

end of the field she seemed to make a great effort. She paused, one hand upon the stile, and said, "If you don't mind, sir, I'd rather go on alone."

"Why? Don't you like me?" "It isn't that, sir. Only if people see us together in the village they'll talk."

"Let them talk," said Walford, delighting in the idea of the gossip. He vaulted the stile and held out his hand. "Come, I'll help you over."

After a moment's hesitation she climbed the stile. She paused upon it for a second, and her distraction expressed itself.

"Oh, sir, . . . you see, sir, you're a gentleman . . ."

"That's all right," said Walford, comfortably. "Give me your hand," and enclosed within his the little hot fingers. She jumped down from the stile and tried to draw her hand away, but Walford held it. "What's the matter? Don't be frightened. Why, you're trembling."

"Please let me go, sir."

"No, I'm not going to let you go." He seized her other hand. "I'm never going to let you go."

"Please, sir."

"Don't be afraid. You think I'm a rotter, don't you? But I'm going to marry you."

Never had she flushed so prettily. She looked away, and he heard an almost angry murmur:

"Sir, don't make game of me."

But the murmur was stifled as suddenly he drew her into his arms, and though she averted her face, pressed kisses upon her cheek and neck. She did not resist. She was too shaken and frightened. She did not resist even when Walford drew her face around and kissed her lips.

"Now," he said, "are you going to marry me?"

She hesitated, then snatched her hands away, and ran across the field. Smiling, he watched her, and told himself that this was enough for the day.

"Kissed you, did he?" said Mrs. Stone, her big brown arms akimbo. "Tell him to keep off it. You don't want a gentleman hanging around you. Perhaps it's only his silliness, but maybe he means you no good."

Eileen raised a tear-stained face: "He wants to marry me, mother."

Mrs. Stone flung herself back with a sort of mellow merriment: "My" she said, "he must be soft!"

Eileen dried her eyes. She was rather offended by this laughter. She might think herself unworthy, but she did not care to have her mother agree. "Now don't be silly," said Mrs. Stone. "They don't marry girls like you. They say that sometimes, but it's best not to listen."

They quarreled that afternoon. Before supper she met by appointment her old playfellow, Alfred. He was the village postman, a supernumerary of 19, with whom she always felt a woman of the world because he was shyer still than she. She was out of temper with him that afternoon. What a dummy he was! Then she reproached herself. "Oh, why was she such a silly?" Much to Alfred's amazement, she kissed him without being asked to.

Two days later, Mrs. Stone was told by Eileen that Mr. Walford had been going on something simply awful. She knew all about Mr. Walford; she knew that he was rich, and that he could pick among dozens of girls of his own kind; he was a gentleman, yes, but the peasant strain in Mrs. Stone whispered to her cannily that gentlemen were, after all, only men; that all men were fools. She summarized this by, "You never know." Finding Mrs. Delabole alone, she slowly brought the old lady to the question, and was not surprised to find her agitated and hurt.

"Is he an honorable gentleman?" asked Mrs. Stone at last.

Mrs. Delabole looked offended: "You need not worry about that. We may think it funny. . . . I don't mean that Eileen's a sweet girl, but still, you know what I mean." She grew confused. "But we need not bother about that. If he says he wants to marry her, he'll do it. If Eileen's willing."

Mrs. Stone, after a moment, replied: "I see, ma'am. Thank you very much, ma'am. I think Eileen will be willing."

So Walford played King Cophetua as he might have played Puck, with an Eileen now less bashful, though still incredulous. Now and then, as she washed the dishes, she pictured herself as a real lady. Perhaps she could have a bed-spread of pink satin. She was the prey of excitements, when it seemed wonderful; of reactions, when it all felt like nonsense. The silence of Mr. and Mrs. Delabole, the coldness of the cook, afforded Walford opportunities to pursue her, to surprise her alone, to compel her to accept caresses which she wanted to resist and to return, and to try to force from her expressions of regard which Eileen

would have liked to have given him if she had only known the words.

On the Sunday morning which preceded the announced date of Walford's return to London, Eileen, disturbed and miserable, went to church. She'd always liked church. It was so nice and quiet. And she loved joining in the hymns, because her voice was hidden by that of other people, and so she didn't feel shy. But that day she drew no benefit from the service. She joined mechanically in the kneeling and rising, but all the time she was aware of Peter's eyes upon her.

When Eileen had to get up and go out, she knew that he would speak to her before everybody. It would be dreadful. It was more than dreadful, for Walford, without hesitation, took the shrinking arm, and led her on. She wriggled her arm.

"Oh, sir," she said, "you mustn't do that before everybody."

"Why, not? We're going to be married in a fortnight. I've applied for the license."

