

DELIA.

XL.

She was only four or five yards away from the Angel in the westward gable. The diamond-paned window of her little white room was open. She knelt on her box of japanned tin, and rested her chin on her hands, her elbows on the window-sill. The young moon hung over the pine trees, and its light, cool and colourless, lay softly upon the silent-sleeping world. Its light fell upon her white face, and discovered new depths in her dreaming eyes. Her soft lips fell apart and showed the little white teeth.

Delia was thinking, vaguely, wonderfully, as girls will think. It was feeling rather than thinking; clouds of beautiful translucent emotion drove across the clear sky of her mind, taking shape that changed and vanished. She had all that wonderful emotional tenderness, that subtle exquisite desire for self-sacrifice, which exists so inexplicably in a girl's heart, exists it seems only to be presently trampled under foot by the grim and gross humours of daily life, to be ploughed in again roughly and remorselessly, as the farmer ploughs in the clover that has sprung up in the soil. She had been looking out at the tranquillity of the moonlight long before the Angel began to play,--waiting; then suddenly the quiet, motionless beauty of silver and shadow was suffused with tender music.

She did not move, but her lips closed and her eyes grew even softer. She had been thinking before of the strange glory that had suddenly flashed out about the stooping hunchback when he spoke to her in the sunset; of that and of a dozen other glances, chance turns, even once the touching of her hand. That afternoon he had spoken to her, asking strange questions. Now the music seemed to bring his very face before her, his look of half curious solicitude, peering into her face, into her eyes, into her and through her, deep down into her soul. He seemed now to be speaking directly to her, telling her of his solitude and trouble. Oh! that regret, that longing! For he was in trouble. And how could a servant-girl help him, this soft-spoken gentleman who carried himself so kindly, who played so sweetly. The music was so sweet and keen, it came so near to the thought of her heart, that presently one hand tightened on the other, and the tears came streaming down her face.

As Crump would tell you, people do not do that kind of thing unless there is something wrong with the nervous system. But then, from the scientific point of view, being in love is a pathological condition.

I am painfully aware of the objectionable nature of my story here. I have even thought of wilfully perverting the truth to propitiate the Lady Reader. But I could not. The story has been too much for me. I do the thing with my eyes open. Delia must remain what she really was--a servant girl. I know that to give a mere servant girl, or at least an

English servant girl, the refined feelings of a human being, to present her as speaking with anything but an intolerable confusion of aspirates, places me outside the pale of respectable writers. Association with servants, even in thought, is dangerous in these days. I can only plead (pleading vainly, I know), that Delia was a very exceptional servant girl. Possibly, if one enquired, it might be found that her parentage was upper middle-class--that she was made of the finer upper middle-class clay. And (this perhaps may avail me better) I will promise that in some future work I will redress the balance, and the patient reader shall have the recognised article, enormous feet and hands, systematic aspiration of vowels and elimination of aspirates, no figure (only middle-class girls have figures--the thing is beyond a servant-girl's means), a fringe (by agreement), and a cheerful readiness to dispose of her self-respect for half-a-crown. That is the accepted English servant, the typical English woman (when stripped of money and accomplishments) as she appears in the works of contemporary writers. But Delia somehow was different. I can only regret the circumstance--it was altogether beyond my control.