

"You understand me? You understand me very well! Yes or no, Mary?"

She did not flinch. "There is no chance for you," she answered slowly, still confronting him. "If there be a second chance for me——"

"Ah!"

"For me, Peter?" And with that her tone told him all, all there was to tell. "If you are willing to take me second-hand," she continued, with a tremulous laugh, "you may take me. I don't deserve it, but I know my own mind now. I have known it since the day my uncle died and I heard your step come through the hall. And if you are still willing?"

He did not answer her, but he took her. He held her to him, his heart too full for anything but a thankfulness beyond speech, while she, shaken out of her composure, trembled between tears and laughter. "Peter! Peter!" she said again and again. And once, "We are the same height, Peter!" and so showed him a new side of her nature which thrilled him with surprise and happiness.

That she brought him no title, no lands, that by her own act she had flung away her inheritance and came to him almost empty-handed was no pain to him and no subject for regret. On the contrary, every word she had said on that, every argument she had used, came home to him now with double force. It had been a poor, it had been a common, it had been a pitiful revenge! It had mingled the sordid with the cup, it had cast the shadow of the Great House on their happiness. In that room in which they had shared their first meal on that far May morning, and where the light of the winter fire now twinkled on the wainscote, now brought to life the stiff, ruffed portraits above it, there was no question of name or fortune, or more or less.

So much so, that when Mrs. Toft came in with the tea she came near to dropping the tray in her surprise. As she said afterwards, "The sight of them two as close as chives in a barrel, I declare you might ha' knocked me down with a straw! God bless 'em!"