"Oh, sir," said Eileen, and no longer wriggled her arm, but with flushed cheeks bent her head as the congregation curiously watched them walk away. As they went up towards the town on the other side of the railway, she was all confused emotion, through which threaded a preoccupation: She had to lay the table for lunch.

They went on beyond Burleigh Abbas, past a hanger grown bill, along a rutted path, where the leaves of last autumn still lay, a dim glow flung on their darkness by the sun that rode high. Peter Walford told himself:

"I must get her a frock like those leaves, sort of smoke gold. By Jove! What fun!"

They reached a small birch wood where the trunks were festooned with silver bark like toy trees. In the strong grass pink campion held up its rosy stars, and blue speedwell, yellow eyed, ran along the ditch, brilliant and shy. The air was so soft and scented that for a moment he felt himself sincere. He took her into his arms and she did not resist him. She bent the dark head upon which ran that fleeting red shadow that the sun brought out. After all, it might be true.

Three months elapsed before Eileen asked herself whether she was happy, and decided that she was. Her life still seemed extraordinary; this house near Hyde Park, with the clean, white face, the green painted railings and jalousies, seemed very wonderful; the bathroom, too, and the strange new habit of bathing every day. The parlor. Oh, she must remember to call it the drawing room, it seemed wrong somehow to sit in it except on Sunday.

Eileen never knew what she wanted for lunch. The first time she said chops, the second time steak, until at the last cook took the initiative, which was pleasant, and made Eileen feel guilty. Only she was so afraid of quarreling with the cook. What astonished her most was the sight of her own hands, where the crimson had now faded into rose. She seemed to have grown a new kind of fingernail, too. How nice they looked. If only Peter wouldn't insist upon those very short sleeves. He said she had nice arms, but she did feel she didn't ought to show them except to him. There! She knew she mustn't say didn't ought to. Drat! Oh, she mustn't say drat.

As Eileen sat at the little Queen Anne bureau before stationery which she hardly dared to use, she was, perhaps, not quite happy. Her rise in the world affected her as mountain climbing does the body. Still she must trust Peter, must believe in him, even when he said he loved her, which seemed a queer thing for him to do. Why should he?

It was characteristic of Eileen that she felt for her husband more admiration than love. She was never quite comfortable with him, partly because he was too magnificent, and partly because she seemed to provide him with a private joke which she could not understand. She did wish he wouldn't dress her up so. They were quite lovely, of course, but these London girls did wear such short skirts, the bold, brazen hussies. And her skirts were shorter than anybody's. What was she to do? She couldn't say she wouldn't go. And why whenever he took her to see people in enormous houses in Kensington, old ladies in black silk, did he choose that day to make her wear orange cobwebs, things that showed her ribbons. They didn't like it at all; she knew that. Why did Peter do it?

Eileen often resumed that discussion. But she never obtained any solution. Sometimes she wondered why Peter took her to these dull places. Also he was very fond of classical concerts on Sunday afternoon. She supposed it was all right, going without a hat with a little tiara of tortoise shell surmounted with rubies, but she looked different from the other people. Why did Peter make her

do that at an oratorio when she didn't do it at a music hall? Still, she supposed Peter knew.

Peter Walford was enjoying himself more than ever before. He had not made too great a sacrifice, for he discovered that his prank had yielded him an exquisite wife. He had been right in his estimate of her esthetic possibilities; she flattered his taste so much that often in her arms he found an emotion born less of love than vanity. She had been a great success, a success of oddity, of course, which wouldn't last. But still, nothing lasted, and meanwhile it was fun to take her about, to show the world that the Russian ballet had not been invented for nothing, to travel through life in a sort of hush of irony.

He even amused himself by getting hold of a letter of hers, which contained all the common errors of spelling and a large number invented by herself. This he passed round a tea party, enjoying the confusion of the Kensingtonians and telling himself: "It's rather funny being rich enough to make them read a letter when cat is spelled with a K, and to make time say: 'How fresh! How naive!'"

In Bohemia his pleasure was of a different kind. It was a pleasure of excitement. He had done the thing they all talked of; he had surprised them because he was a man who had never before talked of the thing he had done. So he had the delight of producing Eileen as a sort of Eastern idol, sheathed in a few yards of champagne crepe de chine, with her hair dressed rather like that of a Fiji islander, covered with a regale of threaded jade, her slim arms and even her silk clad ankles shackled with crowded bangles of gold, ebony, silver, incrusting gems, painted wood, knitted silk, and leather of every shade and shape.

She was excessive and the women stared at her with a sort of hatred and envy.

He took delight in these Chelsea parties, because Eileen carried his esthetic lunacy with a shy openness, and looked down upon her ornaments with surprise, as if she did not recognize herself. She was, Peter told himself, dairy butter, served up in a bowl of chryso-prase, to be eaten with a spoon of tourmaline. She did not mind. She was lost. And in a way she was grateful.

