

a gran' thing it wud be to staun' up an' say to this deluded female: 'Mem, it is ma duty to thenk ye for yer offer; but as yer ritous an' savage an' unseemly carry-ons are entirely ag'in ma principles, I respectfully decline to pit a brush to yer hoose for a' the cash in creation!' Wud that no' be a gran' thing, a splendid thing, Wullie?"

For several seconds the apprentice gazed wide-eyed and open-mouthed at his master.

"But she wud jist get anither penter!" he cried. "I dinna see ony sense in—"

"That's enough, that's enough!" said Mr. Redhorn, with a groan. "Pey attention to yer pentin'. Ye dinna understaun'. Ye dinna realise what harm thae deluded females are daein' to the nation forbye theirsels. Their riots may be forgotten, an' the broken windows can be repaired, but—"

"Davie, the glazier, was sayin' he wished she wud ha'e a fling at some o' the windows in Fairport. It wud be a fine job for him. Was it for breakin' windows she got the jile?"

The painter did not vouchsafe a reply, and another spell of work was done in silence.

"Maister Ridhorn."

"What?"

"She doesna look a bad yin."

"I didna say she was bad. I said she was deluded; an' when folk gets deluded ye can dae naething wi' them. Pey attention—"

"But, Maister Ridhorn."

"Criftens! What is it, laddie?"

"Am I to mind ye to tak' yer medicine the nicht?"

Mr. Redhorn frowned, then laughed mirthlessly.

The boy looked hurt. "It wudna be the first time I had minded ye," he said in an aggrieved voice, "an' ye was aye pleased wi' me for daein' it."

"True, Wullie, true," said his master more kindly. "I had nae business to expect ye to distinguish atween ma moral aspirations an' ma pheelsical infirmity. Jist mind me to tak' ma medicine—a dooble doose, if that'll afford ye ony amusement—an' I'll be gled to ha'e yer company at tea, includin' cake an' sardines. Meantime we'll baith pey attention to the pentin' o' thae railin's, which was oreeginally erected by a gentleman reputed to be a great thinker—chiefly aboot hissel', to judge frae the way he treated ither folk. But we're nane o' us perfec', laddie, an' I'm aye ready to admit it. Proceed!"

MRS. Methven had resided in Fairport a full fortnight without creating any sensations otherwise than mild and pleasant. The minister had called upon her, and she had attended public worship, both events being favourably commented upon by the villagers who, after all, were quite as smart as the smartest of us in judging from outward appearances. Mrs. Methven gratified the shopkeepers. Perhaps the butcher was at first a trifle disappointed in the daily orders for Clover Cottage, but undoubtedly his expectations had been exaggerated by his too sanguine temperament. On the other hand, the grocer was jubilant. "Everything first quality, an' never a word aboot price!" he confided to all and sundry. Mr. Danks, the fish merchant, declared that a more genuine lady had never entered his shop, and that her taste in fish was far and away superior to that of many summer visitors who considered themselves "toffs." As for the young baker, he took to murmuring the words "beauteous being," and made experiments, somewhat costly, in marzipan, which he tried on his mother, not altogether to that good old dame's bodily benefit.

"I tell't ye she wud shake Fairport to its vera foundations," said Joseph Redhorn, after reviewing the contents of the baker's window, one Saturday afternoon, "but I'm thinkin' we wud ha'e been safer wi' an or'nar' earthquake."

The joiner, plumber, and slater were disposed to agree with him, for as yet no extra business had come their way. It was variously rumoured that Mrs. Methven was too deeply immersed in the writing of a book to give a thought to Grey House, that months might elapse ere she turned her attention to its renovation, that she had purchased it merely in the hope of being able to sell it at a profit, that she was about to return to politics and, incidentally, jail. Wherefore, while one section of Fairport's population remained cheerful another was growing depressed.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Methven was resting and deliberating upon her future. Although the "cause" was as dear to her as ever, she had decided that her militant days were over. Henceforth her work lay behind the fighting line. She had recently learned that she was not so strong as she looked. And being a sensible woman, which is generally a women with a sense of humour, she argued that

she could quite easily get rid of her worldly goods for the furtherance of the cause without the expensive advertisement of actual martyrdom.

