CHAPTER VIII

CICCIO

Madame did not pick up her spirits, after her cold. For two days she lay in bed, attended by Mrs. Rollings and Alvina and the young men. But she was most careful never to give any room for scandal. The young men might not approach her save in the presence of some third party. And then it was strictly a visit of ceremony or business.

"Oh, your Woodhouse, how glad I shall be when I have left it," she said to Alvina. "I feel it is unlucky for me."

"Do you?" said Alvina. "But if you'd had this bad cold in some places, you might have been much worse, don't you think."

"Oh my dear!" cried Madame. "Do you think I could confuse you in my dislike of this Woodhouse? Oh no! You are not Woodhouse. On the contrary, I think it is unkind for you also, this place. You look--also--what shall I say--thin, not very happy."

It was a note of interrogation.

"I'm sure I dislike Woodhouse much more than you can," replied Alvina.

"I am sure. Yes! I am sure. I see it. Why don't you go away? Why don't you marry?"

"Nobody wants to marry me," said Alvina.

Madame looked at her searchingly, with shrewd black eyes under her arched eyebrows.

"How!" she exclaimed. "How don't they? You are not bad looking, only a little too thin--too haggard--"

She watched Alvina. Alvina laughed uncomfortably.

"Is there nobody?" persisted Madame.

"Not now," said Alvina. "Absolutely nobody." She looked with a confused laugh into Madame's strict black eyes. "You see I didn't care for the Woodhouse young men, either. I couldn't."

Madame nodded slowly up and down. A secret satisfaction came over her pallid, waxy countenance, in which her black eyes were like twin swift extraneous creatures: oddly like two bright little dark animals in the snow.

"Sure!" she said, sapient. "Sure! How could you? But there are other

men besides these here--" She waved her hand to the window.

"I don't meet them, do I?" said Alvina.

"No, not often. But sometimes! sometimes!"

There was a silence between the two women, very pregnant.

"Englishwomen," said Madame, "are so practical. Why are they?"

"I suppose they can't help it," said Alvina. "But they're not half so practical and clever as you, Madame."

"Oh la--la! I am practical differently. I am practical impractically--" she stumbled over the words. "But your Sue now, in Jude the Obscure--is it not an interesting book? And is she not always too practically practical. If she had been impractically practical she could have been quite happy. Do you know what I mean?--no. But she is ridiculous. Sue: so Anna Karénine. Ridiculous both. Don't you think?"

"Why?" said Alvina.

"Why did they both make everybody unhappy, when they had the man they wanted, and enough money? I think they are both so silly. If they had been beaten, they would have lost all their practical ideas

and troubles, merely forgot them, and been happy enough. I am a woman who says it. Such ideas they have are not tragical. No, not at all. They are nonsense, you see, nonsense. That is all. Nonsense. Sue and Anna, they are--non-sensical. That is all. No tragedy whatsoever. Nonsense. I am a woman. I know men also. And I know nonsense when I see it. Englishwomen are all nonsense: the worst women in the world for nonsense."

"Well, I am English," said Alvina.

"Yes, my dear, you are English. But you are not necessarily so non-sensical. Why are you at all?"

"Nonsensical?" laughed Alvina. "But I don't know what you call my nonsense."

"Ah," said Madame wearily. "They never understand. But I like you, my dear. I am an old woman--"

"Younger than I," said Alvina.

"Younger than you, because I am practical from the heart, and not only from the head. You are not practical from the heart. And yet you have a heart."

"But all Englishwomen have good hearts," protested Alvina.

"No! No!" objected Madame. "They are all ve-ry kind, and ve-ry practical with their kindness. But they have no heart in all their kindness. It is all head, all head: the kindness of the head."

"I can't agree with you," said Alvina.

"No. No. I don't expect it. But I don't mind. You are very kind to me, and I thank you. But it is from the head, you see. And so I thank you from the head. From the heart--no."

Madame plucked her white fingers together and laid them on her breast with a gesture of repudiation. Her black eyes stared spitefully.

"But Madame," said Alvina, nettled, "I should never be half such a good business woman as you. Isn't that from the head?"

"Ha! of course! Of course you wouldn't be a good business woman. Because you are kind from the head. I--" she tapped her forehead and shook her head--"I am not kind from the head. From the head I am business-woman, good business-woman. Of course I am a good business-woman--of course! But--" here she changed her expression, widened her eyes, and laid her hand on her breast--"when the heart speaks--then I listen with the heart. I do not listen with the head. The heart hears the heart. The head--that is another thing. But you

have blue eyes, you cannot understand. Only dark eyes--" She paused and mused.

"And what about yellow eyes?" asked Alvina, laughing.

Madame darted a look at her, her lips curling with a very faint, fine smile of derision. Yet for the first time her black eyes dilated and became warm.

"Yellow eyes like Ciccio's?" she said, with her great watchful eyes and her smiling, subtle mouth. "They are the darkest of all." And she shook her head roguishly.

"Are they!" said Alvina confusedly, feeling a blush burning up her throat into her face.

"Ha--ha!" laughed Madame. "Ha-ha! I am an old woman, you see. My heart is old enough to be kind, and my head is old enough to be clever. My heart is kind to few people--very few--especially in this England. My young men know that. But perhaps to you it is kind."

"Thank you," said Alvina.

"There! From the head Thank you. It is not well done, you see. You see!"

But Alvina ran away in confusion. She felt Madame was having her on a string.

Mr. May enjoyed himself hugely playing Kishwégin. When Madame came downstairs Louis, who was a good satirical mimic, imitated him. Alvina happened to come into their sitting-room in the midst of their bursts of laughter. They all stopped and looked at her cautiously.

"Continuez! Continuez!" said Madame to Louis. And to Alvina: "Sit down, my dear, and see what a good actor we have in our Louis."

