

## CHAPTER XXI.

HOME!

Then a furtive payment of witnesses, and Lewisham was beside her. His face was radiant. A steady current of workers going home to their half-holiday rest poured along the street. On the steps before them lay a few grains of rice from some more public nuptials.

A critical little girl eyed our couple curiously and made some remark to her ragamuffin friend.

"Not them," said the ragamuffin friend, "They've only been askin' questions."

The ragamuffin friend was no judge of faces.

They walked back through the thronged streets to Vauxhall station, saying little to one another, and there Lewisham, assuming as indifferent a manner as he could command, recovered their possessions from the booking-office by means of two separate tickets and put them aboard a four-wheeler. His luggage went outside, but the little brown portmanteau containing Ethel's trousseau was small enough to go on the seat in front of them. You must figure a rather broken-down four-wheeler bearing the yellow-painted box and the experienced trunk

and Mr. Lewisham and all his fortunes, a despondent fitful horse, and a threadbare venerable driver, blasphemous sotto voce and flagellant, in an ancient coat with capes. When our two young people found themselves in the cab again a certain stiffness of manner between them vanished and there was more squeezing of hands. "Ethel Lewisham," said Lewisham several times, and Ethel reciprocated with "Husbinder" and "Hubby dear," and took off her glove to look again in an ostentatious manner at a ring. And she kissed the ring.

They were resolved that their newly-married state should not appear, and with considerable ceremony it was arranged that he should treat her with off-hand brusqueness when they arrived at their lodging. The Teutonic landlady appeared in the passage with an amiable smile and the hope that they had had a pleasant journey, and became voluble with promises of comfort. Lewisham having assisted the slatternly general servant to carry in his boxes, paid the cabman a florin in a resolute manner and followed the ladies into the sitting-room.

Ethel answered Madam Gadow's inquiries with admirable self-possession, followed her through the folding-doors and displayed an intelligent interest in a new spring mattress. Presently the folding-doors were closed again. Lewisham hovered about the front room pulling his moustache and pretending to admire the oleographs, surprised to find himself trembling....

The slatternly general servant reappeared with the chops and tinned

salmon he had asked Madam Gadow to prepare for them. He went and stared out of the window, heard the door close behind the girl, and turned at a sound as Ethel appeared shyly through the folding-doors.

She was suddenly domestic. Hitherto he had seen her without a hat and jacket only on one indistinct dramatic occasion. Now she wore a little blouse of soft, dark red material, with a white froth about the wrists and that pretty neck of hers. And her hair was a new wonderland of curls and soft strands. How delicate she looked and sweet as she stood hesitating there. These gracious moments in life! He took two steps and held out his arms. She glanced at the closed door of the room and came flitting towards him....