She was not far off 16, a country child in a fancy dress, living a life in fancy dress. She understood so little what she was doing that she did not realize that she attracted some of the men she met. She liked some of them, but not all. She was rather frightened of the fat men choking in their collars, and especially of the old ones who took her hand to look at her rings.

So first one year then another passed. She was a little surer of herself. She could answer when she was spoken to, but her answers never seemed to lead to much more. She was not quite so frightened of her servants, who had become her friends, indeed the nicest people she knew. If only life hadn't gone so fast as a film it would have been easier to manage. She had only one sorrow: That she was not allowed to see her mother and sister. Sometimes now she had a day dream which inverted the old day dream of the pink satin bedspread. As she brushed her hair at night she liked to think of Burleigh Abbas, preferably on a blue, misty day, with veils of cool muslin like long fingers drooping from the fir trees. Of her mother's kitchen, of their old cross-bred collies, scratching comfortably by the black-leaded range. Well, it couldn't ever be. It couldn't be helped, and, after all, perhaps she didn't mind. Things were like that, and she supposed they were for the best.

Eileen might have grown accustomed to the strangeness of life—if she had not observed that some sort of friendship existed between Peter and a dancer called Madeline Forest. Three months before she had seen that they sat together rather long, but it took three months more, several small parties and a meeting in the street before her mind could connect these facts and build them into an anxiety.

It was perhaps the sight of her husband at one of those familiar parties in a Chelsea studio that aroused her activity.

All that evening Madeline Forest sat on a divan, while Peter stroked her arm. Well, that was all right. She supposed people did these things. Only a little later, as she went along a corridor, she found Peter with Madeline in his arms. He was kissing her. They did not seem embarrassed; indeed, Peter seized and kissed her, too.

She supposed it was all right, but somehow she was miserable. Her mental processes very slowly told her that in this new atmosphere people acted with incredible freedom, but they did it publicly. Without means of comparison, just out of innocence perhaps, Eileen

managed to establish in her mind a difference: It wasn't the same thing as if he'd done it before everybody. These two, they were hiding; they'd taken an opportunity when they were alone. She did not say anything about it.

Peter was still charming to her, inventive and gay, and he still seemed to find amusement in her, still to enjoy her perplexities. But all the same there was a slow erosion in their relationship. Eileen was not so secure, for Peter was less in the house, and he manufactured for her less often the comic frocks which before had given him occupation. She was a good deal alone, and she disliked the silence of her big house, where the servants were too well trained to laugh out loud. It wasn't like sitting comfortably in the kitchen at Burleigh Abbas, knitting a stocking with blue wool, and listening to the grandfather clock ticking.

With this came a change in her husband's attitude. He could not understand her new absorbed moods; formerly, when she had looked up at him, it had always been with an incredulous smile and a downward droop of the long lashes; now she looked up at him doubtfully, afraid as well as puzzled. Shyness was giving place to a mood that looked like sulks. So she stimulated his irony less, and he tended to her more. He sent her out to buy him a book. She began to mend his clothes.

Once more she was serving, but now it was not the service of incredulous and exalted love, but the service of duty, or perhaps the service that fills the empty hour.

She was little over 19, and in these growing moods of aloofness began to think more and more of familiar things. She enjoyed the letters from her mother, though they told her very little. Her sister Jane was getting married to the young man at the general shop; her friend Hilda had been reproved by the vicar for playing ball with the boys on Sunday afternoon. "She didn't oughter," reflected Eileen, thinking in the vernacular.

Sometimes, when she was very miserable, she brought out those collected letters and read them all. She thought of the past more than of the present, as if she were old; her husband, she did not know why, seemed worried, too.

Almost another year passed away in these broodings, and it was only then, in the spring, when Eileen felt moving within her an impulse toward ease, that suddenly she told herself:

"I want to go home. Not to stay, of course, but just to go home for a day."

She saw herself tiptoeing to her mother's window, taking just one look at the kitchen, and going away, as if afraid to be caught. Well, there was nothing to stop her; it was Saturday night, and Peter had gone away somewhere for the week-end. Why not? She slept little, and wondered what clothes to wear.

Then she rose early, told the maid that she was going out for the day, and reached Burleigh Abbas just about 10. She stood for a moment outside the station, hardly liking to go farther. It didn't seem to have changed much in three years. Still the same old milk churns on the platform and Mr. Brown's quince tree again just covered with white blossoms. Eileen had a sense of a return to eternal simplicity. No, she was wrong; there was a new porter at the station. Things did change. "Well," she thought, "such is life." Sighing a little, she went along the road, which was soft and white with piled dust, recognizing with gladness and sorrow the sweep of a hedge, a wormeaten stile, a gate with a broken hinge.