Louis glanced round, laid his head a little on one side and drew in his chin, with Mr. May's smirk exactly, and wagging his tail slightly, he commenced to play the false Kishwégin. He sidled and bridled and ejaculated with raised hands, and in the dumb show the tall Frenchman made such a ludicrous caricature of Mr. Houghton's manager that Madame wept again with laughter, whilst Max leaned back against the wall and giggled continuously like some pot involuntarily boiling. Geoffrey spread his shut fists across the table and shouted with laughter, Ciccio threw back his head and showed all his teeth in a loud laugh of delighted derision. Alvina laughed also. But she flushed. There was a certain biting, annihilating quality in Louis' derision of the absentee. And the others enjoyed it so much. At moments Alvina caught her lip between her teeth, it was so screamingly funny, and so annihilating. She

laughed in spite of herself. In spite of herself she was shaken into a convulsion of laughter. Louis was masterful--he mastered her psyche. She laughed till her head lay helpless on the chair, she could not move. Helpless, inert she lay, in her orgasm of laughter. The end of Mr. May. Yet she was hurt.

And then Madame wiped her own shrewd black eyes, and nodded slow approval. Suddenly Louis started and held up a warning finger. They all at once covered their smiles and pulled themselves together. Only Alvina lay silently laughing.

"Oh, good morning, Mrs. Rollings!" they heard Mr. May's voice. "Your company is lively. Is Miss Houghton here? May I go through?"

They heard his quick little step and his quick little tap.

"Come in," called Madame.

The Natcha-Kee-Tawaras all sat with straight faces. Only poor Alvina lay back in her chair in a new weak convulsion. Mr. May glanced quickly round, and advanced to Madame.

"Oh, good-morning, Madame, so glad to see you downstairs," he said, taking her hand and bowing ceremoniously. "Excuse my intruding on your mirth!" He looked archly round. Alvina was still incompetent. She lay leaning sideways in her chair, and could not even speak to

him.

"It was evidently a good joke," he said. "May I hear it too?"

"Oh," said Madame, drawling. "It was no joke. It was only Louis making a fool of himself, doing a turn."

"Must have been a good one," said Mr. May. "Can't we put it on?"

"No," drawled Madame, "it was nothing--just a non-sensical mood of the moment. Won't you sit down? You would like a little whiskey?--yes?"

Max poured out whiskey and water for Mr. May.

Alvina sat with her face averted, quiet, but unable to speak to Mr. May. Max and Louis had become polite. Geoffrey stared with his big, dark-blue eyes stolidly at the newcomer. Ciccio leaned with his arms on his knees, looking sideways under his long lashes at the inert Alvina.

"Well," said Madame, "and are you satisfied with your houses?"

"Oh yes," said Mr. May. "Quite! The two nights have been excellent. Excellent!"

"Ah--I am glad. And Miss Houghton tells me I should not dance tomorrow, it is too soon."

"Miss Houghton knows," said Mr. May archly.

"Of course!" said Madame. "I must do as she tells me."

"Why yes, since it is for your good, and not hers."

"Of course! Of course! It is very kind of her."

"Miss Houghton is most kind--to every one," said Mr. May.

"I am sure," said Madame. "And I am very glad you have been such a good Kishwégin. That is very nice also."

"Yes," replied Mr. May. "I begin to wonder if I have mistaken my vocation. I should have been on the boards, instead of behind them."

"No doubt," said Madame. "But it is a little late--"

The eyes of the foreigners, watching him, flattered Mr. May.

"I'm afraid it is," he said. "Yes. Popular taste is a mysterious thing. How do you feel, now? Do you feel they appreciate your work

as much as they did?"

Madame watched him with her black eyes.

"No," she replied. "They don't. The pictures are driving us away. Perhaps we shall last for ten years more. And after that, we are finished."

"You think so," said Mr. May, looking serious.

"I am sure," she said, nodding sagely.

"But why is it?" said Mr. May, angry and petulant.

"Why is it? I don't know. I don't know. The pictures are cheap, and they are easy, and they cost the audience nothing, no feeling of the heart, no appreciation of the spirit, cost them nothing of these. And so they like them, and they don't like us, because they must feel the things we do, from the heart, and appreciate them from the spirit. There!"

"And they don't want to appreciate and to feel?" said Mr. May.

"No. They don't want. They want it all through the eye, and finished--so! Just curiosity, impertinent curiosity. That's all. In all countries, the same. And so--in ten years' time--no more

Kishwégin at all."

"No. Then what future have you?" said Mr. May gloomily.

"I may be dead--who knows. If not, I shall have my little apartment in Lausanne, or in Bellizona, and I shall be a bourgeoise once more, and the good Catholic which I am."

"Which I am also," said Mr. May.

"So! Are you? An American Catholic?"

"Well--English--Irish--American."

"So!"

Mr. May never felt more gloomy in his life than he did that day. Where, finally, was he to rest his troubled head?

There was not all peace in the Natcha-Kee-Tawara group either. For Thursday, there was to be a change of program--"Kishwégin's Wedding--" (with the white prisoner, be if said)--was to take the place of the previous scene. Max of course was the director of the rehearsal. Madame would not come near the theatre when she herself was not to be acting.

Though very quiet and unobtrusive as a rule, Max could suddenly assume an air of hauteur and overbearing which was really very annoying. Geoffrey always fumed under it. But Ciccio it put into unholy, ungovernable tempers. For Max, suddenly, would reveal his contempt of the Eyetalian, as he called Ciccio, using the Cockney word.

"Bah! quelle tête de veau," said Max, suddenly contemptuous and angry because Ciccio, who really was slow at taking in the things said to him, had once more failed to understand.

"Comment?" queried Ciccio, in his slow, derisive way.

"Comment!" sneered Max, in echo. "What? What? Why what did I say? Calf's-head I said. Pig's-head, if that seems more suitable to you."

"To whom? To me or to you?" said Ciccio, sidling up.

"To you, lout of an Italian."

Max's colour was up, he held himself erect, his brown hair seemed to rise erect from his forehead, his blue eyes glared fierce.

"That is to say, to me, from an uncivilized German pig, ah? ah?"

