

tired and sad when he left off. This was his work.

The girls devoured the manuscript with passionate interjections through every line. The reader must have an opportunity of perusing it more carefully. This was the tale it told.

"Twenty years ago—it seems only yesterday—I was a scene-shifter in Drury Lane Theatre in London. I was already far advanced in life, and, having amassed a considerable sum of money, and having no one on whom to spend it, I passed for an odd miserly old bachelor, caring for, and cared for by no one, and leading, on the whole, a cheerless, solitary life. I always thought there was affection bubbling up somewhere in my heart and eager to get out; but I suppose I was not as social as other men were, or other men were unkind towards me. At any rate I lived among my companions like an uneasy shadow: I know they would gladly have got rid of me only that I did my duty, always my strict duty.

"There came to our theatre in the *corps de ballet* a young Spanish girl—as lovely as an angel, and as good. She had the blackest hair and the softest skin I ever saw, and her eyes seemed to be shining out of a whole world of unutterable love. She was a melancholy child, too, I have often wept in my heart to hear her sad story. She was the daughter of a Spanish nobleman—Dona Inez de Centellas, she was called—"

How Rose Marton's heart bounded at the name!

"But a tribe of gypsies stole her away while she was almost a baby, and when, years after, she escaped from them, she found her family had been banished, no one knew where, for their part in some intrigue at the Spanish court, and she, poor child, abandoned by all but Heaven, was forced to gain a wretched livelihood on the stage.

"From the moment I first saw her, she became more to me than myself and all the world beside. It was not that I dreamed—at least seriously thought of what men call love for Inez. I worshipped her silently—more devoutly, Heaven forgive me! than I should. At times I believe I was mad, and thought dimly that perhaps she might love me, too, for she was kind to me when no one else on earth was kind to me; but then I would be sensible again, and she would seem to be as far away from me as a silver star in the heaven, shining down upon a queer old man.

"But it was unutterable joy to be permitted

even to be a father to Inez, and such she almost permitted me to be. Poor angel, she sadly needed some one to protect her from all the glittering devilry it was her daily fate to encounter. She often seemed to me like a pillar of snow under a burning sun, whose lewd rays were for ever panting to devour her purity. But she was even better than she was beautiful, and God preserved her.

"Among all the gay gallants who used to prowl about the stage-door, seeking their victims, there was many a bright golden trap laid for my darling. She avoided them all, and when scores of handsome youths were burning to give her their escort, she would turn to me with those deep heavenly eyes of hers and say I must go home with her, and so I came to be her constant companion, for she knew she could trust me, and knew no one else she could trust. Though still I dreamed of a dearer love, dreamed of it as a feverish, distant dream, I was happy beyond human happiness in her trustful affection. It was as if a beautiful fairy was playing with me and caressing me, though I could not touch her.

"There was one who was always at the stage-door when she came out—a young attorney, John Jordan by name. He appeared to be more in earnest than the rest in his affection, and for ever spoke of marriage when he spoke of love. I never liked him—perhaps I was jealous—but there was a greedy, uneasy look in his face, which I always took for selfishness. No doubt he loved Inez, but it was for his own sake, not for hers. I know she did not love him, at least not as she *could* have loved; but my jealous eye was not long in discovering that she rather encouraged his attentions. Why should she not? She was a waif on an ocean, ready at any moment to be swallowed up in the depths: how must she not have sighed for the safety and sanctity of a home, even if it were not the home she yearned for!

One night as we were going home together, Inez told me with tears in her eyes that we should go home together no more; she was going to be married the next morning to John Jordan, at the Spanish Chapel in Portman Street, and I was to give her away! I knew I had no cause to complain—I, an eccentric old man whom nobody could love—still the news went to my heart like ice. I could not give her away, do what I would—I felt as if it would be giving her away to some evil spirit. I blessed her, however, and told her if ever she should want a friend, there was one would die a thous-