

JANE



A STORY
OF JAMAICA

BY

H. G. de Lissar

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JAMAICA

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JANE: A STORY OF JAMAICA



Page 249

Daddy Buckram invokes a Blessing.

J A N E :
A Story of Jamaica

BY
HERBERT G. DE LISSER

AUTHOR OF
‘In Cuba and Jamaica’
‘Twentieth Century Jamaica’

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

PUBLISHED BY
THE GLEANER COMPANY, LIMITED, KINGSTON, JAMAICA
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

ONE word about the dialect in this book. It will be noticed that sometimes 'you' is spelt *y'u*, and sometimes *you*; that in the same paragraph 'going' will sometimes be spelt *goin'*, sometimes *gwine*, sometimes *going*; and the reader will probably not fail to observe that the same speaker will indifferently say *doan't* and *don't*, *the* and *de*, *that* and *dat*, and so on.

That is how the people of the class dealt with in this story habitually speak. Many of them could, if they liked, talk with hardly a suggestion of dialect: I am alluding, of course, to the people of the city and towns. Rude dialect, hardly intelligible to the stranger and scarcely to be rendered by the written word, is still spoken in some of the country districts of the island.

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Dedication

TO

SIR SYDNEY OLIVER

When this story was appearing in serial form in the JAMAICA GLEANER, you wrote to me saying that you were glad that I had thought of writing it. Your praise was encouraging, and I need hardly say how greatly I appreciated it. I now dedicate the tale to you, who, during the many years you were connected with Jamaica, took a deep interest in every phase of the island's life and fortune, and have left upon it the impress of a personality at once striking, original, and truly sympathetic.

THE AUTHOR.

JANE :

A STORY OF JAMAICA

CHAPTER I

DADDY BUCKRAM was chief elder in the little village church on the hill, and whenever anything of importance happened or threatened to happen in the village he was always consulted in regard to it, and never failed to make some remarks which he considered appropriate to the occasion. To-day he sat in the canvas easy-chair in Mr Burrell's hut and lectured a girl of about fifteen years of age who stood humbly before him holding her hands behind her back as she had been instructed by her mother to do, and listening to his words of advice without quite understanding what half of them meant. There were several other persons in the room. There were the girl's parents, sturdy peasants who owned three acres of land and the tiny house they lived in, and who looked upon their property as a bank upon which they could always draw. There was their eldest son, a lad turned nineteen, who was still undecided whether he should remain at home and help his father, or emigrate to Costa Rica or Panama, there to carve out an independent career for himself. There were the three younger children, a girl of thirteen and two boys; there were also three or four neighbours who had come in to hear Daddy Buckram make one of the speeches for which he was famous. The room was crowded, and some of the people present were obliged to stand, there being in the hut but three wooden-seated chairs, the easy-chair which the Elder occupied, and a small wooden couch. But this crowding did not inconvenience Daddy Buckram, whose long and important connection with a church had developed in him an insatiable craving for large and attentive audiences.

'Jane,' he continued impressively after a pause, 'Kingston is a very big an' wicked city, an' a young girl like you, who de Lord has blessed wid a good figure an' a face, must be careful not to keep bad company. Satan goeth about like a roaring lion in Kingston, seeking who he may devour. He will devour you if you do not take him to the Lord in prayer. Do you' work well.

Write to you' moder often, for a chile who don't remember her parent cannot prosper. Don't stay out in the street in de night, go to church whenever you' employer allow you. If sinners entice thee, consent thou not. Now, tell me what I say to you.'

Jane hesitated a while, then answered: 'You say I mus' behave meself, sah, an' go to church, an' don't keep bad company, an' dat de devil is a roarin' lion. An' . . . an' dat I must write mumma.'

The Elder smiled his approval. 'I see,' he observed benignantly, 'that you have been giving my words attention. If you always remember them like that, you will conquer in de battle.'

'Dat is so, Daddy Buckram,' remarked Jane's mother, pleased that her daughter had won such high commendation. 'I tell Jane just what you done tell her, an' now if she go an' do anyting foolish it will be all her own fault. We bring her up decent an' respectable; she know dat her fader an' me married long before she born; so dat if she go to Kingston an' disgrace herself now, she will has to lie down on de bed she meck for herself. You hear what I say, Jane?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

'An' what you' moder say, is what I say,' said her father. 'Keep you'self up when y'u is in Kingston, an' don't allow any of those Kingston buoy to fool you up. Keep straight!'

As nobody seemed to have anything else to say, Jane's mother asked Daddy Buckram if he would have some sugar and water and some fruit; this refreshment he graciously consented to take (indeed, the old gentleman never refused refreshment of any kind); then Jane and the other young people went outside, leaving the older folk to converse with the Elder while he refreshed himself after his semi-spiritual labours.

After Jane had escaped from the observation of the Elder and her parents her demeanour changed considerably. She danced rather than walked, her strong legs and bare feet springing off the hard white limestone road as though they were made of rubber. It was now definitely decided that she should go to Kingston to work, and the excitement with which such a prospect filled her could scarcely be restrained. She ran across the road to another hut exactly like the one she had just left; there she found three other girls, two of her own age, one about five years older. They were evidently waiting to hear the news, and they instantly guessed what the decision had been from her gay manner and the bright look on her face.

'It's all right?' asked the eldest.

‘Yes; Daddy Buckram tell mumma dat I will get on in Kingston, an’ de lady say she will give me a shillin’ a week an’ look after me. So I gwine to-morrow.’

‘But you lucky, though!’ remarked one of the younger girls, with just a suggestion of envy in her voice. ‘Fancy you gwine to Kingston! I wish it was me!’

‘Y’u right!’ exclaimed the eldest, who, two years before, had lived in Kingston for two months, and had ever since been contemplating a return to the city, this time for good. ‘God! it’s there people dress an’ enjoy themself! Every evenin’ when I was dere I used to go for a long car drive, right round de belt-line. Everyting was spanking, man! When y’u go down King Street y’u see de store all full up of people buyin’ tings; and Sunday night the church are full, an’ y’u can go to Rockfort Garden for a drive, an’ see moving pictchure show. It’s a sweet life, man! If y’u go there once y’u don’t want to come back at all, at all!’

‘An’ fancy Jane going now, eh?’ said one of the others. ‘Well, perhaps my turn will come some day. We mus’ live in hope. What Daddy Buckram say to you?’

‘Him say I musn’t have nothing to do wid de Kingston buoy, for dem is all a roarin’ lion.’

‘Dat is all foolishness,’ said the eldest decisively. ‘Some is good an’ some is bad; some is gentleman and some is ruffian. But y’u can’t say dem is all wort’less, for I used to have a dude in Kingston an’ him treat me high-class. It was him give me dis ear-ring I wearin’ now.’

She shook her head as she spoke, the better to display the pair of cheap gold-plated ear-rings she wore.

‘Him was goin’ to sea,’ she went on, ‘oderwise, perhaps I wouldn’t come back here at all.’

‘But you is big,’ said one of the others, the same that had wished she was in Jane’s place. ‘You is a big ’ooman, an’ can go to Kingston as y’u like. If I was like you I wouldn’t stay here. Even if I did have to run away, I would go.’

‘But suppose y’u didn’t get noten to do?’ asked the eldest. ‘Dat is what y’u have to think about. Kingston is not like de country. If y’u don’t have a job, or somebody to help y’u, you may suck salt through a wooden spoon!’^[1] Jane is all right, for she goin’ wid a lady who will look after her. When I went, I did go wid me aunt. But I couldn’t go by meself, for I don’t know what I would do. I have to wait fo’ my chance.’

[1] May have a hard time of it.

Jane, feeling that she occupied a superior and enviable position, said good-naturedly, ‘I wish de whole of y’u was going wid me. But I not gwine to have anyting to do wid boys, for I promise me parents to keep meself up. I gwine to save my money, an’ come back.’

‘What y’u goin’ to come back for?’ asked the lady who had already had experience of city life.

This question was a poser for Jane, for she knew it was not intended by her parents that she should return. She had now reached an age when she was rapidly approaching womanhood; she had left school some two years before, and had been assisting her mother to ‘work’ the piece of land they owned and to carry its produce every week or every fortnight to the nearby town market. But her sister was now big enough to do this, and even the younger children could help. Some sort of employment, therefore, had to be found for her, and as a Kingston lady had come to spend a week or two in the village and had expressed a desire to take back to the city with her a decent girl to do some light household work, the mother, hearing of this, had hurried to this lady and offered Jane to her as one who would suit her in every particular. The lady had put Jane’s mother through an elaborate catechism, and if the old woman had been of a reflective nature, she must have concluded that what the lady wanted was not a little peasant girl to perform light domestic duties, but a human angel, perfect in all respects, and certain to give no trouble whatever; for, as the lady herself asserted, she had had a great deal of trouble with servants, and would not take Jane unless her character was absolutely without reproach. Jane’s mother assured her that it was, and offered to bring the parson’s testimony to support her own. The lady had dispensed with this. She contended that the parson would hardly know much about Jane, and that she had already had some unfortunate experiences with servants who had come to her recommended by parsons. In the end she consented to take the girl, and the conference that had been held that day with Daddy Buckram had been for the purpose of impressing upon Jane the momentous change which was about to take place in her life.

She was going out into the world to make a career for herself, and she knew it. She had said she would save money and return, mainly with the view of showing that she intended to live up to the high standard of conduct which the Elder had set before her. Asked, then, what she proposed to come

back for, she had no answer to give. Her interlocutor laughed. 'Y'u don't know what you sayin', ' she remarked. 'Wait till y'u see Kingston!'

'As for savin' you' money: y'u think a shillin' a week is any money in Kingston? I wouldn't work fo' less than four shillin's a week, an' to tell you de trute, I would have to get somebody to assist me. Of course, you is a little girl, an' what will do for you wouldn't do for me. But all de same, a shillin' a week is noten [nothing].'

Jane was sufficiently sophisticated to know what her companion meant; for even in the little village the young woman was known as one who 'carried on' with the few young men who had not migrated, and who managed, by dint of irregular labour, to earn a few shillings a week for their support. It was a decaying village, this; the men had left their properties to be looked after by the girls and women, and had either gone to help dig the Panama Canal, or had migrated to such flourishing parishes as Portland and St Mary, where labour was better remunerated than in the little village where they lived. Some of the women had gone away too, but the opportunities open to them were not as many or as good as those which the men found elsewhere. In this village of about a hundred souls there were not more than thirty men and boys; many of these were of the Don Juan type, and not a few held firmly to the principle of a plurality of temporary wives. The women did most of the work of the fields. They took the produce to the neighbouring town market; many of them attended church on Sunday, though the church was fully a mile away; and the children were sent to school intermittently, walking their two miles a day under a blazing sun and thinking nothing of the distance.

Sometimes a regularly-ordained clergyman held forth at the church; more often it was one of the Elders who occupied the pulpit. Entertainments were rare, life was a dead level of monotony broken mainly by periodical business visits to the nearest town, or by rare excursions to Kingston. Everything done in the village was soon known to every one, every one's reputation was a matter of public property. Moral censors were not many, yet those parents who were married desired that their children should not stray from the path of virtue, though, when they did, they were never turned out of the home as outcasts, a lenient attitude towards all frailty of conduct being of the very texture of life in the village. No one over twelve years of age could pretend innocence, and no one did; amongst themselves the young people sometimes talked in a manner that would have caused Daddy Buckram to groan in horror, he having for some time now left the primrose path of dalliance to tread the steep and narrow way. Some of the girls, however, were very well-behaved, and amongst these was Jane; yet it was

characteristic of the easy temper of the country folk that they never thought of prohibiting their children from mixing with Celestina, who, ever since she had returned from her brief visit to Kingston two years before, had exhibited a bolder and freer demeanour than before. That is to say, Celestina did not show that comparative regard for secrecy in matters of intimate conduct which the ethics of the village demanded. Still, though this was commented upon, it brought no punishment, and as Celestina's mother was still alive, and had a provision ground of her own, there was no reason in the world why any one should venture even to rebuke that young lady, who was, as a matter of fact, in an absolutely independent position, and quite prepared to remind any censor of it.

The four girls sat in front of Celestina's house, which was built near the side of a road that ran through the village and passed through many a similar settlement for fifty or sixty miles. The hut was of wattle and plaster, and thatched with the plaited branches of some native palm. It had once been coated on the outside and inside with a layer of whitewash; but the wash had faded, and so the hut was mud-coloured and somewhat dilapidated in appearance. On either side of the road a few more such huts were to be seen; the other houses of the village were hidden from sight by the trees that grew everywhere; to reach them you had to climb over some stiff and rather stony tracks, or push your way along footpaths which, unless you knew them very well, you might easily miss, and so stray into the woods. Every hut was surrounded by a field in which yams and potatoes and coffee grew, and sometimes sugar-cane, and always bananas and breadfruit. Fowls and one or two goats were kept by the better-off peasants, and wandered about at will. Some of the people owned donkeys. Even the poorest seemed to have a starveling dog.

There was a shop in the village, kept by a brown man who passed most of his time in sitting on a bench in front of his establishment, reading a two-days' old newspaper and talking politics with any one who might drop in for a chat. He was regarded as a repository of great learning by the people of the village, as actually knowing more than Daddy Buckram, though, on the other hand, not sanctified as the Elder was. Jane sometimes went to his shop to buy things for her parents, at which times, during the last few months or so, he would chuck her under the chin and tell her that she was growing into a fine-looking girl, and would strongly advise her not to have anything to do with any of the common fellows around, hinting at the same time that he was by no means to be placed in the same category.

The village was built on the lower slope of a hill which went gradually rising until it reached its summit a mile or so away. Then it sloped again, the

ground afterwards swelling into still a loftier elevation. In the distance, high mountains towered, silent and peaceful, clothed with the dreamlike green and gray beauty so typical of the languorous tropics. In whatever direction one looked, one saw trees, and trees, and yet more trees. Most of them were giants, with massive branches from which hung parasitic tendrils that swept the ground; here and there great limestone boulders jutted out amidst the green, some covered with lichen, some shining white in the sun. The heat was intense. At this moment—it was nearly full noon—a flood of light poured fierce and yellow down from a deep blue sky, and from the surface of the road a blinding glare arose.

Everything, man and beast alike, moved slowly in the village. The intense heat, the vast stillness of dreaming mountains and distant sky, the warm heavy-scented breeze, the little effort that was required to support life, all tended to make indolence seductive and activity a curse. Yet there was unrest in the village. The men would not remain, even the women wanted to go elsewhere. They had their grievances: sometimes a drought came, and they saw their fields parched and their crops withered, and they were reduced to sore distress. Then sometimes heavy rains would follow the drought, flood rains that swept away their precious soil, washed out their provisions, and were now and then so fierce as to cause landslides and the loss of property and lives. Then it was that through their pastor they would appeal to the Government to help them, but the help was not always forthcoming; in the meantime they had to pay their taxes, a form of contribution to which they could never quite reconcile themselves.

Seated on the ground in front of Celestina's residence, their backs propped against tree stumps, or against the hut itself, our four girls were now resting after the performance of the morning's trifling work. Clad in cheap coloured prints, very much soiled, the all-in-one frocks drawn up into bundles round their waists and there secured with cords, their legs bare from the knees downwards, they were each revolving in their minds (with the exception of Jane) how they could manage to escape to some place where life would be different from what it was in the village. They represented the new generation of Jamaica peasants; they had learnt to read and write; they were fond of dressing on Sundays; and, if they still worked in the fields, they did not like it. They were all for 'going to town' or 'going foreign,' as the men were doing, but did not know how to set about it. Kingston presented itself to their imaginations as a wonderful place where life could be enjoyed, wages were good, and where one did not have literally to grub in the earth for a living.