All this in French. Alvina, as she sat at the piano, saw Max tall and blanched with anger; Ciccio with his neck stuck out, oblivious and convulsed with rage, stretching his neck at Max. All were in ordinary dress, but without coats, acting in their shirt-sleeves. Ciccio was clutching a property knife.

"Now! None of that! None of that!" said Mr. May, peremptory. But Ciccio, stretching forward taut and immobile with rage, was quite unconscious. His hand was fast on his stage knife.

"A dirty Eyetalian," said Max, in English, turning to Mr. May. "They understand nothing."

But the last word was smothered in Ciccio's spring and stab. Max half started on to his guard, received the blow on his collar-bone, near the pommel of the shoulder, reeled round on top of Mr. May, whilst Ciccio sprang like a cat down from the stage and bounded across the theatre and out of the door, leaving the knife rattling on the boards behind him. Max recovered and sprang like a demon, white with rage, straight out into the theatre after him.

"Stop--stop--!" cried Mr. May.

"Halte, Max! Max, Max, attends!" cried Louis and Geoffrey, as Louis sprang down after his friend. Thud went the boards again, with the spring of a man.

Alvina, who had been seated waiting at the piano below, started up and overturned her chair as Ciccio rushed past her. Now Max, white, with set blue eyes, was upon her.

"Don't--!" she cried, lifting her hand to stop his progress. He saw her, swerved, and hesitated, turned to leap over the seats and avoid her, when Louis caught him and flung his arms round him.

"Max--attends, ami! Laisse le partir. Max, tu sais que je t'aime. Tu le sais, ami. Tu le sais. Laisse le partir."

Max and Louis wrestled together in the gangway, Max looking down with hate on his friend. But Louis was determined also, he wrestled as fiercely as Max, and at last the latter began to yield. He was panting and beside himself. Louis still held him by the hand and by the arm.

"Let him go, brother, he isn't worth it. What does he understand, Max, dear brother, what does he understand? These fellows from the south, they are half children, half animal. They don't know what they are doing. Has he hurt you, dear friend? Has he hurt you? It was a dummy knife, but it was a heavy blow--the dog of an Italian. Let us see."

So gradually Max was brought to stand still. From under the edge of

his waistcoat, on the shoulder, the blood was already staining the shirt.

"Are you cut, brother, brother?" said Louis. "Let us see."

Max now moved his arm with pain. They took off his waistcoat and pushed back his shirt. A nasty blackening wound, with the skin broken.

"If the bone isn't broken!" said Louis anxiously. "If the bone isn't broken! Lift thy arm, frère--lift. It hurts you--so--. No--no--it is not broken--no--the bone is not broken."

"There is no bone broken, I know," said Max.

"The animal. He hasn't done that, at least."

"Where do you imagine he's gone?" asked Mr. May.

The foreigners shrugged their shoulders, and paid no heed. There was no more rehearsal.

"We had best go home and speak to Madame," said Mr. May, who was very frightened for his evening performance.

They locked up the Endeavour. Alvina was thinking of Ciccio. He was

gone in his shirt sleeves. She had taken his jacket and hat from the dressing-room at the back, and carried them under her rain-coat, which she had on her arm.

Madame was in a state of perturbation. She had heard some one come in at the back, and go upstairs, and go out again. Mrs. Rollings had told her it was the Italian, who had come in in his shirt-sleeves and gone out in his black coat and black hat, taking his bicycle, without saying a word. Poor Madame! She was struggling into her shoes, she had her hat on, when the others arrived.

"What is it?" she cried.

She heard a hurried explanation from Louis.

"Ah, the animal, the animal, he wasn't worth all my pains!" cried poor Madame, sitting with one shoe off and one shoe on. "Why, Max, why didst thou not remain man enough to control that insulting mountain temper of thine. Have I not said, and said, and said that in the Natcha-Kee-Tawara there was but one nation, the Red Indian, and but one tribe, the tribe of Kishwe? And now thou hast called him a dirty Italian, or a dog of an Italian, and he has behaved like an animal. Too much, too much of an animal, too little esprit. But thou, Max, art almost as bad. Thy temper is a devil's, which maybe is worse than an animal's. Ah, this Woodhouse, a curse is on it, I know it is. Would we were away from it. Will the week never pass? We shall have to find Ciccio. Without him the

company is ruined--until I get a substitute. I must get a substitute. And how?--and where?--in this country?--tell me that. I am tired of Natcha-Kee-Tawara. There is no true tribe of Kishwe--no, never. I have had enough of Natcha-Kee-Tawara. Let us break up, let us part, mes braves, let us say adieu here in this funeste Woodhouse."

"Oh, Madame, dear Madame," said Louis, "let us hope. Let us swear a closer fidelity, dear Madame, our Kishwégin. Let us never part. Max, thou dost not want to part, brother, well-loved? Thou dost not want to part, brother whom I love? And thou, Geoffrey, thou--"

Madame burst into tears, Louis wept too, even Max turned aside his face, with tears. Alvina stole out of the room, followed by Mr. May.

In a while Madame came out to them.

"Oh," she said. "You have not gone away! We are wondering which way Ciccio will have gone, on to Knarborough or to Marchay. Geoffrey will go on his bicycle to find him. But shall it be to Knarborough or to Marchay?"

"Ask the policeman in the market-place," said Alvina. "He's sure to have noticed him, because Ciccio's yellow bicycle is so uncommon."

Mr. May tripped out on this errand, while the others discussed among themselves where Ciccio might be.

Mr. May returned, and said that Ciccio had ridden off down the Knarborough Road. It was raining slightly.

"Ah!" said Madame. "And now how to find him, in that great town. I am afraid he will leave us without pity."

"Surely he will want to speak to Geoffrey before he goes," said Louis. "They were always good friends."

They all looked at Geoffrey. He shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Always good friends," he said. "Yes. He will perhaps wait for me at his cousin's in Battersea. In Knarborough, I don't know."

"How much money had he?" asked Mr. May.

Madame spread her hands and lifted her shoulders.

"Who knows?" she said.

