CHAPTER VII

NATCHA-KEE-TAWARA

Mr. May and Alvina became almost inseparable, and Woodhouse buzzed with scandal. Woodhouse could not believe that Mr. May was absolutely final in his horror of any sort of coming-on-ness in a woman. It could not believe that he was only so fond of Alvina because she was like a sister to him, poor, lonely, harassed soul that he was: a pure sister who really hadn't any body. For although Mr. May was rather fond, in an epicurean way, of his own body, yet other people's bodies rather made him shudder. So that his grand utterance on Alvina was: "She's not physical, she's mental."

He even explained to her one day how it was, in his naïve fashion.

"There are two kinds of friendships," he said, "physical and mental. The physical is a thing of the moment. Of cauce you quite like the individual, you remain quite nice with them, and so on,--to keep the thing as decent as possible. It is quite decent, so long as you keep it so. But it is a thing of the moment. Which you know. It may last a week or two, or a month or two. But you know from the beginning it is going to end--quite finally--quite soon. You take it for what it is. But it's so different with the mental friendships. They are lasting. They are eternal--if anything human (he said

yuman) ever is eternal, ever can be eternal." He pressed his hands together in an odd cherubic manner. He was quite sincere: if man ever can be quite sincere.

Alvina was quite content to be one of his mental and eternal friends, or rather friendships--since she existed in abstractu as far as he was concerned. For she did not find him at all physically moving. Physically he was not there: he was oddly an absentee. But his naïveté roused the serpent's tooth of her bitter irony.

"And your wife?" she said to him.

"Oh, my wife! Dreadful thought! There I made the great mistake of trying to find the two in one person! And didn't I fall between two stools! Oh dear, didn't I? Oh, I fell between the two stools beautifully, beautifully! And then--she nearly set the stools on top of me. I thought I should never get up again. When I was physical, she was mental--Bernard Shaw and cold baths for supper!--and when I was mental she was physical, and threw her arms round my neck. In the morning, mark you. Always in the morning, when I was on the alert for business. Yes, invariably. What do you think of it? Could the devil himself have invented anything more trying? Oh dear me, don't mention it. Oh, what a time I had! Wonder I'm alive. Yes, really! Although you smile."

Alvina did more than smile. She laughed outright. And yet she remained good friends with the odd little man.

He bought himself a new, smart overcoat, that fitted his figure, and a new velour hat. And she even noticed, one day when he was curling himself up cosily on the sofa, that he had pale blue silk underwear, and purple silk suspenders. She wondered where he got them, and how he afforded them. But there they were.

James seemed for the time being wrapt in his undertaking--particularly in the takings part of it. He seemed for the time being contented--or nearly so, nearly so. Certainly there was money coming in. But then he had to pay off all he had borrowed to buy his erection and its furnishings, and a bulk of pennies sublimated into a very small £.s.d. account, at the bank.

The Endeavour was successful--yes, it was successful. But not overwhelmingly so. On wet nights Woodhouse did not care to trail down to Lumley. And then Lumley was one of those depressed, negative spots on the face of the earth which have no pull at all. In that region of sharp hills with fine hill-brows, and shallow, rather dreary canal-valleys, it was the places on the hill-brows, like Woodhouse and Hathersedge and Rapton which flourished, while the dreary places down along the canals existed only for work-places, not for life and pleasure. It was just like James to have planted his endeavour down in the stagnant dust and rust of potteries and

foundries, where no illusion could bloom.

He had dreamed of crowded houses every night, and of raised prices. But there was no probability of his being able to raise his prices. He had to figure lower than the Woodhouse Empire. He was second-rate from the start. His hope now lay in the tramway which was being built from Knarborough away through the country--a black country indeed--through Woodhouse and Lumley and Hathersedge, to Rapton. When once this tramway-system was working, he would have a supply of youths and lasses always on tap, as it were. So he spread his rainbow wings towards the future, and began to say:

"When we've got the trams, I shall buy a new machine and finer lenses, and I shall extend my premises."

Mr. May did not talk business to Alvina. He was terribly secretive with respect to business. But he said to her once, in the early year following their opening:

"Well, how do you think we're doing, Miss Houghton?"

"We're not doing any better than we did at first, I think," she said.

"No," he answered. "No! That's true. That's perfectly true. But why? They seem to like the programs."

"I think they do," said Alvina. "I think they like them when they're there. But isn't it funny, they don't seem to want to come to them. I know they always talk as if we were second-rate. And they only come because they can't get to the Empire, or up to Hathersedge. We're a stop-gap. I know we are."

Mr. May looked down in the mouth. He cocked his blue eyes at her, miserable and frightened. Failure began to frighten him abjectly.

"Why do you think that is?" he said.

"I don't believe they like the turns," she said.

"But look how they applaud them! Look how pleased they are!"

"I know. I know they like them once they're there, and they see them. But they don't come again. They crowd the Empire--and the Empire is only pictures now; and it's much cheaper to run."

He watched her dismally.

"I can't believe they want nothing but pictures. I can't believe they want everything in the flat," he said, coaxing and miserable. He himself was not interested in the film. His interest was still the human interest in living performers and their living feats.

"Why," he continued, "they are ever so much more excited after a good turn, than after any film."

"I know they are," said Alvina. "But I don't believe they want to be excited in that way."

"In what way?" asked Mr. May plaintively.

"By the things which the artistes do. I believe they're jealous."

"Oh nonsense!" exploded Mr. May, starting as if he had been shot. Then he laid his hand on her arm. "But forgive my rudeness! I don't mean it, of cauce! But do you mean to say that these collier louts and factory girls are jealous of the things the artistes do, because they could never do them themselves?"

"I'm sure they are," said Alvina.

"But I can't believe it," said Mr. May, pouting up his mouth and smiling at her as if she were a whimsical child. "What a low opinion you have of human nature!"

"Have I?" laughed Alvina. "I've never reckoned it up. But I'm sure that these common people here are jealous if anybody does anything or has anything they can't have themselves."

"I can't believe it," protested Mr. May. "Could they be so silly! And then why aren't they jealous of the extraordinary things which are done on the film?"

"Because they don't see the flesh-and-blood people. I'm sure that's it. The film is only pictures, like pictures in the Daily Mirror. And pictures don't have any feelings apart from their own feelings. I mean the feelings of the people who watch them. Pictures don't have any life except in the people who watch them. And that's why they like them. Because they make them feel that they are everything."

"The pictures make the colliers and lasses feel that they themselves are everything? But how? They identify themselves with the heroes and heroines on the screen?"

"Yes--they take it all to themselves--and there isn't anything except themselves. I know it's like that. It's because they can spread themselves over a film, and they can't over a living performer. They're up against the performer himself. And they hate it."

Mr. May watched her long and dismally.

"I can't believe people are like that!--sane people!" he said. "Why, to me the whole joy is in the living personality, the curious

personality of the artiste. That's what I enjoy so much."

"I know. But that's where you're different from them."

"But am I?"

"Yes. You're not as up to the mark as they are."

"Not up to the mark? What do you mean? Do you mean they are more intelligent?"

"No, but they're more modern. You like things which aren't yourself. But they don't. They hate to admire anything that they can't take to themselves. They hate anything that isn't themselves. And that's why they like pictures. It's all themselves to them, all the time."

He still puzzled.

"You know I don't follow you," he said, a little mocking, as if she were making a fool of herself.

"Because you don't know them. You don't know the common people. You don't know how conceited they are."

He watched her a long time.

"And you think we ought to cut out the variety, and give nothing but pictures, like the Empire?" he said.

"I believe it takes best," she said.

"And costs less," he answered. "But then! It's so dull. Oh my word, it's so dull. I don't think I could bear it."

"And our pictures aren't good enough," she said. "We should have to get a new machine, and pay for the expensive films. Our pictures do shake, and our films are rather ragged."

"But then, surely they're good enough!" he said.