The end of May saw the completion of her plans. They were not without their subtlety.

"GOOD-AFTERNOON!"

Mr. Redhorn turned hastily from the bench whereon he had been mixing certain colours. The dingy paint store was suddenly flooded with sunshine, and in the narrow doorway stood the "deluded female."

"I trust I am not disturbing you," she said pleasantly. "I learned from your assistant, whom I met on the road, that you were to be found here. Can you spare me a few minutes, Mr. Redhorn?"

For a moment Mr. Redhorn remained speechless, petrified. As through a mist he saw a tall lady—little more than a girl she seemed to him then—with dark hair and eyes, clad in a gown of pale grey, smiling upon him in the friendliest way possible. Fifty years had not blinded him to beauty.

He remembered his manners ere he recovered his wits, and doffed his cap.

"Would you mind if I sat down, Mr. Redhorn? The sun was hot as I came along."

With his cap, the painter awkwardly dusted the only chair on the premises, and finding his voice, apologised for the chair's lack of a back.

She thanked him with a pretty smile, seated herself gracefully, and looked him full in the eyes.

"Do you know, Mr. Redhorn," she said quietly, "I did not expect to be so kindly received. Indeed, I was almost afraid to call upon you."

"Afraid, mem?"

"Yes. But I'm not afraid now. You are not so—so terrible as I expected to find you."

"Me terrible?" said Mr. Redhorn helplessly.

"Maybe ye've come to the wrang place. I'm Joseph Ridhorn, the penter." From sheer force of habit he was about to add "paper-hanger and decorator," but she continued—

"Terrible, but just."

"Somebody's been tryin' to cod ye, mem," he cried involuntarily. "Was it Peter Danks, the fish-monger? That man's had his knife in me ever since—"

"Mr. Redhorn, pray understand at once that I have not been discussing you with your neighbours. 'Terrible, but just' was the impression I had formed of you, and I am only too glad to find that it was partly wrong. Still, I fancy you could be terrible."

Mr. Redhorn rubbed his long nose, and stole a glance of mingled gratification and suspicion at his visitor. "Terrible, but just!" Undoubtedly, he had been called worse names in his time.

"It may be," she went on, "that you and I differ as regards a certain matter much before the public at present, but I earnestly hope not. In either case, I am about to throw myself on your mercy."

At this the painter could not help stepping back a pace, in doing which he came into violent contact with the bench. Nevertheless he accepted the bench's support, and wiped his forehead.

"As you are doubtless aware, Mr. Redhorn, I have recently acquired possession of a house in Fairport. It is a large house, but I hope to find a use for every room in it. I don't mind telling you—though I trust you not to repeat it in the meantime—that I intend to convert Grey House into a sort of holiday home to which workers for the cause of women's suffrage may come to recruit. You understand?"

"I—I perceive yer meanin', mem," he stammered.

"I was sure you would," she said graciously. "It is very pleasant to be understood so readily. And now I have come to you to ask your assistance."

And now was Mr. Redhorn's opportunity for exercising his high moral principles! "The deluded female" was about to ask him to undertake the painting of Grey House; probably, also, to prepare an estimate of cost of same. His moment had come! But the speech he had so often rehearsed in secret, all save the words "respectfully decline," had vanished from his memory. Still, the two words would be sufficient—if he could only say them. . . . To his shame he knew that he could not say them. Yet, perhaps, it was not the temptation of the cash involved in one of the biggest—if not the biggest—jobs in his experience that alone brought about his feeble state of mind. Leaning against the edge of the bench, he gazed helplessly at the dirty floor.

"I have come to you to ask your assistance, Mr. Redhorn," she repeated in low, persuasive tones.

"Ye're welcome, mem," he returned at last in a far-away voice, without looking up. "I'll dae ma—ma best to please ye."