"These Italians," said Louis, turning to Mr. May. "They have always money. In another country, they will not spend one sou if they can help. They are like this--" And he made the Neapolitan gesture drawing in the air with his fingers.

"But would he abandon you all without a word?" cried Mr. May.

"Yes! Yes!" said Madame, with a sort of stoic pathos. "He would. He alone would do such a thing. But he would do it."

"And what point would he make for?"

"What point? You mean where would he go? To Battersea, no doubt, to his cousin--and then to Italy, if he thinks he has saved enough money to buy land, or whatever it is."

"And so good-bye to him," said Mr. May bitterly.

"Geoffrey ought to know," said Madame, looking at Geoffrey.

Geoffrey shrugged his shoulders, and would not give his comrade away.

"No," he said. "I don't know. He will leave a message at Battersea, I know. But I don't know if he will go to Italy."

"And you don't know where to find him in Knarborough?" asked Mr. May, sharply, very much on the spot.

"No--I don't. Perhaps at the station he will go by train to London." It was evident Geoffrey was not going to help Mr. May.

"Alors!" said Madame, cutting through this futility. "Go thou to Knarborough, Geoffrey, and see--and be back at the theatre for work. Go now. And if thou can'st find him, bring him again to us. Tell him to come out of kindness to me. Tell him."

And she waved the young man away. He departed on his nine mile ride through the rain to Knarborough.

"They know," said Madame. "They know each other's places. It is a little more than a year since we came to Knarborough. But they will remember."

Geoffrey rode swiftly as possible through the mud. He did not care very much whether he found his friend or not. He liked the Italian, but he never looked on him as a permanency. He knew Ciccio was dissatisfied, and wanted a change. He knew that Italy was pulling him away from the troupe, with which he had been associated now for three years or more. And the Swiss from Martigny knew that the Neapolitan would go, breaking all ties, one day suddenly back to Italy. It was so, and Geoffrey was philosophical about it.

He rode into town, and the first thing he did was to seek out the music-hall artistes at their lodgings. He knew a good many of them. They gave him a welcome and a whiskey--but none of them had seen Ciccio. They sent him off to other artistes, other lodging-houses.

He went the round of associates known and unknown, of lodgings strange and familiar, of third-rate possible public houses. Then he went to the Italians down in the Marsh--he knew these people always ask for one another. And then, hurrying, he dashed to the Midland Station, and then to the Great Central Station, asking the porters on the London departure platform if they had seen his pal, a man with a yellow bicycle, and a black bicycle cape. All to no purpose.

Geoffrey hurriedly lit his lamp and swung off in the dark back to Woodhouse. He was a powerfully built, imperturbable fellow. He pressed slowly uphill through the streets, then ran downhill into the darkness of the industrial country. He had continually to cross the new tram-lines, which were awkward, and he had occasionally to dodge the brilliantly-illuminated tram-cars which threaded their way across-country through so much darkness. All the time it rained, and his back wheel slipped under him, in the mud and on the new tram-track.

As he pressed in the long darkness that lay between Slaters Mill and Durbeyhouses, he saw a light ahead--another cyclist. He moved to his side of the road. The light approached very fast. It was a strong acetylene flare. He watched it. A flash and a splash and he saw the humped back of what was probably Ciccio going by at a great pace on the low racing machine.

"Hi Cic'--! Ciccio!" he yelled, dropping off his own bicycle.

"Ha-er-er!" he heard the answering shout, unmistakably Italian, way down the darkness.

He turned--saw the other cyclist had stopped. The flare swung round, and Ciccio softly rode up. He dropped off beside Geoffrey.

"Toi!" said Ciccio.

"Hé! Où vas-tu?"

"Hé!" ejaculated Ciccio.

Their conversation consisted a good deal in noises variously ejaculated.

"Coming back?" asked Geoffrey.

"Where've you been?" retorted Ciccio.

"Knarborough--looking for thee. Where have you--?"

"Buckled my front wheel at Durbeyhouses."

"Come off?"

"Hé!"

"Hurt?"

"Nothing."

"Max is all right."

"Merde!"

"Come on, come back with me."

"Nay." Ciccio shook his head.

"Madame's crying. Wants thee to come back."

Ciccio shook his head.

"Come on, Cic'--" said Geoffrey.

Ciccio shook his head.

"Never?" said Geoffrey.

"Basta--had enough," said Ciccio, with an invisible grimace.

"Come for a bit, and we'll clear together."

Ciccio again shook his head.

"What, is it adieu?"

Ciccio did not speak.

"Don't go, comrade," said Geoffrey.

"Faut," said Ciccio, slightly derisive.

"Eh alors! I'd like to come with thee. What?"

"Where?"

"Doesn't matter. Thou'rt going to Italy?"

"Who knows!--seems so."

"I'd like to go back."

"Eh alors!" Ciccio half veered round.

"Wait for me a few days," said Geoffrey.

"Where?"

"See you tomorrow in Knarborough. Go to Mrs. Pym's, 6 Hampden Street. Gittiventi is there. Right, eh?"

"I'll think about it."

"Eleven o'clock, eh?"

"I'll think about it."

"Friends ever--Ciccio--eh?" Geoffrey held out his hand.

Ciccio slowly took it. The two men leaned to each other and kissed farewell, on either cheek.

"Tomorrow, Cic'--"

"Au revoir, Gigi."

Ciccio dropped on to his bicycle and was gone in a breath. Geoffrey waited a moment for a tram which was rushing brilliantly up to him in the rain. Then he mounted and rode in the opposite direction. He went straight down to Lumley, and Madame had to remain on tenterhooks till ten o'clock.

She heard the news, and said:

"Tomorrow I go to fetch him." And with this she went to bed.

In the morning she was up betimes, sending a note to Alvina. Alvina appeared at nine o'clock.

"You will come with me?" said Madame. "Come. Together we will go to Knarborough and bring back the naughty Ciccio. Come with me, because I haven't all my strength. Yes, you will? Good! Good! Let us tell the young men, and we will go now, on the tram-car."