‘Kingston big?’ asked Jane after a pause during which she had resolved not to protest any further her intention to return to the village.

‘Big!’ exclaimed Celestina, ‘big! My father! You can walk till y’u tired and yet pass house after house. Big house, too. Bigger than de church, bigger than any house up here. An’ y’u can drive right round in de car till y’u sick of it, yet y’u is still in de town. An’ if y’u want to see church, it is Kingston y’u mus’ go to. When it come to Sunday evening y’u put on you’ lace frock, an’ tie you’ hair wid ribbon, an’ go out for a walk before y’u go to service. That is de time y’u can just hear de young men them: “What a nice-lookin’ girl, eh? I bet y’u she come from de country.” Then ef y’u sort of pretends not to hear dem, some of dem will call out, “See here, miss! Hi! y’u might say good evenin’!” An’ them wink at you an’ laugh.’

‘An’ what you say?’ asked Jane and the others all at once, breathless for information.

‘Well, it all depen’s on whether y’u want to notice them or not. I used to form as if I wouldn’t look at dem, for none of dem did please me. But de dude I did get, an’ who I would be all right wid now if him didn’t gone away, I meet him outside Coke Church piazza one Sunday evenin’ when there was a harvest festival goin’ on. I was comin’ out of de church, and I see a good-looking young man take off him hat an’ say, “Good evenin’, my gracious queen!” Something tell me to answer, an’ I say: “Good evenin’, sah, but why y’u call me queen? I are only a pheasant gurl!” Y’u see, I talk in dat big way, so dat he could know that though I come from de country I was edjucated. Him tell me him call me a queen because I was beautiful, an’ from one ting to anoder we went on talkin’, an’ him offer to walk home wid me, an’ we became friendly till him went away an’ I had to come back up here wid me aunt. But I goin’ back to Kingston, though! No fear!’

Thus, completely sophisticated, spoke Celestina, the others regarding her as one might look upon a traveller who had returned from some wonderful unknown country where everything was different from what one knew.

‘I will soon see everything,’ said Jane, when her companion ceased. ‘But I have to work, an’ you did go wid you’ family.’

‘Yes; dat meck a difference. But ef y’u get a friend like mine, y’u needn’t boder to work. What y’u goin’ to meck you’self a slave for?’

But here Jane shook her head resolutely. ‘No,’ she said. ‘I promise me fader to keep meself up, an’ I gwine to do it. Perhaps I may married one of dese days; who is to tell?’

Celestina laughed the laugh of the sceptical. ‘Mary,’ she asked, turning to one of the others, ‘y’u mean to tell me dat if y’u could get somebody to

look after you now, y'u wouldn't teck him?'

'Me!' exclaimed Mary. 'After I looking for a good young man now! Jane don't know what she sayin'!'

The fourth girl said nothing, being apparently of no great importance in the councils of the others. She was the dullest of the four, with a rather plain and stupid face.

All of them were, to superficial appearances, black. But in a country where racial intermixture has been going on for some two hundred years, large numbers of persons who appear black have a strain of white blood in their veins, a strain which sometimes shows itself in the smoothness and shading of the skin, sometimes in the features. A practised eye would have pronounced Celestina to be a 'sambo,' or one-fourth white. Jane was darker, strongly built and robust, but her features, the nose especially, hinted at some white ancestor. Any one accustomed to the Jamaica peasants' appearance would have pronounced her good looking, an opinion with which she would have entirely agreed.

CHAPTER II

FOR some time longer the girls continued sitting near the road and discussing the future. Then Jane heard her mother calling, and rose to go. The others did likewise, Celestina going into her hut to attend to some little matter she had neglected, while Mary and Elizabeth went towards a small coffee plantation where they had engaged to spend the rest of the afternoon in cleaning coffee, thus earning threepence each.

When Jane presented herself at the door of her mother's house, she was asked by the latter to go and assist her brother, who was just then attending to the 'ground.' She nodded and turned away in the direction of what appeared to be a gully, and began clambering down the rather steep sides of it in a manner that would have meant a broken limb to any one not well accustomed to such exercises. At the bottom of the declivity she found her brother, who was digging yam holes with a hoe, and he directed her to plant the yams as soon as he had finished each hole. This she proceeded to do, squatting herself on the ground, covering up the yam roots with her bare hands (into which a splinter of wood would endeavour, not successfully, to force itself every now and then), dragging herself from hole to hole, and enduring the sun—most terrible at this hour—as though it did not exist.

'Whoy!' exclaimed her brother, after the last hole had been dug, 'it hot, sah!' He wiped the perspiration from his brow with the dirty shirt sleeve of his right arm, and, leaning on his hoe, watched his sister as she heaped earth upon the last of the roots. Presently he produced a crushed cigarette from the inner recesses of his shirt bosom, struck a light, puffed the weed, and waited for Jane to get up.

'You gwine to Kingston, to-morrow,' he observed stolidly, 'an' I are soon going to go away meself. Just as cheap,^[2] for dere is not much for a man to do here. Dis little field is stupidness for a man like me, an' it's no use learnin' trade, fo' y'u can't meck a livin' by it. Dere is not a praperty round here dat can give a man plenty o' work an' pay him good money. Jamaica is a dyamn poor country, an' everybody teck an' advantage of a man! In fac', even ef I could get a good job here I doan't t'ink I would stop. Y'u finish?'

[2] 'Just as well.' The Jamaica peasant uses the word 'cheap' in preference to 'well.'

Jane signified that she had, and heaved herself up from the ground with a jerk. She struck her hands against one another to brush off the particles of earth that stuck to them, then, with her brother, began to toil up the side of the declivity towards the house.

'I hope the dyamn tiefs in dis place won't rob me yam before dem is even ripe,' the young man grumbled. 'Y'u can't plant noten but somebody come at night-time an' rob it fram y'u! Well, when y'u go to Kingston, Jane, y'u mustn't forget we up here.'

'No,' she answered briefly; then the hut reached, her brother flung himself down on the ground in front of it and stretched himself out to sleep, drawing his tattered cap over his face, his day's work being entirely over. Jane sauntered towards a little thatched bamboo structure with three sides and no door, the sides themselves being full of holes, and, entering, began to assist her mother in the preparation of the family's dinner. First she took a pail and went to the stream for water. The stream was near; in a few moments she returned with the water, and pouring some of it into a shallow round tin pan, rather battered and rusty, she flopped down on the ground, opened her legs wide, placed the pan between them, and began peeling a large bunch of green bananas that lay within easy reach of her hands. With the aid of a short, strong knife she tore the tough skin off the vegetables: this task took her a little time, for she did not hurry. She hummed a hymn as she worked, while her mother also peeled and cut up a breadfruit, and a very small bit of yam. When the peeling was over, the food was put to boil on a fire made up on the ground; and Jane's mother left the kitchen and went into the hut, where, from a cupboard in the bedroom, she took a parcel of salt fish, selected a part of it, and returned. This, with a little cocoa-nut oil, would form the relish of the family's dinner, which would be ready in another hour, when the younger children would be back from school.

'Where pupa gone to?' asked Jane, while her mother was making up another fire on the earth floor of the kitchen.

'Him gone to Mister Brown place to chop some wood; it's a ninepence worth of work.'

'But Mister Brown didn't pay him de las' time him work for him?'

‘No, him say him will pay de money te-day. Him didn’t have it las’ Saturday.’

‘Sometime y’u can’t get noten to do,’ Jane observed, ‘and den, when y’u get a little jobs for a pence or so, y’u can’t get you’ money. Dat’s why I glad I gwine to Kingston. Dere is plenty of money dere.’

‘Yes,’ returned her mother philosophically, ‘but it belong to white people.’

‘Everything belong to white people,’ said Jane, ‘and brown people. We only have de leavings.’

‘Well, what to do?’ asked her philosophical mother. ‘God mus’ know why Him meck black people poor, an’ He will provide. We mus’ trust to Him. Dat’s why, when you is in Kingston, Jane, y’u mustn’t fo’get you’ church. An’ y’u must be respectful to de lady dat is employin’ y’u, an’ do you’ work well. For ef y’u lose dat situation, I don’t know what y’u will do.’

‘Dat is all right,’ returned Jane. ‘I will do me best. I gwine inside now to pack up me clothes.’

The process of packing her clothes was not a long one, for the simple reason that her personal possessions were few. One good white dress for Sundays and gala days, two coarse print frocks like the one she wore, some underclothing—a very limited stock—and a pair of shoes and stockings completed the inventory of her wardrobe. The shoes and stockings she lingered lovingly over. Only on Sundays, when she went to church, and on other special occasions, did they make their appearance, and then she walked about proudly though with difficulty, for her feet were unaccustomed to confinement. When she had tied these few things into a bundle, she went to the door of the hut, and there stood in the opening gazing into vacancy, while the lengthening shadows of the trees showed that the sun was now rapidly sloping to the west.

Her two younger brothers and her sister came home while she stood there, her elder brother awoke and wandered off somewhere down the road; then her mother called to her from the kitchen. The dinner was ready; it was shared out in little shallow tin plates and pudding pans for the women folk, but the men’s portion was left in the kitchen to keep warm until they should come home.

The children dined in the open air, while Jane and her mother remained in the kitchen, and ate their meal. While they were eating, the father, accompanied by his son, who had met him on the way, came in; they sat down to the table to eat their dinner out of the earthenware plates and with knives; and as they ate they discussed the trivial incidents of the day, the

poor price paid for labour, the difficulty of securing regular employment, the prevalence of prædial thieves. The older man accepted all these things as a matter of course, the younger one grumbled. After both had eaten, the son lighted a crushed cigarette—all his cigarettes presented the same emaciated appearance—and went out to pay his respects to a lady residing some miles away, while his father, after drinking a little rum, lighted a clay pipe stuffed with coarse tobacco, and remained seated by the table smoking and digesting his food.

The day was over in the village. The darkness fell softly and quickly; people now passed up and down the road going from their work to their homes, or on long journeys, during which they would travel all the night. The azure of the evening sky deepened into deep dark blue. A few faint stars trembled above. Others peeped forth, then others, and a great moon, with just an attendant silver cloud or two, sailed slowly over the mountains, over the tree tops, touching the earth below into ineffable beauty. Lights twinkled from the few huts on either side of the road, lights from little kerosene glass lamps set upon tables. The village shop was bright, and there, as it served as a sort of club for the social persons of the village, about half a dozen men assembled to listen to the shopkeeper discoursing on the Government and the Parochial Board, and the tax on land, and the women he had met some time before in Nicaragua.

Near to the shop some of the younger folk of the village forgathered; one young man had a guitar, and this he thrumbed to a melancholy air and with no regard for time. The boys teased the girls, using their hands to touch them often; at which times, whenever a girl received a poke from an adventurous finger, she would exclaim ‘You!’ but showed she rather liked it by not making any endeavour to get out of her tormentor’s way. A score of meagre dogs made their appearance and occasionally added the noise of their barking to the noise of the guitar, being lazily chastised with stones for this interruption by one or two of the company. Jane joined this group, among whom were two of the friends she had met that forenoon; and again the subject of conversation was her approaching departure to Kingston.

‘You soon begin to call us “mountain people,”’ remarked the owner of the guitar, stopping in the midst of a weird strain to make this remark, and referring to the well-known contempt which those who dwell in the capital have for those who live in the country districts.

‘Hi, no!’ replied Jane. ‘I wouldn’t be so ungrateful. Don’t I born in de country too? It would be foolish of me to form like I did born in Kingston. I am not like dat.’

‘Dat’s what y’u say now,’ returned the guitar player; ‘but I know Kingston, and I know what gals that leave de country an’ go to Kingston always do. Dem is not there a week before dem begin to show off themself, an’ rock their body ’pon a man when them see him is from de country. Ask Celestina.’

‘Dat is true,’ said Celestina, pleased to be appealed to on any matter touching the life and manners of the capital. ‘I used to do it meself, an’ why not? You country buoy is not like Kingstonian. Y’u is too scaly.^[3] You don’t have a penny in you’ pocket! A young man in Kingston, ef him meet y’u anywhere, will offer y’u a car-drive, first t’ing. But you don’t have a farden to give anybody. Y’u don’t ’ave sufficient to feed you’self. All you lookin’ for now is to get what y’u can out of we. Dat’s why I can’t bodder stay up here. Jane, me love, y’u wi’ see me in Kingston soon, y’u hear?’

^[3] Mean.

‘All right; I will look out for y’u. But I not gwine to fo’get me people up here all de same,’ replied Jane brightly.

‘I hopes not,’ said the guitar player, whose tone of voice suggested that what he hoped and what he expected were miles apart. ‘As fo’ what Celes say, I doan’t say she is wrong, for I doan’t have anyt’ing to give anybody; an’ if she t’ink she can get anyt’ing out of me, she lie! All she want is easy livin’. But what anybody ever get out of a Kingston man? Dem only have words to give y’u. Dem trust their trousers, an’ trust yellow boots, an’ dem walk ’bout as if dem was gentleman. Dem have more pickney^[4] dan dem have finger, an’ dem can’t support one of them. Up here it better; y’u can always get a banana; but in Kingston, if y’u doan’t have no money—Lard! it better y’u dead! Dat’s why I sorry fo’ Jane.’

^[4] Children.

‘But what y’u sorry for me for?’ demanded Jane indignantly. ‘I don’t want you’ sympathy. You an’ me is not company.’

‘Y’u see how she begin a’ready?’ remarked the guitar player triumphantly. ‘She is abusin’ me before she even go to Kingston.’ He spat upon the ground, dug into the earth with the great toe of his right foot, then

resumed his playing, while he sang, the words being 'Lard! not a light, not a bite; what a Saturday night!' and the whole song being intended to depict the misery to which Jane would be reduced shortly after her arrival in Kingston.

'Don't mind him, me child,' said Celestina; 'I know Kingston better dan him; an' de trute is, him is jealous of de Kingston young man. When him go to town him put on boots for de firs' time, an' as him don't used to walk in boots, dem know him is a mountain man an' laugh at him. Dat is why him abuse dem!'

This speech provoked the group to laughter, but apparently left the guitar player undisturbed. He merely remarked, 'All right! You wait till y'u get a beaten from one o' dem Kingston buoy, an' y'u will sing a different tune'; then he proceeded with the song depicting the misery of a penniless Saturday night.

'I gwine to wear boots often,' said Jane, feeling that as she alone was going to Kingston, it was incumbent upon her to set forth her programme of life for the admiration of her friends.

'Up here it don't necessary, but in Kingston y'u have to dress.'

'Dat is what I would like,' said a girl who had hitherto taken no part in the conversation. 'Y'u know how y'u feel when y'u put on a nice frock an' a high-heel pair o' boots, and know dat everybody admirin' y'u? Dat is why I like go to church! Everybody can see y'u.'

In a similar strain the talk continued for another hour, most of the girls saying the same things over and over again. It was Jane's last night in the village, and she enjoyed this final reunion immensely. Even on so special an occasion, however, she would not allow any of the young men to take liberties with her, telling those who attempted to touch her that 'she didn't want any "hand's play," for she was a decent girl.' The shop had long been shut for the night when the party of companions broke up, all Jane's friends telling her good-bye, and arranging to come and see her if chance should lead them to Kingston.

