

the sounds of traffic in the streets below were louder than they would be for two hours to come in more fashionable thoroughfares. Presently she paused for a moment with the suspended brush in her uplifted fingers, and after a moment's listening resumed her work.

A step sounded on the stairs. The door opened and a man entered the room.

He, too, would have been easily recognisable by anyone who had seen the second photograph upon the mantel-piece. He had the look of one who is just beginning to repent of too jolly an overnight. His face was flushed, his eyes were bleared. The girl did not even look at him, and received his entrance in silence, a silence as eloquent as any reproach could have been. For when a husband comes home imperfectly sober in the early morning and his wife finds nothing to say, it shows that the circumstance must have been so often repeated that she has got past tears and entreaties, and takes it as a thing of course.

As has been suggested, Philip O'Mara was by no means a bad-looking fellow; yet he had a certain undefinable air of being handsomer than he was. The photograph, taken some five years ago, flattered his actual appearance, because no man can pass five years in selfish indulgence without grave detriment to any beauty he may originally have started with.

As with the man, so with the clothes he wore. Contrasted with the almost squalid shabbiness of the room and of his wife's dress, they looked for a moment as if they would have passed muster in any society. Then one saw that his coat was not of velvet, but of coarse velveteen, which led to a doubt as to the genuineness of the jewelled ring on his finger, and a wonder as to whether anything more valuable than a latch-key was attached to the chain which glittered across his waistcoat. Mr. O'Mara's sartorial splendours, like their wearer, were rather of the shabby swell order, and did not come off well from close examination.

"Dear Gillian!" he began, "industrious girl! 'Pon my soul you make me blush for myself!"

The blush was purely internal, for no signs of it were visible without. He took up one of the cards she had finished.

"Delightful, my dear Gillian; delightful. Your powers of imagination are really extraordinary, and your technique improves every day."

Nobody could have told for certain whether he was speaking in mockery or exaggerated compliment.

"You are doing those on commission?"

"No," replied Gillian.

"A pity. But still, work so delightful is certain of a sale."

He returned the card to the table.

"Ah, *apropos* of sale—how inexpressibly revolting it is, by the way, my dear Gillian, that even the creation of beauty, which should be the delightful satisfaction of a divine instinct, should be degraded to the sordid level of the manufacture of articles of vulgar necessity. Talking of sale, have you any money?"

"I have no money," she replied.

It was noticeable that while the husband interlarded his address to her with endearing epithets, and expressed in the longest polysyllables the most beautiful sentiments, Gillian avoided speaking one unnecessary word.

"My own finances," he said, after a search in his pockets, "amount to—yes—one and sixpence half-penny. Not a large amount; but still, judiciously expended, it may do something to mitigate the discomforts I already experience, and which threaten to become even more pronounced. There is some brandy left."

He examined the bottle on the mantel-piece.

"Would you, my dear Gillian, get me a couple of bottles of soda water and a packet of Peach-blossom cigarettes?"

She took the money from the table where he laid it, and for the first time since his entrance raised her eyes to his face.

"Mr. Bream was here last night," she said. "He tells me that Dora is really ill, and must have attention, better food and change of air. He wrote a prescription for her, but I had not the

money to get it made up."

"My dear Gillian!" said O'Mara, "you really distress yourself about the child to a quite unnecessary degree. You are always raising false alarms about her. Six months ago, she was going to die, I remember. Mr. Bream is no doubt a very estimable person, as a clergyman, but he is not omniscient. What can he possibly know about Dora's health?"

"He studied as a doctor before he took orders," answered Gillian.

"Quite a Crichton," said O'Mara, "I have no doubt. Still, I would prefer the verdict of a medical man in practice."

"I shall spend this money," said Gillian, "or at least as much of it as will be required, in getting the medicine Bream prescribed for Dora. With the rest I shall buy soda water or cigarettes, just as you please."

"I am sure," said O'Mara, "that you will do nothing of the kind, my dear Gillian. You, who are a model of all the virtues, know that it is a wife's first duty to obey her husband."

"I shall get the medicine for Dora," repeated Gillian.

"Then," said O'Mara, seizing her wrist with a sudden, sharp wrench, which made her wince and drop the money on the table, "I shall have to do my marketing myself, or find another messenger."

Quite unruffled by this little incident, O'Mara left the room. She heard his voice upon the stair calling to the girl in the basement, and a minute after he re-entered.

"A mistake in your tactics," my dear," he remarked, as he kicked off his shoes and lay down upon the bed. "It would have been wiser to have bought the medicine and said nothing of your intention—wiser, though less honest, and not more dutiful. You will know better next time."

She heard him in silence, finding no reply. With the despairing patience which years of such brutalities had taught her, she again took up her brush, and bent over her work. O'Mara turned upon the bed, seeking an easy posture, and had fallen asleep before the girl came in with her purchases.

