

and the clatter of the old and cracked utensils Jenkyns was setting on the breakfast-table, were the sounds which awakened Joan.

She woke happily, with a smile on her face and Arkdale's name on her lip. She thought they were at the inn where they had stayed the previous night, with the last stage of their journey before them; but her bright, refreshed eyes falling on a child's shoe and a child's toy, she recollected all. The name breathed in tenderness was repeated in agony, with her lips buried in the pillow.

"Humphrey—oh, sweetheart! what has come between us?"

Her next feeling, as she lay listening, was jealousy—jealousy of poor Jenkyns.

"The meddling fool!" she sobbed, as she rose, and began to dress indignantly. "How dare he touch my things? I would I had waked sooner."

She dressed herself with as much care as if it had been Sunday or fair-day at home. She looked wondrous well—her neckerchief was like snow, her hair like nothing in the world, but the loveliest flaxen hair. The little glass in Arkdale's cellar reflected a face infinitely more fair than the little Cam had shown him that September evening; for the last few weeks of happiness, idleness, and roadside fare had wonderfully enriched Joan's small share of beauty, giving it that softness, colour, and repose it had always needed.

Jenkyns was just pausing with a cup in his hand, considering in his own mind whether his mistress deserved her cup setting for her or not, when the door opened, and she made her appearance.

Jenkyns was so startled, he dropped the cup, and it broke to pieces. He had never really seen his mistress before, and was sufficiently struck by her appearance as to stand still, as he had been standing, on his awkward toes, with his tongue in his cheek. Joan did not allow him much time for looking at her.

"How is this?" demanded she, advancing imperiously. "Has your master nothing for you to do but he must needs set you a-meddling in my matters? Prithce, must the few things I have for use be smashed by a clumsy lout like you?"

"Prithce," answered Jenkyns, recovering his tongue and his heels as the same time, "must my master go without his breakfast when it pleases your ladyship to lie a-bed?"

"I think your master would be better employed in giving you a sound drubbing for your insolence than sitting there working in the cold before he's had bit nor sup," said Joan, trying to speak in an unconcerned voice, but growing tremulous towards the end of her sentence.

Arkdale had not yet looked up, or taken any notice of her presence. That slight quiver of her voice touched him, and he turned his head with the intention of saying something kind; but when he saw her standing in the firelight, looking so fair and fresh both in gear and face, the water rose to his eyes, and he said nothing.

Jenkyns, keeping at a safe distance from his master, seized a wig and stand, and began to comb, darting contemptuous glances at his mistress, who feigned not to see them as she swept off all his preparations for breakfast, and began to lay the table afresh.

Now and then she would ask Jenkyns if they had such-and-such an article, and the jealous 'prentice began to suspect she took a savage pleasure in always receiving an answer in the negative, as if the poverty of the place was beginning to prove a pleasant sort of foil to her quickness and ingenuity.

Yet, whenever Arkdale, to whom each question and answer gave a pang, glanced towards Joan, her movements and face assumed an air of sharp resignation.

"Where's the linen kept?" demanded she of Jenkyns.

"Linnin! What you want with linnin at breakfast-time?" said Jenkyns, prevaricating in order to spare his master's feelings.

"I want a tablecloth."

"Why, you just pitched it in the corner."

"I want a clean one."

"Well you'll have it when you wash that, I s'pose."

Here Joan got out one of her own home-spun cloths, shining like satin, and spread it on the table.

"Agreavatin' hussy!" muttered Jenkyns to himself.

"How is this, sir? I can't find more than one spoon!"

"Don't s'pose you could if you was to hunt till next St. Swithen's."

"This coffee-pot runs."

"You shouldn't a-scraped the black off, then. You might a-seen it was left on for a purpose."

"Are there but two of these yellow cups?"

"An' if there was three, d'ye s'pose I should drink out o' the same sort as master?"

Dick, clasping his father's leg with both arms, kept peeping shyly round at his fair stepmother and Jenkyns, and from time to time would lift his eyes to Humphrey's face with a half grave, half comical look, which seemed to ask, "Is this also fun?" but his father's face left him still dubious.

"Will you take your breakfast?" said Joan, at last. "Tis ready."

Arkdale rose, and after standing to warm his hands at the fire, sat down, and took Dick on his knee.

When Joan saw this, she thought of his words on the night before, and was seized with jealousy.

"I will feed the child," said she, sharply, "when we have finished."

Arkdale gently put him down, and Dick looked back at him archly, but tearfully, as if he thought the "fun" were going almost too far.

Jenkyns, who had taken the seat disdainfully pointed out to him by his mistress, got up, took Dick in his arms, and went and sat in the shop.

"Come to your breakfast," said Joan, "and put that child down."

Jenkyns showed no signs of obeying.

"I'll help you, my lad, in a minute," said his master, rising; "and if you don't mind your mistress next time she speaks to you, you and I'll have a little talk outside. Come, now, stir! Put the boy down, and come to the table."