That was how matters stood. The Endeavour paid its way, and made just a margin of profit--no more. Spring went on to summer, and then there was a very shadowy margin of profit. But James was not at all daunted. He was waiting now for the trams, and building up hopes since he could not build in bricks and mortar.

The navvies were busy in troops along the Knarborough Road, and down Lumley Hill. Alvina became quite used to them. As she went down the hill soon after six o'clock in the evening, she met them trooping home. And some of them she liked. There was an outlawed look about them as they swung along the pavement--some of them; and there was a certain lurking set of the head which rather frightened her because

it fascinated her. There was one tall young fellow with a red face and fair hair, who looked as if he had fronted the seas and the arctic sun. He looked at her. They knew each other quite well, in passing. And he would glance at perky Mr. May. Alvina tried to fathom what the young fellow's look meant. She wondered what he thought of Mr. May.

She was surprised to hear Mr. May's opinion of the navvy.

"He's a handsome young man, now!" exclaimed her companion one evening as the navvies passed. And all three turned round, to find all three turning round. Alvina laughed, and made eyes. At that moment she would cheerfully have gone along with the navvy. She was getting so tired of Mr. May's quiet prance.

On the whole, Alvina enjoyed the cinema and the life it brought her. She accepted it. And she became somewhat vulgarized in her bearing. She was déclassée: she had lost her class altogether. The other daughters of respectable tradesmen avoided her now, or spoke to her only from a distance. She was supposed to be "carrying on" with Mr. May.

Alvina did not care. She rather liked it. She liked being déclassée. She liked feeling an outsider. At last she seemed to stand on her own ground. She laughed to herself as she went back and forth from Woodhouse to Lumley, between Manchester House and the

Pleasure Palace. She laughed when she saw her father's theatre-notices plastered about. She laughed when she saw his thrilling announcements in the Woodhouse Weekly. She laughed when she knew that all the Woodhouse youths recognized her, and looked on her as one of their inferior entertainers. She was off the map: and she liked it.

For after all, she got a good deal of fun out of it. There was not only the continual activity. There were the artistes. Every week she met a new set of stars--three or four as a rule. She rehearsed with them on Monday afternoons, and she saw them every evening, and twice a week at matinees. James now gave two performances each evening--and he always had some audience. So that Alvina had opportunity to come into contact with all the odd people of the inferior stage. She found they were very much of a type: a little frowsy, a little flea-bitten as a rule, indifferent to ordinary morality, and philosophical even if irritable. They were often very irritable. And they had always a certain fund of callous philosophy. Alvina did not like them--you were not supposed, really, to get deeply emotional over them. But she found it amusing to see them all and know them all. It was so different from Woodhouse, where everything was priced and ticketed. These people were nomads. They didn't care a straw who you were or who you weren't. They had a most irritable professional vanity, and that was all. It was most odd to watch them. They weren't very squeamish. If the young gentlemen liked to peep round the curtain when the young lady was in her knickers: oh, well, she rather roundly told them

off, perhaps, but nobody minded. The fact that ladies wore knickers and black silk stockings thrilled nobody, any more than grease-paint or false moustaches thrilled. It was all part of the stock-in-trade. As for immorality--well, what did it amount to? Not a great deal. Most of the men cared far more about a drop of whiskey than about any more carnal vice, and most of the girls were good pals with each other, men were only there to act with: even if the act was a private love-farce of an improper description. What's the odds? You couldn't get excited about it: not as a rule.

Mr. May usually took rooms for the artistes in a house down in Lumley. When any one particular was coming, he would go to a rather better-class widow in Woodhouse. He never let Alvina take any part in the making of these arrangements, except with the widow in Woodhouse, who had long ago been a servant at Manchester House, and even now came in to do cleaning.

Odd, eccentric people they were, these entertainers. Most of them had a streak of imagination, and most of them drank. Most of them were middle-aged. Most of them had an abstracted manner; in ordinary life, they seemed left aside, somehow. Odd, extraneous creatures, often a little depressed, feeling life slip away from them. The cinema was killing them.

Alvina had quite a serious flirtation with a man who played a flute and piccolo. He was about fifty years old, still handsome, and

growing stout. When sober, he was completely reserved. When rather drunk, he talked charmingly and amusingly--oh, most charmingly. Alvina quite loved him. But alas, how he drank! But what a charm he had! He went, and she saw him no more.

The usual rather American-looking, clean-shaven, slightly pasty young man left Alvina quite cold, though he had an amiable and truly chivalrous galanterie. He was quite likeable. But so unattractive. Alvina was more fascinated by the odd fish: like the lady who did marvellous things with six ferrets, or the Jap who was tattooed all over, and had the most amazing strong wrists, so that he could throw down any collier, with one turn of the hand. Queer cuts these!--but just a little bit beyond her. She watched them rather from a distance. She wished she could jump across the distance. Particularly with the Jap, who was almost quite naked, but clothed with the most exquisite tattooing. Never would she forget the eagle that flew with terrible spread wings between his shoulders, or the strange mazy pattern that netted the roundness of his buttocks. He was not very large, but nicely shaped, and with no hair on his smooth, tattooed body. He was almost blue in colour--that is, his tattooing was blue, with pickings of brilliant vermilion: as for instance round the nipples, and in a strange red serpent's-jaws over the navel. A serpent went round his loins and haunches. He told her how many times he had had blood-poisoning, during the process of his tattooing. He was a queer, black-eyed creature, with a look of silence and toad-like lewdness. He frightened her. But when he was

dressed in common clothes, and was just a cheap, shoddy-looking European Jap, he was more frightening still. For his face--he was not tattooed above a certain ring low on his neck--was yellow and flat and basking with one eye open, like some age-old serpent. She felt he was smiling horribly all the time: lewd, unthinkable. A strange sight he was in Woodhouse, on a sunny morning; a shabby-looking bit of riff-raff of the East, rather down at the heel. Who could have imagined the terrible eagle of his shoulders, the serpent of his loins, his supple, magic skin?

The summer passed again, and autumn. Winter was a better time for James Houghton. The trams, moreover, would begin to run in January.

He wanted to arrange a good program for the week when the trams started. A long time ahead, Mr. May prepared it. The one item was the Natcha-Kee-Tawara Troupe. The Natcha-Kee-Tawara Troupe consisted of five persons, Madame Rochard and four young men. They were a strictly Red Indian troupe. But one of the young men, the German Swiss, was a famous yodeller, and another, the French Swiss, was a good comic with a French accent, whilst Madame and the German did a screaming two-person farce. Their great turn, of course, was the Natcha-Kee-Tawara Red Indian scene.

The Natcha-Kee-Tawaras were due in the third week in January, arriving from the Potteries on the Sunday evening. When Alvina came in from Chapel that Sunday evening, she found her widow, Mrs.

Rollings, seated in the living room talking with James, who had an anxious look. Since opening the Pleasure Palace James was less regular at Chapel. And moreover, he was getting old and shaky, and Sunday was the one evening he might spend in peace. Add that on this particular black Sunday night it was sleeting dismally outside, and James had already a bit of a cough, and we shall see that he did right to stay at home.

Mrs. Rollings sat nursing a bottle. She was to go to the chemist for some cough-cure, because Madame had got a bad cold. The chemist was gone to Chapel--he wouldn't open till eight.

Madame and the four young men had arrived at about six. Madame, said Mrs. Rollings, was a little fat woman, and she was complaining all the time that she had got a cold on her chest, laying her hand on her chest and trying her breathing and going "He-e-e-er! Herr!" to see if she could breathe properly. She, Mrs. Rollings, had suggested that Madame should put her feet in hot mustard and water, but Madame said she must have something to clear her chest. The four young men were four nice civil young fellows. They evidently liked Madame. Madame had insisted on cooking the chops for the young men. She herself had eaten one, but she laid her hand on her chest when she swallowed. One of the young men had gone out to get her some brandy, and he had come back with half-a-dozen large bottles of Bass as well.

Mr. Houghton was very much concerned over Madame's cold. He asked the same questions again and again, to try and make sure how bad it was. But Mrs. Rollings didn't seem quite to know. James wrinkled his brow. Supposing Madame could not take her part! He was most anxious.

