CHAPTER IX

ALVINA BECOMES ALLAYE

Alvina wept when the Natchas had gone. She loved them so much, she wanted to be with them. Even Ciccio she regarded as only one of the Natchas. She looked forward to his coming as to a visit from the troupe.

How dull the theatre was without them! She was tired of the Endeavour. She wished it did not exist. The rehearsal on the Monday morning bored her terribly. Her father was nervous and irritable. The previous week had tried him sorely. He had worked himself into a state of nervous apprehension such as nothing would have justified, unless perhaps, if the wooden walls of the Endeavour had burnt to the ground, with James inside victimized like another Samson. He had developed a nervous horror of all artistes. He did not feel safe for one single moment whilst he depended on a single one of them.

"We shall have to convert into all pictures," he said in a nervous fever to Mr. May. "Don't make any more engagements after the end of next month."

"Really!" said Mr. May. "Really! Have you quite decided?"

"Yes quite! Yes quite!" James fluttered. "I have written about a new machine, and the supply of films from Chanticlers."

"Really!" said Mr. May. "Oh well then, in that case--" But he was filled with dismay and chagrin.

"Of cauce," he said later to Alvina, "I can't possibly stop on if we are nothing but a picture show!" And he arched his blanched and dismal eyelids with ghastly finality.

"Why?" cried Alvina.

"Oh--why!" He was rather ironic. "Well, it's not my line at all. I'm not a film-operator!" And he put his head on one side with a grimace of contempt and superiority.

"But you are, as well," said Alvina.

"Yes, as well. But not only! You may wash the dishes in the scullery. But you're not only the char, are you?"

"But is it the same?" cried Alvina.

"Of cauce!" cried Mr. May. "Of cauce it's the same."

Alvina laughed, a little heartlessly, into his pallid, stricken

eyes.

"But what will you do?" she asked.

"I shall have to look for something else," said the injured but dauntless little man. "There's nothing else, is there?"

"Wouldn't you stay on?" she asked.

"I wouldn't think of it. I wouldn't think of it." He turtled like an injured pigeon.

"Well," she said, looking laconically into his face: "It's between you and father--"

"Of cauce!" he said. "Naturally! Where else--!" But his tone was a little spiteful, as if he had rested his last hopes on Alvina.

Alvina went away. She mentioned the coming change to Miss Pinnegar.

"Well," said Miss Pinnegar, judicious but aloof, "it's a move in the right direction. But I doubt if it'll do any good."

"Do you?" said Alvina. "Why?"

"I don't believe in the place, and I never did," declared Miss

Pinnegar. "I don't believe any good will come of it."

"But why?" persisted Alvina. "What makes you feel so sure about it?"

"I don't know. But that's how I feel. And I have from the first. It was wrong from the first. It was wrong to begin it."

"But why?" insisted Alvina, laughing.

"Your father had no business to be led into it. He'd no business to touch this show business. It isn't like him. It doesn't belong to him. He's gone against his own nature and his own life."

"Oh but," said Alvina, "father was a showman even in the shop. He always was. Mother said he was like a showman in a booth."

Miss Pinnegar was taken aback.

"Well!" she said sharply. "If that's what you've seen in him!"--there was a pause. "And in that case," she continued tartly, "I think some of the showman has come out in his daughter! or show-woman!--which doesn't improve it, to my idea."

"Why is it any worse?" said Alvina. "I enjoy it--and so does father."

"No," cried Miss Pinnegar. "There you're wrong! There you make a mistake. It's all against his better nature."

"Really!" said Alvina, in surprise. "What a new idea! But which is father's better nature?"

"You may not know it," said Miss Pinnegar coldly, "and if so, I can never tell you. But that doesn't alter it." She lapsed into dead silence for a moment. Then suddenly she broke out, vicious and cold: "He'll go on till he's killed himself, and then he'll know."

The little adverb then came whistling across the space like a bullet. It made Alvina pause. Was her father going to die? She reflected. Well, all men must die.

She forgot the question in others that occupied her. First, could she bear it, when the Endeavour was turned into another cheap and nasty film-shop? The strange figures of the artistes passing under her observation had really entertained her, week by week. Some weeks they had bored her, some weeks she had detested them, but there was always a chance in the coming week. Think of the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras!

She thought too much of the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras. She knew it. And she tried to force her mind to the contemplation of the new state of things, when she banged at the piano to a set of dithering and boring pictures. There would be her father, herself, and Mr. May--or

a new operator, a new manager. The new manager!--she thought of him for a moment--and thought of the mechanical factory-faced persons who managed Wright's and the Woodhouse Empire.

But her mind fell away from this barren study. She was obsessed by the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras. They seemed to have fascinated her. Which of them it was, or what it was that had cast the spell over her, she did not know. But she was as if hypnotized. She longed to be with them. Her soul gravitated towards them all the time.

Monday passed, and Ciccio did not come: Tuesday passed: and Wednesday. In her soul she was sceptical of their keeping their promise--either Madame or Ciccio. Why should they keep their promise? She knew what these nomadic artistes were. And her soul was stubborn within her.

On Wednesday night there was another sensation at the Endeavour. Mr. May found James Houghton fainting in the box-office after the performance had begun. What to do? He could not interrupt Alvina, nor the performance. He sent the chocolate-and-orange boy across to the Pear Tree for brandy.

James revived. "I'm all right," he said, in a brittle fashion. "I'm all right. Don't bother." So he sat with his head on his hand in the box-office, and Mr. May had to leave him to operate the film.

When the interval arrived, Mr. May hurried to the box-office, a narrow hole that James could just sit in, and there he found the invalid in the same posture, semi-conscious. He gave him more brandy.

"I'm all right, I tell you," said James, his eyes flaring. "Leave me alone." But he looked anything but all right.

Mr. May hurried for Alvina. When the daughter entered the ticket place, her father was again in a state of torpor.

"Father," she said, shaking his shoulder gently. "What's the matter."

He murmured something, but was incoherent. She looked at his face. It was grey and blank.

"We shall have to get him home," she said. "We shall have to get a cab."

"Give him a little brandy," said Mr. May.

The boy was sent for the cab, James swallowed a spoonful of brandy. He came to himself irritably.

"What? What," he said. "I won't have all this fuss. Go on with the

performance, there's no need to bother about me." His eye was wild.

"You must go home, father," said Alvina.

"Leave me alone! Will you leave me alone! Hectored by women all my life--hectored by women--first one, then another. I won't stand it--I won't stand it--" He looked at Alvina with a look of frenzy as he lapsed again, fell with his head on his hands on his ticket-board. Alvina looked at Mr. May.

"We must get him home," she said. She covered him up with a coat, and sat by him. The performance went on without music. At last the cab came. James, unconscious, was driven up to Woodhouse. He had to be carried indoors. Alvina hurried ahead to make a light in the dark passage.

"Father's ill!" she announced to Miss Pinnegar.

"Didn't I say so!" said Miss Pinnegar, starting from her chair.

The two women went out to meet the cab-man, who had James in his arms.

"Can you manage?" cried Alvina, showing a light.

"He doesn't weigh much," said the man.

"Tu-tu-tu-tu-tu-tu-tu!" went Miss Pinnegar's tongue, in a rapid tut-tut of distress. "What have I said, now," she exclaimed. "What have I said all along?"

James was laid on the sofa. His eyes were half-shut. They made him drink brandy, the boy was sent for the doctor, Alvina's bed was warmed. The sick man was got to bed. And then started another vigil. Alvina sat up in the sick room. James started and muttered, but did not regain consciousness. Dawn came, and he was the same. Pneumonia and pleurisy and a touch of meningitis. Alvina drank her tea, took a little breakfast, and went to bed at about nine o'clock in the morning, leaving James in charge of Miss Pinnegar. Time was all deranged.

Miss Pinnegar was a nervous nurse. She sat in horror and apprehension, her eyebrows raised, starting and looking at James in terror whenever he made a noise. She hurried to him and did what she could. But one would have said she was repulsed, she found her task unconsciously repugnant.

During the course of the morning Mrs. Rollings came up and said that the Italian from last week had come, and could he speak to Miss Houghton.

"Tell him she's resting, and Mr. Houghton is seriously ill," said

Miss Pinnegar sharply.

When Alvina came downstairs at about four in the afternoon she found a package: a comb of carved bone, and a message from Madame: "To Miss Houghton, with kindest greetings and most sincere thanks from Kishwégin."

The comb with its carved, beast-faced serpent was her portion. Alvina asked if there had been any other message. None.

Mr. May came in, and stayed for a dismal half-hour. Then Alvina went back to her nursing. The patient was no better, still unconscious. Miss Pinnegar came down, red eyed and sullen looking. The condition of James gave little room for hope.

In the early morning he died. Alvina called Mrs. Rollings, and they composed the body. It was still only five o'clock, and not light. Alvina went to lie down in her father's little, rather chilly chamber at the end of the corridor. She tried to sleep, but could not. At half-past seven she arose, and started the business of the new day. The doctor came--she went to the registrar--and so on.

Mr. May came. It was decided to keep open the theatre. He would find some one else for the piano, some one else to issue the tickets.

In the afternoon arrived Frederick Houghton, James's cousin and

nearest relative. He was a middle-aged, blond, florid, church-going draper from Knarborough, well-to-do and very bourgeois. He tried to talk to Alvina in a fatherly fashion, or a friendly, or a helpful fashion. But Alvina could not listen to him. He got on her nerves.

Hearing the gate bang, she rose and hurried to the window. She was in the drawing-room with her cousin, to give the interview its proper air of solemnity. She saw Ciccio rearing his yellow bicycle against the wall, and going with his head forward along the narrow, dark way of the back yard, to the scullery door.

"Excuse me a minute," she said to her cousin, who looked up irritably as she left the room.

She was just in time to open the door as Ciccio tapped. She stood on the doorstep above him. He looked up, with a faint smile, from under his black lashes.

"How nice of you to come," she said. But her face was blanched and tired, without expression. Only her large eyes looked blue in their tiredness, as she glanced down at Ciccio. He seemed to her far away.

"Madame asks how is Mr. Houghton," he said.

