

sulting his programme from time to time in impatience for the appearance of the Jolliffe Troupe.

"Their number's up!" whispered the lawyer in his ear; Captain Neville Follett fixed his eye-glass.

Six pretty girls, walking with the assured and springy step of the trained dancer, marched on to the stage, singing a catchy air. They marched, as it happened, straight towards where Captain Follett sat; it was almost as though they were giving their performance for him alone. But the Captain's eyes were not for them at all; looking past them in the direction of the wings from which they had entered, he saw something else that more deeply interested him.

It was a child. A little mite of some three or four years of age, prettily dressed, who stood just round the angle of the scene, and gravely went through the whole performance on her own account. She jigged about on her small feet, and gravely kicked up her small legs, in time to the kicking of the six dancers on the stage; solemnly marched round in a little circle of her own, out of sight, as they marched round on the stage. And when at last the "turn" was finished, and the girls had bowed themselves off, the Captain saw the child caught up in a medley of rushing figures and hurried away.

"I've seen their manager, and they'll give us five minutes if we go round now," whispered Shearman, getting to his feet. "Follow me, and don't fall over anything."

The bewildered Captain was led along passages and down staircases, under the guidance of Shearman and of a little common-place looking man who was extremely anxious to know what they thought of the troupe and of the dancing, and who chattered incessantly as he went along. Coming to the door of a room, he knocked upon it, and was admitted, while the Captain and his companion stood outside and waited. Now and then a strangely-dressed figure came flitting past; once a whole troupe of acrobats tore madly down the stairs, almost upsetting the Captain, and raced out of sight. Then the door opened, and the little manager came out, shaking his head.

"It ain't no good, gentlemen," he said briskly. "The gels are tired, and they don't see any good to come of any more interviews. It's no good your waitin'—not a bit."

"Will you present my compliments to the ladies," said the Captain stiffly, yet with infinite courtesy, "and remind them that I have come a journey of many thousand miles to England in order to see them; say that I beg for five minutes only."

The door near which they were standing was slightly ajar; suddenly it opened wider. A head was thrust out and a voice called sharply:

"All right, George; let the gentleman come in—for five minutes. There's no arm in that."

The Captain put his crush hat under his arm, and smoothed his slightly grey hair, and bowed himself into the room. An untidy room, with garments of every sort and description tumbled about on the chairs and hanging against the walls. The girls were grouped about their dressing-tables, and in the very centre of them, seated on one of the tables, was the child. The Captain had a ridiculous, pathetic feeling for a moment that he was waging rather unequal warfare against these girls—what with his money and his lawyer and one thing and another.

"This is Captain Follett," said Shearman, coughing nervously. "Captain Follett, this is Miss—"

"Oh, all right; I'll do the introducing!" said a black-eyed girl, whose head the Captain recognized as having been the one thrust out of the door. "We don't need to be so particular as all that. I'm Fanny—and this is Cicily—and this is Queenie—and that's Audrey in the corner there—and that's Daisy—and this is Pauline."

Each girl jerked her head a little defiantly as her name was spoken, and the visitor bowed gravely and unsmilingly at each. In the awkward pause that ensued the Captain's voice spoke for the first time.

"Thank you" he said; "but there is one omission. I should like—as a mere matter of form—to be introduced to—everyone."

The black-eyed girl looked at him curiously for a moment, then drew back a little; she had been standing exactly in front of the child. "Oh—all right," she answered, with a hard laugh. This is Ruby."

The Captain bowed again, and held out his hand for the first time. The mite frankly put her small hand into his, and he gravely shook it; Shearman, watching eagerly, saw that one or two of the girls had unbent a little, and were smiling.

"This ain't business," interrupted Fanny, putting an end to the hand-shaking by getting beside the child, and slipping an arm about her. "I understand, Captain Follett—and if it comes to that we all understand—that you're here to make some proposal about a certain party that shall be nameless"—she hugged the child a little closer as she spoke, and went on a little more fiercely—"that proposal 'av'ng been already made by the gentleman beside you. And the answer's the same as it's always been—and that answer is—'No!'"

"My position, ladies," said the Captain, drawing himself up as though about to make a speech—"my position is a difficult and delicate one. I fully recognize how very much has been done by you all"—he waved a hand comprehensively, and one or two of them bowed—"for the support of the—the party that shall be nameless. But I would merely suggest that it is perhaps—the Captain glanced round the untidy room, and lowered his voice a little—"perhaps not quite the kind of life for a young and—er—delicate child."

"I should like to ask what's the matter with the life?" asked the girl who had been introduced as Audrey. "If you're careful they treat you like ladies; and when you know as much as some of us do you can look after yourself."

"I referred, Miss Audrey," said the Captain, who never forgot a name—"I referred rather to the child. I want you to think of the life she has—and the life she might have. I am willing to take her away from here, and to place her with people who will see to her welfare—and who will bring her up and educate her as a lady."

"Which her mother wasn't!" exclaimed Fanny fiercely. "Er mother was one of us—working hard, and going on from town to town and living decently and well—till your precious brother came along—"

"My brother is dead," broke in the Captain gravely. "Also I believe that the lady is dead—so that we may leave them out of the question. Ladies," he exclaimed, in an unwonted burst of eloquence, "I appeal to you all. The little person who shall be nameless—what sort of life is it going to be for her in the years that are coming? She must wander from place to place, as you wander; she must see sights and hear sounds to which you have grown accustomed, and on which you can put their proper valuation. Then look for a moment at the other side of the picture. She shall be taken away from here, and shall be sent to people who understand her, and understand the training of young children; she shall be provided when she grows up with proper guardianship and with a proper income; she shall never want for anything. It is a sordid fashion of speaking, ladies," went on the Captain, not without agitation; but I should like to say that I am a rich man—and that I am only trying to do my duty to the dead—and to the living."

"Hear, hear!" murmured the lawyer behind his hand.

"All very fine and pretty," said Fanny, still with an arm about the child, "but it won't exactly wash. I don't want to say anything 'ard about the dead, God knows; but your brother wasn't our sort, and you're not out sort, and that's the long and the short of it. When poor Ruby died, and Daisy 'ere came to take her place, we made up our minds—the six of us—that we'd look after the—the person that shall be nameless. Being six of us, we settled we'd share and share alike, and that

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