"Do you think you might go across with Mrs. Rollings and see how this woman is, Alvina?" he said to his daughter.

"I should think you'll never turn Alvina out on such a night," said Miss Pinnegar. "And besides, it isn't right. Where is Mr. May? It's his business to go."

"Oh!" returned Alvina. "I don't mind going. Wait a minute, I'll see if we haven't got some of those pastilles for burning. If it's very bad, I can make one of those plasters mother used."

And she ran upstairs. She was curious to see what Madame and her four young men were like.

With Mrs. Rollings she called at the chemist's back door, and then they hurried through the sleet to the widow's dwelling. It was not far. As they went up the entry they heard the sound of voices. But in the kitchen all was quiet. The voices came from the front room.

Mrs. Rollings tapped.

"Come in!" said a rather sharp voice. Alvina entered on the widow's heels.

"I've brought you the cough stuff," said the widow. "And Miss Huff'n's come as well, to see how you was."

Four young men were sitting round the table in their shirt-sleeves, with bottles of Bass. There was much cigarette smoke. By the fire, which was burning brightly, sat a plump, pale woman with dark bright eyes and finely-drawn eyebrows: she might be any age between forty and fifty. There were grey threads in her tidy black hair. She was neatly dressed in a well-made black dress with a small lace collar. There was a slight look of self-commiseration on her face. She had a cigarette between her drooped fingers.

She rose as if with difficulty, and held out her plump hand, on which four or five rings showed. She had dropped the cigarette unnoticed into the hearth.

"How do you do," she said. "I didn't catch your name." Madame's voice was a little plaintive and plangent now, like a bronze reed mournfully vibrating.

"Alvina Houghton," said Alvina.

"Daughter of him as owns the thee-etter where you're goin' to act,"

interposed the widow.

"Oh yes! Yes! I see. Miss Houghton. I didn't know how it was said. Huff-ton--yes? Miss Houghton. I've got a bad cold on my chest--" laying her plump hand with the rings on her plump bosom. "But let me introduce you to my young men--" A wave of the plump hand, whose forefinger was very slightly cigarette-stained, towards the table.

The four young men had risen, and stood looking at Alvina and Madame. The room was small, rather bare, with horse-hair and white-crochet antimacassars and a linoleum floor. The table also was covered with a brightly-patterned American oil-cloth, shiny but clean. A naked gas-jet hung over it. For furniture, there were just chairs, arm-chairs, table, and a horse-hair antimacassar-ed sofa. Yet the little room seemed very full--full of people, young men with smart waistcoats and ties, but without coats.

"That is Max," said Madame. "I shall tell you only their names, and not their family names, because that is easier for you--"

In the meantime Max had bowed. He was a tall Swiss with almond eyes and a flattish face and a rather stiff, ramrod figure.

"And that is Louis--" Louis bowed gracefully. He was a Swiss Frenchman, moderately tall, with prominent cheekbones and a wing of glossy black hair falling on his temple.

"And that is Géoffroi--Geoffrey--" Geoffrey made his bow--a broad-shouldered, watchful, taciturn man from Alpine France.

"And that is Francesco--Frank--" Francesco gave a faint curl of his lip, half smile, as he saluted her involuntarily in a military fashion. He was dark, rather tall and loose, with yellow-tawny eyes. He was an Italian from the south. Madame gave another look at him. "He doesn't like his English name of Frank. You will see, he pulls a face. No, he doesn't like it. We call him Ciccio also--" But Ciccio was dropping his head sheepishly, with the same faint smile on his face, half grimace, and stooping to his chair, wanting to sit down.

"These are my family of young men," said Madame. "We are drawn from three races, though only Ciccio is not of our mountains. Will you please to sit down."

They all took their chairs. There was a pause.

"My young men drink a little beer, after their horrible journey. As a rule, I do not like them to drink. But tonight they have a little beer. I do not take any myself, because I am afraid of inflaming myself." She laid her hand on her breast, and took long, uneasy breaths. "I feel it. I feel it here." She patted her breast. "It makes me afraid for tomorrow. Will you perhaps take a glass of beer? Ciccio, ask for another glass--" Ciccio, at the end of the table,

did not rise, but looked round at Alvina as if he presumed there would be no need for him to move. The odd, supercilious curl of the lip persisted. Madame glared at him. But he turned the handsome side of his cheek towards her, with the faintest flicker of a sneer.

"No, thank you. I never take beer," said Alvina hurriedly.

"No? Never? Oh!" Madame folded her hands, but her black eyes still darted venom at Ciccio. The rest of the young men fingered their glasses and put their cigarettes to their lips and blew the smoke down their noses, uncomfortably.

Madame closed her eyes and leaned back a moment. Then her face looked transparent and pallid, there were dark rings under her eyes, the beautifully-brushed hair shone dark like black glass above her ears. She was obviously unwell. The young men looked at her, and muttered to one another.

"I'm afraid your cold is rather bad," said Alvina. "Will you let me take your temperature?"

Madame started and looked frightened.

"Oh, I don't think you should trouble to do that," she said.

Max, the tall, highly-coloured Swiss, turned to her, saying:

"Yes, you must have your temperature taken, and then we s'll know, shan't we. I had a hundred and five when we were in Redruth."

Alvina had taken the thermometer from her pocket. Ciccio meanwhile muttered something in French--evidently something rude--meant for Max.

"What shall I do if I can't work tomorrow!" moaned Madame, seeing Alvina hold up the thermometer towards the light. "Max, what shall we do?"

"You will stay in bed, and we must do the White Prisoner scene," said Max, rather staccato and official.

Ciccio curled his lip and put his head aside. Alvina went across to Madame with the thermometer. Madame lifted her plump hand and fended off Alvina, while she made her last declaration:

"Never--never have I missed my work, for a single day, for ten years. Never. If I am going to lie abandoned, I had better die at once."

"Lie abandoned!" said Max. "You know you won't do no such thing. What are you talking about?"

"Take the thermometer," said Geoffrey roughly, but with feeling.

"Tomorrow, see, you will be well. Quite certain!" said Louis. Madame mournfully shook her head, opened her mouth, and sat back with closed eyes and the stump of the thermometer comically protruding from a corner of her lips. Meanwhile Alvina took her plump white wrist and felt her pulse.

"We can practise--" began Geoffrey.

"Sh!" said Max, holding up his finger and looking anxiously at Alvina and Madame, who still leaned back with the stump of the thermometer jauntily perking up from her pursed mouth, while her face was rather ghastly.

Max and Louis watched anxiously. Geoffrey sat blowing the smoke down his nose, while Ciccio callously lit another cigarette, striking a match on his boot-heel and puffing from under the tip of his rather long nose. Then he took the cigarette from his mouth, turned his head, slowly spat on the floor, and rubbed his foot on his spit. Max flapped his eyelids and looked all disdain, murmuring something about "ein schmutziges italienisches Volk," whilst Louis, refusing either to see or to hear, framed the word "chien" on his lips.

Then quick as lightning both turned their attention again to Madame.

Her temperature was a hundred and two.

"You'd better go to bed," said Alvina. "Have you eaten anything?"

"One little mouthful," said Madame plaintively.

Max sat looking pale and stricken, Louis had hurried forward to take Madame's hand. He kissed it quickly, then turned aside his head because of the tears in his eyes. Geoffrey gulped beer in large throatfuls, and Ciccio, with his head bent, was watching from under his eyebrows.

"I'll run round for the doctor--" said Alvina.

"Don't! Don't do that, my dear! Don't you go and do that! I'm likely to a temperature--"

"Liable to a temperature," murmured Louis pathetically.

"I'll go to bed," said Madame, obediently rising.

"Wait a bit. I'll see if there's a fire in the bedroom," said Alvina.

"Oh, my dear, you are too good. Open the door for her, Ciccio--"

Ciccio reached across at the door, but was too late. Max had hastened to usher Alvina out. Madame sank back in her chair.