"Father! He died this morning," she said quietly.

"He died!" exclaimed the Italian, a flash of fear and dismay going over his face.

"Yes--this morning." She had neither tears nor emotion, but just looked down on him abstractedly, from her height on the kitchen step. He dropped his eyes and looked at his feet. Then he lifted his eyes again, and looked at her. She looked back at him, as from across a distance. So they watched each other, as strangers across a wide, abstract distance.

He turned and looked down the dark yard, towards the gate where he could just see the pale grey tire of his bicycle, and the yellow mud-guard. He seemed to be reflecting. If he went now, he went for ever. Involuntarily he turned and lifted his face again towards Alvina, as if studying her curiously. She remained there on the doorstep, neutral, blanched, with wide, still, neutral eyes. She did not seem to see him. He studied her with alert, yellow-dusky, inscrutable eyes, until she met his look. And then he gave the faintest gesture with his head, as of summons towards him. Her soul started, and died in her. And again he gave the slight, almost imperceptible jerk of the head, backwards and sideways, as if summoning her towards him. His face too was closed and expressionless. But in his eyes, which kept hers, there was a dark flicker of ascendancy. He was going to triumph over her. She knew it. And her soul sank as if it sank out of her body. It sank away out of her body, left her there powerless, soulless.

And yet as he turned, with his head stretched forward, to move away: as he glanced slightly over his shoulder: she stepped down from the step, down to his level, to follow him. He went ducking along the dark yard, nearly to the gate. Near the gate, near his bicycle, was a corner made by a shed. Here he turned, lingeringly, to her, and she lingered in front of him.

Her eyes were wide and neutral and submissive, with a new, awful submission as if she had lost her soul. So she looked up at him, like a victim. There was a faint smile in his eyes. He stretched forward over her.

"You love me? Yes?--Yes?" he said, in a voice that seemed like a palpable contact on her.

"Yes," she whispered involuntarily, soulless, like a victim. He put his arm round her, subtly, and lifted her.

"Yes," he re-echoed, almost mocking in his triumph. "Yes. Yes!" And smiling, he kissed her, delicately, with a certain finesse of knowledge. She moaned in spirit, in his arms, felt herself dead, dead. And he kissed her with a finesse, a passionate finesse which seemed like coals of fire on her head.

They heard footsteps. Miss Pinnegar was coming to look for her. Ciccio set her down, looked long into her eyes, inscrutably,

smiling, and said:

"I come tomorrow."

With which he ducked and ran out of the yard, picking up his bicycle like a feather, and, taking no notice of Miss Pinnegar, letting the yard-door bang to behind him.

"Alvina!" said Miss Pinnegar.

But Alvina did not answer. She turned, slipped past, ran indoors and upstairs to the little bare bedroom she had made her own. She locked the door and kneeled down on the floor, bowing down her head to her knees in a paroxysm on the floor. In a paroxysm--because she loved him. She doubled herself up in a paroxysm on her knees on the floor--because she loved him. It was far more like pain, like agony, than like joy. She swayed herself to and fro in a paroxysm of unbearable sensation, because she loved him.

Miss Pinnegar came and knocked at the door.

"Alvina! Alvina! Oh, you are there! Whatever are you doing? Aren't you coming down to speak to your cousin?"

"Soon," said Alvina.

And taking a pillow from the bed, she crushed it against herself and swayed herself unconsciously, in her orgasm of unbearable feeling. Right in her bowels she felt it--the terrible, unbearable feeling. How could she bear it.

She crouched over until she became still. A moment of stillness seemed to cover her like sleep: an eternity of sleep in that one second. Then she roused and got up. She went to the mirror, still, evanescent, and tidied her hair, smoothed her face. She was so still, so remote, she felt that nothing, nothing could ever touch her.

And so she went downstairs, to that horrible cousin of her father's. She seemed so intangible, remote and virginal, that her cousin and Miss Pinnegar both failed to make anything of her. She answered their questions simply, but did not talk. They talked to each other. And at last the cousin went away, with a profound dislike of Miss Alvina.

She did not notice. She was only glad he was gone. And she went about for the rest of the day elusive and vague. She slept deeply that night, without dreams.

The next day was Saturday. It came with a great storm of wind and rain and hail: a fury. Alvina looked out in dismay. She knew Ciccio would not be able to come--he could not cycle, and it was impossible

to get by train and return the same day. She was almost relieved. She was relieved by the intermission of fate, she was thankful for the day of neutrality.

In the early afternoon came a telegram: Coming both tomorrow morning deepest sympathy Madame. Tomorrow was Sunday: and the funeral was in the afternoon. Alvina felt a burning inside her, thinking of Ciccio. She winced--and yet she wanted him to come. Terribly she wanted him to come.

She showed the telegram to Miss Pinnegar.

"Good gracious!" said the weary Miss Pinnegar. "Fancy those people. And I warrant they'll want to be at the funeral. As if he was anything to them--"

"I think it's very nice of her," said Alvina.

"Oh well," said Miss Pinnegar. "If you think so. I don't fancy he would have wanted such people following, myself. And what does she mean by both. Who's the other?" Miss Pinnegar looked sharply at Alvina.

"Ciccio," said Alvina.

"The Italian! Why goodness me! What's he coming for? I can't make

you out, Alvina. Is that his name, Chicho? I never heard such a name. Doesn't sound like a name at all to me. There won't be room for them in the cabs."

"We'll order another."

"More expense. I never knew such impertinent people--"

But Alvina did not hear her. On the next morning she dressed herself carefully in her new dress. It was black voile. Carefully she did her hair. Ciccio and Madame were coming. The thought of Ciccio made her shudder. She hung about, waiting. Luckily none of the funeral guests would arrive till after one o'clock. Alvina sat listless, musing, by the fire in the drawing-room. She left everything now to Miss Pinnegar and Mrs. Rollings. Miss Pinnegar, red-eyed and yellow-skinned, was irritable beyond words.

It was nearly mid-day when Alvina heard the gate. She hurried to open the front door. Madame was in her little black hat and her black spotted veil, Ciccio in a black overcoat was closing the yard door behind her.

"Oh, my dear girl!" Madame cried, trotting forward with outstretched black-kid hands, one of which held an umbrella: "I am so shocked--I am so shocked to hear of your poor father. Am I to believe it?--am I really? No, I can't."

She lifted her veil, kissed Alvina, and dabbed her eyes. Ciccio came up the steps. He took off his hat to Alvina, smiled slightly as he passed her. He looked rather pale, constrained. She closed the door and ushered them into the drawing-room.

Madame looked round like a bird, examining the room and the furniture. She was evidently a little impressed. But all the time she was uttering her condolences.

"Tell me, poor girl, how it happened?"

"There isn't much to tell," said Alvina, and she gave the brief account of James's illness and death.

"Worn out! Worn out!" Madame said, nodding slowly up and down. Her black veil, pushed up, sagged over her brows like a mourning band. "You cannot afford to waste the stamina. And will you keep on the theatre--with Mr. May--?"

Ciccio was sitting looking towards the fire. His presence made Alvina tremble. She noticed how the fine black hair of his head showed no parting at all--it just grew like a close cap, and was pushed aside at the forehead. Sometimes he looked at her, as Madame talked, and again looked at her, and looked away.

At last Madame came to a halt. There was a long pause.

"You will stay to the funeral?" said Alvina.

"Oh my dear, we shall be too much--"

"No," said Alvina. "I have arranged for you--"

"There! You think of everything. But I will come, not Ciccio. He will not trouble you."

Ciccio looked up at Alvina.

"I should like him to come," said Alvina simply. But a deep flush began to mount her face. She did not know where it came from, she felt so cold. And she wanted to cry.

Madame watched her closely.

"Siamo di accordo," came the voice of Ciccio.

Alvina and Madame both looked at him. He sat constrained, with his face averted, his eyes dropped, but smiling.

Madame looked closely at Alvina.

"Is it true what he says?" she asked.

"I don't understand him," said Alvina. "I don't understand what he said."

"That you have agreed with him--"

Madame and Ciccio both watched Alvina as she sat in her new black dress. Her eyes involuntarily turned to his.

"I don't know," she said vaguely. "Have I--?" and she looked at him.

Madame kept silence for some moments. Then she said gravely:

"Well!--yes!--well!" She looked from one to another. "Well, there is a lot to consider. But if you have decided--"

Neither of them answered. Madame suddenly rose and went to Alvina. She kissed her on either cheek.

"I shall protect you," she said.

Then she returned to her seat.

"What have you said to Miss Houghton?" she said suddenly to Ciccio, tackling him direct, and speaking coldly.

He looked at Madame with a faint derisive smile. Then he turned to Alvina. She bent her head and blushed.

"Speak then," said Madame, "you have a reason." She seemed mistrustful of him.

But he turned aside his face, and refused to speak, sitting as if he were unaware of Madame's presence.

"Oh well," said Madame. "I shall be there, Signorino."

She spoke with a half-playful threat. Ciccio curled his lip.

"You do not know him yet," she said, turning to Alvina.

"I know that," said Alvina, offended. Then she added: "Wouldn't you like to take off your hat?"

"If you truly wish me to stay," said Madame.

"Yes, please do. And will you hang your coat in the hall?" she said to Ciccio.

"Oh!" said Madame roughly. "He will not stay to eat. He will go out to somewhere."

Alvina looked at him.

"Would you rather?" she said.

He looked at her with sardonic yellow eyes.

"If you want," he said, the awkward, derisive smile curling his lips and showing his teeth.

She had a moment of sheer panic. Was he just stupid and bestial? The thought went clean through her. His yellow eyes watched her sardonically. It was the clean modelling of his dark, other-world face that decided her--for it sent the deep spasm across her.

"I'd like you to stay," she said.

A smile of triumph went over his face. Madame watched him stonily as she stood beside her chair, one hand lightly balanced on her hip. Alvina was reminded of Kishwégin. But even in Madame's stony mistrust there was an element of attraction towards him. He had taken his cigarette case from his pocket.

"On ne fume pas dans le salon," said Madame brutally.

"Will you put your coat in the passage?--and do smoke if you wish,"

said Alvina.

