isn't to be that.

MARGARET. Be gay, Dad. (Bumping into him and round him and over him.) You will be sick of Margaret with her hair up before you are done with her.

DEARTH. I expect so.

MARGARET. Shut up, Daddy. (She waggles her head, and down comes her hair.) Daddy, I know what you are thinking of. You are thinking what a handful she is going to be.

DEARTH. Well, I guess she is.

MARGARET (surveying him from another angle). Now you are thinking about--about my being in love some day.

DEARTH (with unnecessary warmth). Rot!

MARGARET (reassuringly). I won't, you know; no, never. Oh, I have quite decided, so don't be afraid, (Disordering his hair.) Will you hate him at first, Daddy? Daddy, will you hate him? Will you hate him, Daddy?

DEARTH (at work). Whom?

MARGARET. Well, if there was?

DEARTH. If there was what, darling?

MARGARET. You know the kind of thing I mean, quite well. Would you hate him at first?

DEARTH. I hope not. I should want to strangle him, but I wouldn't hate him.

MARGARET. I would. That is to say, if I liked him.

DEARTH. If you liked him how could you hate him?

MARGARET. For daring!

DEARTH. Daring what?

MARGARET. You know. (Sighing.) But of course I shall have no say in the matter. You will do it all. You do everything for me.

DEARTH (with a groan). I can't help it.

MARGARET. You will even write my love-letters, if I ever have any to write, which I won't.

DEARTH (ashamed). Surely to goodness, Margaret, I will leave you alone to do that!

MARGARET. Not you; you will try to, but you won't be able.

DEARTH (in a hopeless attempt at self-defence). I want you, you see, to do everything exquisitely. I do wish I could leave you to do things a little more for yourself. I suppose it's owing to my having had to be father and mother both. I knew nothing practically about the bringing up of children, and of course I couldn't trust you to a nurse.

MARGARET (severely). Not you; so sure you could do it better yourself. That's you all over. Daddy, do you remember how you taught me to balance a biscuit on my nose, like a puppy?

DEARTH (sadly). Did I?

MARGARET. You called me Rover.

DEARTH. I deny that.

MARGARET. And when you said 'snap' I caught the biscuit in my mouth.

DEARTH. Horrible.

MARGARET (gleaming). Daddy, I can do it still! (Putting a biscuit on her nose.) Here is the last of my supper. Say 'snap,' Daddy.

DEARTH. Not I.

MARGARET. Say 'snap,' please.

DEARTH. I refuse.

MARGARET. Daddy!

DEARTH. Snap. (She catches the biscuit in her mouth.) Let that be the last time, Margaret.

MARGARET. Except just once more. I don't mean now, but when my hair is really up. If I should ever have a--a Margaret of my own, come in and see me, Daddy, in my white bed, and say 'snap'--and I'll have the biscuit ready.

DEARTH (turning away his head). Right O.

MARGARET. Dad, if I ever should marry, not that I will but if I should--at the marriage ceremony will you let me be the one who says 'I do'?

DEARTH. I suppose I deserve this.

MARGARET (coaxingly). You think I 'm pretty, don't you, Dad, whatever other people say?

DEARTH. Not so bad.

MARGARET. I know I have nice ears.

DEARTH. They are all right now, but I had to work on them for months.

MARGARET. You don't mean to say that you did my ears?

DEARTH. Rather!

MARGARET (grown humble). My dimple is my own.

DEARTH. I am glad you think so. I wore out the point of my little finger over that dimple.

MARGARET. Even my dimple! Have I anything that is really mine? A bit of my nose or anything?

DEARTH. When you were a babe you had a laugh that was all your own.

MARGARET. Haven't I it now?

DEARTH. It's gone. (He looks ruefully at her.) I'll tell you how it went. We were fishing in a stream--that is to say, I was wading and you were sitting on my shoulders holding the rod. We didn't catch anything. Somehow or another--I can't think how I did it--you irritated me, and I answered you sharply.

MARGARET (gasping). I can't believe that.