"Never for ten years," she was wailing. "Quoi faire, ah, quoi faire! Que ferez-vous, mes pauvres, sans votre Kishwégin. Que vais-je faire, mourir dans un tel pays! La bonne demoiselle--la bonne demoiselle--elle a du coeur. Elle pourrait aussi être belle, s'il y avait un peu plus de chair. Max, liebster, schau ich sehr elend aus? Ach, oh jeh, oh jeh!"

"Ach nein, Madame, ach nein. Nicht so furchtbar elend," said Max.

"Manca il cuore solamente al Ciccio," moaned Madame. "Che natura povera, senza sentimento--niente di bello. Ahimé, che amico, che ragazzo duro, aspero--"

"Trova?" said Ciccio, with a curl of the lip. He looked, as he dropped his long, beautiful lashes, as if he might weep for all that, if he were not bound to be misbehaving just now.

So Madame moaned in four languages as she posed pallid in her arm-chair. Usually she spoke in French only, with her young men. But this was an extra occasion.

"La pauvre Kishwégin!" murmured Madame. "Elle va finir au monde. Elle passe--la pauvre Kishwégin."

Kishwégin was Madame's Red Indian name, the name under which she danced her Squaw's fire-dance.

Now that she knew she was ill, Madame seemed to become more ill. Her breath came in little pants. She had a pain in her side. A feverish flush seemed to mount her cheek. The young men were all extremely uncomfortable. Louis did not conceal his tears. Only Ciccio kept the thin smile on his lips, and added to Madame's annoyance and pain.

Alvina came down to take her to bed. The young men all rose, and kissed Madame's hand as she went out: her poor jewelled hand, that was faintly perfumed with eau de Cologne. She spoke an appropriate good-night, to each of them.

"Good-night, my faithful Max, I trust myself to you. Good-night, Louis, the tender heart. Good-night valiant Geoffrey. Ah Ciccio, do not add to the weight of my heart. Be good braves, all, be brothers in one accord. One little prayer for poor Kishwégin. Good-night!"

After which valediction she slowly climbed the stairs, putting her hand on her knee at each step, with the effort.

"No--no," she said to Max, who would have followed to her assistance. "Do not come up. No--no!"

Her bedroom was tidy and proper.

"Tonight," she moaned, "I shan't be able to see that the boys' rooms are well in order. They are not to be trusted, no. They need an overseeing eye: especially Ciccio; especially Ciccio!"

She sank down by the fire and began to undo her dress.

"You must let me help you," said Alvina. "You know I have been a nurse."

"Ah, you are too kind, too kind, dear young lady. I am a lonely old woman. I am not used to attentions. Best leave me."

"Let me help you," said Alvina.

"Alas, ahimé! Who would have thought Kishwégin would need help. I danced last night with the boys in the theatre in Leek: and tonight I am put to bed in--what is the name of this place, dear?--It seems I don't remember it."

"Woodhouse," said Alvina.

"Woodhouse! Woodhouse! Is there not something called Woodlouse? I believe. Ugh, horrible! Why is it horrible?"

Alvina quickly undressed the plump, trim little woman. She seemed so soft. Alvina could not imagine how she could be a dancer on the stage, strenuous. But Madame's softness could flash into wild energy, sudden convulsive power, like a cuttle-fish. Alvina brushed out the long black hair, and plaited it lightly. Then she got Madame into bed.

"Ah," sighed Madame, "the good bed! The good bed! But cold--it is so cold. Would you hang up my dress, dear, and fold my stockings?"

Alvina quickly folded and put aside the dainty underclothing. Queer, dainty woman, was Madame, even to her wonderful threaded black-and-gold garters.

"My poor boys--no Kishwégin tomorrow! You don't think I need see a priest, dear? A priest!" said Madame, her teeth chattering.

"Priest! Oh no! You'll be better when we can get you warm. I think it's only a chill. Mrs. Rollings is warming a blanket--"

Alvina ran downstairs. Max opened the sitting-room door and stood watching at the sound of footsteps. His rather bony fists were clenched beneath his loose shirt-cuffs, his eyebrows tragically lifted.

"Is she much ill?" he asked.

"I don't know. But I don't think so. Do you mind heating the blanket while Mrs. Rollings makes thin gruel?"

Max and Louis stood heating blankets. Louis' trousers were cut rather tight at the waist, and gave him a female look. Max was straight and stiff. Mrs. Rollings asked Geoffrey to fill the coal-scuttles and carry one upstairs. Geoffrey obediently went out with a lantern to the coal-shed. Afterwards he was to carry up the horse-hair arm-chair.

"I must go home for some things," said Alvina to Ciccio. "Will you come and carry them for me?"

He started up, and with one movement threw away his cigarette. He did not look at Alvina. His beautiful lashes seemed to screen his eyes. He was fairly tall, but loosely built for an Italian, with slightly sloping shoulders. Alvina noticed the brown, slender Mediterranean hand, as he put his fingers to his lips. It was a hand such as she did not know, prehensile and tender and dusky. With an odd graceful slouch he went into the passage and reached for his coat.

He did not say a word, but held aloof as he walked with Alvina.

"I'm sorry for Madame," said Alvina, as she hurried rather breathless through the night. "She does think for you men."

But Ciccio vouchsafed no answer, and walked with his hands in the pockets of his water-proof, wincing from the weather.

"I'm afraid she will never be able to dance tomorrow," said Alvina.

"You think she won't be able?" he said.

"I'm almost sure she won't."

After which he said nothing, and Alvina also kept silence till they came to the black dark passage and encumbered yard at the back of the house.

"I don't think you can see at all," she said. "It's this way." She groped for him in the dark, and met his groping hand.

"This way," she said.

It was curious how light his fingers were in their clasp--almost like a child's touch. So they came under the light from the window of the sitting-room.

Alvina hurried indoors, and the young man followed.

"I shall have to stay with Madame tonight," she explained hurriedly. "She's feverish, but she may throw it off if we can get her into a sweat." And Alvina ran upstairs collecting things necessary. Ciccio stood back near the door, and answered all Miss Pinnegar's entreaties to come to the fire with a shake of the head and a slight smile of the lips, bashful and stupid.

"But do come and warm yourself before you go out again," said Miss Pinnegar, looking at the man as he drooped his head in the distance. He still shook dissent, but opened his mouth at last.

"It makes it colder after," he said, showing his teeth in a slight, stupid smile.

"Oh well, if you think so," said Miss Pinnegar, nettled. She couldn't make heads or tails of him, and didn't try.

When they got back, Madame was light-headed, and talking excitedly of her dance, her young men. The three young men were terrified. They had got the blankets scorching hot. Alvina smeared the plasters and applied them to Madame's side, where the pain was. What a white-skinned, soft, plump child she seemed! Her pain meant a touch of pleurisy, for sure. The men hovered outside the door. Alvina wrapped the poor patient in the hot blankets, got a few spoonfuls of hot gruel and whiskey down her throat, fastened her down in bed,

lowered the light and banished the men from the stairs. Then she sat down to watch. Madame chafed, moaned, murmured feverishly. Alvina soothed her, and put her hands in bed. And at last the poor dear became quiet. Her brow was faintly moist. She fell into a quiet sleep, perspiring freely. Alvina watched her still, soothed her when she suddenly started and began to break out of the bedclothes, quieted her, pressed her gently, firmly down, folded her tight and made her submit to the perspiration against which, in convulsive starts, she fought and strove, crying that she was suffocating, she was too hot, too hot.

"Lie still, lie still," said Alvina. "You must keep warm."

Poor Madame moaned. How she hated seething in the bath of her own perspiration. Her wilful nature rebelled strongly. She would have thrown aside her coverings and gasped into the cold air, if Alvina had not pressed her down with that soft, inevitable pressure.