He rose to his feet and took off his overcoat. His face was obstinate and mocking. He was rather floridly dressed, though in black, and wore boots of black patent leather with tan uppers. Handsome he was--but undeniably in bad taste. The silver ring was still on his finger--and his close, fine, unparted hair went badly with smart English clothes. He looked common--Alvina confessed it. And her heart sank. But what was she to do? He evidently was not happy. Obstinacy made him stick out the situation.

Alvina and Madame went upstairs. Madame wanted to see the dead James. She looked at his frail, handsome, ethereal face, and crossed herself as she wept.

"Un bel homme, cependant," she whispered. "Mort en un jour. C'est trop fort, voyez!" And she sniggered with fear and sobs.

They went down to Alvina's bare room. Madame glanced round, as she did in every room she entered.

"This was father's bedroom," said Alvina. "The other was mine. He wouldn't have it anything but like this--bare."

"Nature of a monk, a hermit," whispered Madame. "Who would have thought it! Ah, the men, the men!"

And she unpinned her hat and patted her hair before the small mirror, into which she had to peep to see herself. Alvina stood waiting.

"And now--" whispered Madame, suddenly turning: "What about this Ciccio, hein?" It was ridiculous that she would not raise her voice above a whisper, upstairs there. But so it was.

She scrutinized Alvina with her eyes of bright black glass. Alvina looked back at her, but did not know what to say.

"What about him, hein? Will you marry him? Why will you?"

"I suppose because I like him," said Alvina, flushing.

Madame made a little grimace.

"Oh yes!" she whispered, with a contemptuous mouth. "Oh yes!--because you like him! But you know nothing of him--nothing. How can you like him, not knowing him? He may be a real bad character. How would you like him then?"

"He isn't, is he?" said Alvina.

"I don't know. I don't know. He may be. Even I, I don't know

him--no, though he has been with me for three years. What is he? He is a man of the people, a boatman, a labourer, an artist's model. He sticks to nothing--"

"How old is he?" asked Alvina.

"He is twenty-five--a boy only. And you? You are older."

"Thirty," confessed Alvina.

"Thirty! Well now--so much difference! How can you trust him? How can you? Why does he want to marry you--why?"

"I don't know--" said Alvina.

"No, and I don't know. But I know something of these Italian men, who are labourers in every country, just labourers and under-men always, always down, down, down--" And Madame pressed her spread palms downwards. "And so--when they have a chance to come up--" she raised her hand with a spring--"they are very conceited, and they take their chance. He will want to rise, by you, and you will go down, with him. That is how it is. I have seen it before--yes--more than one time--"

"But," said Alvina, laughing ruefully. "He can't rise much because of me, can he?"

"How not? How not? In the first place, you are English, and he thinks to rise by that. Then you are not of the lower class, you are of the higher class, the class of the masters, such as employ Ciccio and men like him. How will he not rise in the world by you? Yes, he will rise very much. Or he will draw you down, down--Yes, one or another. And then he thinks that now you have money--now your father is dead--" here Madame glanced apprehensively at the closed door--"and they all like money, yes, very much, all Italians--"

"Do they?" said Alvina, scared. "I'm sure there won't be any money. I'm sure father is in debt."

"What? You think? Do you? Really? Oh poor Miss Houghton! Well--and will you tell Ciccio that? Eh? Hein?"

"Yes--certainly--if it matters," said poor Alvina.

"Of course it matters. Of course it matters very much. It matters to him. Because he will not have much. He saves, saves, saves, as they all do, to go back to Italy and buy a piece of land. And if he has you, it will cost him much more, he cannot continue with Natcha-Kee-Tawara. All will be much more difficult--"

"Oh, I will tell him in time," said Alvina, pale at the lips.

"You will tell him! Yes. That is better. And then you will see. But he is obstinate--as a mule. And if he will still have you, then you must think. Can you live in England as the wife of a labouring man, a dirty Eyetalian, as they all say? It is serious. It is not pleasant for you, who have not known it. I also have not known it. But I have seen--" Alvina watched with wide, troubled eyes, while Madame darted looks, as from bright, deep black glass.

"Yes," said Alvina. "I should hate being a labourer's wife in a nasty little house in a street--"

"In a house?" cried Madame. "It would not be in a house. They live many together in one house. It would be two rooms, or even one room, in another house with many people not quite clean, you see--"

Alvina shook her head.

"I couldn't stand that," she said finally.

"No!" Madame nodded approval. "No! you could not. They live in a bad way, the Italians. They do not know the English home--never. They don't like it. Nor do they know the Swiss clean and proper house. No. They don't understand. They run into their holes to sleep or to shelter, and that is all."

"The same in Italy?" said Alvina.

"Even more--because there it is sunny very often--"

"And you don't need a house," said Alvina. "I should like that."

"Yes, it is nice--but you don't know the life. And you would be alone with people like animals. And if you go to Italy he will beat you--he will beat you--"

"If I let him," said Alvina.

"But you can't help it, away there from everybody. Nobody will help you. If you are a wife in Italy, nobody will help you. You are his property, when you marry by Italian law. It is not like England. There is no divorce in Italy. And if he beats you, you are helpless--"

"But why should he beat me?" said Alvina. "Why should he want to?"

"They do. They are so jealous. And then they go into their ungovernable tempers, horrible tempers--"

"Only when they are provoked," said Alvina, thinking of Max.

"Yes, but you will not know what provokes him. Who can say when he will be provoked? And then he beats you--"

There seemed to be a gathering triumph in Madame's bright black eyes. Alvina looked at her, and turned to the door.

"At any rate I know now," she said, in rather a flat voice.

"And it is true. It is all of it true," whispered Madame vindictively. Alvina wanted to run from her.

"I must go to the kitchen," she said. "Shall we go down?"

Alvina did not go into the drawing-room with Madame. She was too much upset, and she had almost a horror of seeing Ciccio at that moment.

Miss Pinnegar, her face stained carmine by the fire, was helping Mrs. Rollings with the dinner.

"Are they both staying, or only one?" she said tartly.

"Both," said Alvina, busying herself with the gravy, to hide her distress and confusion.

"The man as well," said Miss Pinnegar. "What does the woman want to bring him for? I'm sure I don't know what your father would say--a common show-fellow, looks what he is--and staying to dinner."

Miss Pinnegar was thoroughly out of temper as she tried the potatoes. Alvina set the table. Then she went to the drawing-room.

"Will you come to dinner?" she said to her two guests.

Ciccio rose, threw his cigarette into the fire, and looked round. Outside was a faint, watery sunshine: but at least it was out of doors. He felt himself imprisoned and out of his element. He had an irresistible impulse to go.

When he got into the hall he laid his hand on his hat. The stupid, constrained smile was on his face.

"I'll go now," he said.

"We have set the table for you," said Alvina.

"Stop now, since you have stopped for so long," said Madame, darting her black looks at him.

But he hurried on his coat, looking stupid. Madame lifted her eyebrows disdainfully.

"This is polite behaviour!" she said sarcastically.

Alvina stood at a loss.

"You return to the funeral?" said Madame coldly.

He shook his head.

"When you are ready to go," he said.

"At four o'clock," said Madame, "when the funeral has come home. Then we shall be in time for the train."

He nodded, smiled stupidly, opened the door, and went.

"This is just like him, to be so--so--" Madame could not express herself as she walked down to the kitchen.

"Miss Pinnegar, this is Madame," said Alvina.

"How do you do?" said Miss Pinnegar, a little distant and condescending. Madame eyed her keenly.

"Where is the man? I don't know his name," said Miss Pinnegar.

"He wouldn't stay," said Alvina. "What is his name, Madame?"

"Marasca--Francesco. Francesco Marasca--Neapolitan."

"Marasca!" echoed Alvina.

"It has a bad sound--a sound of a bad augury, bad sign," said Madame. "Ma-rà-sca!" She shook her head at the taste of the syllables.

"Why do you think so?" said Alvina. "Do you think there is a meaning in sounds? goodness and badness?"

"Yes," said Madame. "Certainly. Some sounds are good, they are for life, for creating, and some sounds are bad, they are for destroying. Ma-rà-sca!--that is bad, like swearing."

"But what sort of badness? What does it do?" said Alvina.

"What does it do? It sends life down--down--instead of lifting it up."

"Why should things always go up? Why should life always go up?" said Alvina.

"I don't know," said Madame, cutting her meat quickly. There was a pause.

"And what about other names," interrupted Miss Pinnegar, a little

lofty. "What about Houghton, for example?"

Madame put down her fork, but kept her knife in her hand. She looked across the room, not at Miss Pinnegar.

"Houghton--! Huff-ton!" she said. "When it is said, it has a sound against: that is, against the neighbour, against humanity. But when it is written Hough-ton! then it is different, it is for."

"It is always pronounced Huff-ton," said Miss Pinnegar.

"By us," said Alvina.

"We ought to know," said Miss Pinnegar.

Madame turned to look at the unhappy, elderly woman.

"You are a relative of the family?" she said.

"No, not a relative. But I've been here many years," said Miss Pinnegar.

"Oh, yes!" said Madame. Miss Pinnegar was frightfully affronted. The meal, with the three women at table, passed painfully.

Miss Pinnegar rose to go upstairs and weep. She felt very forlorn.

Alvina rose to wipe the dishes, hastily, because the funeral guests would all be coming. Madame went into the drawing-room to smoke her sly cigarette.

Mr. May was the first to turn up for the lugubrious affair: very tight and tailored, but a little extinguished, all in black. He never wore black, and was very unhappy in it, being almost morbidly sensitive to the impression the colour made on him. He was set to entertain Madame.

She did not pretend distress, but sat black-eyed and watchful, very much her business self.

"What about the theatre?--will it go on?" she asked.

"Well I don't know. I don't know Miss Houghton's intentions," said Mr. May. He was a little stilted today.

"It's hers?" said Madame.

"Why, as far as I understand--"

"And if she wants to sell out--?"

Mr. May spread his hands, and looked dismal, but distant.

"You should form a company, and carry on--" said Madame.