It was about ten o'clock when she went to bed. The hut she slept in happened to be floored—many of the houses in the village were not—and a mat with a few rags spread upon the floor of the room in which her parents slept constituted the bedding of herself and her younger brothers and sisters. Her parents occupied the bed in the room; her brother slept on the wooden couch in the outer room. She quickly undressed, not even noticing the two or three large spiders that hung upon the wall just above where she was to sleep. She knew they would not go out of their way to bite her, while for her to kill them would mean (she was persuaded) the certainty of her breaking

an immense amount of crockery for some time after. She undressed quickly (she had already washed her feet in a little water outside the hut), put on a soiled garment which served her for weeks at a time as nightdress, lay down beside her sister and brothers, and promptly fell asleep. That there was no ventilation whatever in the overcrowded room did not in the least inconvenience her.

Outside the stillness was intense: even the dogs had retired. The moon held empire above, the trees were bathed in that wonderful green and silver light which almost turned night to day. The village slept the sleep of the righteous, though righteousness was not amongst the virtues on which it would have particularly prided itself. Not until about five o'clock in the morning did it awaken, to resume once more the monotonous and trivial duties of the day.

Jane was up with the earliest. A bit of the breadfruit left over from yesterday's dinner, and toasted by her mother, and a mug of tea made from a sweet smelling shrub which grew near the hut, formed her morning meal. She hastily gulped this down while standing at the threshold of the hut; then tied her head with a bright-coloured 'Madrass' headkerchief, balanced the bundle containing her clothes on top of this, and said good-bye. There were tears in her mother's eyes, and she herself felt a tightening in her chest. Her face became drawn, but she did not break down, not being by any means of a weak and maudlin disposition. The whole family accompanied her to where the road formed the boundary of their property, and as she started upon her way her father again reminded her that she must 'keep herself up.' She nodded in reply, set her lips tight, and swung down the road with the free, springing step of the Jamaica peasant woman; in a few moments a bend in the road took her out of sight of hut and family.

She had about four miles to walk before she would reach the house where was the lady who was to take her to Kingston, and she had promised to be there by seven o'clock. She knew she had plenty of time, but did not on that account lessen her rate of speed. Now and then as she walked she would call out a shrill good-bye, to the trees as one would have thought who did not know the locality, and was not aware that hidden behind the thick foliage and the underbush were houses where friends and acquaintances lived.

On either hand the forest ran, the ground often rising steeply into lofty eminences. Part of the road was in shadow, the sun not yet having climbed high enough to flood every inch of the countryside with its living light. But already the freshness of the morning was wearing away, and as she walked she saw the big green lizards chasing their prey across the ground, and

amongst the trees she heard the birds piping and calling to one another. Frequently, for a little while, the entire way would be plunged in semi-darkness; this was when the great trees, bending over on either side, intermingled their branches, thus forming a leafy roof which caught and intercepted the rays of the rapidly rising sun.

Sometimes the forest would end upon the right hand or the left, the roadside would break away into sheer precipice, and a great stretch of green and fertile country, flooded with warm and golden light, would spread out into the distance for miles and miles, until it merged itself into yet more distant hills and radiant blue sky. Tiny settlements would glisten far below, the white-washed walls of the huts and houses reflecting the rays of the sun. The land rose and fell into little hills and valleys; here the predominating colour was yellow, there it was soft emerald; here it was dark gray in the shadow of a great mountain, there it blazed with every variety of green, intermingled with scarlet. Slender palms and tremendous silk-cotton trees stood out singly upon the sides of the precipice, their roots twisted and twined in the loose limestone rock, their fronds and leaves flashing back the light that beat upon them. Thin columns of smoke could be seen, the spirals of them dissolving slowly into the circumambient air; smoke from peasants' fires either in the villages or from some open hill-side where one or two wayfarers cooked their morning meal. There were many cultivations too, little fields of bananas, patches of potato, squares and oblongs of yams, the vines of these climbing on poles and showing a yellowish tint. And occasionally the bare brown earth stood out in relief against its borders of green, where it had been burnt and cleaned for cultivation, or where some landslide had lately taken place.

And over the whole arched the magnificent concave of glowing sky, and about it all hung the silence of the great encircling mountains.

Such scenes were familiar to Jane, and roused her admiration not at all. She hardly glanced to right or left as she trudged on; never once did she reflect that she was leaving all this, which had formed part of her life as far back as she could remember, and leaving it perhaps for ever. Sturdily she footed it until she reached the place where her future mistress was staying. It was something more than a village, though not quite a town. She knocked at the gate of a small stone house with a garden in front of it, then timidly entered when bidden to do so by some one concealed behind a green jalousie window. When she closed the gate behind her, she, so to speak, closed the chapter of her earlier life. She had now ceased to be a country girl. She had become the employee of a city dweller, a member of the large army of West Indian domestics.

CHAPTER III

JANE came to Kingston by the great northern road, the road that begins at the edge of Kingston's waterfront, runs through the entire length of the town, turns a little to the west, and then, a few miles farther, begins to climb the hills until, at certain places along its course, the traveller can turn and see in the distance the white-and-green city that he has left behind him, dozing and baking in the sun.

A dilapidated buggy brought her. She sat in front with the coachman, holding herself very upright and still, partly through timidity, partly through fear of the hard-featured mistress who sat behind her. Jane stood in awe of her mistress. That lady intended that she should, for it was an article of faith with her that kindness and affection bestowed upon a member of the servant class was so much virtue wasted. She was a stoutish person of yellow complexion and self-confident air, and possessed of a rather shrill voice. She was a widow, and had no children, but her nephew and two nieces lived with her; and to perform all the household work of this family of four she had two servants, one a grown woman employed at 3s. a week, with 'feeding,' and a schoolgirl, who, in the present instance, was Jane.

All the way down from Constant Spring to the city Jane experienced sensations which one might suppose would be felt by a child in wonderland. She had never seen such large houses before; in a vague sort of way she wondered how many hundreds of persons lived in them, so spacious did the villas of the Kingston gentry appear to her unsophisticated eyes. Then there was the wonder of the electric-cars, things she had often heard of, but which she had never been able to imagine in any kind of way. When she came to where the road ended and the long street proper began, her amazement further increased. The numerous little shops, the houses standing close to one another, the bustle of the street, the number of people she saw moving in all directions, or lazily leaning against doors and fences, or squatting on the edges of sidewalks and wherever else they could find a seat—she had never thought that so many buildings and persons could be seen at one time; and the farther on she went the more did she become impressed with the greatness of the city in which she had come to live. For at every crossing, on looking to the right or to the left, was the same endless vista of houses, and everywhere were cabs and carts and people, and once or twice a bellowing

motor car rushed past with a speed which seemed to her to rival that of lightning.

What a place Kingston was! Celestina was right; there was nothing like this in the country. She felt awed, frightened, depressed: lonely too, for she was a stranger in a strange land. A vague regret that she had come took possession of her; all the confidence she had felt the day before, when, in the little village among the hills, she had talked with her friends about her future life—all her confidence had left her. The feeling of which she was now mainly conscious was that of being confused. She had seen so many new and strange things within an hour! When the buggy, turning to the right, drew up before a little brick-and-wood single-story house in Heywood Street, and she was told by her mistress to descend and help to take the parcels out of the trap, she climbed down into the street mechanically, seized hold of the parcel which the coachman shoved into her hands, and then stood waiting, completely at a loss what next to do.

‘Go and knock at the door,’ Mrs Mason commanded, and she did as she was told. The door was opened by an untidy-looking black woman of about twenty-six years of age, who hurriedly came down the steps into the street with a pretence of gladness at her mistress having returned. Jane, not yet knowing what to do, stood where she was, with the parcel in her hands, awaiting further orders.

‘Are you going to stay there all day?’ Mrs Mason asked. ‘Why don’t you take the bundle inside and come back?’

‘I see what it is going to be already,’ was her muttered comment on Jane’s stupidity. ‘I am going to ’ave trouble. Well, Sarah’ (to the servant), ‘how is everything since I leave? I suppose you mash up all me crockery?’

‘No, missis, everyt’ing all right,’ answered Sarah. ‘How y’u enjie you’self, ma’am? Y’u looking well! Glad you came back, ma’am.’

By the time this speech was delivered (the insincerity of which was quite apparent to Mrs Mason) Sarah had taken hold of two or three of the bundles in the buggy, Jane had returned for the two small boxes, and Mrs Mason had begun to ascend the steps which led to the doorway of her house. The door opened into what Mrs Mason called her drawing-room, a room about fifteen feet square, furnished with three American yellow cane-seated rocking chairs, four black Austrian steambent chairs, a small marble-topped table (which stood in the centre), two small mahogany tables which were arranged opposite to each other against the walls, and a horsehair sofa of uncertain age and dingy appearance. Hung on the walls of the little room were coloured prints framed with gold moulding, and two enlarged photographs, one of the late Mr Mason and one of his widow. Just below these was an

illuminated card with the motto, 'God Bless Our Home.' A large mantelpiece, on which were some ornaments, was the most showy article of furniture in the room.

It happened that Jane, looking about for a suitable place on which to deposit the bundle she had carried inside, had decided on one of the mahogany tables. This was unfortunate, for the bundle contained, among other things, a can of 'wet sugar'; and some of this sugar had leaked out of the can and through the cloth. Sarah, with more experience, had taken her parcels through the drawing-room and into what served as the dining-room, where she had placed them on the floor. Mrs Mason being the last to enter the house (which she did slowly, with the thoughtful intention of allowing her neighbours to notice her return in state) was met midway in the drawing-room by Sarah, who was returning to relieve her of the hat box she carried; and both Sarah and herself saw the sugar-laden bundle on the table at the same time. Mrs Mason was scandalised. Her voice took on an extra degree of shrillness as she loudly asked Jane what she meant by what she had done. Sarah frantically echoed her cry. She did more: she hurried to the table, and, discovering the stain made by the moist sugar, uttered an exclamation of horror and immediately called her mistress's attention to the awful circumstance.

If Mrs Mason was scandalised a moment before, she was now thunderstruck. The new girl, the girl that had come to her with such a good character from her mother, and who was being given such an excellent start in life, had not been a moment in the house before she had begun to act with the customary wilful and malicious carelessness of all former schoolgirls!

'Jane,' she piped shrilly, 'do you see what you have done?'

'But what y'u mean by destroying de lady furniture?' was another question immediately put to Jane by Sarah, whose indignation apparently could not be contained.

Jane was sublimely unconscious of having done anything wrong. Her wish had been to do what was right; and as in her own home she would certainly have placed a parcel on a table, no matter if it contained silk or green bananas, she could not immediately realise the nature of her offence. She merely knew that she was being taxed with some misdemeanour or other, and as some sort of answer was clearly necessary, she said, 'Beg parding, ma'am, I won't do it again,' and remained where she was standing.

'Well, dis gal is really foolish!' exclaimed Sarah. 'She say she sorry she destroy Miss Mason table, an' she wont even teck off de t'ing off of it! Gal! y'u foolish, no?'

‘Look here, Jane,’ said Mrs Mason, fatigue and the carelessness of the girl combining to make her feel angry, ‘Look here! let me tell you at once that I don’t want to ‘ave any botheration with you. You seem to have been brought up in a very careless way where you come from, but you will have to learn better here. You must be very stupid to go an’ put the wet sugar on me drawing-room table; and if it wasn’t that you just come to Kingston for the first time and perhaps don’t know better, I would teach you a good leason for you’ carelessness. Now just take that parcel off the table at once an’ put it where Sarah will tell you. And never you do such a thing again!’

‘Come on!’ said Sarah sharply to Jane. ‘It’s a good t’ing,’ she added loudly, but as if she intended her words for Jane’s hearing alone, ‘it’s a good t’ing you have a lady like Miss Mason to deal wid, or y’u would feel sorry for you’ foolishness.’

Jane said nothing, but followed Sarah meekly. She understood that she had just escaped a severe punishment which two grown persons considered she thoroughly deserved, and so terror now came to add to her general misery. She would have liked to return home at once, but knew that was impossible. She had never connected Kingston with threats of bodily castigation; besides, she was not at all convinced that she had done anything wrong.

She wasn’t allowed much time to reflect upon her situation, for Mrs Mason at once set her to opening the parcels and storing their contents in a wooden cupboard in the dining-room, Sarah assisting her, with frequent comments on her clumsiness, and more than one allusion to her evident desire to destroy Mrs Mason’s furniture.

When this bit of work was over, Mrs Mason announced that she expected her trunks by cart a little later on, and ordered both Jane and Sarah to listen for the rap of the cartman; though, as she added, he being what she called a ‘nager,’^[5] she did not expect he would arrive until several hours after the appointed time, and probably only after making an attempt to steal something out of her trunks.

^[5] A negro.

She gave Jane a bit of bread and some sugar, and directed Sarah to tell the girl what she was to do. Then, as both her nieces and her nephew would come home before six o’clock, she went to her room to rest for a while before actively taking over the housekeeping.

The house contained four rooms built in one row, each room opening into the other. The first, which faced the street, was the drawing-room, the next (and the smallest) was where the family took their meals, the third was Mrs Mason's bedroom, and the last was occupied by her nieces, two girls of eighteen and nineteen years of age respectively, who had been recently employed to serve in one of the cloth shops in Orange Street. There was another room in the yard, a sort of annex to the main building, and this was her nephew's bedroom. The yard itself was fairly large, unpaved, and at the end of it, at right angles to the house, was a range of light, dilapidated outbuildings, one of which was a servant's room, where Sarah slept, and which was now to be shared by Jane.

Into this room Jane was conducted by Sarah. It contained a canvas cot big enough for one person only, and on the cot was a dirty straw pillow and a bundle of rags. There was a chair with its cane-seat half gone, two small boxes, and a little trunk in which Sarah kept such articles of dress as she happened to possess. Jane had with her the little bundle containing her clothing, and Sarah told her to put this on the trunk. On her timidly asking where she was to sleep, Sarah said that Mrs Mason would give her some bedding later on, which she could spread upon the floor.

At the threshold of the room Jane sat down to eat her lunch of bread and sugar, while Sarah, hoping that Mrs Mason was asleep, entered into a conversation with her. Sarah's manner had suddenly changed. It was not unfriendly, and tended every moment to become more intimate. Emboldened by this new attitude of hers, Jane ventured to ask her what she thought of Mrs Mason.

'A real wretch!' declared Sarah with startling frankness. 'I just stayin' here tell I can get anoder jobs. She quarrel about everyt'ing, and she so mean dat if y'u teck a piece of stale bread dat she don't want, she will miss it and ask y'u about it. She an' me can't agree at all; but of cou'se, as she come back fresh to-day, she wont say noten to me yet. But you wait an' see! She an' me gwine to quarrel before long. And her two niece is just like herself. Dem t'ink them is young lady because dem can dress up, but I doan't t'ink noten of dem, for if dem was young lady dem would a live in a better 'ouse dan dis, an' would keep more dan one sarvant an' a schoolgirl. Dem gwine to want y'u to do everyt'ing fo' dem, an' dem will work y'u to death if y'u meck them do it. As soon as I get anoder jobs I goin' clear out an' leave de dam place!'

