

"Sir Jacob has told me," she replied quietly.

"It was only yesterday that I was able to tell him," he went on, as if Rose had been longing for the moment to arrive. "Only yesterday that I was really in a position to demand my own terms. You remember, Rose, how we parted some years ago?"

"Yes, I remember." Her tone was cold, and had but little encouragement in it, but John did not observe this. Being an active man, who brought an intense eagerness to his own work, on which his thoughts were always concentrated, he was not largely gifted with sympathetic perception: and when he had made up his own mind that another person was thinking, acting, or disposed to act in a particular way, nothing but direct ocular proof to the contrary would drive him from his belief. People who work on things which entirely seize upon and occupy the brain are not generally observant of others. "Very clever men," said a young lady to me once, *à propos* of a great philosopher, "are so often extremely stupid." John Gower was extremely stupid, incomprehensively stupid. Had he looked at her with eyes of understanding, he would have seen that her heart was changed. But his eyes were blurred with the mist of his own fancy, and he saw nothing as it was.

"Only yesterday: and after seven years of waiting. It seems long, doesn't it, looking back? But the time has come at last, Rose. I have worked hard for it. Be sure that the goal was always in my mind—when you laid your hands upon my shoulders and held up your face to be kissed, seven years ago, promising that you would always love me, you gave me such a stimulus for work as no other man ever had—the hope of winning you. There was no time for dreaming about happiness and all that. I put away such things in a corner. I said to myself, 'If you get on, John Gower, you may be able to marry the girl who loves you. It is your duty to work hard.'"

She made no kind of reply. What was there to say? She took no kind of interest in his struggles.

"Well, Rose, I did work hard. I think there is no one in the whole North of England who has worked so hard as I have. For I had so much to do. From six to six in the works. That was learning the machinery: getting to understand every nerve

and muscle in the anatomy of that great steam monster who does our work for us. I learned him at last, and then I began to see how he could be improved. All the evenings I spent teaching myself other things, French and German, so as to read scientific books: mathematics, all sorts of things, without which a mechanical engineer is not worth his salt. So the time went on, and was not tedious. After my articles were got through I stayed on at the works with a salary. That helped me too, for it is always best to be among the best kind of machinery. And then suddenly, because you were still a long way off, there came to me—my idea."

His idea! Rose looked at the pile of papers which she had held in her hands. That idea, then, was her fate. She wished that it had never been framed, or had been forgotten, like some dream of the night, the moment after it had flashed across his brain. But John Gower was not a man to let go a valuable thought.

"What a day that was!" her lover went on. "I was standing in the engine-room looking at the wheels when the thought came to me. All at once I saw it; all at once, too, I saw how great an idea it was, how rich it would make me, now powerful. I could hardly get through the day, and while I was doing my own work I was thinking over the engine of the future. And that night I drew the first plans and began the first model. I called it, in my own mind, because I spoke to no one about it, not even my own father, the 'Rose Escomb,' that model of mine, which I made and re-made, pulled to pieces and put together again, so often. It was lucky then that I had lived so solitary a life, because no one ever came to see me in my lodgings, and I had no interruption to fear. But I locked it up in the day-time for fear some wind of my invention might get about. Oh! I was cautious. And when it was quite finished and perfect, when I could think of nothing that would improve it, when I was satisfied that my machine was as complete as my hands could make it, I sent the specifications to London and registered it. And then I came up myself, and felt that the day was come at last when I could come to Sir Jacob—even Sir Jacob—and ask him for his niece. Even then," he went on, not noticing how pale was Rose's cheek, "even then I did not like to leave things to chance. So when I showed Sir Jacob the