Mr. May looked even more distant, drawing himself up in an odd fashion, so that he looked as if he were trussed. But Madame's shrewd black eyes and busy mind did not let him off.

"Buy Miss Houghton out--" said Madame shrewdly.

"Of cauce," said Mr. May. "Miss Houghton herself must decide."

"Oh sure--! You--are you married?"

"Yes."

"Your wife here?"

"My wife is in London."

"And children--?"

"A daughter."

Madame slowly nodded her head up and down, as if she put thousands of two-and-two's together.

"You think there will be much to come to Miss Houghton?" she said.

"Do you mean property? I really can't say. I haven't enquired."

"No, but you have a good idea, eh?"

"I'm afraid I haven't.

"No! Well! It won't be much, then?"

"Really, I don't know. I should say, not a large fortune--!"

"No--eh?" Madame kept him fixed with her black eyes. "Do you think the other one will get anything?"

"The other one--?" queried Mr. May, with an uprising cadence. Madame nodded slightly towards the kitchen.

"The old one--the Miss--Miss Pin--Pinny--what you call her."

"Miss Pinnegar! The manageress of the work-girls? Really, I don't know at all--" Mr. May was most freezing.

"Ha--ha! Ha--ha!" mused Madame quietly. Then she asked: "Which work-girls do you say?"

And she listened astutely to Mr. May's forced account of the

work-room upstairs, extorting all the details she desired to gather. Then there was a pause. Madame glanced round the room.

"Nice house!" she said. "Is it their own?"

"So I believe--"

Again Madame nodded sagely. "Debts perhaps--eh? Mortgage--" and she looked slyly sardonic.

"Really!" said Mr. May, bouncing to his feet. "Do you mind if I go to speak to Mrs. Rollings--"

"Oh no--go along," said Madame, and Mr. May skipped out in a temper.

Madame was left alone in her comfortable chair, studying details of the room and making accounts in her own mind, until the actual funeral guests began to arrive. And then she had the satisfaction of sizing them up. Several arrived with wreaths. The coffin had been carried down and laid in the small sitting-room--Mrs. Houghton's sitting-room. It was covered with white wreaths and streamers of purple ribbon. There was a crush and a confusion.

And then at last the hearse and the cabs had arrived--the coffin was

carried out--Alvina followed, on the arm of her father's cousin, whom she disliked. Miss Pinnegar marshalled the other mourners. It was a wretched business.

But it was a great funeral. There were nine cabs, besides the hearse--Woodhouse had revived its ancient respect for the house of Houghton. A posse of minor tradesmen followed the cabs--all in black and with black gloves. The richer tradesmen sat in the cabs.

Poor Alvina, this was the only day in all her life when she was the centre of public attention. For once, every eye was upon her, every mind was thinking about her. Poor Alvina! said every member of the Woodhouse "middle class": Poor Alvina Houghton, said every collier's wife. Poor thing, left alone--and hardly a penny to bless herself with. Lucky if she's not left with a pile of debts. James Houghton ran through some money in his day. Ay, if she had her rights she'd be a rich woman. Why, her mother brought three or four thousands with her. Ay, but James sank it all in Throttle-Ha'penny and Klondyke and the Endeavour. Well, he was his own worst enemy. He paid his way. I'm not so sure about that. Look how he served his wife, and now Alvina. I'm not so sure he was his own worst enemy. He was bad enough enemy to his own flesh and blood. Ah well, he'll spend no more money, anyhow. No, he went sudden, didn't he? But he was getting very frail, if you noticed. Oh yes, why he fair seemed to totter down to Lumley. Do you reckon as that place pays its way? What, the Endeavour?--they say it does. They say it makes a nice

bit. Well, it's mostly pretty full. Ay, it is. Perhaps it won't be now Mr. Houghton's gone. Perhaps not. I wonder if he will leave much. I'm sure he won't. Everything he's got's mortgaged up to the hilt. He'll leave debts, you see if he doesn't. What is she going to do then? She'll have to go out of Manchester House--her and Miss Pinnegar. Wonder what she'll do. Perhaps she'll take up that nursing. She never made much of that, did she--and spent a sight of money on her training, they say. She's a bit like her father in the business line--all flukes. Pity some nice young man doesn't turn up and marry her. I don't know, she doesn't seem to hook on, does she? Why she's never had a proper boy. They make out she was engaged once. Ay, but nobody ever saw him, and it was off as soon as it was on. Can you remember she went with Albert Witham for a bit. Did she? No, I never knew. When was that? Why, when he was at Oxford, you know, learning for his head master's place. Why didn't she marry him then? Perhaps he never asked her. Ay, there's that to it. She'd have looked down her nose at him, times gone by. Ay, but that's all over, my boy. She'd snap at anybody now. Look how she carries on with that manager. Why, that's something awful. Haven't you ever watched her in the Cinema? She never lets him alone. And it's anybody alike. Oh, she doesn't respect herself. I don't consider. No girl who respected herself would go on as she does, throwing herself at every feller's head. Does she, though? Ay, any performer or anybody. She's a tidy age, though. She's not much chance of getting off. How old do you reckon she is? Must be well over thirty. You never say. Well, she looks it. She does beguy--a dragged old maid. Oh but she

sprightles up a bit sometimes. Ay, when she thinks she's hooked on to somebody. I wonder why she never did take? It's funny. Oh, she was too high and mighty before, and now it's too late. Nobody wants her. And she's got no relations to go to either, has she? No, that's her father's cousin who she's walking with. Look, they're coming. He's a fine-looking man, isn't he? You'd have thought they'd have buried Miss Frost beside Mrs. Houghton. You would, wouldn't you? I should think Alvina will lie by Miss Frost. They say the grave was made for both of them. Ay, she was a lot more of a mother to her than her own mother. She was good to them, Miss Frost was. Alvina thought the world of her. That's her stone--look, down there. Not a very grand one, considering. No, it isn't. Look, there's room for Alvina's name underneath. Sh!--

Alvina had sat back in the cab and watched from her obscurity the many faces on the street: so familiar, so familiar, familiar as her own face. And now she seemed to see them from a great distance, out of her darkness. Her big cousin sat opposite her--how she disliked his presence.

In chapel she cried, thinking of her mother, and Miss Frost, and her father. She felt so desolate--it all seemed so empty. Bitterly she cried, when she bent down during the prayer. And her crying started Miss Pinnegar, who cried almost as bitterly. It was all rather horrible. The afterwards--the horrible afterwards.

There was the slow progress to the cemetery. It was a dull, cold day. Alvina shivered as she stood on the bleak hillside, by the open grave. Her coat did not seem warm enough, her old black seal-skin furs were not much protection. The minister stood on the plank by the grave, and she stood near, watching the white flowers blowing in the cold wind. She had watched them for her mother--and for Miss Frost. She felt a sudden clinging to Miss Pinnegar. Yet they would have to part. Miss Pinnegar had been so fond of her father, in a quaint, reserved way. Poor Miss Pinnegar, that was all life had offered her. Well, after all, it had been a home and a home life. To which home and home life Alvina now clung with a desperate yearning, knowing inevitably she was going to lose it, now her father was gone. Strange, that he was gone. But he was weary, worn very thin and weary. He had lived his day. How different it all was, now, at his death, from the time when Alvina knew him as a little child and thought him such a fine gentleman. You live and learn and lose.

For one moment she looked at Madame, who was shuddering with cold, her face hidden behind her black spotted veil. But Madame seemed immensely remote: so unreal. And Ciccio--what was his name? She could not think of it. What was it? She tried to think of Madame's slow enunciation. Marasca--maraschino. Marasca! Maraschino! What was maraschino? Where had she heard it. Cudgelling her brains, she remembered the doctors, and the suppers after the theatre. And maraschino--why, that was the favourite white liqueur of the innocent Dr. Young. She could remember even now the way he seemed to

smack his lips, saying the word maraschino. Yet she didn't think much of it. Hot, bitterish stuff--nothing: not like green Chartreuse, which Dr. James gave her. Maraschino! Yes, that was it. Made from cherries. Well, Ciccio's name was nearly the same. Ridiculous! But she supposed Italian words were a good deal alike.

Ciccio, the marasca, the bitter cherry, was standing on the edge of the crowd, looking on. He had no connection whatever with the proceedings--stood outside, self-conscious, uncomfortable, bitten by the wind, and hating the people who stared at him. He saw the trim, plump figure of Madame, like some trim plump partridge among a flock of barn-yard fowls. And he depended on her presence. Without her, he would have felt too horribly uncomfortable on that raw hillside. She and he were in some way allied. But these others, how alien and uncouth he felt them. Impressed by their fine clothes, the English working-classes were none the less barbarians to him, uncivilized: just as he was to them an uncivilized animal. Uncouth, they seemed to him, all raw angles and harshness, like their own weather. Not that he thought about them. But he felt it in his flesh, the harshness and discomfort of them. And Alvina was one of them. As she stood there by the grave, pale and pinched and reserved looking, she was of a piece with the hideous cold grey discomfort of the whole scene. Never had anything been more uncongenial to him. He was dying to get away--to clear out. That was all he wanted. Only some southern obstinacy made him watch, from the duskiness of his face, the pale, reserved girl at the grave. Perhaps he even disliked her,

at that time. But he watched in his dislike.

When the ceremony was over, and the mourners turned away to go back to the cabs, Madame pressed forward to Alvina.

"I shall say good-bye now, Miss Houghton. We must go to the station for the train. And thank you, thank you. Good-bye."

"But--" Alvina looked round.

"Ciccio is there. I see him. We must catch the train."

"Oh but--won't you drive? Won't you ask Ciccio to drive with you in the cab? Where is he?"

Madame pointed him out as he hung back among the graves, his black hat cocked a little on one side. He was watching. Alvina broke away from her cousin, and went to him.

"Madame is going to drive to the station," she said. "She wants you to get in with her."

He looked round at the cabs.

"All right," he said, and he picked his way across the graves to Madame, following Alvina.

"So, we go together in the cab," said Madame to him. Then:
"Good-bye, my dear Miss Houghton. Perhaps we shall meet once more. Who knows? My heart is with you, my dear." She put her arms round Alvina and kissed her, a little theatrically. The cousin looked on, very much aloof. Ciccio stood by.