'Y'u don't glad she come back, den?' asked Jane, who could not but remember the enthusiasm with which Sarah had greeted her mistress.

‘Glad? What to glad fo’? What she bring fo’ me? If she did broke her neck when she was comin’ down de hill, I would be glad, yes; but dat is de only t’ing I would be glad about. I tell y’u, nobody can stay long wid her.’

‘Y’u ever work any other place before?’ was Jane’s next question, asked with the hope of finding out if employment was easy to obtain in Kingston, and with a kinder sort of person than Mrs Mason promised to be.

‘Plenty of place. I only been here four months. But mose of de people I work wid is de same like dis one. Dem all t’ink you is a slave an’ a t’ief. De fact of de matter is,’ she continued spitefully, ‘I hate to ’ave to work out at all, but y’u see, I don’t ’ave no friend, so I can’t do better. Y’u done eat? Well, come help me wash up some plate. I will soon ’ave to put on de dinner.’

Jane noticed that Sarah, like Celestina, looked upon a ‘friend’ as the one and only way out of the misery of domestic service: Sarah, too, was even more emphatic on the disadvantages of domestic service than ever Celestina had been, and Sarah had practical experience.

She helped to wash the plates, then made up the fire for Sarah, who afterwards got her to clean a few knives. This she did after a fashion of her own, and put them where she was told. Then Mrs Mason called her and began personally to instruct her in her several duties.

CHAPTER IV

IT seemed to Jane that she was expected to do everything. She was to run errands, clean the house, dust the furniture, learn to cook, help Sarah with the washing, and, it was added (with unconscious irony), make herself generally useful. Sarah's principal functions were cooking and washing, and neither of these, in the opinion of Mrs Mason (and, truth to tell, of all Sarah's previous employers), did she manage to do satisfactorily.

Mrs Mason having rested, was now in a kinder temper than when she had discovered the bundle on her drawing-room table. She even relaxed so far as to warn Jane against following Sarah's example, and held out the hope that Jane would be promoted to Sarah's place, though decidedly not to Sarah's pay, the moment she became efficient enough to justify Mrs Mason's bundling Sarah 'neck and crop' out of the house.

These were the lady's own words, for already a cursory examination of things had convinced her that Sarah had been neglecting her duties. Besides, her plan had always been to set servant against servant, this being one of the best means she knew of preventing them from gossiping and wasting time. Later on in the day she told Sarah that she must keep a sharp eye upon Jane and report to her any laxity on the girl's part. This Sarah promised to do most faithfully, and immediately afterwards her voice was heard remonstrating with Jane. But she privately told Jane of the interview, for Sarah firmly believed in eye-service, and was determined to get Jane to perform for her, if possible, the major part of her work.

Jane was tired, but was kept pretty busy until Mrs Mason's nieces and nephew came in. The two girls were somewhat darker than their aunt, and there was nothing about their attitude to justify Sarah's unfriendly criticism. The nephew was of Mrs Mason's complexion, with a weak chin and rather snubby nose. His hair was crisp and curly; he was shiftless in character. Up to then—he was twenty-two years of age—he had done little more than lose his situations. He was, nevertheless, a firm believer in his own abilities, to which he alluded with painful frequency. He apparently suffered from lack of appreciation on the part of others.

Dinner was served soon after the younger people had come in, and though the family did not as a rule have any one to wait on table when they dined, Mrs Mason thought it just as well that Jane should be inducted at

once into the mysteries of butlering, since her services in that connection might be required on some important occasion.

The girl brought in the dishes nervously, and Mrs Mason told her where to place them. Then she stood near her mistress to await further instructions. From his seat at the foot of the table, and when he thought his aunt's attention was fully engaged in ladling out pea soup, Cecil surveyed the new schoolgirl with the appreciative glance of a connoisseur; he took her in, so to speak, limb by limb, then sized her up as a physical whole; he approved of her as an addition to the household, and tried to convey to her his friendly and sympathetic feeling by one or two furtive winks. These Jane, with all the awe of the new situation still upon her, could not quite believe were intended for her. The young ladies discussed her openly, and asked her questions about herself with that friendly freedom of intercourse which so many Jamaicans show in dealing with their servants.

The elder, Miss Cynthia, asked her if she were going to be a good girl. Her answer was: 'Yes, ma'am.'

The younger sister wanted to know if she liked Kingston and was glad she had come to town. She said yes.

'I hope she will be'ave,' said Mrs Mason. 'I 'ave had to get rid of two girls in the last six months through their forwardness. And if she don't be'ave I will send her right back to her mother. You hear that, Jane?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

'The one thing I don't like in a servant is back-answers. If you are civil I can put up with a lot, but not otherwise. Pass this plate to Mr Cecil.

As Jane did so, that enterprising young gentleman made use of the opportunity to pinch her arm slightly, which act, being quite unexpected, caused her to spill a little of the soup on the table.

'You must learn to be more carful, Jane,' said Miss Emma, the younger of the two sisters. 'If you throw away things like that over the tablecloth when anybody is here, they will say you are not use' to waiting on table, and make us look bad. You must mind what you doing.'

'She nearly destroyed my mahogany table this morning,' Mrs Mason observed, 'and I would 'ave been very vexed with her if she hadn't just come. But she will 'ave to learn all these things. Jane' (sharply) 'pay attention to what I am saying an' don't stare at Mr Cecil. He is not saying anything to you. Remember, I 'ave told you I don't allow forwardness.'

But Cecil had been trying to attract Jane's attention. She, however, was wise enough to say nothing about this. The rest of the ordeal she passed through easily enough, for though she was corrected once or twice, her

efforts were fairly successful. Mrs Mason and her family's experience with butlers was of the most elementary order; so that, if Jane did lack knowledge of what she was to do, meticulous criticism was not to be expected from them.

Dinner over, Jane found that her day's duties were nearly completed. Mrs Mason told her that she had better accompany Sarah to the shop that night; this to enable her to learn something about the neighbourhood. While waiting till Sarah should be ready to go, she sat at the threshold of the servants' room chatting. But she talked more to drive away the feeling of loneliness which gripped at her heart than because she felt inclined for conversation.

'Ow y'u like it?' asked Sarah after a while, referring to the girl's first day in Kingston.

'I doan't know,' replied Jane hesitatingly. 'I doan't go anywhere yet. I feel tired, an' de ole lady seem like she love to rough me. An' Mr Cecil' . . . she hesitated and stopped.

'Him!' exclaimed Sarah contemptuously; 'Him is a real mamparla [effeminate] man! Him 'fraid for him aunt, an' yet him want to "speak up" female. It was him dat meck Rachael leave here.'

'Which Rachael?' asked Jane.

'De schoolgal dat was here before you. She was a Kingston gurl, a little older dan you, an' she didn't have no use for him. But him tease her till she rude to him, an' him aunt curse her an' drive her 'way. De whole o' them is a set! Me clearing out of it, me love! Just wait till I get anoder jobs!'

Here she heard Mrs Mason calling to her, and ran to answer the summons. For though she professed the greatest contempt for her mistress, she knew that 'anoder jobs' was not always easy to obtain, and she did not wish to lose her situation just then.

She came back in a few minutes.

'Y'u finish eat you' dinner?' she asked Jane.

'Yes,' said the latter.

'All right. Put on you' hat, an' come wid me. I am gwine to de market an' de shop.'

Jane rose hastily, put on the straw hat she had brought with her, and which, hitherto, she had worn only on special occasions. She had more than once heard from Celestina of the glories of shopping on a Saturday night in Kingston, which alone, according to that experienced young woman, made life in the city well worth living. She was eager to see something of this

shopping for herself, and the opportunity now afforded her to do so instantly drove away the feeling of loneliness that had taken possession of her.

She and Sarah passed through the side gate of Mrs Mason's yard and went out into the street. To Jane, accustomed to darkness relieved only by the glow of the moon, the lighted street, with the brightly-lit shops on either side of it, represented a very wonder of illumination; and when she came to Orange Street, and, looking up and down the length of it, saw what appeared to her to be a great avenue of light, admiration reached to ecstasy, and for the first time she felt glad that she had come to town.

The little Syrian shops, filled to overflowing with showy goods intended to capture the fancy of servant girls and women from the country; the groceries and salt provision shops, containing all manner of what to the working classes of Kingston are the most delicious of delicacies; the crowds of venders and higglers, each one calling out his and her wares and inviting the passer-by to stop and purchase; the electric-cars, all lighted up now, and moving swiftly on their lines with a constant clanging of warning gongs; the hubbub, the incessant movement of hundreds of people, the sound of religious singing which pierced its way through all the other noises; and then the market itself, that market to which Jane's mother had come occasionally to sell her goods, and which to Jane's wondering eyes looked as though it contained all the food that could be grown in a whole year in all the villages she had ever seen—all this filled her with unspeakable delight. As she followed Sarah she stumbled more than once, so intent was she upon gazing at everything she saw. Already the fascination of city life had seized her, and from that hour henceforward, no matter what hardships she might have to face in Kingston, that city was the place above all others in Jamaica that would most appeal to her heart.

Mrs Mason having brought some ground provisions with her from the country, had not sent the girls to buy anything in that line; Sarah's purchases were therefore trifling, but Jane noticed that Sarah higgled a long time to get seven bananas for a penny-ha'-penny, and, when she succeeded, carefully broke off a banana from the 'hand' of fruit and put it in her pocket. She explained the reason to Jane, who, she felt, might blab to her mistress, either intentionally or otherwise.

'Y'u see,' she said, 'if it wasn't dat I did talk to de 'ooman, I would only get six banana for a quattie;^[6] for dat is what everybody givin' now. So de extra one is mine. Miss Mason is so mean, she wouldn't even gie y'u de banana skin, so I teck it myself an' I gwine to give y'u a piece. Only now an' den y'u can get anyt'ing out of her when y'u go to de shop; an' if God put it

in you' way to meck a little somet'ing, and y'u doan't do it, dat is your fault.'

[6] A 'quattie' is a penny-ha'-penny. A 'gill' is three farthings.

'But suppose she find out?' said Jane, much disturbed by the fear of discovery.

'It's your fault ef she find out. She quarrel 'bout everyt'ing y'u buy for her, so y'u will always hear her talk; but y'u simply 'ave to teck no notice of her. God know I am not a tief, so I doan't care what anybody choose to say; for ef I get a t'ing little cheaper an' I keep de balance for myself, dat is not robbin'!' She took the banana out of her pocket, breaking it into two unequal parts and giving the smaller part to Jane. She seemed conscious of surpassing virtue as she made the division. She repudiated entirely any suggestion of stealing. Apparently she was only rewarding herself for her own display of business ability.

Sarah seemed to know a large number of persons, especially young men of a rather disreputable appearance, who hung about the market and outside the shops. To some of these she introduced Jane as 'Miss Mason new school gurl,' and at least one of them attempted to be familiar with the neophyte on the strength of that introduction. But if Jane was timid and nervous in the presence of her mistress, she was not at all backward in repelling the advances of gentlemen who were more or less like those with whom she had been well acquainted in the country, for, as she said, 'she could speak for herself.' On the way home Sarah called in at a Chinaman's shop to buy some groceries, and this also was a source of delight to Jane. She was afraid of the Chinaman and of his wife; but she saw a lot of girls of her own age, and even younger, arguing with these Chinese about the purchases they were making, as though they were grown-up women; and this seemed to her to be proof of the superiority of the town girl over one, like herself, born and brought up in the country.

It was rather fine, she thought, to be able to scream out to the Chinaman: 'John, you brute! I see y'u! Y'u not givin' me good weight.' Or to his wife: 'Madam! what you doin'? Don't y'u hear me beg y'u a little salt?' All these calls, cries, and imprecations left the two Chinese unruffled, and thus Jane saw that, in a Kingston shop, one could be impudent without any serious consequences following.

After Sarah had made her purchases, she begged a little salt, as she had been told to do by Mrs Mason. She called Jane's attention to this as a further instance of Mrs Mason's meanness, pointing out that if she had not been told to get some salt for her mistress, as a sort of discount on the things bought, she would have got a couple of crackers or a piece of raw salt fish for herself. In more than one way, then, that Saturday night Jane had it brought home to her that the meanness of mistresses fully justified servants in taking a commission in kind out of the purchases they made. She noticed too, when they got home, that Mrs Mason thought it very strange that bananas should be so dear at that time of the year; and when, a few minutes later, she was called aside by her mistress and questioned as to how many bananas Sarah had got for a quattie, and whether she was sure Sarah had bought a quattie's worth or only a penny-farthing's worth of fruit, she declared that Sarah had got only six bananas and had paid penny-ha'-penny for them. Mrs Mason believed her, although Jane had lied with terror in her heart. She told Sarah of the incident that night when she was spreading a bundle of rags on the floor, by way of preparing her bed.

'What I did tell you?' asked Sarah triumphantly. 'Didn't I tell y'u how she mean an' suspicious? She not a lady at all.'

Then both set to and closed both the door and the jalousie window of the room so as to exclude fresh air as much as possible, and in a little while they were asleep.

CHAPTER V

TO JANE it appeared, during the first few days she worked with Mrs Mason, that nothing she did was rightly done, and she soon realized that a schoolgirl could not hope for those long hours of rest such as she had been accustomed to in the country. Her tribulations began early on the Sunday following the day on which she came to Kingston. Mrs Mason had sent her to the nearby ice-shop to buy a penny's worth of ice, and this had been given to covered with sawdust. Wishing to show her diligence, she had taken the ice to the pipe in the yard, immediately on returning with it, and had begun to wash off the sawdust prior to wrapping it up in the cloth provided for that purpose, when Mrs Mason's niece, Emma, happened to see her. Knowing that ice would not be needed before breakfast, Emma asked what she was doing with it.

'Washing it, ma'am,' explained Jane.

'What for?'

inquired Emma.

'To teck off de dirt, ma'am.'

Emma only laughed, not being bad-natured; but Mrs Mason, arriving on the scene just then, was exceeding wroth, declaring that she had never heard of such foolishness before.

Then it was presently discovered that Jane was clumsy. While she was setting the table for breakfast that same Sunday morning, one of the plates slipped from her hand and broke in two. She took up the pieces hastily, put them together, and placed them on the dinner-wagon, in the vain hope that the accident would not be discovered just then, and that, later on, it might be attributed to some other person.

But the dinner-wagon was small; Mrs Mason had not a large stock of crockery; and within five minutes after the plate was broken, that lady had the pieces in her hands and was shrilly calling to Jane to come and explain to her what had happened, although she already knew quite well.

'It fall out of me hand and broke, ma'am,' stammered Jane, with a sinking sensation in her heart. 'It just drop like that,' she added, giving this additional bit of information with a view to showing that the accident was entirely the plate's fault.

Mrs Mason had heard the same sort of excuse a hundred times before. But as she believed in bringing guilt home by a rigid system of cross-examination, she sat in front of Jane and asked her where she had been standing when the plate fell.

‘Right by de table, ma’am,’ Jane said, indicating the spot with her finger.

‘And what were y’u doing?’

‘I was wipin’ it, ma’am.’

‘An’ what were y’u looking at?’

‘Noten, ma’am.’

‘Well, if you were looking at nothing, you couldn’t ’ave been doing you’ work properly, Jane.’

‘I doan’t mean dat, ma’am. I mean dat I was not lookin’ at anyt’ing dat didn’t concern me.’

‘Then how the plate come to drop?’