"But I am not properly dressed," said Alvina.

"Who will see?" said Madame. "Come, let us go."

They told Geoffrey they would meet him at the corner of Hampden Street at five minutes to eleven.

"You see," said Madame to Alvina, "they are very funny, these young men, particularly Italians. You must never let them think you have caught them. Perhaps he will not let us see him--who knows? Perhaps he will go off to Italy all the same."

They sat in the bumping tram-car, a long and wearying journey. And then they tramped the dreary, hideous streets of the manufacturing

town. At the corner of the street they waited for Geoffrey, who rode up muddily on his bicycle.

"Ask Ciccio to come out to us, and we will go and drink coffee at the Geisha Restaurant--or tea or something," said Madame.

Again the two women waited wearily at the street-end. At last Geoffrey returned, shaking his head.

"He won't come?" cried Madame.

"No."

"He says he is going back to Italy?"

"To London."

"It is the same. You can never trust them. Is he quite obstinate?"

Geoffrey lifted his shoulders. Madame could see the beginnings of defection in him too. And she was tired and dispirited.

"We shall have to finish the Natcha-Kee-Tawara, that is all," she said fretfully.

Geoffrey watched her stolidly, impassively.

"Dost thou want to go with him?" she asked suddenly.

Geoffrey smiled sheepishly, and his colour deepened. But he did not speak.

"Go then--" she said. "Go then! Go with him! But for the sake of my honour, finish this week at Woodhouse. Can I make Miss Houghton's father lose these two nights? Where is your shame? Finish this week and then go, go--But finish this week. Tell Francesco that. I have finished with him. But let him finish this engagement. Don't put me to shame, don't destroy my honour, and the honour of the Natcha-Kee-Tawara. Tell him that."

Geoffrey turned again into the house. Madame, in her chic little black hat and spotted veil, and her trim black coat-and-skirt, stood there at the street-corner staring before her, shivering a little with cold, but saying no word of any sort.

Again Geoffrey appeared out of the doorway. His face was impassive.

"He says he doesn't want," he said.

"Ah!" she cried suddenly in French, "the ungrateful, the animal! He shall suffer. See if he shall not suffer. The low canaille, without faith or feeling. My Max, thou wert right. Ah, such canaille should

be beaten, as dogs are beaten, till they follow at heel. Will no one beat him for me, no one? Yes. Go back. Tell him before he leaves England he shall feel the hand of Kishwégin, and it shall be heavier than the Black Hand. Tell him that, the coward, that causes a woman's word to be broken against her will. Ah, canaille, canaille! Neither faith nor feeling, neither faith nor feeling. Trust them not, dogs of the south." She took a few agitated steps down the pavement. Then she raised her veil to wipe away her tears of anger and bitter disappointment.

"Wait a bit," said Alvina. "I'll go." She was touched.

"No. Don't you!" cried Madame.

"Yes I will," she said. The light of battle was in her eyes. "You'll come with me to the door," she said to Geoffrey.

Geoffrey started obediently, and led the way up a long narrow stair, covered with yellow-and-brown oil-cloth, rather worn, on to the top of the house.

"Ciccio," he said, outside the door.

"Oui!" came the curly voice of Ciccio.

Geoffrey opened the door. Ciccio was sitting on a narrow bed, in a

rather poor attic, under the steep slope of the roof.

"Don't come in," said Alvina to Geoffrey, looking over her shoulder at him as she entered. Then she closed the door behind her, and stood with her back to it, facing the Italian. He sat loose on the bed, a cigarette between his fingers, dropping ash on the bare boards between his feet. He looked up curiously at Alvina. She stood watching him with wide, bright blue eyes, smiling slightly, and saying nothing. He looked up at her steadily, on his guard, from under his long black lashes.

"Won't you come?" she said, smiling and looking into his eyes. He flicked off the ash of his cigarette with his little finger. She wondered why he wore the nail of his little finger so long, so very long. Still she smiled at him, and still he gave no sign.

"Do come!" she urged, never taking her eyes from him.

He made not the slightest movement, but sat with his hands dropped between his knees, watching her, the cigarette wavering up its blue thread of smoke.

"Won't you?" she said, as she stood with her back to the door. "Won't you come?" She smiled strangely and vividly.

Suddenly she took a pace forward, stooped, watching his face as if

timidly, caught his brown hand in her own and lifted it towards herself. His hand started, dropped the cigarette, but was not withdrawn.

"You will come, won't you?" she said, smiling gently into his strange, watchful yellow eyes, that looked fixedly into hers, the dark pupil opening round and softening. She smiled into his softening round eyes, the eyes of some animal which stares in one of its silent, gentler moments. And suddenly she kissed his hand, kissed it twice, quickly, on the fingers and the back. He wore a silver ring. Even as she kissed his fingers with her lips, the silver ring seemed to her a symbol of his subjection, inferiority. She drew his hand slightly. And he rose to his feet.

She turned round and took the door-handle, still holding his fingers in her left hand.

"You are coming, aren't you?" she said, looking over her shoulder into his eyes. And taking consent from his unchanging eyes, she let go his hand and slightly opened the door. He turned slowly, and taking his coat from a nail, slung it over his shoulders and drew it on. Then he picked up his hat, and put his foot on his half-smoked cigarette, which lay smoking still. He followed her out of the room, walking with his head rather forward, in the half loutish, sensual-subjected way of the Italians.

As they entered the street, they saw the trim, French figure of Madame standing alone, as if abandoned. Her face was very white under her spotted veil, her eyes very black. She watched Ciccio following behind Alvina in his dark, hangdog fashion, and she did not move a muscle until he came to a standstill in front of her. She was watching his face.

"Te voilà donc!" she said, without expression. "Allons boire un café, hé? Let us go and drink some coffee." She had now put an inflection of tenderness into her voice. But her eyes were black with anger. Ciccio smiled slowly, the slow, fine, stupid smile, and turned to walk alongside.

Madame said nothing as they went. Geoffrey passed on his bicycle, calling out that he would go straight to Woodhouse.

