

"I wanted to help" I explained. "My idea was to keep a tobacconist's stall, and then one could smoke cigarettes all the time. The assistants in shops always do that to advertise their goods."

"O! And I suppose that assistants in sweet shops eat sweets all the time?"

"Of course."

"Have you ever thought," said James reflectively, "what a tired time the right-hand man of a butcher must have?"

"Look here," I said, "did you come to talk not like that to me?"

"No: I want you to have your fortune told. There's a palmist here."

"But I haven't a fortune."

"You don't want one. Half-a-crown's enough."

I went with him under protest. It was a very dark tent into which we plunged, and I could see no fortune-teller.

"Where's she?" I asked impatiently.

"The other side of the curtain," said James; "but you mustn't go in. You put your hand through there, and she is at the other side. Of course, if she saw you it would spoil everything."

"Who is she?"

"Never mind."

I put my hand though. Someone took it and it seemed as though she were going over the lines of my palm with a pencil.

"Don't do that—please!" I said. "It tickles."

There was a light laugh from behind the curtain.

"You are very ticklish," said a voice.

"That isn't palmistry," I remonstrated.

"You are also quick-tempered, slow-minded, thin skinned—"

"Fat-headed, go on!" I said bitterly.

"Just you wait till I see you."

"I'm awfully sorry," said the voice. "I don't think I can have the right hand."

"Of course you haven't, it's the left."

"Yes, that's right, I see! I was looking at it upside down. You are modest, clever, athletic, and of an artistic temperament."

James laughed unkindly.

"Did you laugh?" asked a voice.

"Certainly not!" I replied. "I wouldn't think of such a thing. But you are only

saying things I know already. Won't you tell me my future?"

"You will be married within a year," I gaped.

"Did you gasp?" asked a voice.

"That was the impression I intended to convey. But are you sure?"

"Quite, quite sure. The line of the heart says so."

"Heart lines, old chap," said Jim, nudging me.

"What did you say?" asked the voice.

"Nothing," I answered. "What you heard was a hitherto honoured and respected friend being kicked. But I say, tell me. When shall I be engaged?"

"Before the end of the week."

"Hi, Jim, quick," I shrieked. "What's the day now?"

"The thirteenth," said Jim.

I shot a glance of scorn and loathing at him.

"Sorry, old man," he said hurriedly.

"It's Saturday"

"Why—good Lord—then I shall get engaged to-night."

"Why not?" asked Jim.

"Why not. O you idiot! She's not even in the house. She's in London."

"Who is?"

"Who?—why—O, nobody. You see what I mean. There's nobody in the house that—"

"It's no good," said James with a grin.

"You've given yourself away."

I turned back to the curtain. "Are you still here?" I asked. "Are you there, are you there, are you there, are you—"

"I've finished, thank you," came the voice.

"But are you quite sure about being engaged by the end of the week?"

"Quite, quite sure," said the voice a little slakily.

James and I went out.

"Who is she?" I asked. "I didn't recognize the voice."

"O, she'd take good care about that."

"Well, anyhow, it's impossible."

"Perhaps she's a Jew," said James illuminatingly.

I stopped and looked at him.