‘As I tell you, ma’am. It just teck an’ drop out of me hand, an’ before I could catch it up, it broke in two.’

‘Now gurl,’ said Mrs Mason, with a fine show of righteous indignation, ‘don’t talk stupidity to me! How can a plate drop out of your ’and if you was holding it properly? Why are you telling lies to excuse your carelessness? You ever hear a plate have life? How can it broke itself?’

As Jane had no reply to make to this, Mrs Mason turned to another section of the indictment.

‘And why instead of coming to tell me you had broken me plate, y’u try to piece it up, an’ put it on me dinner-wagon? Don’t you see you are not a good gurl? Why did you put the broken plate on me dinner-wagon, I say?’

Jane stood dumbly before her, tears beginning to appear at the corners of her eyes.

‘Aren’t y’u going to answer me?’ loudly demanded Mrs Mason, who felt that the girl must be brought to a proper state of contrition before final judgment was pronounced against her.

‘What’s it, Aunt Charlotte?’ asked Cynthia, putting her head and shoulders out of her aunt’s bedroom and looking into the dining-room. Cynthia was dressing for church, and at that moment was in deshabelle. But she knew there were no men about, and so felt that her half-clothed appearance did not matter.

‘What’s it but this gurl again,’ Mrs Mason answered. ‘She mash me plate and put it back on me dinner-wagon. Don’t you see she getting bad already before she been here two days? They are all alike! You can’t get a decent

gurl for love or money, and yet when they are in the country they can only get bananas and herrings to eat! Jane, do you think you 'ave behaved properly?'

'No ma'am,' said Jane, hoping that by confessing her sins and wickedness she would escape further punishment.

'Give her a chance, Aunt Charlotte,' suggested Cynthia. 'She is new.'

'Well,' said Mrs Mason, 'I won't flog y'u this morning, because Miss Cynthia beg for you, and because it is Sunday morning, an' I don't want any nager bawling in my yard. But you 'ave to thank you' stars that y'u get off so easy, despite that wicked lie and deceit you 'ave practised. That plate cost me a sixpence, and I am going to take it out of your wages at the end of the week. In fact,' concluded Mrs Mason with conviction, 'I don't know what I am paying you wages for. Many gurls would be glad to take your place for the food and shelter I am giving you; and I know you are not going to be grateful! I suppose that other wretch, Sarah, is burning up me breakfast now,' and with that she hurried outside to see what Sarah was doing.

Jane had thought the night before, after she had been to the market with Sarah, of the many things she would be able to buy with her money at the end of next week, the sight of 'pretty things' having stirred in her the desire of possession. And now, at one fell stroke, Mrs Mason had confiscated one-half of her week's wage. It was a bitter blow; she would much have preferred the flogging. But she divined that had she got the flogging she would also have lost the sixpence. Cynthia knew this also, so she called Jane to help her to dress, with that obvious kindness which benefactors usually display towards those who have been put under an everlasting obligation to them.

Jane bungled through the business of waiting-maid pretty badly; but saved herself from all blame by expressing intense admiration for the dress spread out on the bed. It was made of some flashing pink stuff, and with it was to be worn a hat trimmed with great feathers that looked like a field-marshal's plume. Cynthia was going to church that morning for the purpose of setting on fire with envy several girls whom she knew, and affectionately styled 'my dear,' and most cordially disliked. When she had dressed, she turned herself round and round before the big looking-glass in her aunt's room, and asked Jane how she looked.

'Y'u look nice, ma'am,' Jane declared warmly. Then a happy thought came to her: 'Y'u pretty, ma'am. You is fashionable.'

That last word Jane had heard in the country, where it had been applied to Celestina principally; and now she brought it out in the hope of pleasing

this stylish young lady who might now and then be able to save her from the wrath to come.

Her diplomacy was an unqualified success. Praise such as this was sweet to the ears of Cynthia, who at once called out to her sister to come and look at her. Her sister was also dressed, though not in new garments, and she heartily endorsed every word that Jane had said. They got on very well together did these two sisters, forming between them an offensive and defensive league against all other young women of their class. They spoke to Jane very nicely while putting the last touches to their toilet, and it was clear enough that they were kindly disposed towards her. Jane decided that Mrs Mason was a terror, but that her nieces were nice young ladies. Yet as they were out at work every day except Sunday, she knew they could not give her any considerable assistance.

As for Mrs Mason's nephew, he did not go to church that day, but lingered about the house and yard, in slippers and without his jacket, always choosing those spots where he could watch Jane as she went about her work. It was Sarah who drew Jane's attention to this.

'Y'u notice dat mamparla^[7] man?' she asked the girl as she scoured a pot with the vehemence of a deadly enemy. 'Him won't teck him eye off you. Him mus' be think him is pretty!'

^[7] Worthless, effeminate: a term of contempt.

'But why him lookin' at me?' asked Jane, though she had not forgotten Cecil's winks and signs of the previous evening.

'Don't y'u know?' replied Sarah. 'All him can do is to worry him aunt schoolgal. Rachel wouldn't even look 'pon him. Him face favour yabba-pot!'^[8]

^[8] A native earthenware pot, round and ugly.

Jane laughed; yet felt no displeasure because Cecil was devouring her with his glances. At the back of her mind too she had a kind of suspicion that Sarah disliked Cecil because he had never paid her the compliment of his attentions.

‘Him doan’t gone to church wid him sister,’ said Jane. ‘Him ever go out on Sunday?’

‘Yes, but him won’t go out if him can talk to you. Dat is why him stop home to-day. His aunt sleeping inside, an’ if I ever move from dis spot him will come straight up to you.’

Being convinced of this, and wishing to spite Cecil, Sarah would not move from the place where she sat; but this did not in the least disconcert the young gentleman. He lounged about the yard, smoking one cigarette after another with evident enjoyment; he was a great smoker and a connoisseur in the matter of cigarettes. He used to boast that he had studied the cigarette question very carefully; and it was, indeed, one of the very few questions he had ever studied. He knew every brand of cigarette manufactured in Jamaica. After sampling all, he had come to the conclusion that White Seals were the best, and on this point he was always ready to hold forth at any length, and to give voluminous reasons for the faith that was in him.

‘A White Seal cigarette,’ he would say, ‘is strong without being rank, pleasant of odour, and satisfying to the smoker’s palate. You get twelve of them for a penny-ha’-penny, and, if you are careful, that will last you a whole day.’ He also contended that the smoking of White Seal cigarettes inculcated the habit of patience; while you watched and waited you could smoke. It was now a staying match between himself and Sarah, of whose feelings towards him he was well aware. He therefore enlisted his favourite cigarettes against her in this battle of patience; it was White Seal against Sarah, and he backed the former to win. It did.

Doggedly did Sarah sit there, but as doggedly did Cecil loaf about. Cigarette after cigarette he consumed, and the wind blew the smoke of defiance in Sarah’s direction. Sarah had something to do inside the house; so, at last, she was obliged to rise reluctantly and, so to speak, surrender the position to Cecil.

‘You watch an’ see ef him doan’t come up an’ talk to you,’ she said to Jane, as, eyeing the young man malevolently, she walked away.

It was as she prophesied. No sooner had Sarah disappeared from sight than Cecil turned to what he considered ‘business.’ He strolled nonchalantly in Jane’s direction, and after glancing at the house to see whether any one was likely to observe him, he remarked:—

‘How y’u getting on, Jane?’

Though she might discuss him freely at a distance, Jane felt in his presence something of the awe that overcame her when she was speaking to

her mistress. He was Mrs Mason's nephew, he was Mr Cecil, he was the young ladies' brother—the gentleman of the house. He was her young master, too, and Sarah had told her that another girl had been abruptly dismissed for being rude to him. If she were dismissed she should not know what to do, for she was in a big, strange city and she had not a friend in it.

Timidly she answered Cecil—'I gotten on well, sah.'

'That's right,' said Cecil heartily, as though he had contributed considerably to her well-being and progress. 'A fine-looking gurl like you is bound to get on well. Where you come from?'

'Mount Salas, sah.'

'I don't know it,' replied Cecil reflectively; though his lack of geographical knowledge was not to be wondered at, seeing that he had never left Kingston once in his life, and regarded books as a superfluity.

'Any more nice-looking gurls up there like you?' was his next question.

Jane answered nothing, but hung her head and smiled. She went on with her work.

'You mustn't be bashful,' said Cecil encouragingly. 'You must talk up. Tell me the truth: you like me?' Jane did not know what reply to give to this question. She dared say neither yes nor no, and could not with truth at that moment have said either. Her heart beat a little quicker, she became more timid. She knew perfectly well what these advances meant, and she was afraid. Just then, hearing Sarah coming out of the house, Cecil hastily stooped down and, throwing threepence in Jane's lap (and pinching her arm incidentally as he straightened himself), he quietly told her to take the money as a present, and strolled off as Sarah came back into the yard. Cecil made some pretence at going to light his cigarette at the kitchen fire, while Sarah laughed scornfully and began to sing, 'It was under de cocoanut-tree, darling,' in a voice full of meaning.

Jane hid the threepenny bit, and truthfully told Sarah what Cecil had said to her.

'Dat's de beginning,' commented Sarah sagaciously. 'But ef I was you I wouldn't boder wid him, for if him aunt ever fine out dat him is talkin' to you, she will ill-treat y'u and turn you away.'

'I not gwine to have noten to do wid him,' Jane declared.

'Y'u right, me child,' agreed Sarah.

CHAPTER VI

SEVERAL days came and went, bringing their little trials and troubles to Jane; but nothing eventful happened. It was a rule of Mrs Mason's establishment that her schoolgirls should not leave the yard after nightfall except on errands, she having strong objections to their 'carrying on' with the youth of the neighbourhood, who, according to her, seemed to have nothing to do but 'carry on' with the girls, with, sometimes, lamentable results. On two occasions, indeed, this worthy lady had been obliged to despatch incontinently to their parents two girls she had brought from the country to work with her, they not having walked strictly in the paths of the righteous.

It was also a principle of Mrs Mason's never to accept responsibility for whatever might befall her schoolgirls. So, when she got rid of those two erring ones, she attributed their sins and wickedness to pure perverseness on their part, arguing sagely that if they had not disobeyed her orders, nothing whatever could have happened to them. It never occurred to her that a life of continuous drudgery might possibly prove irksome to a growing girl; she demanded a high standard of conduct from such, and was invariably scandalised when she found her expectations unfulfilled. This was often; hence, so to speak, Mrs Mason lived in an atmosphere of moral indignation. Believing Jane to be no better than the rest, she strictly forbade her to cross the threshold of the gate after nightfall without permission.

Sarah, being a woman of independent status, could go in and out as she pleased. But Mrs Mason stipulated that she should not remain out later than half-past nine, for, as the lady put it, 'this is not a nager yard, and I will not 'ave any servant doing what they like.' But Sarah honoured this rule in the breach, and, when she was supposed to be in bed, she sometimes even introduced a friend of hers into the premises, sitting with him at the gate until eleven o'clock and later. On the Wednesday night of Jane's second week in Kingston one of these gentlemen called to see Sarah. He intimated his arrival by knocking at the gate very gently at about ten o'clock.

'It's me cousin,' explained Sarah to Jane. 'If Miss Mason ask y'u anyt'ing about me, y'u musn't tell her anybody come to me.' Then, a thought striking her, she invited Jane to go and sit with her and her friend a little while. This Jane gladly consented to do, and for an hour or more the

girls squatted by the gate with the young man, laughing and talking under their breath.

This stolen sweet was very acceptable to Jane, as Sarah had imagined it would be. Sarah, in fact, though she would gladly have wished Jane away, felt that to make her a partner in forbidden actions would be to bind her to silence and co-operation. Presently, she thought, Jane would have male cousins of her own who would come to see her, and thus both of them would enjoy the luxury of visits from affectionate relatives.

Unfortunately the whispering was overheard by Mrs Mason and her nieces. These ladies could not be sure if it were going on in the yard, and they did not care to call out to Sarah at nearly eleven o'clock at night, as that might give the neighbours reason for doubting the superior respectability of the Mason household, a matter of some concern to the family. But the next morning, after the young ladies and Cecil had hurried out to work, Mrs Mason had both Sarah and Jane before her, and taxed them with having entertained friends in her yard at a late hour the night before. As was usual with her, she made a positive statement instead of asking for information on the subject, it being an article of faith with her that all servants were liars, and that only by the assumption of certainty on her part, when she was by no means certain, could she elicit from them any admission of their guilt.

'So this is the way you use me yard!' was her greeting to both the young women. 'You bring you' dirty friends into me place up to twelve o'clock at night, and keep me up and disgrace me house. Now, don't tell me any lie! I not only heard you, but I got out of me bed and saw you; so you can't tell me that nobody came to see you last night!'

Sarah knew that Mrs Mason may have heard but could not possibly have seen them, since only by coming out into the yard could she have done that. She therefore guessed that the lady was setting a trap for her, and before Jane, with her inexperience, could give them both away, she swept rapidly to the rescue.

'Y'u know, Miss Mason,' she protested, 'y'u shouldn't do that. It's not becausen I are poor that you should teck such an exvantage of me to use me in dat way; for y'u never catch me tellin' you any lie yet, ma'am, and you mus' know dat I wouldn't bring anybody into you' yard, for I know y'u don't like it. I am a female dat don't like anybody to talk to me an' cuss me 'bout her yard, for, after all, de street is for everybody dat pay taxes, an' I can go out into de street if I wants to meet me frien's. You shouldn't say such a thing, ma'am; fo' Jane here can tell y'u dat from de time I wash me foot last night, about half-past nine, till dis marning, I don't get up out of me bed. If y'u doubts me y'u can ask Jane, for God know I am not a liard, an' I

wouldn't like anybody call me one, for I might get ignorant, and be rude to dem.'

Thus Sarah rapidly, and with the intention of giving Jane her cue. The latter took it, and having now become a little accustomed to Mrs Mason and her methods, answered boldly enough.

'It wusn't we, ma'am, you did hear last night, for after I say me prayers, I fall asleep till dis morning, but while I was sleeping I did t'ink I hear a noise, but being I was sleeping, I couldn't tell what it was, and— —'

Here her imagination failed her, and she ended on a weak and uncompleted sentence. Sarah felt that Jane had gone too far in her effort to give an explanation of the noise complained of by Mrs Mason, for that suggested an excuse. This was Mrs Mason's own opinion. She went straight to the point.

'See here, Jane, I suppose y'u take me for a fool, eh?' she demanded.

'No, ma'am,' stammered Jane, startled that Mrs Mason should have thought her guilty of so terrible a piece of presumption.

'It is evident that you do take me for a fool,' Mrs Mason blazed out, 'if y'u think I could believe one word you 'ave said. I see what it is. You following the example of this wretch Sarah, who will insist upon bringing her nasty frien's and companions into me place; and y'u dare to tell me a lie to me face! Drat you' farredness!' and, carried away by anger, Mrs Mason dealt the girl a sharp box on her ear.

Jane's hands flew to her head to ward off another blow, and she backed away from her irate mistress precipitately, emitting a howl as she did so.

'Stop you' noise!' cried Mrs Mason, pursuing her, 'stop you' noise in me yard! You mus' be think you are in you' mother's place! Stop you' noise, I say, stop it!' and she gave Jane another box. This not hurting the girl overmuch, she thought it wise to repress any cry of pain, and thus obey her mistress's order to make no noise in her yard.

