

should have rightly understood your reason for listening kindly to me, a stranger; but be that as it may, I trust to God you will find comfort here in time."

Joan hung her head and wept.

"Oh, Joan, I try not to look back, but how can I see you and not look back to the time that ended but yesterday, though it seems so long ago? Dost remember, lass, what didst think the best colours of all the pleasant harvest—the wheat and poppy and corncockle a-growing together? Thy face, my Joan, has caught all three—thy eyes the blue o' the corncockle, thy lips the poppy's red, and thy hair the ripe wheat's yellow. How, then, can I look at thee and not remember how happy we were a journeying together, and not say to myself, 'Sure my sweet fellow traveller loved me and I her?'"

Here Dick's hand and another's held up the golden curtain, and Arkdale, stealing in, found himself in a prison of shimmering gold and soft arms.

"Sweetheart, when would you think me truest? speaking yesternight, when I was sick and sore with disappointment, and weary with travel, or now—now that I am no longer weary or disappointed? Now that I hold thee and Dick in my arms, and feel myself more blessed than any woman on the earth?"

"If this is being false, Joan, never be true again!"

"'Tis being true to tell you I was false last night in letting you believe I came away with you for anything but liking for you, Humphrey. I think I loved you sooner than you me."

Humphrey said that was not true, but as pleasant a falsehood as he had ever heard.

Joan laboured all day with a stout and loving heart, and chatted and sang cheerily to Dick, who now preferred her company to that of his father or Jenkyns. She watched Arkdale, at first with anxiety, then with pride, as he threw himself into the business of the day—and, as he told Joan, a great day's business it was.

The news of his return had spread, and there came hurrying to his humble shop quite a crowd of persons on various errands apart from shaving and hairdressing. About a dozen huge silver watches were received by Joan into the interior, then came a few old clocks, and on enquiring of Jenkyns what these might mean, she was told that his master was the only man in the town to whom several of the tradesmen of Bolton, and, indeed, more than one of the neighbouring gentry, would trust the setting right of their watches or clocks.

One person who came mysteriously, requesting to see Arkdale alone, was so unceremoniously dispatched, that Joan ventured to remonstrate with her husband, telling him that Jenkyns had heard from some boys that the visitor had arrived in the town in a very neat cart, now put up at the "Royal George."

"Be at ease, my Joan," answered the barber. "I know the fellow; he has come to bargain with me for the secret of my new hair-dye, which I do not part with to the king's own wig-maker yet awhile."

Then came a country barber on a brown nag, which was held at the top of the steps by Jenkyns for full half an hour, to the great mortification of Arkdale's rival, Pritchard. This person merely came to beg for information concerning a certain new invention said to be in use in France—a little lathing-brush to use instead of the hand in shaving, and supposed to be in Arkdale's possession.

"Now, why," asked Joan, as the owner of the brown nag bustled out, taking a paper containing all the information he had wanted with him, and leaving something out of his stout leather purse on Arkdale's table—"now, why do you satisfy this one more than he who puts up at the inn like a gentleman?"

"Put it to my good nature, Joan," answered he, locking up the money.

"Nay," said Joan, "remember I have known what it is to bargain with thee."

"Then, cunning one, put it to my happening to know that a man will be in the town to-morrow with these brushes, if he arrive not to-day."

"Next time I want to sell my hair, I'll go to some one else, Dick," said Joan: "I am scarce a match for thy dad!"

"Yet, for all that, she drove me from twelve to fifteen, Dick."

"And gave it to him for nothing at last, my pretty Dick."

But all the rest of the day Joan watched him with smiling satisfaction, saying in her heart—"After all, in a great measure, he is right, whilst I am wrong. Of course, like all men, he goes into extremes; but I truly believe he is one to make a fortune. I am not for a Jack-of-all-trades myself, but these are good, solid, profitable talents which he has, and that no one can gainsay."

Joan had said that she would not look forward again, and she remained true to her word; but though she kept her mind's eyes closed, she could not help feeling the glow of a bright future any more than one can help feeling the sunshine by shutting one's eyes.

Sometimes while she was engaged in unpacking and finding places for the various items of her dowry, she would discover that, quite without her leave, her thoughts had gone through the cellar ceiling, and began to furnish the first floor. Nay, sometimes, to her indignation, she found them in possession of the whole house, which bore before it an announcement that "Humphrey Arkdale was Hairdresser and Clock-maker to his Worship the Mayor, instead of the invitation—'Come to the Subterranean Barber.'"

When it was evening the three sat round the fire—Joan at her spinning-wheel, Jenkyns nursing Dick, and Humphrey enjoying his rest lazily, as it seemed to the others.

But Joan's busy eye soon detected something more than mere enjoyment of rest in the attitude of Humphrey's figure. Moving her head a little, so as to see into his face, she saw that his large, shrewd eyes, which seemed to be looking at the chestnuts Dick and Jenkyns were roasting in the ashes, were contracted with the expression of a man who, while a crowd of thoughts are floating through his mind, is trying determinedly to hold and analyze one.