So the hours passed, till about one o'clock, when the perspiration became less profuse, and the patient was really better, really quieter. Then Alvina went downstairs for a moment. She saw the light still burning in the front room. Tapping, she entered. There sat Max by the fire, a picture of misery, with Louis opposite him, nodding asleep after his tears. On the sofa Geoffrey snored lightly, while Ciccio sat with his head on the table, his arms spread out, dead asleep. Again she noticed the tender, dusky Mediterranean hands, the

slender wrists, slender for a man naturally loose and muscular.

"Haven't you gone to bed?" whispered Alvina. "Why?"

Louis started awake. Max, the only stubborn watcher, shook his head lugubriously.

"But she's better," whispered Alvina. "She's perspired. She's better. She's sleeping naturally."

Max stared with round, sleep-whitened, owlish eyes, pessimistic and sceptical:

"Yes," persisted Alvina. "Come and look at her. But don't wake her, whatever you do."

Max took off his slippers and rose to his tall height. Louis, like a scared chicken, followed. Each man held his slippers in his hand. They noiselessly entered and peeped stealthily over the heaped bedclothes. Madame was lying, looking a little flushed and very girlish, sleeping lightly, with a strand of black hair stuck to her cheek, and her lips lightly parted.

Max watched her for some moments. Then suddenly he straightened himself, pushed back his brown hair that was brushed up in the German fashion, and crossed himself, dropping his knee as before an

altar; crossed himself and dropped his knee once more; and then a third time crossed himself and inclined before the altar. Then he straightened himself again, and turned aside.

Louis also crossed himself. His tears burst out. He bowed and took the edge of a blanket to his lips, kissing it reverently. Then he covered his face with his hand.

Meanwhile Madame slept lightly and innocently on.

Alvina turned to go. Max silently followed, leading Louis by the arm. When they got downstairs, Max and Louis threw themselves in each other's arms, and kissed each other on either cheek, gravely, in Continental fashion.

"She is better," said Max gravely, in French.

"Thanks to God," replied Louis.

Alvina witnessed all this with some amazement. The men did not heed her. Max went over and shook Geoffrey, Louis put his hand on Ciccio's shoulder. The sleepers were difficult to wake. The wakers shook the sleeping, but in vain. At last Geoffrey began to stir.
But in vain Louis lifted Ciccio's shoulders from the table. The head and the hands dropped inert. The long black lashes lay motionless, the rather long, fine Greek nose drew the same light breaths, the

mouth remained shut. Strange fine black hair, he had, close as fur, animal, and naked, frail-seeming, tawny hands. There was a silver ring on one hand.

Alvina suddenly seized one of the inert hands that slid on the table-cloth as Louis shook the young man's shoulders. Tight she pressed the hand. Ciccio opened his tawny-yellowish eyes, that seemed to have been put in with a dirty finger, as the saying goes, owing to the sootiness of the lashes and brows. He was quite drunk with his first sleep, and saw nothing.

"Wake up," said Alvina, laughing, pressing his hand again.

He lifted his head once more, suddenly clasped her hand, his eyes came to consciousness, his hand relaxed, he recognized her, and he sat back in his chair, turning his face aside and lowering his lashes.

"Get up, great beast," Louis was saying softly in French, pushing him as ox-drivers sometimes push their oxen. Ciccio staggered to his feet.

"She is better," they told him. "We are going to bed."

They took their candles and trooped off upstairs, each one bowing to Alvina as he passed. Max solemnly, Louis gallant, the other two dumb

and sleepy. They occupied the two attic chambers.

Alvina carried up the loose bed from the sofa, and slept on the floor before the fire in Madame's room.

Madame slept well and long, rousing and stirring and settling off again. It was eight o'clock before she asked her first question. Alvina was already up.

"Oh--alors--Then I am better, I am quite well. I can dance today."

"I don't think today," said Alvina. "But perhaps tomorrow."

"No, today," said Madame. "I can dance today, because I am quite well. I am Kishwégin."

"You are better. But you must lie still today. Yes, really--you will find you are weak when you try to stand."

Madame watched Alvina's thin face with sullen eyes.

"You are an Englishwoman, severe and materialist," she said.

Alvina started and looked round at her with wide blue eyes.

"Why?" she said. There was a wan, pathetic look about her, a sort of

heroism which Madame detested, but which now she found touching.

"Come!" said Madame, stretching out her plump jewelled hand. "Come, I am an ungrateful woman. Come, they are not good for you, the people, I see it. Come to me."

Alvina went slowly to Madame, and took the outstretched hand. Madame kissed her hand, then drew her down and kissed her on either cheek, gravely, as the young men had kissed each other.

"You have been good to Kishwégin, and Kishwégin has a heart that remembers. There, Miss Houghton, I shall do what you tell me. Kishwégin obeys you." And Madame patted Alvina's hand and nodded her head sagely.

"Shall I take your temperature?" said Alvina.

"Yes, my dear, you shall. You shall bid me, and I shall obey."

So Madame lay back on her pillow, submissively pursing the thermometer between her lips and watching Alvina with black eyes.

"It's all right," said Alvina, as she looked at the thermometer. "Normal."

"Normal!" re-echoed Madame's rather guttural voice. "Good! Well,

then when shall I dance?"

Alvina turned and looked at her.

"I think, truly," said Alvina, "it shouldn't be before Thursday or Friday."

"Thursday!" repeated Madame. "You say Thursday?" There was a note of strong rebellion in her voice.

"You'll be so weak. You've only just escaped pleurisy. I can only say what I truly think, can't I?"

"Ah, you Englishwomen," said Madame, watching with black eyes. "I think you like to have your own way. In all things, to have your own way. And over all people. You are so good, to have your own way. Yes, you good Englishwomen. Thursday. Very well, it shall be Thursday. Till Thursday, then, Kishwégin does not exist."

And she subsided, already rather weak, upon her pillow again. When she had taken her tea and was washed and her room was tidied, she summoned the young men. Alvina had warned Max that she wanted Madame to be kept as quiet as possible this day.

As soon as the first of the four appeared, in his shirt-sleeves and his slippers, in the doorway, Madame said:

"Ah, there you are, my young men! Come in! Come in! It is not Kishwégin addresses you. Kishwégin does not exist till Thursday, as the English demoiselle makes it." She held out her hand, faintly perfumed with eau de Cologne--the whole room smelled of eau de Cologne--and Max stooped his brittle spine and kissed it. She touched his cheek gently with her other hand.

"My faithful Max, my support."

Louis came smiling with a bunch of violets and pinky anemones. He laid them down on the bed before her, and took her hand, bowing and kissing it reverently.

"You are better, dear Madame?" he said, smiling long at her.

"Better, yes, gentle Louis. And better for thy flowers, chivalric heart." She put the violets and anemones to her face with both hands, and then gently laid them aside to extend her hand to Geoffrey.

"The good Geoffrey will do his best, while there is no Kishwégin?" she said as he stooped to her salute.

"Bien sûr, Madame."

"Ciccio, a button off thy shirt-cuff. Where is my needle?" She looked round the room as Ciccio kissed her hand.

"Did you want anything?" said Alvina, who had not followed the French.

"My needle, to sew on this button. It is there, in the silk bag."

"I will do it," said Alvina.

"Thank you."

While Alvina sewed on the button, Madame spoke to her young men, principally to Max. They were to obey Max, she said, for he was their eldest brother. This afternoon they would practise well the scene of the White Prisoner. Very carefully they must practise, and they must find some one who would play the young squaw--for in this scene she had practically nothing to do, the young squaw, but just sit and stand. Miss Houghton--but ah, Miss Houghton must play the piano, she could not take the part of the young squaw. Some other then.

While the interview was going on, Mr. May arrived, full of concern.

"Shan't we have the procession!" he cried.

"Ah, the procession!" cried Madame.

The Natcha-Kee-Tawara Troupe upon request would signalize its entry into any town by a procession. The young men were dressed as Indian braves, and headed by Kishwégin they rode on horseback through the main streets. Ciccio, who was the crack horseman, having served a very well-known horsey Marchese in an Italian cavalry regiment, did a bit of show riding.