But Jane's silence under this last blow was attributed by Mrs Mason to an obstinate and rebellious spirit. For though she had ordered Jane to cease making a noise, she yet wanted her to give outward and visible sign and vocal expression of suffering, this being the only way in which (in Mrs Mason's view) she could expiate her crime of the night before. So she hit the girl again, and still Jane repressed any sound. This was too much for Mrs Mason. Jane, she felt, was openly defying her. She now caught hold of her by the arm and dealt her box after box, uttering with every blow the command, 'Cry, I say! Cry! Cry! I tell you, cry!' Thus adjured, and smarting from pain, Jane sent forth scream after scream, at the pitch of her voice, and

once again Mrs Mason commanded her to cease her 'nager noise' immediately, on pain of instantly being turned out of the yard.

How to obey such contradictory orders would have puzzled a wiser person than Jane. What she did was to break away from Mrs Mason and run into the room occupied by herself and Sarah. Her mistress did not pursue her, but turned to vent her displeasure on Sarah, who now stood waiting, defiance in her face, to hear what Mrs Mason might have to say to her.

'You are a forward, worthless woman,' shrieked Mrs Mason at her. 'You are not only corrupt yourself, but you trying to corrupt that little girl. You are a liar if you tell me you didn't 'ave company here las' night!'

Sarah felt that the term of her service with Mrs Mason was speedily drawing to an abrupt termination, and at once made up her mind to give word for word, and so leave, at the least, with all the honours of war.

'Who you callin' liard?' she insolently asked. 'Y'u better call you' two brown niece liard, or your mamparla nephew. You is a liard you'self if y'u say y'u did see me last night. What sort of hie you must be 'ave to see t'rough board and brick! Y'u tell me about me corrupt? Y'u corrupt you'self! In fact, y'u better mind you' two niece, and you' "Mister Cecil," who can't meck even you' schoolgal stay in your employments in peace! I never work wid such a disgrunted female like you yet! Y'u call you'self a lady, but I don't know what kind o' lady you can be when you always countin' how much piece of yam come into de table, an' always followin' up you' sarvant. De trute is dat people like you shouldn't 'ave sarvant at all! I know I am black, an' I know that God meck two colour, black an' white, but it must be de devil meck brown people, for dem is neider black nor white! In fact, y'u better pay me at once an' let me go. I not stayin' here any longer. Pay me me wages, an' meck me leave you' yard.'

'Pay *you*?' yelled Mrs Mason at the top of her voice. 'Pay *you*? I will kick you out, that's what I will do, you impudent dog! If y'u don't leave me yard at once, I will send for a policeman.'

'Who you gwine to send for policeman for?' demanded Sarah, also at the top of her voice, and with arms akimbo. 'Me? Y'u must be drunk! Look on de mallata [mulatto] 'ooman how she stand! Y'u t'ink I am a schoolgal, no? Y'u t'ink you can teck an exvantage of me? If it wasn't for one t'ing, I would a hole you in here, an' gie y'u such a beaten dat you wouldn't walk for a week. Y'u better pay me, for I tell y'u I am gotten very ignorant. Don't aggravate me, Miss Mason, don't aggravate me, or I will get meself in trouble! Pay me me money, ma'am, an' meck me go.'

Such quarrels were common enough in Mrs Mason's experience. She had fought many a servant before. She was not daunted. She stood her ground boldly and repeated her order that Sarah should leave the yard immediately. Sarah replied by going to the door of her room and planting herself there.

Mrs Mason was equal to the emergency.

'Jane!' she called peremptorily.

The girl came out timidly, brushing past Sarah, who took no notice of her.

'Yes, ma'am,' she answered tearfully.

'Go at once and call me a policeman.'

Sarah laughed scornfully as Jane hurried away, and for the next two or three minutes the two combatants faced one another glaring, no word being uttered on either side. Then the gate opened and Jane came in, followed by the policeman, a young black man of intelligent appearance, who inquiringly looked at Mrs Mason as he entered.

'Hofficer,' said she with dignity, 'I send for you to remove that woman, who has been abusing me and using the most shameful expressions in me yard. Please turn her out of this yard at once!'

'What shameful expression I use to y'u?' demanded Sarah.

'I am not having any further talk with you,' said Mrs Mason. 'I beg you take that woman out me yard, policeman.'

'Why don't you leave de lady yard?' asked the policeman, approaching Sarah.

'Because she won't pay me me wages, which she want to tief,' replied Sarah. 'I don't want to stay in 'er yard, but I not gwine widout me wages.'

'Y'u 'ave any wages for her, ma'am?' the policeman asked Mrs Mason.

'She is not entitled to any,' asserted that lady. 'If I told you what that woman 'ave been doing you would agree with me. Just let her leave me yard at once.'

'See here,' said Sarah to the policeman, 'I am workin' here, an' she tell a lie 'pon me just now, an' nearly half-murder 'er schoolgal. She abuse me an' want me to leave me pay, for she wants to tief it; but I not leavin' dis place if I don't get it. I don't do noten. I don't disgrace meself, so she can't put me in charge. Beg you tell her so for me, sah.'

'I am waiting for you to put her out,' said Mrs Mason, ignoring Sarah and addressing herself to the policeman.

‘Well,’ replied the latter hesitatingly, ‘y’u better pay her an’ let her go. She is workin’ here, an’ I can’t put her out if you have anything for her. She is at present peaceful,’ he added, with the air of a judge.

‘What you say?’ asked Mrs Mason, astounded at the attitude taken up by the policeman.

‘That’s the law,’ he explained. ‘She are entitled to be here, for she is workin’ here. If she abuse you, you can brought her up. You have any witness, ma’am?’

‘I am not talking about witness, me good man,’ said Mrs Mason scornfully. ‘I couldn’t go into a Court House with a dirty woman like that. I just want her to leave me yard.’

‘See here, Miss Mason,’ said Sarah quickly. ‘I tell y’u not to use me, for I will get ignorant again. Don’t call me a dirty woman. Y’u better pay me! I don’t want to get meself in trouble!’

‘Yes, you better pay her, ma’am,’ advised the policeman soothingly.

But Mrs Mason felt bitterly the humiliation of defeat. She attributed it entirely to the ignorance of the policeman. ‘Every nager is a nager,’ she muttered loudly enough for him to hear, then turned inside to calculate exactly how much Sarah was entitled to for four days’ work. She returned with the money and threw it at the woman. Sarah picked it up contemptuously and laughed at the top of her voice, went into her room and gathered up her few belongings, then fired a parting shot at Mrs Mason.

‘De mallata [mulatto] ’ooman vex because she can’t tief me,’ she said, and flounced out of the yard, the policeman following her. Mrs Mason watched them both go, then turned to instruct Jane in the duties of the day.

CHAPTER VII

MRS MASON realised that, with Sarah gone, she was now entirely dependent upon Jane for the performance of the household work until she could get another servant. She therefore, though still boiling over with rage, immediately adopted a maternal attitude towards Jane, and delivered to that erring girl a little homily that could not have been bettered by the kindest of mistresses.

‘You see, Jane, ’ow you have made me lose me temper?’ she began. ‘Do you think I find any satisfaction in chastising you? Do you believe your mother would be pleased if I write to her and tell her ’ow you get up late in the night to carry on with worthless young men?’

Jane, remembering her parents’ admonition as to ‘keeping herself up,’ hung down her head. Mrs Mason observed the movement and knew at once that she was on the right track.

‘In fact, I think I ought to write to you’ parents at once and tell them about your behaviour. I ’ave taken you under my protection to train you and bring you up as a good servant, and nobody can say that you ’ave been treated unkindly since you been here. An’ I warned you about Sarah. Yet look what you went and do last night. I will ’ave to write you’ mother and tell her the whole thing. Perhaps I better send you back at the same time I send the letter.’

On hearing this, Jane began to cry quietly. The thought of going home in disgrace, with the censure and ridicule that would attend such a home-coming, frightened her desperately.

‘I beg parding, ma’am, I won’t do it again,’ she sobbed, and Mrs Mason made a show of relenting.

‘Very well, then,’ she said, ‘I will give you a chance this time. But the next time I ’ave any reason to complain about you, back you go! Now come with me to the kitchen an’ let me show you what you ’ave to do.’

Jane followed meekly, very glad to be let off on such easy terms. She obeyed orders willingly, Mrs Mason herself assisting, and she was tired to death by the time that Cecil and the girls came home for dinner.

At dinner the events of the morning were related with point and emphasis by Mrs Mason, in the hearing of Jane.

‘Well, what a set!’ exclaimed Cynthia. ‘I don’t know what’s coming to the servants in these days! Well!’

‘It’s the education they getting,’ said Mrs Mason severely. ‘They go to free schools, an’ we ’ave to pay for their schooling, and all they can do with it is to forge people’s name and abuse their betters. That’s what the Government doing now; educating all these people instead of teaching them ’ow to work. If you ’ad ’eard that woman abuse me this morning and talk about her rights and the law, you would wonder. An’ the policeman agree with her, too!’

‘You should ’ave pitched her out the place,’ said Emma indignantly. ‘Forward wretch! I wish I was here when she was going on wid her impertinance!’ When Emma became excited, her pronunciation left much to be desired.

‘But you couldn’t go with a woman like that,’ said Cynthia. ‘You couldn’t fight her. Best thing was to make her leave.’

‘Yes. I paid her and ordered her out, and I ’ave told Jane that the next time she be ’ave in that way, I am sending her home. I am not going to ’ave any skylarking in my yard at night.’

‘Jane ought to be ashamed of herself,’ said Cynthia. ‘She look like a decent gurl, and she is very young. What she want with young men?’

‘That’s what I ask her,’ replied her aunt. ‘I hope you understand that, Jane?’

The girl declared that she did, though the question was a trifle ambiguous. This was, she took it, another way of advising her to keep perfectly ‘straight.’

Later on, a couple of the young ladies’ friends called to see them, and Mrs Mason, Emma, and Cynthia sat with the visitors in the drawing-room. Their conversation ran chiefly upon servants, their wickedness, and their general unobservance of the moral law; and, of course, Mrs Mason again related her latest adventure with one of the species, and gave her hearers the impression that she would certainly have been murdered that morning had not the policeman appeared at the most critical moment of Sarah’s attack.

Jane sat at the threshold of her room, more lonely and miserable than she had ever felt since she had come to Kingston. After all, Sarah had been a companion, and both of them had been united in a common dislike of Mrs Mason. Now she had no one to talk to, and only that morning she had learnt that Mrs Mason’s threats of corporeal punishment were no idle words. She envied Sarah. That indomitable young woman had abused her mistress, defied arrest, and had gone about her business; but she, Jane, could only

return to the country if she left her employer, and even that would not be easy to do. Then, it was not pleasant to sleep in the room alone. Ghosts existed; she knew that beyond a doubt. And who was to say that they would not trouble her now that she had to sleep by herself? If she could run away to some other place . . . but no, that was not to be thought of just now. Later on, when she knew Kingston better, she would do so; but, for the present, she must stay where she was. Perhaps the new servant Mrs Mason would employ would be friendly. In the meantime. . . .

The stealthy approach of some one caused her to look up quickly. It was Cecil, who was dressed for going out, and who might have seemed to any one to be intending to leave the yard through the gate. This was the impression he wished to convey, and leave the yard he certainly and suddenly would if a third party should unexpectedly come upon the scene. His excuse was ready: he did not care to pass through the drawing-room while the visitors were there. A quick change of direction, however, brought him to where Jane sat, and he patted her on the cheek with his hand.

‘I hear you get a beating this morning,’ he began sympathetically. ‘It’s a shame. If I had been here I would have begged for you.’

To this speech Jane returned no answer, not knowing what to say.

‘It won’t happen again if I am here next time,’ said Cecil grandly. ‘But why did you talk to the man who came here. Him didn’t come to you?’

‘No, sah, him come to Sarah, and she tell me to come and keep her company.’

‘Tcho! you shouldn’t have listened to her. You don’t want that sort of company. A gurl like you shouldn’t bother with those come-around [common] fellows. If you want a friend you should take a chap like me. Eh? What you say?’

Jane had nothing to say, but hung her head in silence. Now that Sarah was gone she had no courage to repulse a young man who was Mrs Mason’s nephew, and who, she was well aware, might make life very unpleasant for her by complaining of her to his aunt.

‘What you say?’ he asked again.

‘I don’t say nothing, Mister Cecil; you’ aunt — —’

‘What about me aunt?’

‘Mind she come out here an’ see y’u, sah.’

‘Well, what about that? I am not afraid of her,’ he replied boldly, while he hastily glanced round to see if there was any sign of the lady for whom he professed such contempt.

‘But she will blame me if she see me talkin’ to you,’ urged Jane. ‘She beat me dis morning already.’

‘She can’t beat y’u again, though, not while I am here. Pooh! you too coward. What y’u do with that money I give you on Sunday?’

‘I buy something wid it, sah.’

‘Well, here is a sixpence. Get up an’ take it.’ As Jane got up to take the sixpenny piece, Cecil slipped it into her hand and put his arm round her waist.

‘You mustn’t be afraid,’ he advised her. ‘If me aunt even turn you away I would look after you. You think I couldn’t do it?’

‘No,’ said Jane, not having Sarah’s knowledge of the young gentleman, and therefore not altogether sharing her contemptuous opinion of him.

‘Then what y’u afraid of?’

‘Y’u better go inside, Mister Cecil,’ was Jane’s answer, insistently given.

But he took no notice of her advice; he concluded that it was only fear that made her ask him to go away.

A thought struck him. ‘Wait here till I come,’ he told her, and went towards the house. He passed inside, tiptoeing, and satisfied himself that his sisters and aunt were all busy in the drawing-room. Indeed, at that moment one of the guests was preparing to sing, and Cecil knew from experience that the song would be followed by several others, all sung by voices of varying degrees of loudness. He went back to Jane.

‘I want you to fill me pitcher with water,’ he told her, and went into his apartment. She followed him, took the pitcher, filled it at the pipe, and brought it back. As she put it down he seized her arm and asked her if she didn’t love him. She stood stock still, her heart beating wildly. ‘A regular country girl,’ thought Cecil triumphantly.

Jane went about her work with a frightened, subdued demeanour the next day. She blundered more than usual, but this did not draw upon her any extraordinary censure from Mrs Mason, for the latter had not yet secured a servant to take Sarah’s place. Jane avoided looking any one in the face, and when Cecil came home she never glanced in his direction once. There being no visitors that night, Cecil did not endeavour to talk to her in the yard, and as soon as she could she went into her room and remained there till it was time to go to sleep.

She felt as though she had been a very long time in Kingston instead of but a couple of weeks. Such a number of things had happened! Six months

in the country could not have brought so many changes in her life. The advice and admonition of her parents, of Daddy Buckram, the threats and scolding of her mistress—all these had availed her little. She had not ‘kept herself up’ as she had promised to do. She felt ashamed. And yet, strange to say, she also felt more self-reliant now. She was determined to avoid Cecil, whom she did not like.