At last she reached her mother's cottage, and now she could no longer hesitate; she felt afraid to stand aside from the old life. It was easy to rush into it, to run through the front garden where the spring cabbage was coming up nicely, into the cottage, where her amazed mother held her off, instinctively wiping her hands upon her apron before she embraced her.

"Well, I never!" said Mrs. Stone. "Fancy coming down like that, without writing. We might have been out."

Eileen smiled, but she could not express even to herself that it was impossible for Mrs. Stone to be out. Where could she have gone to? So she answered questions. Yes, she was very happy. Peter was very nice. No, they'd had no more trouble with the cook. How much did this coat and skirt cost? She didn't know; Peter paid all the bills. Twenty pounds, perhaps; perhaps more.

"My," said Mrs. Stone. Then an idea came to her: "Does Mr. Walford know you're here?"

"No, ma."

"Do you mean to say you've come without him knowing? He wouldn't like it."

"O, ma," said Eileen, suddenly

tearful. "I had a fancy. Don't be hard on me. O, here's Jane." Indeed Jane was coming up the path, followed by an awkward fellow with red hair. "Lor!" cried Eileen, "that's Bert. He looks just the same."

"They're going to be married," said Mrs. Stone. "You ain't the only one who's settling down."

It was very awkward in the kitchen, for the young man from whom she had so often bought pins stood at the door and refused to come in, but leaned upon the lintel, lifting with great regularity first his right foot, then his left, while Jane, after carefully kissing her sister, looked at her clothes with a certain animosity. After an hour the conversation collapsed for lack of questions. Until then it had been all questions, and there was nobody about whom Eileen could ask another.

She realized that these people no longer were hers, that her life had been turned away like a stream that is suddenly dammed. So it was with a sense of escape that suddenly she said: "Ma, I think I'll go to church."

Mrs. Stone and the others thought this rather rude of Eileen; they were all very uncomfortable, but thought it manners to continue in this state all day. Only, what could one say to such a proper sentiment? After a moment Mrs. Stone announced that she couldn't go because she had to watch the joint.

"Thanks to you, my girl," she said, "we have a joint every Sunday." So Eileen, by the side of Jane, and followed by the red haired young man, who refused to walk with them, went on toward the church. When Eileen reached her pew she hoped church would reunite them. She looked curiously about at the pitch pine pews, terminated by lumps of wood cut into trefoils. The old familiar smell of incense and varnish, the lectern, looking as if it had not been polished since she left. My! It brought one back! she followed the service with greater difficulty than in the old days, for she had not been to church since she was married; also, she was covertly looking about, identifying people, then looking down, realizing that everybody was staring at the fine lady and incredulously recognizing her.

As she had to rise for the hymn her two small gloved hands clenched upon the edge of the pew. She wondered if she were going mad, for, on the left side, not far away, she saw Peter. Just where he'd sat before! The same old Peter, but somehow different, pale and worried. Perhaps it was the funny light in the church. What was he doing here? He saw her now, and did not smile at her. His eyes were as surprised as hers. She was disturbed and now grew terrified. Peter would know that she'd come, and he'd forbidden her to. O, what should she say to him? It did not occur to her to wonder what he was doing there.

Eileen, with her companions, lingered for a moment outside the church. The congregation was hurrying out, for everybody wanted to see her, and almost everybody nodded and smiled, though no one spoke. Eileen was too disturbed to think of that, but she felt lonely. She'd have liked to speak to somebody. Only, what was Peter doing there?

He came up to them after a moment, rather jauntily, fanning himself with his soft hat.

"Hallo, Eileen," he said, "what ever are you doing here?"

Before answering she saw that there was a little gray in his hair; she'd never noticed it before. Perhaps it had increased.

"Oh," she said, "I don't know."

At this moment her companions, grown violently self-conscious, suddenly went off, as if in panic. So Eileen and her husband stayed for a moment in the churchyard. They were alone now, for the congregation had disappeared. They felt embarrassed, unready for explanation. Eileen especially found herself guilty.

"Well," said Peter suddenly, "we can't stay here all the morning."

He took her arm and led her away. Silently they went through the village, meeting no creature, for all the inhabitants had gone to their cottages to prepare their Sunday dinner. A few curious eyes watched them, no doubt, but they were so absorbed, each one in himself, that they did not think even of that; an instinct was showing them the way.

They went beyond the railway and up the down, until by common consent they stopped on the rutted path by the birch wood. It was spring there now, and the birches were still bare of leaf; the grass was short, and along the ditch some scattered primroses held out little pallid hands. In the soft and delicate air an enthrallment fell away from Peter; He looked about him with a smile, at the green down that softly swelled, where a few lambs followed the ewes, and sometimes

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