

At this date the Casterbridge Barracks were cavalry quarters, their adaptation to artillery having been effected some years later. It had been owing to the fact that the ---th Dragoons, in which John Clark had served, happened to be lying there that Selina made his acquaintance. At the time of his death the barracks were occupied by the Scots Greys, but when the pathetic circumstances of the sergeant-major's end became known in the town the officers of the Greys offered the services of their fine reed and brass band, that he might have a funeral marked by due military honours. His body was accordingly removed to the barracks, and carried thence to the churchyard in the Durnover quarter on the following afternoon, one of the Greys' most ancient and docile chargers being blacked up to represent Clark's horse on the occasion.

Everybody pitied Selina, whose story was well known. She followed the corpse as the only mourner, Clark having been without relations in this part of the country, and a communication with his regiment having brought none from a distance. She sat in a little shabby brown-black mourning carriage, squeezing herself up in a corner to be as much as possible out of sight during the slow and dramatic march through the town to the tune from Saul. When the interment had taken place, the volleys been fired, and the return journey begun, it was with something like a shock that she found the military escort to be moving at a quick march to the lively strains of 'Off she goes!' as if all care for the sergeant-major was

expected to be ended with the late discharge of the carbines. It was, by chance, the very tune to which they had been footing when he died, and unable to bear its notes, she hastily told her driver to drop behind. The band and military party diminished up the High Street, and Selina turned over Swan bridge and homeward to Mellstock.

Then recommenced for her a life whose incidents were precisely of a suit with those which had preceded the soldier's return; but how different in her appreciation of them! Her narrow miss of the recovered respectability they had hoped for from that tardy event worked upon her parents as an irritant, and after the first week or two of her mourning her life with them grew almost insupportable. She had impulsively taken to herself the weeds of a widow, for such she seemed to herself to be, and clothed little Johnny in sables likewise. This assumption of a moral relationship to the deceased, which she asserted to be only not a legal one by two most unexpected accidents, led the old people to indulge in sarcasm at her expense whenever they beheld her attire, though all the while it cost them more pain to utter than it gave her to hear it. Having become accustomed by her residence at home to the business carried on by her father, she surprised them one day by going off with the child to Chalk-Newton, in the direction of the town of Ivell, and opening a miniature fruit and vegetable shop, attending Ivell market with her produce. Her business grew somewhat larger, and it was soon sufficient to enable her to support herself and the boy in comfort. She called herself 'Mrs. John Clark' from the day of leaving home, and painted the name on her signboard--no man forbidding her.

By degrees the pain of her state was forgotten in her new circumstances, and getting to be generally accepted as the widow of a sergeant-major of dragoons--an assumption which her modest and mournful demeanour seemed to

substantiate--her life became a placid one, her mind being nourished by the melancholy luxury of dreaming what might have been her future in New Zealand with John, if he had only lived to take her there. Her only travels now were a journey to Ivell on market-days, and once a fortnight to the churchyard in which Clark lay, there to tend, with Johnny's assistance, as widows are wont to do, the flowers she had planted upon his grave.

On a day about eighteen months after his unexpected decease, Selina was surprised in her lodging over her little shop by a visit from Bartholomew Miller. He had called on her once or twice before, on which occasions he had used without a word of comment the name by which she was known.

'I've come this time,' he said, 'less because I was in this direction than to ask you, Mrs. Clark, what you mid well guess. I've come o' purpose, in short.'

She smiled.

"Tis to ask me again to marry you?"

'Yes, of course. You see, his coming back for 'ee proved what I always believed of 'ee, though others didn't. There's nobody but would be glad to welcome you to our parish again, now you've showed your independence and acted up to your trust in his promise. Well, my dear, will you come?'

'I'd rather bide as Mrs. Clark, I think,' she answered. 'I am not ashamed of my position at all; for I am John's widow in the eyes of Heaven.'

'I quite agree--that's why I've come. Still, you won't like to be always straining at this shop-keeping and market-standing; and 'twould be better for Johnny if you had nothing to do but tend him.'

He here touched the only weak spot in Selina's resistance to his proposal--the good of the boy. To promote that there were other men she might have married offhand without loving them if they had asked her to; but though she had known the worthy speaker from her youth, she could not for the moment fancy herself happy as Mrs. Miller.

He paused awhile. 'I ought to tell 'ee, Mrs. Clark,' he said by and by, 'that marrying is getting to be a pressing question with me. Not on my own account at all. The truth is, that mother is growing old, and I am away from home a good deal, so that it is almost necessary there should be another person in the house with her besides me. That's the practical

consideration which forces me to think of taking a wife, apart from my wish to take you; and you know there's nobody in the world I care for so much.'

She said something about there being far better women than she, and other natural commonplaces; but assured him she was most grateful to him for feeling what he felt, as indeed she sincerely was. However, Selina would not consent to be the useful third person in his comfortable home--at any rate just then. He went away, after taking tea with her, without discerning much hope for him in her good-bye.