The next day Mrs Mason employed a new servant, who stipulated for three shillings and sixpence per week. Mrs Mason agreed to pay this reluctantly, and only after much argument. The new servant was a woman of about forty-five years of age, and by no means prepared, as she showed at the start, to deal with Jane on a footing of friendship and equality. She was a married woman, her husband being away in Colon. She agreed to sleep at Mrs Mason’s, and, as she did not go out often at night, and never for long, Cecil had no opportunity for surreptitious conversations with the schoolgirl. This annoyed him immensely, and he soon had one or two quarrels with Amanda, as the new servant was named. But she never took him very seriously, and his aunt saw clearly that he was in the wrong whenever he complained of Amanda. Cecil considered himself a much ill-used person, and also unlucky. Thus two months passed away, Jane gradually becoming more efficient, and thus escaping continuous blame. But her work also increased, for Mrs Mason looked upon idleness in a servant as a terrible sin.

Now and then, of course, Jane broke things, and was made to pay for them out of her shilling a week. And she was always forgetting something. But even her mistress came to see that she was a decent, hard-working girl, and appreciated the fact. Of course, she never told Jane so, for she held praise to be demoralising. She showed her appreciation by giving the girl tasks which she would not ordinarily have expected a schoolgirl to perform.

In those two months Jane learnt a great deal about Kingston. At the end of that time she knew the principal streets and could easily find her way about. She had been allowed to go to church on two or three occasions, she had taken a ride or two upon the cars, she had made a few friends in the neighbourhood. She had admirers, of course, and chaffed these with spirit when they came about her. She would linger to have a chat with some one she knew when she was sent out to buy things at the market or the shop, and she grew more self-assertive with every week that passed. She would answer Mrs Mason now, when that lady blamed her, and Mrs Mason did not venture to strike her again, for she knew her value and was aware that the girl would be able to get another place. Jane had begun to think so too. Whenever her mistress quarrelled with her now she made up her mind to run away. Some day, she felt, she would. But the day had not yet come.

Her feeling of depression at not having kept her promise to her parents had passed away very rapidly. As a matter of fact, a few days after her memorable talk alone with Cecil she was her normal self again. It never occurred to her to worry her mind with moral reflections. She avoided Cecil because she did not like him. It was one of the misfortunes of that youth that he did not inspire much liking or respect in any one, though he was perfectly persuaded that Jane regarded him with awe. He waited for an opportunity to talk intimately with her once more. In the meantime he devoutly hoped that his aunt, who never kept a servant for much longer than four months, would get rid of Amanda, or make the latter's life so intolerable that she would leave of her own free will. Then once again he would be able to make love to Jane.

CHAPTER VIII

THE third month of her career in Kingston had passed when, one forenoon, in coming in from the shop to which she had been sent by her mistress, Jane was greeted by her mother and Kate, the latter being one of the girls with whom, it will be remembered, she had discussed her prospects in Kingston on the day before she left the country for the city.

‘Hi!’ she exclaimed, genuinely surprised. ‘I dream of you two a week ago, but I never expect to see such a person like you. How y’u do, mumma? How y’u do, Kate?’

The mother rose from the doorstep on which she had been sitting, and shook hands cordially with her daughter, Kate following her example. Mrs Mason, standing at the door, beamed upon the group as though conscious that the happiness of this reunion was entirely due to her forethought and arrangement.

‘Well, Jane,’ said her mother, ‘I more than glad to see y’u. How y’u gotten on? But I needn’t ask you dat, for you’ schoolmissis tell me all about y’u already. As I was tellin’ her before y’u come in, I did know from de first dat she was de proper sort of lady to look after y’u and see you brought up properly. Yes, ma’am’ (turning to Mrs Mason), ‘I told her fader so de very day I did bring Jane to y’u to show her to y’u. She is improve already, an’, wid de help of God, will get on nicely. But y’u know she is growin’, ma’am? Yes, ma’am, she is really growin’. She will soon meck me feel small. Kingston an’ good treatment agree wid her.’

Mrs Mason immediately seized the opportunity to comment in a modest way upon her own virtues.

‘I am doing the best I can for Jane, Mrs Burrell,’ she said, with unctuous rectitude. ‘Perhaps she don’t appreciate it, but I know you do, for if I didn’t know the sort of person you are, I wouldn’t ’ave taken Jane at all. Girls don’t understand the feelings of we established people, Mrs Burrell, an’ that is why when y’u speak to them for their own good, they think you are unkind. I always say to her: “Jane, you’ mother expect me to train you decently and to see you grow up to be a credit to her, and therefore, though you don’t understand me now when I speak to you, I know you’ mother will appreciate it.” Don’t I tell you so, Jane?’

There was no way of avoiding the trap, though Jane saw it plainly. 'Yes, ma'am,' she said, knowing that by so saying she had given Mrs Mason a certificate of character which the lady did not, in her opinion, at all deserve. Mrs Mason, full of knowledge as to the ways and wiles of schoolgirls when their family came to see them, had adopted this method of demanding from them open testimony as to her care and treatment of them when some responsible relative of theirs was present; after that, she usually arranged that the girl should not have any time alone with her visitor 'to carry lie and story,' as she put it. When Jane had caught sight of her mother on coming in, her first impulse had been to seize the opportunity to tell her of Mrs Mason's character; but that astute lady, by appealing to the mother and laying down the dictum that 'established people' differed in their views of what was right and proper from girls like Jane, had won the old woman completely over. This was apparent from the next thing the old woman said.

'Jane will has to appreciate y'u, ma'am, for I put her wid y'u, an' you is suppose to speak to her if y'u see her doin' anything y'u don't like. And y'u is even suppose to chastise her if she don't obeys y'u; for we are not to spare de rod and spile de child. Jane know that when she was at home, neider her fader nor me tolerated rudeness, so she will has to hear you just as if it was me, for I put my aut'ority in your han's.'

To give Jane's mother her due, she was the kindest of parents, and she usually left Jane much to her own devices. She, however, for the purpose of pleasing Mrs Mason, and also because she wished to show her own conception of what elderly people were entitled to expect from the young, spoke in affected tones of severity, thus practically giving Mrs Mason a warrant to deal with Jane as she should think fit.

But here the girl found courage.

'I do me work, an' I don't do noten for anybody to beat me for,' she said, with a note of defiance in her voice. She was not so glad to see her mother now. She felt that one who should have been her friend had gone completely over to the enemy.

'Yes,' Mrs Mason hastened to admit. 'I couldn't say I think Jane a bad gurl, Mrs Burrell. I couldn't say that at all!'

'I bring a little present for you' schoolmissis, Jane,' her mother continued, now quite satisfied that the relations existing between Mrs Mason and the girl were all that could be desired, and anxious that her daughter should know that something from the country had been brought for the child in Kingston. For the present to which Mrs Burrell alluded, though nominally intended for Mrs Mason, was chiefly meant for Jane. The object was to show her that she had not been forgotten at home. Mrs Mason knew the custom

well; many was the occasion on which she had received similar presents from mothers of her schoolgirls, very little of which had ever been given to those girls, for did they not always have enough?

Jane would much have preferred if her mother had brought her portion of the gift separately, for she shrewdly suspected that Mrs Mason would regard the whole of it as hers. She glanced at the small heap of yams, potatoes, and ripe bananas which still lay at the threshold of the door; seeing this glance, Mrs Mason stooped down and with reckless generosity broke off two of the bananas and handed one each to the girls, saying at the same time to Jane:

‘You better take you’ friend into the room with you, if you want to talk to her. I wish to ’ave a little conversation with you’ mother.’

Jane, followed by Kate, went to the room, and, when the door was closed—

‘How is things?’ eagerly asked Kate, who was deeply impressed with this her first visit to Kingston, and wanted to know more of city life.

‘I caan’t tell y’u, me child,’ said Jane piteously. ‘It’s de devil. If you ever see how me work from morning to night you would sorry for me. You hear how dat ole beast tell mumma how she look after me? Not a word of it true. She is a regular ole screech!’

‘Lard!’ exclaimed Kate. ‘Y’u mus’ be sarry y’u come to Kingstown!’

‘Well, not exactly,’ Jane confessed. ‘It livelier here dan in de country, an’ I more use to it now. But I don’t t’ink I goin’ to stop wid Miss Mason long. I can’t stand her!’

‘I wanted was to come to Kingstown meself,’ Kate confessed, ‘and as you’ moder was comin’ last night, I beg her meck me walk wid her. I like de place, ma’am! My! it big an’ full of people! But I wouldn’t like to come here an’ have to work like you say you workin’. Where you gwine to go when y’u leave here?’

‘I don’t know yet. I don’t meck up me mind. But you don’t tell me anyt’ing about me friends at home. How them getten on? Them doan’t send no message for me?’

‘Yes,’ Kate hastened to answer, ‘all de buoy send dem love, and Celes say to tell y’u dat she will come an’ see y’u if she come to town. But why y’u never write we?’

‘I have no time, me love, I gots to work too hard. But y’u t’ink I doan’t miss y’u? I miss y’u for true! If some of you could come an’ live in town, dat would be all right.’

‘P’rhaps it will happen,’ said Kate hopefully. ‘Who is to tell? But y’u mean to say y’u doan’t have no friend here?’

‘What sort of friend y’u mean?’

‘Female; y’u got any oder?’

‘No. But I meck one or two gurl frien’s since I come here.’

‘But think Celes did say dat Kingston have such a lot of nice young man?’

‘So-so; but being I workin’ here wid dis ole ’ooman, I caan’t meck any acquaintanceship wid any dat is worth while.’

‘Tcho!’ exclaimed Kate reflectively. ‘I doan’t see de use of livin’ in town ef all y’u have to do is to work, an’ y’u can’t enjie you’self. It dull up at home, but y’u doan’t have to kill you’self.’

‘I couldn’t come back home,’ said Jane decisively. ‘I get too use to Kingston already. Besides, doan’t I tell y’u I not gwine to stay wid Miss Mason much longer? Now dat I been here an’ have experience, an’ know a few frien’s, I can make me own way. To tell y’u de trute, too, Kate, Miss Mason have a nephew dat boder me all de time when him have a chance. Him use to talk to me when I come here firs’, but I keep clear of him now. Sometimes y’u see him come out into de yard, forming as if him is lookin’ fo’ somet’ing, but I know it’s me him lookin’ for. Him dodge all ’bout, meanwhile I in my room watchin’ him. I doan’t even meck him see me! Ef I did know better when I come here firs’, I wouldn’t meck him talk to me at all.’

Kate looked at her inquiringly, with something like comprehension in her eyes.

‘I was a fool,’ Jane continued confidentially. ‘But, of course, what to do?’

Kate, who could not possibly claim the right to be censorious in matters of conduct, having had her own experiences long before Jane, laughed a little and then seemed inclined to make inquiries about Cecil. Jane, on the other hand, was still eager to learn more about her friends at home.

She called by name all the persons she had known in the village, was glad to learn that none of them had died, was deeply interested in a scandalous story in which Celestina and the brown shopkeeper figured prominently, and hoped that her brother would succeed in Panama, whither he had gone.

In the meantime Mrs Mason kept Mrs Burrell occupied, offered her some refreshment, assured her repeatedly that Jane, after a couple of years

with her, would be a wonder in the way of servants, and then began to look dissatisfied when the old woman showed signs of out-staying her welcome.

A long pause occurring in the conversation between the two, Jane's mother perceived that Mrs Mason had nothing more to say to her, and rose to go. Mrs Mason called to Jane and Kate, and the two girls came out of the room.

'Your mother going, Jane,' she said, 'an' I tell her she must come back soon to see y'u.'

'Yes, ma'am, thank you, ma'am,' said Mrs Burrell, curtsying. 'Now, Jane, y'u mus' behave you'self an' meck you' schoolmistress give y'u a good name. And keep yu'self up like you been doin'. Good-bye, Misses.'

Mrs Mason graciously shook hands with her and nodded to Kate. Jane also shook hands with the two, then followed her mother to the gate, Mrs Mason's watchful eye upon her all the while. The girl saw her mother and her friend go, then turned back into the yard with a heavy heart.

Her mother and herself had, in a way, become strangers. This she felt more than thought; for such a proposition she never would have been able to formulate clearly in her mind. Her mother's way of looking at things seemed more or less that of Mrs Mason, and between Mrs Mason and herself there was a great gulf fixed. Mrs Mason looked upon her as a little servant-girl merely, but Jane felt she was an individual with feelings, desires, and rights of her own. Her mother had left her entirely in Mrs Mason's hands, and there she was perfectly determined not to remain. If she went away, her mother and father would probably blame her, but this she could not help. Kingston was big, she had become accustomed to it, she would probably be able to make her way in it as other people were doing. One by one the ties that bound her to the past were being loosened, unknown to herself. What she did feel was that she was free to do as she pleased.

CHAPTER IX

IT was some three weeks after Jane's mother had been to see her that what Cecil had long hoped for happened at last. Amanda had given a fair amount of satisfaction during her first month or so, and Mrs Mason had begun to congratulate herself that Sarah's place had been taken by a responsible person who, being a married woman and of comparatively advanced age, did not need to seek pleasure in the company of indifferent young men. But after a while she began to discover that respectability has its disadvantages. For not for a single moment did it appear that Amanda could forget she was a married woman, and, as such, entitled to much respect and consideration. If she treated Jane as a being of infinite inferiority, she also exacted respectful consideration from Mrs Mason herself. As she became more accustomed to the establishment, she offered suggestions as to what should and should not be done, contradicted Mrs Mason, ignored Cecil entirely, and did not pay any particular attention to the young ladies. When six weeks had elapsed, she demanded a larger wage; three shillings and sixpence a week being altogether too small an amount to keep her, as she averred. This shocked Mrs Mason immensely; she had never in her life paid more than three shillings a week to any servant. Yet she was obliged to yield, for servants' wages were gradually rising in Kingston, owing (according to Mrs Mason's explanation) to the amount of unnecessary education which the people were receiving from the Government. Amanda asked for a shilling a week more. After arguing the matter with her for two days, Mrs Mason agreed upon a compromise of sixpence. But in the argument some straight talk had taken place between both parties, and this had not served to promote cordial relations between them.

A few weeks later Amanda gave further offence by insisting that she should have her two Sundays in the month, as agreed upon when she first came to work with Mrs Mason. This the latter considered most unreasonable. It is true she had mentioned 'every other Sunday' as belonging to the servant, but she did not expect the concession to be insisted on as a right, or even taken advantage of to any considerable extent. As she could not deny that she had told Amanda she could have two Sundays a month, she took refuge in 'throwing words on her,' a process which Amanda understood perfectly, it forming part of the diplomatic correspondence

between most persons in Jamaica. Thus one Saturday night, when Amanda reminded her that she would not be at work the next day, she replied:—

‘All right, Amanda. I hope goin’ to church will do you good. Everybody go to church now; in fact, the church is making ladies and gentlemen of everybody. It don’t prevent people from lying and stealing, though! If you were only to think of one thing, and not of another, you would wonder why anybody go to church at all, the little good it’s doin’ them.’

‘Do y’u means me, Mrs Mason?’ asked Amanda with tremendous dignity, the dignity of a married woman who was also connected with a church.

‘You? Why, what make you think so, me good soul? I suppose I am entitled to talk in my own house?’

‘I not sayin’ y’u not entitle to talk, ma’am; but your word sound very funny after I tell y’u I am not comin’ to-morrow. I am used to going to me church to worship me God, and nobody can say dat I act in any way to disgrace me connection. Dat is why I ask y’u de question.’

‘Well, Amanda,’ said Mrs Mason, ‘you are a very funny woman. If the cap didn’t fit you, why should you wear it?’