"Come then, Ciccio," said Madame.

"Good-bye," said Alvina to him. "You'll come again, won't you?" She looked at him from her strained, pale face.

"All right," he said, shaking her hand loosely. It sounded hopelessly indefinite.

"You will come, won't you?" she repeated, staring at him with strained, unseeing blue eyes.

"All right," he said, ducking and turning away.

She stood quite still for a moment, quite lost. Then she went on with her cousin to her cab, home to the funeral tea.

"Good-bye!" Madame fluttered a black-edged handkerchief. But Ciccio, most uncomfortable in his four-wheeler, kept hidden.

The funeral tea, with its baked meats and sweets, was a terrible affair. But it came to an end, as everything comes to an end, and Miss Pinnegar and Alvina were left alone in the emptiness of Manchester House.

"If you weren't here, Miss Pinnegar, I should be quite by myself," said Alvina, blanched and strained.

"Yes. And so should I without you," said Miss Pinnegar doggedly. They looked at each other. And that night both slept in Miss Pinnegar's bed, out of sheer terror of the empty house.

During the days following the funeral, no one could have been more tiresome than Alvina. James had left everything to his daughter, excepting some rights in the work-shop, which were Miss Pinnegar's. But the question was, how much did "everything" amount to? There was something less than a hundred pounds in the bank. There was a mortgage on Manchester House. There were substantial bills owing on account of the Endeavour. Alvina had about a hundred pounds left from the insurance money, when all funeral expenses were paid. Of that she was sure, and of nothing else.

For the rest, she was almost driven mad by people coming to talk to her. The lawyer came, the clergyman came, her cousin came, the old, stout, prosperous tradesmen of Woodhouse came, Mr. May came, Miss Pinnegar came. And they all had schemes, and they all had advice.

The chief plan was that the theatre should be sold up: and that Manchester House should be sold, reserving a lease on the top floor, where Miss Pinnegar's work-rooms were: that Miss Pinnegar and Alvina should move into a small house, Miss Pinnegar keeping the work-room, Alvina giving music-lessons: that the two women should be partners in the work-shop.

There were other plans, of course. There was a faction against the chapel faction, which favoured the plan sketched out above. The theatre faction, including Mr. May and some of the more florid tradesmen, favoured the risking of everything in the Endeavour. Alvina was to be the proprietress of the Endeavour, she was to run it on some sort of successful lines, and abandon all other enterprise. Minor plans included the election of Alvina to the post of parish nurse, at six pounds a month: a small private school; a small haberdashery shop; and a position in the office of her cousin's Knarborough business. To one and all Alvina answered with a tantalizing: "I don't know what I'm going to do. I don't know. I can't say yet. I shall see. I shall see." Till one and all became angry with her. They were all so benevolent, and all so sure that they were proposing the very best thing she could do. And they were all nettled, even indignant that she did not jump at their proposals. She listened to them all. She even invited their advice. Continually she said: "Well, what do you think of it?" And she repeated the chapel plan to the theatre group, the theatre plan to the chapel party, the nursing to the pianoforte proposers, the

haberdashery shop to the private school advocates. "Tell me what you think," she said repeatedly. And they all told her they thought their plan was best. And bit by bit she told every advocate the proposal of every other advocate "Well, Lawyer Beeby thinks--" and "Well now, Mr. Clay, the minister, advises--" and so on and so on, till it was all buzzing through thirty benevolent and officious heads. And thirty benevolently-officious wills were striving to plant each one its own particular scheme of benevolence. And Alvina, naïve and pathetic, egged them all on in their strife, without even knowing what she was doing. One thing only was certain. Some obstinate will in her own self absolutely refused to have her mind made up. She would not have her mind made up for her, and she would not make it up for herself. And so everybody began to say "I'm getting tired of her. You talk to her, and you get no forrarder. She slips off to something else. I'm not going to bother with her any more." In truth, Woodhouse was in a fever, for three weeks or more, arranging Alvina's unarrangeable future for her. Offers of charity were innumerable--for three weeks.

Meanwhile, the lawyer went on with the proving of the will and the drawing up of a final account of James's property; Mr. May went on with the Endeavour, though Alvina did not go down to play; Miss Pinnegar went on with the work-girls: and Alvina went on unmaking her mind.

Ciccio did not come during the first week. Alvina had a post-card

from Madame, from Cheshire: rather far off. But such was the buzz and excitement over her material future, such a fever was worked up round about her that Alvina, the petty-propertied heroine of the moment, was quite carried away in a storm of schemes and benevolent suggestions. She answered Madame's post-card, but did not give much thought to the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras. As a matter of fact, she was enjoying a real moment of importance, there at the centre of Woodhouse's rather domineering benevolence: a benevolence which she unconsciously, but systematically frustrated. All this scheming for selling out and making reservations and hanging on and fixing prices and getting private bids for Manchester House and for the Endeavour, the excitement of forming a Limited Company to run the Endeavour, of seeing a lawyer about the sale of Manchester House and the auctioneer about the sale of the furniture, of receiving men who wanted to pick up the machines upstairs cheap, and of keeping everything dangling, deciding nothing, putting everything off till she had seen somebody else, this for the moment fascinated her, went to her head. It was not until the second week had passed that her excitement began to merge into irritation, and not until the third week had gone by that she began to feel herself entangled in an asphyxiating web of indecision, and her heart began to sing because Ciccio had never turned up. Now she would have given anything to see the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras again. But she did not know where they were. Now she began to loathe the excitement of her property: doubtfully hers, every stick of it. Now she would give anything to get away from Woodhouse, from the horrible buzz and entanglement of her

sordid affairs. Now again her wild recklessness came over her.

She suddenly said she was going away somewhere: she would not say where. She cashed all the money she could: a hundred-and-twenty-five pounds. She took the train to Cheshire, to the last address of the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras: she followed them to Stockport: and back to Chinley: and there she was stuck for the night. Next day she dashed back almost to Woodhouse, and swerved round to Sheffield. There, in that black town, thank heaven, she saw their announcement on the wall. She took a taxi to their theatre, and then on to their lodgings. The first thing she saw was Louis, in his shirt sleeves, on the landing above.

She laughed with excitement and pleasure. She seemed another woman. Madame looked up, almost annoyed, when she entered.

"I couldn't keep away from you, Madame," she cried.

"Evidently," said Madame.

Madame was darning socks for the young men. She was a wonderful mother for them, sewed for them, cooked for them, looked after them most carefully. Not many minutes was Madame idle.

"Do you mind?" said Alvina.

Madame darned for some moments without answering.

"And how is everything at Woodhouse?" she asked.

"I couldn't bear it any longer. I couldn't bear it. So I collected all the money I could, and ran away. Nobody knows where I am."

Madame looked up with bright, black, censorious eyes, at the flushed girl opposite. Alvina had a certain strangeness and brightness, which Madame did not know, and a frankness which the Frenchwoman mistrusted, but found disarming.

"And all the business, the will and all?" said Madame.

"They're still fussing about it."

"And there is some money?"

"I have got a hundred pounds here," laughed Alvina. "What there will be when everything is settled, I don't know. But not very much, I'm sure of that."

"How much do you think? A thousand pounds?"

"Oh, it's just possible, you know. But it's just as likely there won't be another penny--"

Madame nodded slowly, as always when she did her calculations.

"And if there is nothing, what do you intend?" said Madame.

"I don't know," said Alvina brightly.

"And if there is something?"

"I don't know either. But I thought, if you would let me play for you, I could keep myself for some time with my own money. You said perhaps I might be with the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras. I wish you would let me."

Madame bent her head so that nothing showed but the bright black folds of her hair. Then she looked up, with a slow, subtle, rather jeering smile.

"Ciccio didn't come to see you, hein?"

"No," said Alvina. "Yet he promised."

Again Madame smiled sardonically.

"Do you call it a promise?" she said. "You are easy to be satisfied with a word. A hundred pounds? No more?"

"A hundred and twenty--"

"Where is it?"

"In my bag at the station--in notes. And I've got a little here--"
Alvina opened her purse, and took out some little gold and silver.

"At the station!" exclaimed Madame, smiling grimly. "Then perhaps you have nothing."

"Oh, I think it's quite safe, don't you--?"

"Yes--maybe--since it is England. And you think a hundred and twenty pounds is enough?"

"What for?"

"To satisfy Ciccio."

"I wasn't thinking of him," cried Alvina.

"No?" said Madame ironically. "I can propose it to him. Wait one moment." She went to the door and called Ciccio.

He entered, looking not very good-tempered.

"Be so good, my dear," said Madame to him, "to go to the station and fetch Miss Houghton's little bag. You have got the ticket, have you?" Alvina handed the luggage ticket to Madame. "Midland Railway," said Madame. "And, Ciccio, you are listening--? Mind! There is a hundred and twenty pounds of Miss Houghton's money in the bag. You hear? Mind it is not lost."

"It's all I have," said Alvina.

"For the time, for the time--till the will is proved, it is all the cash she has. So mind doubly. You hear?"

"All right," said Ciccio.

"Tell him what sort of a bag, Miss Houghton," said Madame.

Alvina told him. He ducked and went. Madame listened for his final departure. Then she nodded sagely at Alvina.

"Take off your hat and coat, my dear. Soon we will have tea--when Cic' returns. Let him think, let him think what he likes. So much money is certain, perhaps there will be more. Let him think. It will make all the difference that there is so much cash--yes, so much--"

"But would it really make a difference to him?" cried Alvina.

"Oh my dear!" exclaimed Madame. "Why should it not? We are on earth, where we must eat. We are not in Paradise. If it were a thousand pounds, then he would want very badly to marry you. But a hundred and twenty is better than a blow to the eye, eh? Why sure!"

"It's dreadful, though--!" said Alvina.

"Oh la-la! Dreadful! If it was Max, who is sentimental, then no, the money is nothing. But all the others--why, you see, they are men, and they know which side to butter their bread. Men are like cats, my dear, they don't like their bread without butter. Why should they? Nor do I, nor do I."

"Can I help with the darning?" said Alvina.