"Master," answered Jenkyns, getting his back against the wall where the strap hung, "I'm very sorry I am," and he began to blubber, "but ever since Dick was born, I've never touched bit nor sup 'fore he was served, and I never will."

Arkdale knew that this rule of Jenkyns' had not been one of mere politeness, as there had been times when, if the 'prentice had satisfied his hunger first, Dick would have come but poorly off. He hardly knew how to punish the young man for his devotion to Dick, yet he felt Joan was expecting such open rebellion to be met with very sharp punishment. While he hesitated, she said, gently—

"Well, well, bring him with you, Jenkyns, if you think he is hungry, as perhaps he may be, since I was late this morning."

So Jenkyns sat down with Dick on his knee, looking happy, but abashed and deferential.

All breakfast-time Joan was frigidly silent. Arkdale had a few questions to put to Jenkyns, or not a word had been spoken.

When the 'prentice went to his work, and Dick was under the table at play with the bantam, Arkdale's heart suddenly misgave him at the thoughts of beginning the day's work under such a state of things; and just as he was leaving the fire-side, he turned back, and stood still.

"Joan, I thank you for your good patience with Jenkyns, and with the many other annoyances you have had to deal with this morning. Believe me, I have noticed and suffered for all."

Joan's eyes looked into the fire with a cold resigned gaze, that if it did not hide their tears, gave them a different meaning.

"But, of a truth, Joan, thee hast made the place so pleasant in spite of all, that thee'lt have me tarrying instead of hurrying away if thee dostna' mind."

"I have but done my duty, Humphrey, as I trust to God I always may do under all circumstances."

"By the mass, my Joan," said Arkdale, with a bitter sigh, "if 'tis to be but duty for us to serve one another now, what name can we give it come ten or twenty years?"

"I have enough to do to look forward to the next few hours at present."

He turned away with a heavy step, and went into the shop.

Poor Jenkyns had a hard morning of it. Dick was at play at his father's feet. Joan, when she had mended an old clean frock she had found among some rubbish, and prepared his bath at the fire, went to fetch him.

Both Humphrey and Jenkyns looked round with a pang as she took him up, and carried him off without a smile or a caress, and both listened for Dick's opinion of this unusual treatment.

All was quiet, however.

When Joan had got on the other side of the curtain which was drawn across the shop in the day-time, Dick stooped, and looked inquiringly in her face. Joan, avoiding the bright, arch eyes, sat down, and jerked off his clothes, flinging each to the far end of the room; and Dick, instead of being offended as each little garment was thus disposed of, kicked and crowed with delight.

Joan's movements became more and more sharp and unkind. Dick looked serious—puzzled, and sometimes glanced wistfully round at the old curtain, but always looked back trustingly at Joan.

He put out his hand to stroke her face. Joan held him off.

"The little fool!" she said. "How can I love thee while thy father loves thee better than me!"

She was determined to quarrel with Dick, but Dick would not be quarrelled with.

As she grew more and more angry, Dick grew more convinced all was meant for fun.

At last, when, after his bath, glowing with Joan's hard usage, he sat in his little shirt on her knee, Joan paused one moment in her task, and gazed at him.

She thought him the very loveliest thing her eyes had ever seen.

"He must always love thee more than me, and I must always hate thee," she said, in her passionate heart.

Dick's eye caught the glimmer of her hair; his hand snatched at it, and pulled it down about them both like a mantle of sunshine.

Glad of the excuse, Joan slapped the dimpled arm smartly, almost violently.

The two men heard the sound; and one, unnoticed by Joan, came from the shop, to which her back was turned, and stood watching and listening.

Dick gave one cry that caught up all his breath, and then paused with his mouth wide open and his head thrown back. Joan, now full of remorse, drew him to her, and kissed the hurt arm, trembling at the thoughts of the outcry that would come with his breath.

Dick's breath did come in good time, and with it not the expected screams, but a peal of fresh, bubbling laughter, while his eyes smiled up at her through their tears, with a look that said.

"You cannot cheat me; I know 'twas fun."

Tears streamed from Joan's eyes. She bent over him with a gaze of passionate love and awe.

"Thou blessed little child!" sobbed she, aloud. "Sure thou didst share thy mother's heavenly birth ere thou wast born to us, for thou art an angel, and I unworthy of serving thee."

"Nay, Joan; 'tis we who are unworthy of being served by thee," said a sad voice.

Joan rose and turned towards Humphrey with the child in her arms, half covered with the golden curtain he had pulled about them.

The boy was heavy for her unaccustomed arms, and she but her foot on the rail of the chair, and partly rested him on her knee as she stood.

"Humphrey, I struck your child. Canst forgive me?"

"How can I do other than forgive you, my poor lass, when I know you did it in the sharpness of your sorrow?"

"But 'twas a wicked sorrow, Humphrey."

"'Twas of my bringing."

"No."

"No, Joan? Ay, I remember last night you said 'twas you had cheated yourself; but I know that, had I been less blind in my self-conceit, I