"How good of you!" Certainly this was the most agreeable prospective customer of the painter's career, but he was now too confused to appreciate the agreeableness as he ought to have done.

"I'll tell you what I want in as few words as possible," she continued briskly. "Before converting Grey House from its present condition, I very much wish to convert the people of Fairport from theirs. You understand?" (Mr. Redhorn didn't, but he made an inarticulate sound which was cheerfully accepted as indicating assent.) "I am simply determined to gain the sympathy of Fairport towards our cause. With a colony of sympathisers around it, Grey House will indeed be a happy resting place for our tired labourers. So, to begin with, a few friends and myself are going to hold a meeting in the hall, on Friday evening of next week, when we shall do all we can to put our aims and so on, clearly before the people of Fairport. I am confident that the people will understand our position from our brief speeches as they cannot be expected to do from the newspapers. And so I have come to the man whom I believe to be respected by the people, the man whom I know to be just, the man whom I know to be gifted with much intelligence and the power of expressing himself—I have come to you, Mr. Redhorn, to ask you on Friday evening of next week, to take the chair."

It is no exaggeration to say that at these words the brain of Joseph Redhorn reeled, and that he reeled slightly himself. He put out a hand to steady himself and knocked over a pot of pink paint.

Too late Mrs. Methven sprang from her seat. A spirt of paint reached her pearly grey skirt. For a moment she looked thoroughly angry, but the expression of the luckless painter's countenance was too much for her sense of dignity. Still flushed, she broke into a kindly laugh.

"Oh, mem! What ha'e I done?" cried Mr. Redhorn in horror and dismay. "Eediot that I am!" he added, securing turpentine and a handful of clean rags, and falling on his knees.

"Don't distress yourself," she said gently and untruthfully; "it's a very old one, really."

With babblings of apology and self-reproach he strove to remove the stains, but was far from successful, the pearly grey fabric being of a peculiarly absorbent nature. "I've made it waur!" he groaned despairingly. "Mem, gi'e me a pentin' job to dae for ye—onything ye like—an' I'll dae it for naething, an' thenk ye for the opportunity. Oh, yer bonnie dress! Oh, mem, what can I say?"

"Not another word, Mr. Redhorn, please. We can't help accidents. If I may, I will sit down again until the turpentine dries. I'm so fond of the smell! And perhaps you will allow me to explain what I would like you to do at our meeting." And the painter having resumed his position at the bench, a picture of misery and humility, she proceeded to talk as he had never before heard woman talk.

Doubtless she was taking an unfair advantage; yet who shall say that Mr. Redhorn's ultimate acquiescence in her wishes resulted wholly from the upsetting of a paint pot?

Half-an-hour later she took her departure, leaving him in a semi-dazed condition from which he did not fully recover that day, while her final words kept jumbling in his memory till long past midnight.

"I'm so glad I can depend on one man," she had said. "If you were to fail me, I don't know what I should do. I don't believe I could face the Fairport meeting without you. But I know you won't fail me. I trust you. Good-bye, Mr. Redhorn. We shall meet again before the event. And remember that all this is a secret between us."

The ensuing ten days were almost more than Joseph Redhorn could bear. His faithful apprentice referred to the "medicine" every three hours or so. Vain were the master's reprimands, his protestations that his agony was mental, not physical; and eventually he was compelled to take Willie into his confidence.

"An' what about the job?" said Willie.

HOW he found courage to set out for the hall, Mr. Redhorn does not yet know. He has only a dim memory of leaving his abode while the rest of Fairport was taking its evening meal, sneaking along a back way, and gaining admittance to the little committee room behind the platform through the window. According to his watch he spent two hours and twenty minutes in solitude ere the ladies arrived, not that their arrival was any relief to him. "We are going to have a splendid meeting," said Mrs. Methven brightly, ignoring the chairman's abject nervousness. "You have kept our secret, Mr. Redhorn?"

CONCLUDED ON PAGE 30.