

and the gathered tears ran down, and she smiled upon him with all the sweetness that had been deepening and mellowing in her face, like the colour on the corn, the bloom upon the fruit, all their long journey through.

The rich browned face on her knee looked troubled for an instant, then the great limbs were drawn up, and sitting beside her on the sacks, the young man put an arm round her, and would have taken her hand, but that both her hands were clasped, while her face bent over them. Soon she looked up, and took his hand.

"Do you know, Humphrey," said she, "they have a custom in that part my mother came from that I never heard of elsewhere, and yet I can but think it good. 'Tis that a wife, at first sight of her new home, should kneel and ask a blessing on it, and on her ingoing. Dear heart! such have I now done. Will you not say 'amen' to my prayer?"

"God bless thee, lass! I'll say amen to that. I would to the other too, but that it rather goes against a strong fellow like me to acknowledge you sorry hole as a home at all. To me, my Joan, 'tis but a workshop wherein I am making the foundations of that home I have told thee of; and, indeed, I would have thee ask blessings upon that, and look on this but as a sort of tarrying place on the road, for only as such dare I ask thy patience with it a little while."

Joan shook her head, and looked on with a yearning smile to the housetops coming nearer.

"Ah," she said, "it will never be with any other as with this. In this I shall know if I am to be happy or miserable all my life long. In 'yon sorry hole,' as you call it, shall I have for the first time the happiness I have so often longed for, of saying, 'This is mine.' Nay, Humphrey, tell me for the present of this home, where to-night I shall sit down with you and your child, and be happier than I have ever been in my life; tell me of this and no other, for I am like Legbin Grimthorne's, bride. Do you know how the song goes?" And she sung in a low voice:

"An' there, where she had come a bride,
Wi' heart see leal and lovin',
She prayed she might till death abide,
An' know nor change nor rovin'."

It chanced that the miller knew Joan's song, which, indeed, belonged rather to his part of the country than to hers, and while Humphrey whispered, "God forbid, lass, thee should'st abide there long," the miller, taking up the song at the last verse, droned out, in a deep, sonorous voice—

"Alack, the bride, the bonny bride,
That death should be her dowry!
She roved no more till forth they bore
The fairest corpse in Gorthrie!"

Joan, always on the look-out for omens and portents, shivered, but laughed merrily when Humphrey said—

"Come, come, Mr. Miller, prithee give us a livelier ditty, or folks will swear we are from a burial."

The miller, in return for the rebuff, made Joan uncomfortable by throwing ominous glances at her baggage, which occupied a good part of the van.

"We must have our wits about us, for I am certain he means to ask more than we bargained for," whispered she.

"Well, take it all in all, it has been a cheap journey for me, sweetheart," answered Arkdale, "and I cannot but feel a little rueful that it will so soon come to an end."

And then they sat quiet, hand in hand, thinking, Arkdale regretfully of the long, happy journey, Joan of that journey's end.

The journey, indeed, had been one of unbroken pleasure. No coachdriver or waggoner had over-looked them or maltreated Joan's baggage, now safely stowed in the van of the Bolton miller. It is true, they were both so well pleased with each stage of their journey that they would hardly have considered any price within their means too dear to pay for it. Joan was as delighted with all she saw as a woman, who had scarcely before set foot out of her own county, well could be; and Arkdale had so much pleasure in her delight and wonder, as to be con-

stantly going out of his way to show her such famous places they might be passing near to.

At Huntingdon he had taken her to see the birthplace of Cromwell. They stayed at Oakham, in the midst of the lovely valley of Catmose, for half a day, and Joan thought she had never seen such harvest fields. They tasted the renowned Nottingham ale, visited the caves at Matlock, saw Mary Queen of Scots' prison at Buxton, and enjoyed a day's sight-seeing at Manchester, where they were a good deal stared at.—Joan fancied on account of her countrified dress, but it is more probable to have been the hale, sunburnt, and comely appearance of the young couple that drew on them the attention of the pale-faced mechanics and weavers of the great town.

But by day they had warm, dry weather, by night deep skies crowded with stars, and below them heavy dews, that made the distant valleys like sheets of water.

Arkdale looked back on these things as a school-boy looks back on a long, delicious holiday as it draws to a close. He thought of his wedding morning, of Joan, looking so bright and sweet in her wedding bravery—the gown of French cambric, sprigged with scarlet, he had given her, and the scarlet rose wreath he had seen Margery and Joan sitting on the old wall by five in the morning to make. He thought of Farmer Bristow's surly generosity, of the kindness of Joan's neighbours, of Joan's quiet conquering of her grief at leaving the old home—a grief which was only shown at the latest minute, when with a rush of tears, she suddenly slipped on her knees and kissed the old door-stone.

There had been no weeping, no regretting since; nothing but sunshine and buoyant hope and holiday-making. Sometimes, indeed, Arkdale thought, with a little wonder, that she had been over quick in forgetting what she had seemed to hold so dear; but, as the thought was flattering to himself, he only loved her the better for it, and his content with his hasty bargain was great.