"Hein? I shall give you Ciccio's socks, yes? He pushes holes in the toes--you see?" Madame poked two fingers through the hole in the toe of a red-and-black sock, and smiled a little maliciously at Alvina.

"I don't mind which sock I darn," she said.

"No? You don't? Well then, I give you another. But if you like I will speak to him--"

"What to say?" asked Alvina.

"To say that you have so much money, and hope to have more. And that you like him--Yes? Am I right? You like him very much?--hein? Is it so?"

"And then what?" said Alvina.

"That he should tell me if he should like to marry you also--quite simply. What? Yes?"

"No," said Alvina. "Don't say anything--not yet."

"Hé? Not yet? Not yet. All right, not yet then. You will see--"

Alvina sat darning the sock and smiling at her own shamelessness. The point that amused her most of all was the fact that she was not by any means sure she wanted to marry him. There was Madame spinning her web like a plump prolific black spider. There was Ciccio, the unrestful fly. And there was herself, who didn't know in the least what she was doing. There sat two of them, Madame and herself, darning socks in a stuffy little bedroom with a gas fire, as if they had been born to it. And after all, Woodhouse wasn't fifty miles away.

Madame went downstairs to get tea ready. Wherever she was, she

superintended the cooking and the preparation of meals for her young men, scrupulous and quick. She called Alvina downstairs. Ciccio came in with the bag.

"See, my dear, that your money is safe," said Madame.

Alvina unfastened her bag and counted the crisp white notes.

"And now," said Madame, "I shall lock it in my little bank, yes, where it will be safe. And I shall give you a receipt, which the young men will witness."

The party sat down to tea, in the stuffy sitting-room.

"Now, boys," said Madame, "what do you say? Shall Miss Houghton join the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras? Shall she be our pianist?"

The eyes of the four young men rested on Alvina. Max, as being the responsible party, looked business-like. Louis was tender, Geoffrey round-eyed and inquisitive, Ciccio furtive.

"With great pleasure," said Max. "But can the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras afford to pay a pianist for themselves?"

"No," said Madame. "No. I think not. Miss Houghton will come for one month, to prove, and in that time she shall pay for herself. Yes? So

she fancies it."

"Can we pay her expenses?" said Max.

"No," said Alvina. "Let me pay everything for myself, for a month. I should like to be with you, awfully--"

She looked across with a look half mischievous, half beseeching at the erect Max. He bowed as he sat at table.

"I think we shall all be honoured," he said.

"Certainly," said Louis, bowing also over his tea-cup.

Geoffrey inclined his head, and Ciccio lowered his eyelashes in indication of agreement.

"Now then," said Madame briskly, "we are all agreed. Tonight we will have a bottle of wine on it. Yes, gentlemen? What d'you say? Chianti--hein?"

They all bowed above the table.

"And Miss Houghton shall have her professional name, eh? Because we cannot say Miss Houghton--what?"

"Do call me Alvina," said Alvina.

"Alvina--Al-vy-na! No, excuse me, my dear, I don't like it. I don't like this 'vy' sound. Tonight we shall find a name."

After tea they inquired for a room for Alvina. There was none in the house. But two doors away was another decent lodging-house, where a bedroom on the top floor was found for her.

"I think you are very well here," said Madame.

"Quite nice," said Alvina, looking round the hideous little room, and remembering her other term of probation, as a maternity nurse.

She dressed as attractively as possible, in her new dress of black voile, and imitating Madame, she put four jewelled rings on her fingers. As a rule she only wore the mourning-ring of black enamel and diamond, which had been always on Miss Frost's finger. Now she left off this, and took four diamond rings, and one good sapphire. She looked at herself in her mirror as she had never done before, really interested in the effect she made. And in her dress she pinned a valuable old ruby brooch.

Then she went down to Madame's house. Madame eyed her shrewdly, with just a touch of jealousy: the eternal jealousy that must exist between the plump, pale partridge of a Frenchwoman, whose black hair

is so glossy and tidy, whose black eyes are so acute, whose black dress is so neat and chic, and the rather thin Englishwoman in soft voile, with soft, rather loose brown hair and demure, blue-grey eyes.

"Oh--a difference--what a difference! When you have a little more flesh--then--" Madame made a slight click with her tongue. "What a good brooch, eh?" Madame fingered the brooch. "Old paste--old paste--antique--"

"No," said Alvina. "They are real rubies. It was my great-grandmother's."

"Do you mean it? Real? Are you sure--"

"I think I'm quite sure."

Madame scrutinized the jewels with a fine eye.

"Hm!" she said. And Alvina did not know whether she was sceptical, or jealous, or admiring, or really impressed.

"And the diamonds are real?" said Madame, making Alvina hold up her hands.

"I've always understood so," said Alvina.

Madame scrutinized, and slowly nodded her head. Then she looked into Alvina's eyes, really a little jealous.

"Another four thousand francs there," she said, nodding sagely.

"Really!" said Alvina.

"For sure. It's enough--it's enough--"

And there was a silence between the two women.

The young men had been out shopping for the supper. Louis, who knew where to find French and German stuff, came in with bundles, Ciccio returned with a couple of flasks, Geoffrey with sundry moist papers of edibles. Alvina helped Madame to put the anchovies and sardines and tunny and ham and salami on various plates, she broke off a bit of fern from one of the flower-pots, to stick in the pork-pie, she set the table with its ugly knives and forks and glasses. All the time her rings sparkled, her red brooch sent out beams, she laughed and was gay, she was quick, and she flattered Madame by being very deferential to her. Whether she was herself or not, in the hideous, common, stuffy sitting-room of the lodging-house she did not know or care. But she felt excited and gay. She knew the young men were watching her. Max gave his assistance wherever possible. Geoffrey watched her rings, half spell-bound. But Alvina was concerned only

to flatter the plump, white, soft vanity of Madame. She carefully chose for Madame the finest plate, the clearest glass, the whitest-hafted knife, the most delicate fork. All of which Madame saw, with acute eyes.

At the theatre the same: Alvina played for Kishwégin, only for Kishwégin. And Madame had the time of her life.

"You know, my dear," she said afterward to Alvina, "I understand sympathy in music. Music goes straight to the heart." And she kissed Alvina on both cheeks, throwing her arms round her neck dramatically.

"I'm so glad," said the wily Alvina.

And the young men stirred uneasily, and smiled furtively.

They hurried home to the famous supper. Madame sat at one end of the table, Alvina at the other. Madame had Max and Louis by her side, Alvina had Ciccio and Geoffrey. Ciccio was on Alvina's right hand: a delicate hint.

They began with hors d'oeuvres and tumblers three parts full of Chianti. Alvina wanted to water her wine, but was not allowed to insult the sacred liquid. There was a spirit of great liveliness and conviviality. Madame became paler, her eyes blacker, with the wine

she drank, her voice became a little raucous.

"Tonight," she said, "the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras make their feast of affiliation. The white daughter has entered the tribe of the Hirondelles, swallows that pass from land to land, and build their nests between roof and wall. A new swallow, a new Huron from the tents of the pale-face, from the lodges of the north, from the tribe of the Yenghees." Madame's black eyes glared with a kind of wild triumph down the table at Alvina. "Nameless, without having a name, comes the maiden with the red jewels, dark-hearted, with the red beams. Wine from the pale-face shadows, drunken wine for Kishwégin, strange wine for the braves in their nostrils, Vaali, à vous."

Madame lifted her glass.

"Vaali, drink to her--Boire à elle--" She thrust her glass forwards in the air. The young men thrust their glasses up towards Alvina, in a cluster. She could see their mouths all smiling, their teeth white as they cried in their throats: "Vaali! Vaali! Boire à vous."

Ciccio was near to her. Under the table he laid his hand on her knee. Quickly she put forward her hand to protect herself. He took her hand, and looked at her along the glass as he drank. She saw his throat move as the wine went down it. He put down his glass, still watching her.

"Vaali!" he said, in his throat. Then across the table "Hé, Gigi--Viale! Le Petit Chemin! Comment? Me prends-tu? L'allée--"

There came a great burst of laughter from Louis.

"It is good, it is good!" he cried. "Oh Madame! Viale, it is Italian for the little way, the alley. That is too rich."

Max went off into a high and ribald laugh.

"L'allée italienne!" he said, and shouted with laughter.

"Alley or avenue, what does it matter," cried Madame in French, "so long as it is a good journey."

Here Geoffrey at last saw the joke. With a strange determined flourish he filled his glass, cocking up his elbow.

"A toi, Cic'--et bon voyage!" he said, and then he tilted up his chin and swallowed in great throatfuls.

"Certainly! Certainly!" cried Madame. "To thy good journey, my Ciccio, for thou art not a great traveller--"

"Na, pour ça, y'a plus d'une voie," said Geoffrey.

During this passage in French Alvina sat with very bright eyes looking from one to another, and not understanding. But she knew it was something improper, on her account. Her eyes had a bright, slightly-bewildered look as she turned from one face to another. Ciccio had let go her hand, and was wiping his lips with his fingers. He too was a little self-conscious.

"Assez de cette éternelle voix italienne," said Madame. "Courage, courage au chemin d'Angleterre."

"Assez de cette éternelle voix rauque," said Ciccio, looking round. Madame suddenly pulled herself together.

"They will not have my name. They will call you Allay!" she said to Alvina. "Is it good? Will it do?"

"Quite," said Alvina.

And she could not understand why Gigi, and then the others after him, went off into a shout of laughter. She kept looking round with bright, puzzled eyes. Her face was slightly flushed and tender looking, she looked naïve, young.

"Then you will become one of the tribe of Natcha-Kee-Tawara, of the name Allaye? Yes?"

"Yes," said Alvina.

"And obey the strict rules of the tribe. Do you agree?"

"Yes."

"Then listen." Madame primmed and preened herself like a black pigeon, and darted glances out of her black eyes.

"We are one tribe, one nation--say it."

"We are one tribe, one nation," repeated Alvina.

"Say all," cried Madame.

"We are one tribe, one nation--" they shouted, with varying accent.