Mr. May was very keen on the procession. He had the horses in readiness. The morning was faintly sunny, after the sleet and bad weather. And now he arrived to find Madame in bed and the young men holding council with her.

"How very unfortunate!" cried Mr. May. "How very unfortunate!"

"Dreadful! Dreadful!" wailed Madame from the bed.

"But can't we do anything?"

"Yes--you can do the White Prisoner scene--the young men can do that, if you find a dummy squaw. Ah, I think I must get up after all."

Alvina saw the look of fret and exhaustion in Madame's face.

"Won't you all go downstairs now?" said Alvina. "Mr. Max knows what you must do."

And she shooed the five men out of the bedroom.

"I must get up. I won't dance. I will be a dummy. But I must be there. It is too dre-eadful, too dre-eadful!" wailed Madame.

"Don't take any notice of them. They can manage by themselves. Men are such babies. Let them carry it through by themselves."

"Children--they are all children!" wailed Madame. "All children! And so, what will they do without their old gouvernante? My poor braves, what will they do without Kishwégin? It is too dreadful, too dre-eadful, yes. The poor Mr. May--so disappointed."

"Then let him be disappointed," cried Alvina, as she forcibly tucked up Madame and made her lie still.

"You are hard! You are a hard Englishwoman. All alike. All alike!" Madame subsided fretfully and weakly. Alvina moved softly about. And in a few minutes Madame was sleeping again.

Alvina went downstairs. Mr. May was listening to Max, who was telling in German all about the White Prisoner scene. Mr. May had spent his boyhood in a German school. He cocked his head on one

side, and, laying his hand on Max's arm, entertained him in odd German. The others were silent. Ciccio made no pretence of listening, but smoked and stared at his own feet. Louis and Geoffrey half understood, so Louis nodded with a look of deep comprehension, whilst Geoffrey uttered short, snappy "Ja!--Ja!--Doch!--Eben!" rather irrelevant.

"I'll be the squaw," cried Mr. May in English, breaking off and turning round to the company. He perked up his head in an odd, parrot-like fashion. "I'll be the squaw! What's her name? Kishwégin? I'll be Kishwégin." And he bridled and beamed self-consciously.

The two tall Swiss looked down on him, faintly smiling. Ciccio, sitting with his arms on his knees on the sofa, screwed round his head and watched the phenomenon of Mr. May with inscrutable, expressionless attention.

"Let us go," said Mr. May, bubbling with new importance. "Let us go and rehearse this morning, and let us do the procession this afternoon, when the colliers are just coming home. There! What? Isn't that exactly the idea? Well! Will you be ready at once, now?"

He looked excitedly at the young men. They nodded with slow gravity, as if they were already braves. And they turned to put on their

boots. Soon they were all trooping down to Lumley, Mr. May prancing like a little circus-pony beside Alvina, the four young men rolling ahead.

"What do you think of it?" cried Mr. May. "We've saved the situation--what? Don't you think so? Don't you think we can congratulate ourselves."

They found Mr. Houghton fussing about in the theatre. He was on tenterhooks of agitation, knowing Madame was ill.

Max gave a brilliant display of yodelling.

"But I must explain to them," cried Mr. May. "I must explain to them what yodel means."

And turning to the empty theatre, he began, stretching forth his hand.

"In the high Alps of Switzerland, where eternal snows and glaciers reign over luscious meadows full of flowers, if you should chance to awaken, as I have done, in some lonely wooden farm amid the mountain pastures, you--er--you--let me see--if you--no--if you should chance to spend the night in some lonely wooden farm, amid the upland pastures, dawn will awake you with a wild, inhuman song, you will open your eyes to the first gleam of icy, eternal sunbeams, your

ears will be ringing with weird singing, that has no words and no meaning, but sounds as if some wild and icy god were warbling to himself as he wandered among the peaks of dawn. You look forth across the flowers to the blue snow, and you see, far off, a small figure of a man moving among the grass. It is a peasant singing his mountain song, warbling like some creature that lifted up its voice on the edge of the eternal snows, before the human race began--"

During this oration James Houghton sat with his chin in his hand, devoured with bitter jealousy, measuring Mr. May's eloquence. And then he started, as Max, tall and handsome now in Tyrolese costume, white shirt and green, square braces, short trousers of chamois leather stitched with green and red, firm-planted naked knees, naked ankles and heavy shoes, warbled his native Yodel strains, a piercing and disturbing sound. He was flushed, erect, keen tempered and fierce and mountainous. There was a fierce, icy passion in the man. Alvina began to understand Madame's subjection to him.

Louis and Geoffrey did a farce dialogue, two foreigners at the same moment spying a purse in the street, struggling with each other and protesting they wanted to take it to the policeman, Ciccio, who stood solid and ridiculous. Mr. Houghton nodded slowly and gravely, as if to give his measured approval.

Then all retired to dress for the great scene. Alvina practised the music Madame carried with her. If Madame found a good pianist, she

welcomed the accompaniment: if not, she dispensed with it.

"Am I all right?" said a smirking voice.

And there was Kishwégin, dusky, coy, with long black hair and a short chamois dress, gaiters and moccasins and bare arms: so coy, and so smirking. Alvina burst out laughing.

"But shan't I do?" protested Mr. May, hurt.

"Yes, you're wonderful," said Alvina, choking. "But I must laugh."

"But why? Tell me why?" asked Mr. May anxiously. "Is it my appearance you laugh at, or is it only me? If it's me I don't mind. But if it's my appearance, tell me so."

Here an appalling figure of Ciccio in war-paint strolled on to the stage. He was naked to the waist, wore scalp-fringed trousers, was dusky-red-skinned, had long black hair and eagle's feathers--only two feathers--and a face wonderfully and terribly painted with white, red, yellow, and black lines. He was evidently pleased with himself. His curious soft slouch, and curious way of lifting his lip from his white teeth, in a sort of smile, was very convincing.

"You haven't got the girdle," he said, touching Mr. May's plump waist--"and some flowers in your hair."

Mr. May here gave a sharp cry and a jump. A bear on its hind legs, slow, shambling, rolling its loose shoulders, was stretching a paw towards him. The bear dropped heavily on four paws again, and a laugh came from its muzzle.

"You won't have to dance," said Geoffrey out of the bear.

"Come and put in the flowers," said Mr. May anxiously, to Alvina.

In the dressing-room, the dividing-curtain was drawn. Max, in deerskin trousers but with unpainted torso looked very white and strange as he put the last touches of war-paint on Louis' face. He glanced round at Alvina, then went on with his work. There was a sort of nobility about his erect white form and stiffly-carried head, the semi-luminous brown hair. He seemed curiously superior.

Alvina adjusted the maidenly Mr. May. Louis arose, a brave like Ciccio, in war-paint even more hideous. Max slipped on a tattered hunting-shirt and cartridge belt. His face was a little darkened. He was the white prisoner.

They arranged the scenery, while Alvina watched. It was soon done. A back cloth of tree-trunks and dark forest: a wigwam, a fire, and a cradle hanging from a pole. As they worked, Alvina tried in vain to dissociate the two braves from their war-paint. The lines were

drawn so cleverly that the grimace of ferocity was fixed and horrible, so that even in the quiet work of scene-shifting Louis' stiffish, female grace seemed full of latent cruelty, whilst Ciccio's more muscular slouch made her feel she would not trust him for one single moment. Awful things men were, savage, cruel, underneath their civilization.