DEARTH. Yes, it sounds extraordinary, but I did. It gave you a shock, and, for the moment, the world no longer seemed a safe place to you; your faith in me had always made it safe till then. You were suddenly not even sure of your bread and butter, and a frightened tear came to your eyes. I was in a nice state about it, I can tell you. (He is in a nice state about it still.)

MARGARET. Silly! (Bewildered) But what has that to do with my laugh, Daddy?

DEARTH. The laugh that children are born with lasts just so long as they have perfect faith. To think that it was I who robbed you of yours!

MARGARET. Don't, dear. I am sure the laugh just went off with the tear to comfort it, and they have been playing about that stream ever since. They have quite forgotten us, so why should we remember them. Cheeky little beasts! Shall I tell you my farthest back recollection? (In some awe.) I remember the first time I saw the stars. I had never seen night, and then I saw it and the stars together. Crack-in-my-eye Tommy, it isn't every one who can boast of such a lovely, lovely, recollection for their earliest, is it?

DEARTH. I was determined your earliest should be a good one.

MARGARET (blankly). Do you mean to say you planned it?

DEARTH. Rather! Most people's earliest recollection is of some trivial thing; how they cut their finger, or lost a piece of string. I was resolved my Margaret's should be something bigger. I was poor, but I could give her the stars.

MARGARET (clutching him round the legs). Oh, how you love me, Daddikins.

DEARTH. Yes, I do, rather.

(A vagrant woman has wandered in their direction, one whom the shrill winds of life have lashed and bled; here and there ragged graces still cling to her, and unruly passion smoulders, but she, once a dear, fierce rebel, with eyes of storm, is now first of all a whimperer. She and they meet as strangers.)

MARGARET (nicely, as becomes an artist's daughter.) Good evening.

ALICE. Good evening, Missy; evening, Mister.

DEARTH (seeing that her eyes search the ground). Lost anything?

ALICE. Sometimes when the tourists have had their sandwiches there are bits left over, and they squeeze them between the roots to keep the place tidy. I am looking for bits.

DEARTH. You don't tell me you are as hungry as that?

ALICE (with spirit). Try me. (Strange that he should not know that once loved husky voice.)

MARGARET (rushing at her father and feeling all his pockets.) Daddy, that was my last biscuit!

DEARTH. We must think of something else.

MARGARET (taking her hand). Yes, wait a bit, we are sure to think of something. Daddy, think of something.

ALICE (sharply). Your father doesn't like you to touch the likes of me.

MARGARET. Oh yes, he does. (Defiantly) And if he didn't, I'd do it all the same. This is a bit of myself, daddy.

DEARTH. That is all you know.

ALICE (whining). You needn't be angry with her. Mister; I'm all right.

DEARTH. I am not angry with her; I am very sorry for you.

ALICE (flaring). if I had my rights, I would be as good as you--and better.

DEARTH. I daresay.

ALICE. I have had men-servants and a motor-car. DEARTH. Margaret and I never rose to that.

MARGARET (stung). I have been in a taxi several times, and Dad often gets telegrams.

DEARTH. Margaret! MARGARET.

I'm sorry I boasted.

ALICE. That's nothing. I have a town house--at least I had ... At any rate he said there was a town house.

MARGARET (interested). Fancy his not knowing for certain.

ALICE. The Honourable Mrs. Finch-Fallowe--that's who I am.

MARGARET (cordially). It's a lovely name.

ALICE. Curse him.

MARGARET. Don't you like him?

DEARTH. We won't go into that. I have nothing to do with your past, but I wish we had some food to offer you.

ALICE. You haven't a flask?

DEARTH. No, I don't take anything myself. But let me see....

MARGARET (sparkling). I know! You said we had five pounds. (To the needy one.) Would you like five pounds?

DEARTH. Darling, don't be stupid; we haven't paid our bill at the inn.

ALICE (with bravado). All right; I never asked you for anything.

DEARTH. Don't take me up in that way: I have had my ups and downs myself. Here is ten bob and welcome.

(He surreptitiously slips a coin into MARGARET'S hand.)