"Good!" said Madame. "And no nation do we know but the nation of the Hirondelles--"

"No nation do we know but the nation of the Hirondelles," came the ragged chant of strong male voices, resonant and gay with mockery.

"Hurons--Hirondelles, means swallows," said Madame.

"Yes, I know," said Alvina.

"So! you know! Well, then! We know no nation but the Hirondelles. WE HAVE NO LAW BUT HURON LAW!"

"We have no law but Huron law!" sang the response, in a deep, sardonic chant.

"WE HAVE NO LAWGIVER EXCEPT KISHWÉGIN."

"We have no lawgiver except Kishwégin," they sang sonorous.

"WE HAVE NO HOME BUT THE TENT OF KISHWÉGIN."

"We have no home but the tent of Kishwégin."

"THERE IS NO GOOD BUT THE GOOD OF NATCHA-KEE-TAWARA."

"There is no good but the good of Natcha-Kee-Tawara."

"WE ARE THE HIRONDELLES."

"We are the Hirondelles."

"WE ARE KISHWÉGIN."

"We are Kishwégin."

"WE ARE MONDAGUA."

"We are Mondagua--"

"WE ARE ATONQUOIS--"

"We are Atonquois--"

"WE ARE PACOHUILA--"

"We are Pacohuila--"

"WE ARE WALGATCHKA--"

"We are Walgatchka--"

"WE ARE ALLAYE--"

"We are Allaye--"

"La musica! Pacohuila, la musica!" cried Madame, starting to her feet and sounding frenzied.

Ciccio got up quickly and took his mandoline from its case.

"A--A--Ai--Aii--eee--ya--" began Madame, with a long, faint wail. And on the wailing mandoline the music started. She began to dance a slight but intense dance. Then she waved for a partner, and set up a tarantella wail. Louis threw off his coat and sprang to tarantella attention, Ciccio rang out the peculiar tarantella, and Madame and Louis danced in the tight space.

"Brava--Brava!" cried the others, when Madame sank into her place. And they crowded forward to kiss her hand. One after the other, they kissed her fingers, whilst she laid her left hand languidly on the head of one man after another, as she sat slightly panting. Ciccio however did not come up, but sat faintly twanging the mandoline. Nor did Alvina leave her place.

"Pacohuila!" cried Madame, with an imperious gesture. "Allaye! Come--"

Ciccio laid down his mandoline and went to kiss the fingers of Kishwégin. Alvina also went forward. Madame held out her hand. Alvina kissed it. Madame laid her hand on the head of Alvina.

"This is the squaw Allaye, this is the daughter of Kishwégin," she said, in her Tawara manner.

"And where is the brave of Allaye, where is the arm that upholds the daughter of Kishwégin, which of the Swallows spreads his wings

over the gentle head of the new one!"

"Pacohuila!" said Louis.

"Pacohuila! Pacohuila! Pacohuila!" said the others.

"Spread soft wings, spread dark-roofed wings, Pacohuila," said Kishwégin, and Ciccio, in his shirt-sleeves solemnly spread his arms.

"Stoop, stoop, Allaye, beneath the wings of Pacohuila," said Kishwégin, faintly pressing Alvina on the shoulder.

Alvina stooped and crouched under the right arm of Pacohuila.

"Has the bird flown home?" chanted Kishwégin, to one of the strains of their music.

"The bird is home--" chanted the men.

"Is the nest warm?" chanted Kishwégin.

"The nest is warm."

"Does the he-bird stoop--?"

"He stoops."

"Who takes Allaye?"

"Pacohuila."

Ciccio gently stooped and raised Alvina to her feet.

"C'est ça!" said Madame, kissing her. "And now, children, unless the Sheffield policeman will knock at our door, we must retire to our wigwams all--"

Ciccio was watching Alvina. Madame made him a secret, imperative gesture that he should accompany the young woman.

"You have your key, Allaye?" she said.

"Did I have a key?" said Alvina.

Madame smiled subtly as she produced a latch-key.

"Kishwégin must open your doors for you all," she said. Then, with a slight flourish, she presented the key to Ciccio. "I give it to him? Yes?" she added, with her subtle, malicious smile.

Ciccio, smiling slightly, and keeping his head ducked, took the key.

Alvina looked brightly, as if bewildered, from one to another.

"Also the light!" said Madame, producing a pocket flash-light, which she triumphantly handed to Ciccio. Alvina watched him. She noticed how he dropped his head forward from his straight, strong shoulders, how beautiful that was, the strong, forward-inclining nape and back of the head. It produced a kind of dazed submission in her, the drugged sense of unknown beauty.

"And so good-night, Allaye--bonne nuit, fille des Tawara." Madame kissed her, and darted black, unaccountable looks at her.

Each brave also kissed her hand, with a profound salute. Then the men shook hands warmly with Ciccio, murmuring to him.

He did not put on his hat nor his coat, but ran round as he was to the neighbouring house with her, and opened the door. She entered, and he followed, flashing on the light. So she climbed weakly up the dusty, drab stairs, he following. When she came to her door, she turned and looked at him. His face was scarcely visible, it seemed, and yet so strange and beautiful. It was the unknown beauty which almost killed her.

"You aren't coming?" she quavered.

He gave an odd, half-gay, half-mocking twitch of his thick dark

brows, and began to laugh silently. Then he nodded again, laughing at her boldly, carelessly, triumphantly, like the dark Southerner he was. Her instinct was to defend herself. When suddenly she found herself in the dark.

She gasped. And as she gasped, he quite gently put her inside her room, and closed the door, keeping one arm round her all the time. She felt his heavy muscular predominance. So he took her in both arms, powerful, mysterious, horrible in the pitch dark. Yet the sense of the unknown beauty of him weighed her down like some force. If for one moment she could have escaped from that black spell of his beauty, she would have been free. But she could not. He was awful to her, shameless so that she died under his shamelessness, his smiling, progressive shamelessness. Yet she could not see him ugly. If only she could, for one second, have seen him ugly, he would not have killed her and made her his slave as he did. But the spell was on her, of his darkness and unfathomed handsomeness. And he killed her. He simply took her and assassinated her. How she suffered no one can tell. Yet all the time, his lustrous dark beauty, unbearable.

When later she pressed her face on his chest and cried, he held her gently as if she was a child, but took no notice, and she felt in the darkness that he smiled. It was utterly dark, and she knew he smiled, and she began to get hysterical. But he only kissed her, his smiling deepening to a heavy laughter, silent and invisible, but

sensible, as he carried her away once more. He intended her to be his slave, she knew. And he seemed to throw her down and suffocate her like a wave. And she could have fought, if only the sense of his dark, rich handsomeness had not numbed her like a venom. So she was suffocated in his passion.

In the morning when it was light he turned and looked at her from under his long black lashes, a long, steady, cruel, faintly-smiling look from his tawny eyes, searching her as if to see whether she were still alive. And she looked back at him, heavy-eyed and half subjected. He smiled slightly at her, rose, and left her. And she turned her face to the wall, feeling beaten. Yet not quite beaten to death. Save for the fatal numbness of her love for him, she could still have escaped him. But she lay inert, as if envenomed. He wanted to make her his slave.

When she went down to the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras for breakfast she found them waiting for her. She was rather frail and tender-looking, with wondering eyes that showed she had been crying.

"Come, daughter of the Tawaras," said Madame brightly to her. "We have been waiting for you. Good-morning, and all happiness, eh? Look, it is a gift-day for you--"

Madame smilingly led Alvina to her place. Beside her plate was a bunch of violets, a bunch of carnations, a pair of exquisite bead

moccasins, and a pair of fine doeskin gloves delicately decorated with feather-work on the cuffs. The slippers were from Kishwégin, the gloves from Mondagua, the carnations from Atonquois, the violets from Walgatchka--all To the Daughter of the Tawaras, Allaye, as it said on the little cards.

"The gift of Pacohuila you know," said Madame, smiling. "The brothers of Pacohuila are your brothers."

One by one they went to her and each one laid the back of her fingers against his forehead, saying in turn:

"I am your brother Mondagua, Allaye!"

"I am your brother Atonquois, Allaye!"

"I am your brother Walgatchka, Allaye, best brother, you know--" So spoke Geoffrey, looking at her with large, almost solemn eyes of affection. Alvina smiled a little wanly, wondering where she was. It was all so solemn. Was it all mockery, play-acting? She felt bitterly inclined to cry.

Meanwhile Madame came in with the coffee, which she always made herself, and the party sat down to breakfast. Ciccio sat on Alvina's right, but he seemed to avoid looking at her or speaking to her. All the time he looked across the table, with the half-asserted, knowing

look in his eyes, at Gigi: and all the time he addressed himself to Gigi, with the throaty, rich, plangent quality in his voice, that Alvina could not bear, it seemed terrible to her: and he spoke in French: and the two men seemed to be exchanging unspeakable communications. So that Alvina, for all her wistfulness and subjectedness, was at last seriously offended. She rose as soon as possible from table. In her own heart she wanted attention and public recognition from Ciccio--none of which she got. She returned to her own house, to her own room, anxious to tidy everything, not wishing to have her landlady in the room. And she half expected Ciccio to come to speak to her.

As she was busy washing a garment in the bowl, her landlady knocked and entered. She was a rough and rather beery-looking Yorkshire woman, not attractive.

"Oh, yo'n made yer bed then, han' yer!"

"Yes," said Alvina. "I've done everything."

"I see yer han. Yo'n bin sharp."

Alvina did not answer.

"Seems yer doin' yersen a bit o' weshin'."

Still Alvina didn't answer.

"Yo' can 'ing it i' th' back yard."

"I think it'll dry here," said Alvina.

"Isna much dryin' up here. Send us howd when 't's ready. Yo'll 'appen be wantin' it. I can dry it off for yer i' t' kitchen. You don't take a drop o' nothink, do yer?"

"No," said Alvina. "I don't like it."

"Summat a bit stronger 'n 't bottle, my sakes alive! Well, yo mun ha'e yer fling, like t' rest. But coom na, which on 'em is it? I catched sight on 'im goin' out, but I didna ma'e out then which on 'em it wor. He--eh, it's a pity you don't take a drop of nothink, it's a world's pity. Is it the fairest on 'em, the tallest."