The scene had its beauty. It began with Kishwégin alone at the door of the wigwam, cooking, listening, giving an occasional push to the hanging cradle, and, if only Madame were taking the part, crooning an Indian cradle-song. Enter the brave Louis with his white prisoner, Max, who has his hands bound to his side. Kishwégin gravely salutes her husband--the bound prisoner is seated by the fire--Kishwégin serves food, and asks permission to feed the prisoner. The brave Louis, hearing a sound, starts up with his bow and arrow. There is a dumb scene of sympathy between Kishwégin and the prisoner--the prisoner wants his bonds cut. Re-enter the brave Louis--he is angry with Kishwégin--enter the brave Ciccio hauling a bear, apparently dead. Kishwégin examines the bear, Ciccio examines the prisoner. Ciccio tortures the prisoner, makes him stand, makes him caper unwillingly. Kishwégin swings the cradle. The prisoner is tripped up--falls, and cannot rise. He lies near the fallen bear. Kishwégin carries food to Ciccio. The two braves converse in dumb show, Kishwégin swings the cradle and croons. The men rise once more and bend over the prisoner. As they do so, there is a muffled roar. The bear is sitting up. Louis swings round, and

at the same moment the bear strikes him down. Ciccio springs forward and stabs the bear, then closes with it. Kishwégin runs and cuts the prisoner's bonds. He rises, and stands trying to lift his numbed and powerless arms, while the bear slowly crushes Ciccio, and Kishwégin kneels over her husband. The bear drops Ciccio lifeless, and turns to Kishwégin. At that moment Max manages to kill the bear--he takes Kishwégin by the hand and kneels with her beside the dead Louis.

It was wonderful how well the men played their different parts. But Mr. May was a little too frisky as Kishwégin. However, it would do.

Ciccio got dressed as soon as possible, to go and look at the horses hired for the afternoon procession. Alvina accompanied him, Mr. May and the others were busy.

"You know I think it's quite wonderful, your scene," she said to Ciccio.

He turned and looked down at her. His yellow, dusky-set eyes rested on her good-naturedly, without seeing her, his lip curled in a self-conscious, contemptuous sort of smile.

"Not without Madame," he said, with the slow, half-sneering, stupid smile. "Without Madame--" he lifted his shoulders and spread his hands and tilted his brows--"fool's play, you know."

"No," said Alvina. "I think Mr. May is good, considering. What does Madame do?" she asked a little jealously.

"Do?" He looked down at her with the same long, half-sardonic look of his yellow eyes, like a cat looking casually at a bird which flutters past. And again he made his shrugging motion. "She does it all, really. The others--they are nothing--what they are Madame has made them. And now they think they've done it all, you see. You see, that's it."

"But how has Madame made it all? Thought it out, you mean?"

"Thought it out, yes. And then done it. You should see her dance--ah! You should see her dance round the bear, when I bring him in! Ah, a beautiful thing, you know. She claps her hand--" And Ciccio stood still in the street, with his hat cocked a little on one side, rather common-looking, and he smiled along his fine nose at Alvina, and he clapped his hands lightly, and he tilted his eyebrows and his eyelids as if facially he were imitating a dance, and all the time his lips smiled stupidly. As he gave a little assertive shake of his head, finishing, there came a great yell of laughter from the opposite pavement, where a gang of pottery lasses, in aprons all spattered with grey clay, and hair and boots and skin spattered with pallid spots, had stood to watch. The girls opposite shrieked again, for all the world like a gang of grey baboons. Ciccio turned round and looked at them with a sneer along his nose.

They yelled the louder. And he was horribly uncomfortable, walking there beside Alvina with his rather small and effeminately-shod feet.

"How stupid they are," said Alvina. "I've got used to them."

"They should be--" he lifted his hand with a sharp, vicious movement--"smacked," he concluded, lowering his hand again.

"Who is going to do it?" said Alvina.

He gave a Neapolitan grimace, and twiddled the fingers of one hand outspread in the air, as if to say: "There you are! You've got to thank the fools who've failed to do it."

"Why do you all love Madame so much?" Alvina asked.

"How, love?" he said, making a little grimace. "We like her--we love her--as if she were a mother. You say love--" He raised his shoulders slightly, with a shrug. And all the time he looked down at Alvina from under his dusky eyelashes, as if watching her sideways, and his mouth had the peculiar, stupid, self-conscious, half-jeering smile. Alvina was a little bit annoyed. But she felt that a great instinctive good-naturedness came out of him, he was self-conscious and constrained, knowing she did not follow his language of gesture. For him, it was not yet quite natural to express himself in speech.

Gesture and grimace were instantaneous, and spoke worlds of things, if you would but accept them.

But certainly he was stupid, in her sense of the word. She could hear Mr. May's verdict of him: "Like a child, you know, just as charming and just as tiresome and just as stupid."

"Where is your home?" she asked him.

"In Italy." She felt a fool.

"Which part?" she insisted.

"Naples," he said, looking down at her sideways, searchingly.

"It must be lovely," she said.

"Ha--!" He threw his head on one side and spread out his hands, as if to say--"What do you want, if you don't find Naples lovely."

"I should like to see it. But I shouldn't like to die," she said.

"What?"

"They say 'See Naples and die,'" she laughed.

He opened his mouth, and understood. Then he smiled at her directly.

"You know what that means?" he said cutely. "It means see Naples and die afterwards. Don't die before you've seen it." He smiled with a knowing smile.

"I see! I see!" she cried. "I never thought of that."

He was pleased with her surprise and amusement.

"Ah Naples!" he said. "She is lovely--" He spread his hand across the air in front of him--"The sea--and Posilippo--and Sorrento--and Capri--Ah-h! You've never been out of England?"

"No," she said. "I should love to go."

He looked down into her eyes. It was his instinct to say at once he would take her.

"You've seen nothing--nothing," he said to her.

"But if Naples is so lovely, how could you leave it?" she asked.

"What?"

She repeated her question. For answer, he looked at her, held out

his hand, and rubbing the ball of his thumb across the tips of his fingers, said, with a fine, handsome smile:

"Pennies! Money! You can't earn money in Naples. Ah, Naples is beautiful, but she is poor. You live in the sun, and you earn fourteen, fifteen pence a day--"

"Not enough," she said.

He put his head on one side and tilted his brows, as if to say "What are you to do?" And the smile on his mouth was sad, fine, and charming. There was an indefinable air of sadness or wistfulness about him, something so robust and fragile at the same time, that she was drawn in a strange way.

"But you'll go back?" she said.

"Where?"

"To Italy. To Naples."

"Yes, I shall go back to Italy," he said, as if unwilling to commit himself. "But perhaps I shan't go back to Naples."

"Never?"

"Ah, never! I don't say never. I shall go to Naples, to see my mother's sister. But I shan't go to live--"

"Have you a mother and father?"

"I? No! I have a brother and two sisters--in America. Parents, none. They are dead."

"And you wander about the world--" she said.

He looked at her, and made a slight, sad gesture, indifferent also.

"But you have Madame for a mother," she said.

He made another gesture this time: pressed down the corners of his mouth as if he didn't like it. Then he turned with the slow, fine smile.

"Does a man want two mothers? Eh?" he said, as if he posed a conundrum.

"I shouldn't think so," laughed Alvina.

He glanced at her to see what she meant, what she understood.

"My mother is dead, see!" he said. "Frenchwomen--Frenchwomen--they

have their babies till they are a hundred--"

"What do you mean?" said Alvina, laughing.

"A Frenchman is a little man when he's seven years old--and if his mother comes, he is a little baby boy when he's seventy. Do you know that?"

"I didn't know it," said Alvina.

"But now--you do," he said, lurching round a corner with her.

They had come to the stables. Three of the horses were there, including the thoroughbred Ciccio was going to ride. He stood and examined the beasts critically. Then he spoke to them with strange sounds, patted them, stroked them down, felt them, slid his hand down them, over them, under them, and felt their legs.

Then, he looked up from stooping there under the horses, with a long, slow look of his yellow eyes, at Alvina. She felt unconsciously flattered. His long, yellow look lingered, holding her eyes. She wondered what he was thinking. Yet he never spoke. He turned again to the horses. They seemed to understand him, to prick up alert.

"This is mine," he said, with his hand on the neck of the old

thoroughbred. It was a bay with a white blaze.

"I think he's nice," she said. "He seems so sensitive."