MARGARET. And I have half a crown. It is quite easy for us. Dad will be getting another fiver any day. You can't think how exciting it is when the fiver comes in; we dance and then we run out and buy chops.

DEARTH. Margaret!

ALICE. It's kind of you. I'm richer this minute than I have been for many a day.

DEARTH. It's nothing; I am sure you would do the same for us.

ALICE. I wish I was as sure.

DEARTH. Of course you would. Glad to be of any help. Get some victuals as quickly as you can. Best of wishes, ma'am, and may your luck change.

ALICE. Same to you, and may yours go on.

MARGARET. Good-night.

ALICE. What is her name, Mister?

DEARTH (who has returned to his easel). Margaret.

ALICE. Margaret. You drew something good out of the lucky bag when you got her, Mister.

DEARTH. Yes.

ALICE. Take care of her; they are easily lost.

(She shuffles away.)

DEARTH. Poor soul. I expect she has had a rough time, and that some man is to blame for it--partly, at any rate. (Restless) That woman rather affects me, Margaret; I don't know why. Didn't you like her husky voice? (He goes on painting.) I say, Margaret, we lucky ones, let's swear always to be kind to people who are down on their luck, and then when we are kind let's be a little kinder.

MARGARET (gleefully). Yes, let's.

DEARTH. Margaret, always feel sorry for the failures, the ones who are always failures--especially in my sort of calling. Wouldn't it be lovely, to turn them on the thirty-ninth year of failure into glittering successes?

MARGARET. Topping.

DEARTH. Topping.

MARGARET. Oh, topping. How could we do it, Dad?

DEARTH. By letter. 'To poor old Tom Broken Heart, Top Attic, Garret Chambers, S.E.--'DEAR SIR,--His Majesty has been graciously pleased to purchase your superb picture of Marlow Ferry.'

MARGARET. 'P.S.--I am sending the money in a sack so as you can hear it chink.'

DEARTH. What could we do for our friend who passed just now? I can't get her out of my head.

MARGARET. You have made me forget her. (Plaintively) Dad, I didn't like it.

DEARTH. Didn't like what, dear?

MARGARET (shuddering). I didn't like her saying that about your losing me.

DEARTH (the one thing of which he is sure). I shan't lose you.

MARGARET (hugging his arm). It would be hard for me if you lost me, but it would be worse for you. I don't know how I know that, but I do know it. What would you do without me?

DEARTH (almost sharply). Don't talk like that, dear. It is wicked and stupid, and naughty. Somehow that poor woman--I won't paint any more to-night.

MARGARET. Let's get out of the wood; it frightens me.

DEARTH. And you loved it a moment ago. Hullo! (He has seen a distant blurred light in the wood, apparently from a window.) I hadn't noticed there was a house there.

MARGARET (tingling). Daddy, I feel sure there wasn't a house there!

DEARTH. Goose. It is just that we didn't look: our old way of letting the world go hang; so interested in ourselves. Nice behaviour for people who have been boasting about what they would do for other people. Now I see what I ought to do.

MARGARET. Let's get out of the wood.

DEARTH. Yes, but my idea first. It is to rouse these people and get food from them for the husky one.

MARGARET (clinging to him). She is too far away now.

DEARTH. I can overtake her.

MARGARET (in a frenzy). Don't go into that house, Daddy! I don't know why it is, but I am afraid of that house!

(He waggles a reproving finger at her.)

DEARTH. There is a kiss for each moment until I come back. (She wipes them from her face.) Oh, naughty, go and stand in the corner. (She stands against a tree but she stamps her foot.) Who has got a nasty temper!

(She tries hard not to smile, but she smiles and he smiles, and they make comic faces at each other, as they have done in similar circumstances since she first opened her eyes.)

I shall be back before you can count a hundred.

(He goes off humming his song so that she may still hear him when he is lost to sight; all just as so often before. She tries dutifully to count her hundred, but the wood grows dark and soon she is afraid again. She runs from tree to tree calling to her Daddy. We begin to lose her among the shadows.)

MARGARET (Out of the impalpable that is carrying her away). Daddy, come back; I don't want to be a might-have-been.