When the three sat with their cups of coffee, Madame pushed up her veil just above her eyes, so that it was a black band above her brows. Her face was pale and full like a child's, but almost stonily expressionless, her eyes were black and inscrutable. She watched both Ciccio and Alvina with her black, inscrutable looks.

"Would you like also biscuits with your coffee, the two of you?" she said, with an amiable intonation which her strange black looks belied.

"Yes," said Alvina. She was a little flushed, as if defiant, while Ciccio sat sheepishly, turning aside his ducked head, the slow, stupid, yet fine smile on his lips.

"And no more trouble with Max, hein?--you Ciccio?" said Madame, still with the amiable intonation and the same black, watching eyes. "No more of these stupid scenes, hein? What? Do you answer me."

"No more from me," he said, looking up at her with a narrow, cat-like look in his derisive eyes.

"Ho? No? No more? Good then! It is good! We are glad, aren't we, Miss Houghton, that Ciccio has come back and there are to be no more rows?--hein?--aren't we?"

"I'm awfully glad," said Alvina.

"Awfully glad--yes--awfully glad! You hear, you Ciccio. And you remember another time. What? Don't you? Hé?"

He looked up at her, the slow, derisive smile curling his lips.

"Sure," he said slowly, with subtle intonation.

"Yes. Good! Well then! Well then! We are all friends. We are all friends, aren't we, all the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras? Hé? What you think?

What you say?"

"Yes," said Ciccio, again looking up at her with his yellow, glinting eyes.

"All right! All right then! It is all right--forgotten--" Madame sounded quite frank and restored. But the sullen watchfulness in her eyes, and the narrowed look in Ciccio's, as he glanced at her, showed another state behind the obviousness of the words. "And Miss Houghton is one of us! Yes? She has united us once more, and so she has become one of us." Madame smiled strangely from her blank, round white face.

"I should love to be one of the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras," said Alvina.

"Yes--well--why not? Why not become one? Why not? What you say, Ciccio? You can play the piano, perhaps do other things. Perhaps better than Kishwégin. What you say, Ciccio, should she not join us? Is she not one of us?"

He smiled and showed his teeth but did not answer.

"Well, what is it? Say then? Shall she not?"

"Yes," said Ciccio, unwilling to commit himself.

"Yes, so I say! So I say. Quite a good idea! We will think of it, and speak perhaps to your father, and you shall come! Yes."

So the two women returned to Woodhouse by the tram-car, while Ciccio rode home on his bicycle. It was surprising how little Madame and Alvina found to say to one another.

Madame effected the reunion of her troupe, and all seemed pretty much as before. She had decided to dance the next night, the Saturday night. On Sunday the party would leave for Warsall, about thirty miles away, to fulfil their next engagement.

That evening Ciccio, whenever he had a moment to spare, watched Alvina. She knew it. But she could not make out what his watching meant. In the same way he might have watched a serpent, had he found one gliding in the theatre. He looked at her sideways, furtively, but persistently. And yet he did not want to meet her glance. He avoided her, and watched her. As she saw him standing, in his negligent, muscular, slouching fashion, with his head dropped forward, and his eyes sideways, sometimes she disliked him. But there was a sort of finesse about his face. His skin was delicately tawny, and slightly lustrous. The eyes were set in so dark, that one expected them to be black and flashing. And then one met the yellow pupils, sulphureous and remote. It was like meeting a lion. His long, fine nose, his rather long, rounded chin and curling lips seemed refined through ages of forgotten culture. He was

waiting: silent there, with something muscular and remote about his very droop, he was waiting. What for? Alvina could not guess. She wanted to meet his eye, to have an open understanding with him. But he would not. When she went up to talk to him, he answered in his stupid fashion, with a smile of the mouth and no change of the eyes, saying nothing at all. Obstinately he held away from her. When he was in his war-paint, for one moment she hated his muscular, handsome, downward-drooping torso: so stupid and full. The fine sharp uprightness of Max seemed much finer, clearer, more manly. Ciccio's velvety, suave heaviness, the very heave of his muscles, so full and softly powerful, sickened her.

She flashed away angrily on her piano. Madame, who was dancing Kishwégin on the last evening, cast sharp glances at her. Alvina had avoided Madame as Ciccio had avoided Alvina--elusive and yet conscious, a distance, and yet a connection.

Madame danced beautifully. No denying it, she was an artist. She became something quite different: fresh, virginal, pristine, a magic creature flickering there. She was infinitely delicate and attractive. Her braves became glamorous and heroic at once, and magically she cast her spell over them. It was all very well for Alvina to bang the piano crossly. She could not put out the glow which surrounded Kishwégin and her troupe. Ciccio was handsome now: without war-paint, and roused, fearless and at the same time suggestive, a dark, mysterious glamour on his face, passionate and

remote. A stranger--and so beautiful. Alvina flashed at the piano, almost in tears. She hated his beauty. It shut her apart. She had nothing to do with it.

Madame, with her long dark hair hanging in finely-brushed tresses, her cheek burning under its dusky stain, was another creature. How soft she was on her feet. How humble and remote she seemed, as across a chasm from the men. How submissive she was, with an eternity of inaccessible submission. Her hovering dance round the dead bear was exquisite: her dark, secretive curiosity, her admiration of the massive, male strength of the creature, her quivers of triumph over the dead beast, her cruel exultation, and her fear that he was not really dead. It was a lovely sight, suggesting the world's morning, before Eve had bitten any white-fleshed apple, whilst she was still dusky, dark-eyed, and still. And then her stealthy sympathy with the white prisoner! Now indeed she was the dusky Eve tempted into knowledge. Her fascination was ruthless. She kneeled by the dead brave, her husband, as she had knelt by the bear: in fear and admiration and doubt and exultation. She gave him the least little push with her foot. Dead meat like the bear! And a flash of delight went over her, that changed into a sob of mortal anguish. And then, flickering, wicked, doubtful, she watched Ciccio wrestling with the bear.