But Joan, as the miller's great horses bore her merrily into Bolton, knew her own heart better than Arkdale did. She knew her love of home had not lessened one whit, but that, instead of lingering behind, it had gone before, to the home where Arkdale's little one awaited her, and there had clung, with a blind passion that would see no defect Arkdale tried to prepare her for.

She could not turn her thoughts with any pleasure to that home of the future of which he talked so much, and which was to possess such wondrous perfection. With such ideas as he had of what a house should be, she could not be surprised at the contempt he expressed for that to which he was now taking her, and which Joan had no doubt was a straight town house, with perhaps as many as four windows in the front—proper town windows, which Joan would have rival in brightness all the windows of the street. She could see it in her mind's eye quite plainly, as she would have it, even to the bit of stone-crop on the roof, to guard against lightning. She was delighted to think how long it was since any woman had meddled there—how it was reserved for her to bring havoc to order, to wipe the dust from Arkdale's household gods, and set them up in freshened beauty. She was prepared to touch them with tender reverence, as things an angel's hand had lain down unwillingly, for it pleased her now to think the former mistress of that house an angel. Since Arkdale would not own her less worthy than Joan, Joan would have her something infinitely beyond all women.

It was now dark. The horses fell into a slow, heavy walk; the miller tugged, and swore, and glanced vindictively at Joan's baggage. Now and then a light from a solitary house would flicker across the road.

Joan, with her arm clasped in Arkdale's, peered out at the front of the van with impatient, longing eyes.

"How strange," said she. "This is the first starless night we have had since we set forth."

"It matters little," answered Arkdale; "we are within a stone's throw of home."

"And our fireside will only seem the brighter," said Joan, softly.

As they came into the town with great noise and ado, many persons ran out of their houses and beset the miller with questions concerning parcels or messages with which he had been entrusted; and, as he often had to stop in the flare of some shop light, Arkdale was soon recognised by innumerable friends and neighbours, some of whom would run along by the van and shout out scraps of news in a dialect by which Joan was completely puzzled.

She drew away from Arkdale's side, whilst he went forwards, shaking hands and exchanging hearty greetings all the way.

The news of his wedding had been carried into Bolton by a Manchester weaver, and Joan could see many an inquisitive face trying to look past Arkdale's broad shoulders into the van, and could hear many a sly inquiry as to what he had brought from the fair.

Arkdale parried these questions by asking questions himself. Had Jenkyns—Arkdale's apprentice—given satisfaction in his absence? And had he still the honour of being the cheapest barber in Bolton? and of serving the most respected of its townspeople?

Before he could be answered he was told that Jenkyns had just heard of his arrival, and was flying down the street, razor in hand, having left Simon Blutcher, of the "Royal George, with his beard half off and half on.

Then Joan, who was sure this apprentice of Humphrey's would be a thorn in her side, heard a panting, and saw a thin, pale face, with bright eyes and long untied hair thrust in at the front of the van.

"Well, Jenkyns," shouted Arkdale, as the van went on and Jenkyns ran, "how are you, and how's the boy?"

"Oh, aint he well!" answered Jenkyns between his panting. "And don't he eat; and aint he as good as gold; and don't he keep the money!"

"Does he?" said Arkdale, in a half-pleased, half-perplexed voice.

The van was going at a quicker pace now, and no one keeping up with it but Jenkyns.

"Keeps the money, does he?" said Arkdale, taking Joan's hand.

"Just don't he; and don't he laugh and skirl when he hears it a-jingling in the box!"

"I hope there's plenty there, Jenkyns," cried Arkdale, his paternal pride suddenly giving place to business anxiety. "What art doing—shaking your head? Do you mean to say, sir, business is going badly?"

"Oh, aint it, that's all!" answered Jenkyns, who seemed always to make his replies interrogatively.

"The deuce it is!" shouted Arkdale, letting go Joan's arm and leaning out, anxiously.

"Just aint it!" said Jenkins.

"Then you've been muddling, or has Pritchard been at it again?" cried Arkdale.

"Been at it!" said Jenkyns, getting more and more shrill as he got more and more short of breath. "Aint he been at it!"

"Has he?" asked Arkdale.

"Aint he got a board out large as life," gasped Jenkyns—"Why go over the way, when you can be shaved here for one penny? And aint I a'most learned Dick his letters off it, for want of nothing else to do; for, says I to the child, 'If it gets your father's customs out of us, we'll get your eddication out of it.'"

"A nice expensive education, upon my word," muttered Arkdale.

The van now stopped. Jenkyns disappeared, and, as Arkdale was assisting Joan down, came running back to say that Simon Blutcher was going over to Pritchard's, with the cloths about his neck, swearing frightfully.

"Then you've lost me the custom of the 'Royal George,' from landlord to boots," exclaimed Arkdale, angrily. "Joan, lass, I must go after the fellow. Get thee in with Jenkyns. And, Jenkyns, we must bestir us. Hang me if I don't have a board out to-night—'A clean shave for a halfpenny.' And you let it come to Pritchard's ears, lad, that if he tries that, I'll go to a farthing. Miller, do you help my 'prentice with