"In England," he answered suddenly, "horses live a long time, because they don't live--never alive--see? In England railway-engines are alive, and horses go on wheels." He smiled into her eyes as if she understood. She was a trifle nervous as he smiled at her from out of the stable, so yellow-eyed and half-mysterious, derisive. Her impulse was to turn and go away from the stable. But a deeper impulse made her smile into his face, as she said to him:

"They like you to touch them."

"Who?" His eyes kept hers. Curious how dark they seemed, with only a yellow ring of pupil. He was looking right into her, beyond her usual self, impersonal.

"The horses," she said. She was afraid of his long, cat-like look. Yet she felt convinced of his ultimate good-nature. He seemed to her to be the only passionately good-natured man she had ever seen. She watched him vaguely, with strange vague trust, implicit belief in him. In him--in what?

That afternoon the colliers trooping home in the winter afternoon were rejoiced with a spectacle: Kishwégin, in her deerskin, fringed

gaiters and fringed frock of deerskin, her long hair down her back, and with marvellous cloths and trappings on her steed, riding astride on a tall white horse, followed by Max in chieftain's robes and chieftain's long head-dress of dyed feathers, then by the others in war-paint and feathers and brilliant Navajo blankets. They carried bows and spears. Ciccio was without his blanket, naked to the waist, in war-paint, and brandishing a long spear. He dashed up from the rear, saluted the chieftain with his arm and his spear on high as he swept past, suddenly drew up his rearing steed, and trotted slowly back again, making his horse perform its paces. He was extraordinarily velvety and alive on horseback.

Crowds of excited, shouting children ran chattering along the pavements. The colliers, as they tramped grey and heavy, in an intermittent stream uphill from the low grey west, stood on the pavement in wonder as the cavalcade approached and passed, jingling the silver bells of its trappings, vibrating the wonderful colours of the barred blankets and saddle cloths, the scarlet wool of the accoutrements, the bright tips of feathers. Women shrieked as Ciccio, in his war-paint, wheeled near the pavement. Children screamed and ran. The colliers shouted. Ciccio smiled in his terrifying war-paint, brandished his spear and trotted softly, like a flower on its stem, round to the procession.

Miss Pinnegar and Alvina and James Houghton had come round into Knarborough Road to watch. It was a great moment. Looking along the

road they saw all the shopkeepers at their doors, the pavements eager. And then, in the distance, the white horse jingling its trappings of scarlet hair and bells, with the dusky Kishwégin sitting on the saddle-blanket of brilliant, lurid stripes, sitting impassive and all dusky above that intermittent flashing of colour: then the chieftain, dark-faced, erect, easy, swathed in a white blanket, with scarlet and black stripes, and all his strange crest of white, tip-dyed feathers swaying down his back: as he came nearer one saw the wolfskin and the brilliant moccasins against the black sides of his horse; Louis and Goeffrey followed, lurid, horrid in the face, wearing blankets with stroke after stroke of blazing colour upon their duskiness, and sitting stern, holding their spears: lastly, Ciccio, on his bay horse with a green seat, flickering hither and thither in the rear, his feathers swaying, his horse sweating, his face ghastlily smiling in its war-paint. So they advanced down the grey pallor of Knarborough Road, in the late wintry afternoon. Somewhere the sun was setting, and far overhead was a flush of orange.

"Well I never!" murmured Miss Pinnegar. "Well I never!"

The strange savageness of the striped Navajo blankets seemed to her unsettling, advancing down Knarborough Road: she examined Kishwégin curiously.

"Can you believe that that's Mr. May--he's exactly like a girl.

Well, well--it makes you wonder what is and what isn't. But aren't they good? What? Most striking. Exactly like Indians. You can't believe your eyes. My word what a terrifying race they--" Here she uttered a scream and ran back clutching the wall as Ciccio swept past, brushing her with his horse's tail, and actually swinging his spear so as to touch Alvina and James Houghton lightly with the butt of it. James too started with a cry, the mob at the corner screamed. But Alvina caught the slow, mischievous smile as the painted horror showed his teeth in passing; she was able to flash back an excited laugh. She felt his yellow-tawny eyes linger on her, in that one second, as if negligently.

"I call that too much!" Miss Pinnegar was crying, thoroughly upset. "Now that was unnecessary! Why it was enough to scare one to death. Besides, it's dangerous. It ought to be put a stop to. I don't believe in letting these show-people have liberties."

The cavalcade was slowly passing, with its uneasy horses and its flare of striped colour and its silent riders. Ciccio was trotting softly back, on his green saddle-cloth, suave as velvet, his dusky, naked torso beautiful.

"Eh, you'd think he'd get his death," the women in the crowd were saying.

"A proper savage one, that. Makes your blood run cold--"

"Ay, an' a man for all that, take's painted face for what's worth. A tidy man, I say."

He did not look at Alvina. The faint, mischievous smile uncovered his teeth. He fell in suddenly behind Geoffrey, with a jerk of his steed, calling out to Geoffrey in Italian.

It was becoming cold. The cavalcade fell into a trot, Mr. May shaking rather badly. Ciccio halted, rested his lance against a lamp-post, switched his green blanket from beneath him, flung it round him as he sat, and darted off. They had all disappeared over the brow of Lumley Hill, descending. He was gone too. In the wintry twilight the crowd began, lingeringly, to turn away. And in some strange way, it manifested its disapproval of the spectacle: as grown-up men and women, they were a little bit insulted by such a show. It was an anachronism. They wanted a direct appeal to the mind. Miss Pinnegar expressed it.

"Well," she said, when she was safely back in Manchester House, with the gas lighted, and as she was pouring the boiling water into the tea-pot, "You may say what you like. It's interesting in a way, just to show what savage Red-Indians were like. But it's childish. It's only childishness. I can't understand, myself, how people can go on liking shows. Nothing happens. It's not like the cinema, where you see it all and take it all in at once; you know everything at a

glance. You don't know anything by looking at these people. You know they're only men dressed up, for money. I can't see why you should encourage it. I don't hold with idle show-people, parading round, I don't, myself. I like to go to the cinema once a week. It's instruction, you take it all in at a glance, all you need to know, and it lasts you for a week. You can get to know everything about people's actual lives from the cinema. I don't see why you want people dressing up and showing off."

They sat down to their tea and toast and marmalade, during this harangue. Miss Pinnegar was always like a douche of cold water to Alvina, bringing her back to consciousness after a delicious excitement. In a minute Madame and Ciccio and all seemed to become unreal--the actual unrealities: while the ragged dithering pictures of the film were actual, real as the day. And Alvina was always put out when this happened. She really hated Miss Pinnegar. Yet she had nothing to answer. They were unreal, Madame and Ciccio and the rest. Ciccio was just a fantasy blown in on the wind, to blow away again. The real, permanent thing was Woodhouse, the semper idem Knarborough Road, and the unchangeable grubby gloom of Manchester House, with the stuffy, padding Miss Pinnegar, and her father, whose fingers, whose very soul seemed dirty with pennies. These were the solid, permanent fact. These were life itself. And Ciccio, splashing up on his bay horse and green cloth, he was a mountebank and an extraneous nonentity, a coloured old rag blown down the Knarborough Road into Limbo. Into Limbo. Whilst Miss Pinnegar and her father sat

frowsily on for ever, eating their toast and cutting off the crust, and sipping their third cup of tea. They would never blow away--never, never. Woodhouse was there to eternity. And the Natcha-Kee-Tawara Troupe was blowing like a rag of old paper into Limbo. Nothingness! Poor Madame! Poor gallant histrionic Madame! The frowsy Miss Pinnegar could crumple her up and throw her down the utilitarian drain, and have done with her. Whilst Miss Pinnegar lived on for ever.

This put Alvina into a sharp temper.

"Miss Pinnegar," she said. "I do think you go on in the most unattractive way sometimes. You're a regular spoil-sport."

"Well," said Miss Pinnegar tartly. "I don't approve of your way of sport, I'm afraid."

"You can't disapprove of it as much as I hate your spoil-sport existence," said Alvina in a flare.

"Alvina, are you mad!" said her father.

"Wonder I'm not," said Alvina, "considering what my life is."