She was the clue to all the action, was Kishwégin. And her dark braves seemed to become darker, more secret, malevolent, burning

with a cruel fire, and at the same time wistful, knowing their end. Ciccio laughed in a strange way, as he wrestled with the bear, as he had never laughed on the previous evenings. The sound went out into the audience, a soft, malevolent, derisive sound. And when the bear was supposed to have crushed him, and he was to have fallen, he reeled out of the bear's arms and said to Madame, in his derisive voice:

"Vivo sempre, Madame." And then he fell.

Madame stopped as if shot, hearing his words: "I am still alive, Madame." She remained suspended motionless, suddenly wilted. Then all at once her hand went to her mouth with a scream:

"The Bear!"

So the scene concluded itself. But instead of the tender, half-wistful triumph of Kishwégin, a triumph electric as it should have been when she took the white man's hand and kissed it, there was a doubt, a hesitancy, a nullity, and Max did not quite know what to do.

After the performance, neither Madame nor Max dared say anything to Ciccio about his innovation into the play. Louis felt he had to speak--it was left to him.

"I say, Cic'--" he said, "why did you change the scene? It might have spoiled everything if Madame wasn't such a genius. Why did you say that?"

"Why," said Ciccio, answering Louis' French in Italian, "I am tired of being dead, you see."

Madame and Max heard in silence.

When Alvina had played God Save the King she went round behind the stage. But Ciccio and Geoffrey had already packed up the property, and left. Madame was talking to James Houghton. Louis and Max were busy together. Mr. May came to Alvina.

"Well," he said. "That closes another week. I think we've done very well, in face of difficulties, don't you?"

"Wonderfully," she said.

But poor Mr. May spoke and looked pathetically. He seemed to feel forlorn. Alvina was not attending to him. Her eye was roving. She took no notice of him.

Madame came up.

"Well, Miss Houghton," she said, "time to say good-bye, I suppose."

"How do you feel after dancing?" asked Alvina.

"Well--not so strong as usual--but not so bad, you know. I shall be all right--thanks to you. I think your father is more ill than I. To me he looks very ill."

"Father wears himself away," said Alvina.

"Yes, and when we are no longer young, there is not so much to wear. Well, I must thank you once more--"

"What time do you leave in the morning?"

"By the train at half-past ten. If it doesn't rain, the young men will cycle--perhaps all of them. Then they will go when they like--"

"I will come round to say good-bye--" said Alvina.

"Oh no--don't disturb yourself--"

"Yes, I want to take home the things--the kettle for the bronchitis, and those things--"

"Oh thank you very much--but don't trouble yourself. I will send Ciccio with them--or one of the others--"

"I should like to say good-bye to you all," persisted Alvina.

Madame glanced round at Max and Louis.

"Are we not all here? No. The two have gone. No! Well! Well what time will you come?"

"About nine?"

"Very well, and I leave at ten. Very well. Then au revoir till the morning. Good-night."

"Good-night," said Alvina. Her colour was rather flushed.

She walked up with Mr. May, and hardly noticed he was there. After supper, when James Houghton had gone up to count his pennies, Alvina said to Miss Pinnegar:

"Don't you think father looks rather seedy, Miss Pinnegar?"

"I've been thinking so a long time," said Miss Pinnegar tartly.

"What do you think he ought to do?"

"He's killing himself down there, in all weathers and freezing in

that box-office, and then the bad atmosphere. He's killing himself, that's all."

"What can we do?"

"Nothing so long as there's that place down there. Nothing at all."

Alvina thought so too. So she went to bed.

She was up in time, and watching the clock. It was a grey morning, but not raining. At five minutes to nine, she hurried off to Mrs. Rollings. In the back yard the bicycles were out, glittering and muddy according to their owners. Ciccio was crouching mending a tire, crouching balanced on his toes, near the earth. He turned like a quick-eared animal glancing up as she approached, but did not rise.

"Are you getting ready to go?" she said, looking down at him. He screwed his head round to her unwillingly, upside down, his chin tilted up at her. She did not know him thus inverted. Her eyes rested on his face, puzzled. His chin seemed so large, aggressive. He was a little bit repellent and brutal, inverted. Yet she continued:

"Would you help me to carry back the things we brought for Madame?"

He rose to his feet, but did not look at her. He was wearing broken cycling shoes. He stood looking at his bicycle tube.

"Not just yet," she said. "I want to say good-bye to Madame. Will you come in half an hour?"

"Yes, I will come," he said, still watching his bicycle tube, which sprawled nakedly on the floor. The forward drop of his head was curiously beautiful to her, the straight, powerful nape of the neck, the delicate shape of the back of the head, the black hair. The way the neck sprang from the strong, loose shoulders was beautiful. There was something mindless but intent about the forward reach of his head. His face seemed colourless, neutral-tinted and expressionless.

She went indoors. The young men were moving about making preparations.

"Come upstairs, Miss Houghton!" called Madame's voice from above. Alvina mounted, to find Madame packing.

"It is an uneasy moment, when we are busy to move," said Madame, looking up at Alvina as if she were a stranger.

"I'm afraid I'm in the way. But I won't stay a minute."

"Oh, it is all right. Here are the things you brought--" Madame indicated a little pile--"and thank you very much, very much. I feel you saved my life. And now let me give you one little token of my gratitude. It is not much, because we are not millionaires in the Natcha-Kee-Tawara. Just a little remembrance of our troublesome visit to Woodhouse."

She presented Alvina with a pair of exquisite bead moccasins, woven in a weird, lovely pattern, with soft deerskin soles and sides.

"They belong to Kishwégin, so it is Kishwégin who gives them to you, because she is grateful to you for saving her life, or at least from a long illness."

"Oh--but I don't want to take them--" said Alvina.

"You don't like them? Why?"

"I think they're lovely, lovely! But I don't want to take them from you--"

"If I give them, you do not take them from me. You receive them. Hé?" And Madame pressed back the slippers, opening her plump jewelled hands in a gesture of finality.