"No," said Alvina. "The darkest one."

"Oh ay! Well, 's a strappin' anuff feller, for them as goes that road. I thought Madame was partikler. I s'll charge yer a bit more, yer know. I s'll 'ave to make a bit out of it. I'm partikler as a rule. I don't like 'em comin' in an' goin' out, you know. Things get said. You look so quiet, you do. Come now, it's worth a hextra quart to me, else I shan't have it, I shan't. You can't make as free as

all that with the house, you know, be it what it may--"

She stood red-faced and dour in the doorway. Alvina quietly gave her half-a-sovereign.

"Nay, lass," said the woman, "if you share niver a drop o' th' lashins, you mun split it. Five shillin's is oceans, ma wench. I'm not down on you--not me. On'y we've got to keep up appearances a bit, you know. Dash my rags, it's a caution!"

"I haven't got five shillings--" said Alvina.

"Yer've not? All right, gi'e 's ha 'efcrown today, an' t'other termorrer. It'll keep, it'll keep. God bless you for a good wench. A' open 'eart 's worth all your bum-righteousness. It is for me. An' a sight more. You're all right, ma wench, you're all right--"

And the rather bleary woman went nodding away.

Alvina ought to have minded. But she didn't. She even laughed into her ricketty mirror. At the back of her thoughts, all she minded was that Ciccio did not pay her some attention. She really expected him now to come to speak to her. If she could have imagined how far he was from any such intention.

So she loitered unwillingly at her window high over the grey, hard,

cobbled street, and saw her landlady hastening along the black asphalt pavement, her dirty apron thrown discreetly over what was most obviously a quart jug. She followed the squat, intent figure with her eye, to the public-house at the corner. And then she saw Ciccio humped over his yellow bicycle, going for a steep and perilous ride with Gigi.

Still she lingered in her sordid room. She could feel Madame was expecting her. But she felt inert, weak, incommunicative. Only a real fear of offending Madame drove her down at last.

Max opened the door to let her in.

"Ah!" he said. "You've come. We were wondering about you."

"Thank you," she said, as she passed into the dirty hall where still two bicycles stood.

"Madame is in the kitchen," he said.

Alvina found Madame trussed in a large white apron, busy rubbing a yellow-fleshed hen with lemon, previous to boiling.

"Ah!" said Madame. "So there you are! I have been out and done my shopping, and already begun to prepare the dinner. Yes, you may help me. Can you wash leeks? Yes? Every grain of sand? Shall I trust you

then--?"

Madame usually had a kitchen to herself, in the morning. She either ousted her landlady, or used her as second cook. For Madame was a gourmet, if not gourmand. If she inclined towards self-indulgence in any direction, it was in the direction of food. She loved a good table. And hence the Tawaras saved less money than they might. She was an exacting, tormenting, bullying cook. Alvina, who knew well enough how to prepare a simple dinner, was offended by Madame's exactions. Madame turning back the green leaves of a leek, and hunting a speck of earth down into the white, like a flea in a bed, was too much for Alvina.

"I'm afraid I shall never be particular enough," she said. "Can't I do anything else for you?"

"For me? I need nothing to be done for me. But for the young men--yes, I will show you in one minute--"

And she took Alvina upstairs to her room, and gave her a pair of the thin leather trousers fringed with hair, belonging to one of the braves. A seam had ripped. Madame gave Alvina a fine awl and some waxed thread.

"The leather is not good in these things of Gigi's," she said. "It is badly prepared. See, like this." And she showed Alvina another

place where the garment was repaired. "Keep on your apron. At the week-end you must fetch more clothes, not spoil this beautiful gown of voile. Where have you left your diamonds? What? In your room? Are they locked? Oh my dear--!" Madame turned pale and darted looks of fire at Alvina. "If they are stolen--!" she cried. "Oh! I have become quite weak, hearing you!" She panted and shook her head. "If they are not stolen, you have the Holy Saints alone to be thankful for keeping them. But run, run!"

And Madame really stamped her foot.

"Bring me everything you've got--every thing that is valuable. I shall lock it up. How can you--"

Alvina was hustled off to her lodging. Fortunately nothing was gone. She brought all to Madame, and Madame fingered the treasures lovingly.

"Now what you want you must ask me for," she said.

With what close curiosity Madame examined the ruby brooch.

"You can have that if you like, Madame," said Alvina.

"You mean--what?"

"I will give you that brooch if you like to take it--"

"Give me this--!" cried Madame, and a flash went over her face. Then she changed into a sort of wheedling. "No--no. I shan't take it! I shan't take it. You don't want to give away such a thing."

"I don't mind," said Alvina. "Do take it if you like it."

"Oh no! Oh no! I can't take it. A beautiful thing it is, really. It would be worth over a thousand francs, because I believe it is quite genuine."

"I'm sure it's genuine," said Alvina. "Do have it since you like it."

"Oh, I can't! I can't!--"

"Yes do--"

"The beautiful red stones!--antique gems, antique gems--! And do you really give it to me?"

"Yes, I should like to."

"You are a girl with a noble heart--" Madame threw her arms round Alvina's neck, and kissed her. Alvina felt very cool about it.

Madame locked up the jewels quickly, after one last look.

"My fowl," she said, "which must not boil too fast."

At length Alvina was called down to dinner. The young men were at table, talking as young men do, not very interestingly. After the meal, Ciccio sat and twanged his mandoline, making its crying noise vibrate through the house.

"I shall go and look at the town," said Alvina.

"And who shall go with you?" asked Madame.

"I will go alone," said Alvina, "unless you will come, Madame."

"Alas no, I can't. I can't come. Will you really go alone?"

"Yes, I want to go to the women's shops," said Alvina.

"You want to! All right then! And you will come home at tea-time, yes?"

As soon as Alvina had gone out Ciccio put away his mandoline and lit a cigarette. Then after a while he hailed Geoffrey, and the two young men sallied forth. Alvina, emerging from a draper's shop in Rotherhampton Broadway, found them loitering on the pavement

outside. And they strolled along with her. So she went into a shop that sold ladies' underwear, leaving them on the pavement. She stayed as long as she could. But there they were when she came out. They had endless lounging patience.

"I thought you would be gone on," she said.

"No hurry," said Ciccio, and he took away her parcels from her, as if he had a right. She wished he wouldn't tilt the flap of his black hat over one eye, and she wished there wasn't quite so much waist-line in the cut of his coat, and that he didn't smoke cigarettes against the end of his nose in the street. But wishing wouldn't alter him. He strayed alongside as if he half belonged, and half didn't--most irritating.

She wasted as much time as possible in the shops, then they took the tram home again. Ciccio paid the three fares, laying his hand restrainingly on Gigi's hand, when Gigi's hand sought pence in his trouser pocket, and throwing his arm over his friend's shoulder, in affectionate but vulgar triumph, when the fares were paid. Alvina was on her high horse.

They tried to talk to her, they tried to ingratiate themselves--but she wasn't having any. She talked with icy pleasantness. And so the tea-time passed, and the time after tea. The performance went rather mechanically, at the theatre, and the supper at home, with bottled

beer and boiled ham, was a conventionally cheerful affair. Even Madame was a little afraid of Alvina this evening.

"I am tired, I shall go early to my room," said Alvina.

"Yes, I think we are all tired," said Madame.

"Why is it?" said Max metaphysically--"why is it that two merry evenings never follow one behind the other."

"Max, beer makes thee a farceur of a fine quality," said Madame. Alvina rose.

"Please don't get up," she said to the others. "I have my key and can see quite well," she said. "Good-night all."

They rose and bowed their good-nights. But Ciccio, with an obstinate and ugly little smile on his face, followed her.

"Please don't come," she said, turning at the street door. But obstinately he lounged into the street with her. He followed her to her door.

"Did you bring the flash-light?" she said. "The stair is so dark."

He looked at her, and turned as if to get the light. Quickly she

opened the house-door and slipped inside, shutting it sharply in his face. He stood for some moments looking at the door, and an ugly little look mounted his straight nose. He too turned indoors.

Alvina hurried to bed and slept well. And the next day the same, she was all icy pleasantness. The Natcha-Kee-Tawaras were a little bit put out by her. She was a spoke in their wheel, a scotch to their facility. She made them irritable. And that evening--it was Friday--Ciccio did not rise to accompany her to her house. And she knew they were relieved that she had gone.

That did not please her. The next day, which was Saturday, the last and greatest day of the week, she found herself again somewhat of an outsider in the troupe. The tribe had assembled in its old unison. She was the intruder, the interloper. And Ciccio never looked at her, only showed her the half-averted side of his cheek, on which was a slightly jeering, ugly look.

"Will you go to Woodhouse tomorrow?" Madame asked her, rather coolly. They none of them called her Allaye any more.

"I'd better fetch some things, hadn't I?" said Alvina.

"Certainly, if you think you will stay with us."

This was a nasty slap in the face for her. But:

"I want to," she said.

"Yes! Then you will go to Woodhouse tomorrow, and come to Mansfield on Monday morning? Like that shall it be? You will stay one night at Woodhouse?"

Through Alvina's mind flitted the rapid thought--"They want an evening without me." Her pride mounted obstinately. She very nearly said--"I may stay in Woodhouse altogether." But she held her tongue.

After all, they were very common people. They ought to be glad to have her. Look how Madame snapped up that brooch! And look what an uncouth lout Ciccio was! After all, she was demeaning herself shamefully staying with them in common, sordid lodgings. After all, she had been bred up differently from that. They had horribly low standards--such low standards--not only of morality, but of life altogether. Really, she had come down in the world, conforming to such standards of life. She evoked the images of her mother and Miss Frost: ladies, and noble women both. Whatever could she be thinking of herself!

However, there was time for her to retrace her steps. She had not given herself away. Except to Ciccio. And her heart burned when she thought of him, partly with anger and mortification, partly, alas, with undeniable and unsatisfied love. Let her bridle as she might,

her heart burned, and she wanted to look at him, she wanted him to notice her. And instinct told her that he might ignore her for ever. She went to her room an unhappy woman, and wept and fretted till morning, chafing between humiliation and yearning.