

"'Tis obliging in you," said Rose laughing, and trying to withdraw her hand. "Nay, Mr. Dane, nay indeed——"; but the torrent of romantic love swept on—

"Dear heart, let us go together, you and I. We've tasted the pleasures of the town, and bitter they are at last. Come away to the downs with me. I've a home for you that you'll love, and you——"

"La, Mr. Dane, I have heard it all on the stage. Nay; rise, for your own sake, rise. We are both ludicrous so."

Mr. Dane sprang up flushed: "Ludicrous, ma'am!"

"Indeed, I have no wish to wound you, but if you could see that what you talk of is folly, you would be happier."

"Folly, ma'am! And why?"

Rose played with her flowers a moment, then looked up and met his eyes frankly: "Since you ask, Mr. Dane—because neither you love me nor I you." Jack stared at her and at last laughed.

"Are my deeds and my words all a lie then? Oh, ay! 'Tis convenient to tell me so. My lord Sherborne is vastly a nobler swain than I. Pray heaven, ma'am, that he means you as honestly as I."

Rose drew herself up: "For that word, Mr. Dane, I'll leave you to blame yourself," she said very quietly.

"Nay, not I, ma'am," cried Jack. Rose turned away from him and rang the bell.

It was not answered at once. In the hall was the sound of a scuffle and a woman's scream, then the four heroes of the lane broke into the room together, and "Bottled the prigster, now, boys!" cried the leader, and with lifted cudgels they rushed at Jack. Rose caught at the mantel and stared amazed and dumb, but without in the hall two maids screamed efficiently.

Jack sprang back and snatched up a sturdy chair. With a full-armed rattling blow of it he swept the cudgels clear of him and sprang away safe to the open window. Then he hurled his chair in the heroes' faces and leapt down to the