"But I don't like to take these," said Alvina. "I feel they belong

to Natcha-Kee-Tawara. And I don't want to rob Natcha-Kee-Tawara, do I? Do take them back."

"No, I have given them. You cannot rob Natcha-Kee-Tawara in taking a pair of shoes--impossible!"

"And I'm sure they are much too small for me."

"Ha!" exclaimed Madame. "It is that! Try."

"I know they are," said Alvina, laughing confusedly.

She sat down and took off her own shoe. The moccasin was a little too short--just a little. But it was charming on the foot, charming.

"Yes," said Madame. "It is too short. Very well. I must find you something else."

"Please don't," said Alvina. "Please don't find me anything. I don't want anything. Please!"

"What?" said Madame, eyeing her closely. "You don't want? Why? You don't want anything from Natcha-Kee-Tawara, or from Kishwégin? Hé? From which?"

"Don't give me anything, please," said Alvina.

"All right! All right then. I won't. I won't give you anything. I can't give you anything you want from Natcha-Kee-Tawara."

And Madame busied herself again with the packing.

"I'm awfully sorry you are going," said Alvina.

"Sorry? Why? Yes, so am I sorry we shan't see you any more. Yes, so I am. But perhaps we shall see you another time--hé? I shall send you a post-card. Perhaps I shall send one of the young men on his bicycle, to bring you something which I shall buy for you. Yes? Shall I?"

"Oh! I should be awfully glad--but don't buy--" Alvina checked herself in time. "Don't buy anything. Send me a little thing from Natcha-Kee-Tawara. I love the slippers--"

"But they are too small," said Madame, who had been watching her with black eyes that read every motive. Madame too had her avaricious side, and was glad to get back the slippers. "Very well--very well, I will do that. I will send you some small thing from Natcha-Kee-Tawara, and one of the young men shall bring it. Perhaps Ciccio? Hé?"

"Thank you so much," said Alvina, holding out her hand. "Good-bye.

I'm so sorry you're going."

"Well--well! We are not going so very far. Not so very far. Perhaps we shall see each other another day. It may be. Good-bye!"

Madame took Alvina's hand, and smiled at her winsomely all at once, kindly, from her inscrutable black eyes. A sudden unusual kindness. Alvina flushed with surprise and a desire to cry.

"Yes. I am sorry you are not with Natcha-Kee-Tawara. But we shall see. Good-bye. I shall do my packing."

Alvina carried down the things she had to remove. Then she went to say good-bye to the young men, who were in various stages of their toilet. Max alone was quite presentable.

Ciccio was just putting on the outer cover of his front tire. She watched his brown thumbs press it into place. He was quick and sure, much more capable, and even masterful, than you would have supposed, seeing his tawny Mediterranean hands. He spun the wheel round, patting it lightly.

"Is it finished?"

"Yes, I think." He reached his pump and blew up the tire. She watched his softly-applied force. What physical, muscular force

there was in him. Then he swung round the bicycle, and stood it again on its wheels. After which he quickly folded his tools.

"Will you come now?" she said.

He turned, rubbing his hands together, and drying them on an old cloth. He went into the house, pulled on his coat and his cap, and picked up the things from the table.

"Where are you going?" Max asked.

Ciccio jerked his head towards Alvina.

"Oh, allow me to carry them, Miss Houghton. He is not fit--" said Max.

True, Ciccio had no collar on, and his shoes were burst.

"I don't mind," said Alvina hastily. "He knows where they go. He brought them before."

"But I will carry them. I am dressed. Allow me--" and he began to take the things. "You get dressed, Ciccio."

Ciccio looked at Alvina.

"Do you want?" he said, as if waiting for orders.

"Do let Ciccio take them," said Alvina to Max. "Thank you ever so much. But let him take them."

So Alvina marched off through the Sunday morning streets, with the Italian, who was down at heel and encumbered with an armful of sick-room apparatus. She did not know what to say, and he said nothing.

"We will go in this way," she said, suddenly opening the hall door. She had unlocked it before she went out, for that entrance was hardly ever used. So she showed the Italian into the sombre drawing-room, with its high black bookshelves with rows and rows of calf-bound volumes, its old red and flowered carpet, its grand piano littered with music. Ciccio put down the things as she directed, and stood with his cap in his hands, looking aside.

"Thank you so much," she said, lingering.

He curled his lips in a faint deprecatory smile.

"Nothing," he murmured.

His eye had wandered uncomfortably up to a portrait on the wall.

"That was my mother," said Alvina.

He glanced down at her, but did not answer.

"I am so sorry you're going away," she said nervously. She stood looking up at him with wide blue eyes.

The faint smile grew on the lower part of his face, which he kept averted. Then he looked at her.

"We have to move," he said, with his eyes watching her reservedly, his mouth twisting with a half-bashful smile.

"Do you like continually going away?" she said, her wide blue eyes fixed on his face.

He nodded slightly.

"We have to do it. I like it."

What he said meant nothing to him. He now watched her fixedly, with a slightly mocking look, and a reserve he would not relinquish.

"Do you think I shall ever see you again?" she said.

"Should you like--?" he answered, with a sly smile and a faint

shrug.

"I should like awfully--" a flush grew on her cheek. She heard Miss Pinnegar's scarcely audible step approaching.

He nodded at her slightly, watching her fixedly, turning up the corners of his eyes slyly, his nose seeming slyly to sharpen.

"All right. Next week, eh? In the morning?"

"Do!" cried Alvina, as Miss Pinnegar came through the door. He glanced quickly over his shoulder.

"Oh!" cried Miss Pinnegar. "I couldn't imagine who it was." She eyed the young fellow sharply.

"Couldn't you?" said Alvina. "We brought back these things."

"Oh yes. Well--you'd better come into the other room, to the fire," said Miss Pinnegar.

"I shall go along. Good-bye!" said Ciccio, and with a slight bow to Alvina, and a still slighter to Miss Pinnegar, he was out of the room and out of the front door, as if turning tail.

"I suppose they're going this morning," said Miss Pinnegar.