

and frankly told him my difficulties. He engaged me directly."

"Ah! thank God! said Emma, clasping her hands. "And the situation——"

"Will yield eighteen shillings a-week. It isn't much, certainly, but we can manage, perhaps, to live on it. Only we must leave these lodgings, and seek very humble ones."

"Eighteen shillings a-week!" repeated Emma. "That is not much, indeed, William; and what is your employer?"

"A cheesemonger!" answered Harding. "Cheese, butter, hams, and bacon—you know what such people sell."

"Cheese, butter, hams, and bacon!" echoed his wife. "And you are to——"

"To retail them? Yes. There is no disgrace in cutting a rasher of bacon, or two penn'orth of cheese, is there? Besides, sometimes I shall persuade my customers to buy the whole fitch, or the entire cheese, and then my master will smile, and say, 'Well done.' And that will be consolation, will it not?"

"Cheese, butter, bacon!" repeated Emma, again, in a tone of bitter disappointment.

"He won't dismiss me for my opinions, at least," said William. "All he requires is vigilance, honesty, and a pleasant way of wheedling customers into purchasing large quantities with a quick eye for bad money. Bless you, I might say, 'Hang the King!' fifty times a-day, and he would take no offence."

"Well I didn't expect this of you, William. And you will have to wear an apron, I suppose?"

"Undoubtedly. What of that?"

"O dear me, what a figure you will look. I would rather starve, William."

"No, you wouldn't. Hunger is a sharp thorn, as the beggars say. I shall bring you home my wages every Saturday night. You will ask, 'What shall we have for to-morrow's dinner?' I shall answer, 'What you please, love.'"

"There, hold your stuff, William. I have no patience with you. I declare you make a merit of what you have done."

"I do make a merit of it, Emma. God be my witness, I do. I have now the certainty of a roof, a bed, and food, for all three of us. I was a breadlinder, and I have found my bread."

"Little more than your bread, then, I can tell you; for what will eighteen shillings a-week do, with rent, and clothes, and all to come out of it? My stars, I suppose you think that I can manage with it. But if you entertain any such wild notions, I would have you dismiss them. Eighteen shillings a-week, and coals, candles, tea, sugar, bread, butter, meat, potatoes, clothes for you, and clothes for me, and clothes for the baby. Shoes for—for two of us, at any rate, for baby's little shoes ain't worth mentioning—I'll grant that. And you expect me to do all this out of your paltry eighteen shillings a-week! You must have taken leave of your senses, I think."

"Or, you have lost yours—which, Emma?"

She did not reply. Harding, hearing a noise, looked round, and beheld a whiskered and mustachioed face, which was protruded into the room.

"I make many regrets; I ask a thousand pardons," said Signor Pepolini, in the face with its ornaments, belonged to him. "I will walk in, if you will give me the grand invitation."

Harding looked at his wife, and at the Signor, and at his wife again.

"I will walk in, and will make myself very little in a corner, if you will say the grand welcome," proceeded the Signor. "I tried to read the news,—I tried to read a book, I tried to smoke my pipe,—it was no use. I have the memory of the sweet voice. I make many regrets. I ask a thousand pardons."

Harding looked very earnestly at his wife for an explanation. But he still did not utter a word, or give the Signor the grand welcome.

"The gentleman is the new lodger," faltered Emma.

"Yes," replied Harding. "I understand that. But you have not the honor of his acquaintance, have you?"

"Oh no," she said, quickly.

"Well, Sir," said Harding, turning to the Signor, "your business?"

"I will be very small in this chair," said Pepolini, entering the room, and dropping into a seat. "I speak your language not bad. I shall have the honor of conversing with you. I shall have the honor of offering you some very good wine."

He thrust his hand into the capacious pocket of his morning gown, and drew forth a bottle, which he fixed between his knees. Then he produced a corkscrew, and proceeded to draw the cork.

"I shall have the honor to offer you some very fine cigar," he added, diving into another pocket, and bringing up a cigar-case. "They are the most beautiful for smoking. I shall have the honor to offer you some snuff."

He inserted his fingers into a pocket of his waistcoat, and produced a snuff box. Harding viewed these proceedings with the air of a man who did not know how to conduct himself.

"Ah, *Mon Dieu!* we cannot drink without the glasses," said the Signor, depositing the bottle, the snuff-box and the cigar-case on the table, and returning the corkscrew to his pocket. "I shall have the honor to bring glasses from my apartment."

"I beg that you will not inconvenience yourself," said Harding. "I never drink wine before dinner, I seldom smoke, and I am not a snuff-taker."

"You will not taste my wine?" returned Pepolini, shrugging his shoulders. "You make me ashamed of my poor presents. It is so good. It would not hurt a very small child. It will make you very glad. I assure you it is very innocent. You smile. You will taste it. I shall have the pleasure to drink your very good health."

The Signor stood irresolutely on the threshold.

"I am a good companion. I love the joke and the fun," he continued. "I shall have the honor to make you laugh very much."

"You are what we English call a good fellow," said Harding, offering his palm to the Signor. "I am happy to make your acquaintance."

"You will drink my wine?—you will smoke my cigars? You excite me to be very happy. I shall have the honor to dine with you in my apartment. I will go and prepare a grand dinner. I give you the grand invitation. My name is Jean Masson, but I call myself Signor Pepolini to please the lords and ladies of the Grand Theatre."

Conceding to Harding's request that he would make no preparations for a grand dinner, but would take an unpretending chop with them, M. Jean Masson resumed his seat, which he was prevailed upon to draw out of the corner, and thereon to expand to his natural size before the fire.

Harding went on the next Monday morning to his employment. He had a clean coarse apron in his pocket. His wife cried when he rose from the breakfast to set forth, but he kissed away her tears, and told her that he had found their bread,—his, hers, and the baby's.

"Little woman," he said, "remember what M. Jean Masson told us,—that you will be a fine singer. Then you, also, will find bread."

They had not yet removed into the humble lodgings that he had spoken of, as being more suited to his small income than those they now occupied. Boldero had sent four guineas for the month's instruction in the *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*. Harding said that this sum would pay eight weeks' rent, and they could live sumptuously on eighteen shillings a-week.

"We won't go away from M. Jean, if we can help it," was his excuse for this otherwise scarcely politic proceeding. "In eight weeks something may turn up. And our Signor may be the means of getting you a professional education—who knows? But if we quit his neighborhood, we may never see him again, or he might not choose to visit us, for our home would be so poor, that we might not have a passage. And M. Jean might not relish that."

"Not have a passage," cried the petrified Emma. "You are not in earnest, William?"

He said he was. God help them, without a passage, his wife thought. So she was quite satisfied that Boldero's four guineas should liquidate eight weeks' rent in their present apartments.

Harding was to dine and to take his tea with his employer. Emma therefore would see him no more till the shop was closed for the day. Baby was put to bed and the fire was