Joan watched him, thinking to herself, joyfully—

"Was ever a man's heart so deep in his business?"

Suddenly he looked up, and said—

"Sweetheart, didst ever use the spinning-jenny?"

Joan looked back at him with amazement, indignation, and reproach; looked, in fact, as she might have looked had he called her honesty into question.

"Well," said Arkdale, with a smile, "why look at me as I were mad? Hast used the thing, Joan, or not?"

"Never!" answered Joan, vehemently; "never, Humphrey, as I hope for God's grace at my dying day."

For some minutes after, when Arkdale had turned away and fallen into another fit of thoughtfulness, Joan drew out her thread with a perplexed and offended look on her brow; but by-and-by she said to herself—

"Now, what folly in me to show such hastiness! Here he spoke to me for the sake of civility, out of his deep thought, and I must needs quarrel with his words, as if he could pick and choose them, and feign what he did not feel. He is not a woman."

He sat silent so long that Joan began to grow jealous of the very thing she so much commended—business itself. Bending her head so as to catch his eye, she said laughingly—

"Come, a penny for thy thoughts."

"A penny! I want a fortune for them, Joan."

"I'm the more wishful of hearing them."

"Tell them to thee?" Humphrey looked at her with a smile, and taking her busy hands, pushed her wheel away and drew her within one arm. "Tell thee my thoughts? Why, as for that, I suppose, lass, I scarce can help myself; and yet I hardly durst."

"For why?"

"My Joan, thee'st of a tribe who, did they but know what thou watest to know, were as like to tear thy husband limb from limb as look at

him. Thee didst get thy bread by the same trade as the poor mad lasses hereabouts, who set their lads to hunt and murder Hargreaves—poor Hargreaves, of the spinning-jenny, my mention whereof did turn thee white. Nay, Joan, be not hurt; I know well thy heart is too tender to have pleasure in such doings; and I know that, for my sake, thee'll look at these things from the other side now."

Joan did not answer, but, after remaining still and almost breathless for a minute, put his arm from her, rose, and stood by the fire, whose light showed her cheek had lost some of its colour.

"What was that?" said she, turning suddenly upon him, with voice and eyes full of alarm and entreaty. "Not my husband speaking kindly—pityingly, almost—of the wretch who tried to take the bread out o' the mouths of us poor girls. Poor Hargreaves! did I bear? He has a harder name in our part!"

"He has an honoured name in this poor home of mine and thine, Joan; and, should he ever set foot in it, will be made welcome."

"If he ever eats bread of mine, may that bread poison me," said Joan, all her superstition and passionate love for her class aroused.

"Yet, Joan, thy husband is the worse man of the two."

"As how? Hath he been at any such sorry business?"

Arkdale remained silent a moment, with his knee on the chair, his arms folded, and eyes fixed on the floor. Joan's eyes were on his face, with a look of sharp suspicion.

"Joan," said he, presently, in a measured patient voice, that touched Joan's heart even while it roused her suspicions more and more, "there are men—men I have known and spoken with—gifted with minds far-sighted and ready speech, who could show you how the very thing you so much fear and loathe—you and those I have taken you from amongst—is to be as much for your good as for the good of others."

"Do I want a wise man like you, Humphrey, to tell me there are liars and hypocrites in the world?"

"Such men there are," he said, as if he had not heard her, "and honest and true men. But for myself, Joan, I can only tell you that what I do and yet hope to do, I do and hope to do from a conviction it is good, and should be done; and, moreover, will be done by those who come after me, if not done by me. This I say, and that I speak truth God knows; and this is all I can say in justification of myself to you."

"Then say out—say out, Humphrey. Do not spare me! You are what they call an inventor."

"I hope to deserve that name."

"Oh, I have no doubt you are already! But as to the justification you spoke of—may I ask what justified your marrying me, a spinner, whose hatred for such doings as yours you must well know?"

"That very fact should give you better thoughts of me, Joan. How could I have any intent to injure those amongst whom I found a wife so dear and kind of heart as thee?"

Joan stood with her face turned away; her eyes were on the door. She felt just then as terrified and helpless as a lamb who finds itself treacherously lured into the home of the wolf, by whom her flock has been worried. In those days thieves, executioners, and resurrectionists were scarcely thought more vile, by those of Joan's class and calling, than inventors. Joan knew a girl who had walked forty miles to see a woman whose son had thrown a cleaver at Hargreaves, and the journey had been spoken of ever since as a sort of holy pilgrimage.

"And they will hear, some day, that Joan Merryweather is the wife of a man worse than Hargreaves. Oh, how I have been cheated!"

Tears and fire filled her eyes as she lifted her head and looked at her husband. A voice whispered her, "leave him—be true to thy people; leave him—defy him!" But all Joan's horror at her position, and all her abhorrence of the inventor, could not blind her to the fact of her love for the man who stood watching her struggle with firm, tender patience. Her face fell into her hands. Both things seemed so utterly impossible—to live with an inventor; to leave Ark-