It was past noon when he awoke, and finding the soda water on the mantel-piece beside the brandy, mixed himself a copious draught, which he drank to his great apparent refreshment. He sluiced his face and head liberally with cold water, and having replaced his coat and waistcoat, arranged the easel beside the window and seated himself before it.

"There were once, my dear Gillian," he began, lighting a cigarette, and regarding the picture through the smoke with an eye at once critical and approving, "There were once—you will see the application of the story directly—two travellers who had, through infinite difficulties and dangers, travelled across a desert, and arrived within an hour's walk of the confines of civilization. One of them at that point succumbed to his fatigue. He could go no further. They had between them one dose of brandy. 'If,' said the sick man to his companion, 'you will give me that brandy, I think I could manage the rest of the distance.' His companion, instead of giving it to him, drank it himself. 'What detestable selfishness!' you will remark, precisely as I did myself when I first read this instructive legend. But I was mistaken, for his object in drinking the brandy was to recuperate his force sufficiently to enable him to carry his friend the rest of the distance. Thus we may learn, my dear Gillian, not to judge our neighbours on insufficient evidence. You see the application of the fable? I am the robust traveller, you—or rather our darling Dora—is the feeble one. Without that brandy and soda I could not possibly have finished this picture, and unless I finished the picture there would be no dinner for us to-day."

Gillian listened in her accustomed silence, and O'Mara, having set his palate, attacked his work. He painted rapidly and dexterously, and after a couple of hours of work punctuated by the drinking of more brandy and soda and the lighting of fresh cigarettes, pushed his chair back and rose.

"That should do, I think. I must invent a title for it—something touching and poetical.

There is much virtue in a name. Our good British public have not yet risen so high in artistic appreciation as to separate art and literature. To me, its creator, that picture needs no title. To any soul in kinship with my own it would need none. The average Philistine will ask, 'What is it?' It is not enough that it is beautiful, a touch of celestial harmony in adorable contrast with the hideousness of daily life." He sighed, as if the stupidity of the world was hard to bear. "I should be glad of your opinion, Gillian."

"What do you think you will get for it, Philip?" she asked gravely.

"My darling!" he remonstrated, with a quick indrawing of the breath between his teeth, as if the question hurt him. "You should really discourage this—this extreme practicality of mind. It is growing on you."

"I must have money, Philip; you must bring me some to-day."

"My dear, you shall have money. But surely, after so many years' knowledge of my temperament, you might have more feeling for my peculiarities than to ask me, happy as I am in the contemplation of a thing of beauty fresh from my hands, what—what will I get for it. Get for it! Is it not enough to know that I must part with it, the last sweet child of my fancy, the Benjamin, so to speak, of what poor artistic faculty I possess? Still, you are right. The vulgar necessities of life are paramount. Facts must be faced."

"You will let me have some money to-night?" she pleaded. "There is rent due, Philip, and there is nothing in the house to eat. And, oh Philip! I shouldn't mind for myself, but Dora! She is really ill. See how pale she is, and all day long she has never made a movement. She lies for hours, and she used to be so bright and lively."

"Well, well!" he answered, fretfully, perhaps a little touched through his hidebound selfishness for the moment, "I will bring what I get for the picture."

CHAPTER II.

THE ROAD TO RUIN.

It was manifestly impossible for a gentleman of O'Mara's high breeding and fastidious tastes to be seen trudging on foot with a picture under his arm, like any work-a-day canvas spoiler, who habitually painted, not for the divine creation of beauty, but with the sordid aim of money-making. Accordingly, he took a hansom, and drove comfortably to the shop of a picture dealer in Wardour street, with whom he had done business aforetime.

"Hum!" said the dealer, looking at the picture with his mouth critically screwed on one side, "really, I don't know as I want it. Pictures are a fearful drug in the market. Trade's so bad, everything flat. 'Taint so good as that last one of yours, you know."

"Naturally," said O'Mara. "The first I ever offered you was no good, and I have been steadily deteriorating ever since. But you bought them!"

O'Mara had the knack of suiting his conversation to his company and did not waste flowers of speech on this artistic middleman.

"Where is it?" asked the dealer.

"A little corner of my uncle's place—Sir Charles Vandeleur, in Surrey; I've been staying down there for the last month."

"Ah!" The title, carelessly dropped, had its effect upon the worthy tradesman. "What are you going to call it?"

"Really, I don't know. 'Crépuscule,' would that do?"

"Don't believe in foreign titles; people don't understand 'em. What's it mean?"

"It means Twilight."

"That'd do," said the dealer. "if it hadn't been used so much. Tell you what, call it 'In the Gloaming.' There's a tune called that, very popular on the organ."

O'Mara's eyes were raised to the ceiling in a speechless pang of æsthetic agony.

"That'd do," said the dealer, and repeated the title with the relish of a man who feels that he has satisfactorily solved a problem. "In the Gloaming.' Could you get a couple of figgers in just