‘But hexcuse me, ma’am; y’u saying some very funny t’ings to-night,’ returned Amanda. ‘You’ word seem to have two meanin’s. Ef you doan’t satisfy wid me, y’u can tell me so, an’ I won’t bodder come back Monday mornin’. But y’u musn’t throw words upon me.’

‘Look here, Amanda,’ replied Mrs Mason, with just a suggestion of irritability in her voice, ‘I am not prepared to ’ave any talk with anybody to-night. If you don’t want to come back on Monday, you needn’t come back. I am not telling y’u not to come back. You ’ave no right to pick up me words like that. When I address meself to you, then it is time for you to answer me; but not before.’

As this was, in some sort, a withdrawal of the remarks of which Amanda had complained, she pretended to be satisfied. Yet, being human, and taking a natural satisfaction in her victory, she could not refrain on her part from giving expression to her feelings. ‘Moses dead, but God remain,’ she said to no one in particular as she moved away, thus intimating that if she left Mrs Mason she would easily obtain other employment. Mrs Mason heard, and a little later on she remarked to her nieces and nephew,—

‘I can see that Amanda is not goin’ to suit me much longer. She wanted to be rude to-night, but I keep me temper an’ let her say what she like. But I don’t intend to put up with her insolence again. I would have sent her right away; but I know it is not easy to get a servant just when y’u want one, so I

will quietly look out for one, an' then bundle that woman out me yard. I will have a little patience and bear with her a little more.'

'She told me yesterday that she hear from her 'usband,' said Cynthia. 'I suppose he must be send something for her, that's why she so independent.'

'Yes, that must be it,' agreed Mrs Mason. 'When them have 'usbands you can't say a word to them, though I really don't see why they bother married, for they are always leaving their 'usbands, or their 'usbands leaving them. Just as well they don't get married.'

This was a common remark of Mrs Mason's, and yet, as she invariably condemned the illicit relationships of the working classes most vigorously, it was difficult to see how she could reconcile with such condemnation her general attitude towards their marriages. It seemed that her ideal for them was that they should all be celibates, religious without going too often to church, and hard-working without any expectation of liberal pay. As no domestic she had ever known had ever accepted that ideal, or appeared at all willing to do so, the servant problem was to her mind insoluble, and servants were a race of beings who had come into the world for the purpose of tormenting the lives of persons of a better class.

Cecil listened to this conversation with the utmost satisfaction. He even joined in it.

'What did I tell you?' he asked in the tone of a man who has simply been waiting on time to justify his prognostications. 'I saw from the very first that woman wouldn't suit you; but when I used to complain about her you used to say it was my fault. You know better now.'

Mrs Mason said nothing in reply to this, for she was well aware that when she had supported Amanda the latter had been clearly in the right. Yet now that she had determined that Amanda was impossible, she wished to see nothing good in her. Cecil went to bed that night in a jubilant frame of mind. He felt that Amanda's doom was sealed. Her going was now but a matter of days.

It was a matter of a fortnight. In that interval the relations between mistress and servant had become more strained, for Amanda, having offered to leave and been practically asked to remain, felt that she was mistress of the situation and gave herself airs. She answered Mrs Mason very often now, she argued about everything, she fought for her own way. It was a clash of wills and of temperaments all the time, and while Amanda thought she was establishing her supremacy, Mrs Mason was busy looking out for another servant, and Cecil was doing his best to egg his aunt's anger on.

Then, on a Saturday morning, Mrs Mason's patience was rewarded. A younger woman than Amanda knocked at the gate after the latter had been sent to the market, and inquired whether 'the lady' wanted a servant. Asked what she could do, she replied 'everything,' an answer which suited Mrs Mason well enough, since she did not like her servants to bargain for one particular kind of work only. The woman had one or two good-character papers, but would not consent to sleep on the premises. This was not satisfactory; nevertheless there was Jane, who did sleep, and it was not absolutely necessary that two servants should be within call at night. Mrs Mason agreed to employ her at Amanda's wages; she was to come to work early on Monday morning. The agreement having been signed and sealed, so to speak, Mrs Mason at once prepared the field for the coming battle between herself and Amanda; she planned out her strategy, and, like a wise general, left her tactics to be decided by the exigencies of the moment.

The pride of Amanda was in her Christian character; and comparative honesty she regarded as necessary to the Christian life. Any suspicion as to her purchases, therefore, cut her to the heart, and Mrs Mason knew this. Consequently when the woman returned from marketing, Mrs Mason judiciously took up every article she had bought and weighed it in her hand with a critical and suspicious air. This was not done merely for the purpose of provoking Amanda, for Mrs Mason sincerely believed that dishonesty was the general rule of the average servant's life. She wanted, also, before sending Amanda away, to show her that she thought her no better than any other domestic, in spite of her married state and her church connections.

'What's de matter, ma'am?' demanded Amanda belligerently, as she saw Mrs Mason pause suspiciously over a little heap of sweet potatoes.

'You must know, Amanda,' replied that lady as if surprised at the question. 'Sweet potato is now selling five for a quattie, and you only bring me four. I don't understand what you could have been doing with me money.'

'Well, ma'am, I doan't eat you' money, an' I doan't tief it. An' ef you think y'u can get five sweet potato for a quattie, y'u can send to de market an' try an' get it.'

'Don't answer me in that way, Amanda,' rapped out Mrs Mason sharply. 'If I want to send to the market, I will send to the market. You couldn't prevent me. I say that there is something funny about these potatoes, an' if you don't like what I say, you can lump it. The idea! I am not even to speak now about me own money an' me own provisions. You must be the mistress here!'

‘I couldn’t expect to be mistress in your ’ouse, Mrs Mason,’ retorted Amanda quite as warmly. ‘But I won’t allow you or anybody else to insult me. I am a married woman like you’self, an’ manners due to dog much less to a human being.’

‘I don’t care who manners due to,’ sneered Mrs Mason. ‘All that I know is that you are my servant, an’ you suppose to take orders from me, an’ to give me no back answer. Don’t forget you’self with me!’

‘I couldn’t feget meself wid you, ma’am,’ Amanda fired back at her. ‘Y’u must tell dat sort of thing to Jane, not to me.’

‘I tell it to who I like,’ quickly came Mrs Mason’s rejoinder; ‘whether to you or Jane. I don’t see any difference; you are both my domestic. I will say just what I please to you.’

‘Well, see here, Miss Mason,’ said Amanda, producing her trump card, ‘there is no need fo’ you an’ me to quarrel. Separation can always come. Meck it come at once. I will go my way, and you can get somebody else.’

This speech was precisely what Mrs Mason was waiting for. Her answer was ready.

‘I am not going to pay you before you done your work, I can assure you of that, me good woman. So if you want to go before you finish you’ work, you can go. But not a penny will you get from me. Sarah teach me a good lesson. You not goin’ to teach me another.’

With that she got up and went inside, and for the rest of the day peace reigned between her and Amanda. For the latter, now that Mrs Mason had told her she could go if she wished, after completing her week’s work, was by no means very anxious to be taken at her word. She therefore went about her business rather briskly, gave no back-answers, and did her best to please Mrs Mason. This that lady noticed with a great deal of satisfaction, for she knew that the blow she intended to inflict upon Amanda later on would fall all the more severely because of Amanda’s evident wish to remain. It delighted Mrs Mason’s soul that she should be able to get even with a woman whose ‘impudence,’ as she expressed it, ‘flesh and blood could not bear.’

Night came, and Amanda had finished all her work. She went to Mrs Mason for her wages, and that lady, standing on the low step that led from the yard into the house, carefully counted out four shillings. Had Amanda been observant, she would have noticed that Mrs Mason’s two nieces were standing just behind their aunt, and that her nephew was hovering about with an expectant demeanour. This was a rather unusual assembly, but Amanda felt certain, because Mrs Mason had said nothing more to her after

the quarrel in the morning, that amicable relations had been established once more.

‘Amanda,’ said Mrs Mason calmly, as she handed the woman her pay, ‘it is your Sunday to-morrow, no?’

‘Yes, ma’am,’ said Amanda cheerfully, ‘but if y’u want me I will come.’

This was an extraordinary concession, which Mrs Mason would not have hesitated to take advantage of under different conditions. But now —

‘No, Amanda,’ she replied sweetly, ‘I know you like to go to you’ church, an’ it is right that a decent married woman like you should be in church every Sunday. I wouldn’t make you come here to-morrow for anything.’

Consideration of this kind was puzzling; but still Amanda was unsuspicious.

‘All right, den, ma’am,’ she said. ‘I will come soon Monday morning.’

‘I wouldn’t bother do that if I was you, Amanda,’ Mrs Mason returned, ‘for I will be having no further use for your services. If you ’ave anything here y’u better remove it at once. You know I told you I didn’t give or take notice.’

The woman, astonished, stared at her. Mrs Mason returned her look, the personification of triumphant calm. Cecil laughed loudly in sheer exuberance of spirits.

‘Then y’u mean that y’u discharge me, ma’am?’ Amanda asked Mrs Mason, after a moment’s pause.

‘You don’t suit me, Amanda,’ replied Mrs Mason judicially. ‘You see, you are a married woman, an’ of course you think it hard to be a servant. But I don’t want independent people to work with me, for if you independent you can’t want to work. So we better part. I hope you’ next employer will give you every Sunday.’

Sudden dismissal of this sort was a terrible humiliation. It is true Mrs Mason had stipulated that she should neither give nor take notice, but Amanda had hoped for some clear indication of her intentions before the sentence of banishment was pronounced. To be thus taken unawares, to be outflanked by the enemy, as it were, was a blow from which she could not recover at the moment. Her dignity was shattered. She had no argument left in her. She wanted to say something of a telling nature, but her voice broke as she began, and — —

‘All right, Mrs Mason, de same God dat you pray to is de same God dat I pray to,’ was all she could think of. She meant that she left Mrs Mason to the vengeance of God, and Mrs Mason understood her perfectly.

‘Very well, Amanda,’ she replied with dignity, ‘that is enough, quite enough. I don’t want any rudeness. Just take you’ things an’ go.’

She stood there while Amanda went into the little room to gather up her few belongings. Her triumph was complete. She had demonstrated how easy it was to replace one servant with another.

Jane stood by the kitchen door watching the scene. Mrs Mason, catching sight of her, reflected that it was a good object lesson for her. Jane, on her part, determined that she would never give Mrs Mason the opportunity of turning her off ‘like a dawg.’

CHAPTER X

BOUNDLESS was Cecil's joy when he saw Amanda disappear through the gate. Here indeed was revenge, and not that only, but opportunity as well. He whistled merrily as he walked about the house, and when, a little later on, he heard one of his sisters call Jane and give her instructions about some purchase she was being sent to make, he hurried out into the street and stationed himself at a corner which he knew the girl would have to pass. He purposed having a little conversation with her there; he was of opinion that she was as pleased as he was that such an obstacle and hindrance as Amanda had at last been removed.

He had not been waiting for more than a minute or two before he saw her coming, and he hastened forward to meet her. She gave no sign of having noticed him, though she not only saw him but clearly divined his purpose. Glancing hastily round to see if any one who knew his people were in the vicinity, and satisfied that there was none, he boldly stopped Jane and opened the conversation by asking her where she was going to.

'De shop,' she answered laconically.

'It's a long time since I have a talk with you, Jane,' he remarked, 'an' I have been wanting to say something to you for over two months.'

'What can y'u have to say to me, Mr Cecil?' she inquired, making as if she would move off.

The question disconcerted him. Her manner was not encouraging. He hesitated to plunge into the subject which he had in mind.

'So Amanda is off,' he said, by way of keeping up the conversation. 'You glad, eh?'

'I doan't see why I should be glad,' she replied; 'Amanda didn't interfere wid me.'

The youth felt angry and insulted. After all, Jane was only his aunt's servant, and she had no right to treat him as if he were an equal. Still, conciliatory methods were the only ones he could employ with her.

'What's the matter with y'u?' he asked in an appealing tone of voice. 'You vex with me?'

'Why I should vex wid y'u, Mr Cecil, or please wid y'u?' the girl retorted.

He became angry. 'You getting rude!' he said hotly.

'Rude to *you*?' she flung back, and flounced past him, leaving him standing amazed and humiliated in the street.

Cecil shared to the full the contemptuous opinion which his aunt and sisters had of servants, and now he had been flouted and insulted by one who was only a schoolgirl and to whom, not very long ago, he had been able to speak as he pleased. He would very much have liked to order her never to return to the house again, and was bitterly chagrined because he knew he had no power to do so, and could not even complain of her to Mrs Mason, lest that sagacious lady should immediately discover the reason of his annoyance. He thought the situation over in his mind. He had enough penetration to perceive that the Jane he was now dealing with was a very different kind of being from the Jane who had come, a shy and somewhat stupid girl, from the country. 'Kingston spoils these gurls,' was his comment on the evil influence of the city upon character.

It was very annoying to find in how short a time the simple, unsophisticated child from the country had become a worldly-wise young woman; and Cecil was all for primitive simplicity and the innocence of rural life. If Jane were always going to treat him like this . . . but no. That was hardly likely. 'She is only forming,' he said to himself. 'She want me to fool around her.' He had read or heard somewhere that faint heart never won fair lady, and the proverb encouraged him to perseverance. He decided upon a plan of campaign which he felt could not but end successfully.

The next day, though he had many opportunities of speaking to Jane, he magnificently ignored her presence. He stalked about the yard smoking cigarettes, he made her see him, he rattled coppers in his pocket, he did everything he could to attract her attention, while pretending to be unaware of her very existence. This, he thought, could not fail to affect her; it would bring her to her senses. But, young as she was, she understood it all. She understood it instinctively. This was the male animal spreading out and ruffling its adornments to fascinate her, but it was an animal for which she had formed a very hearty dislike and contempt. She laughed to herself as she went about her work. She now and then observed him furtively through the corner of her eye. It had been his determination to keep up this acting at least for a week, but towards evening he got thoroughly tired of it. Why should he wait? That very evening he would return to the attack, having sufficiently shown her how he should treat her if she were foolish enough to continue obdurate to his attentions.

His sisters went to church a little before seven o'clock, and his aunt went out to see a friend who lived near by. Cecil regarded this exodus as due to a

special stroke of luck; he would not have hesitated to say that Providence itself was interposing in his behalf. Jane was left in charge of the house and yard, he having informed his aunt that he too was going out a little later. When he felt sure that Mrs Mason had gone a fair distance from home, he sauntered up to Jane, who, as was usual with her in her moments of leisure, was sitting at the threshold of her room.

This time Cecil did not accost her with anything like the assurance he had shown on the previous evening. He was by no means certain, now that he was actually about to renew his advances, that they would be any more successful than they had been in the street the night before. Perhaps he should have waited a little longer . . . anyhow, he would see.

He began in a light and airy manner.

‘How’s things, Jane?’

‘All right, Mr Cecil.’

‘Glad to hear. I was wondering last night what was the matter with you. I wanted to give y’u this, but you walk off so quick that you didn’t give me time.’ He handed her a shilling as he spoke, with a spasm of regret as he did so at having to make such a tremendous pecuniary sacrifice. It was a considerable present. She took it, and Cecil felt sure that a good understanding was established between them.

‘I am glad Amanda is gone,’ he said confidently, leaning over her. ‘I was wishing she would go long ago. I never had a chance to talk to you while she was here. Don’t you was sorry?’

‘No,’ replied Jane positively.

The youth thought of his shilling with a feeling of dismay. Such an answer after his outlay! ‘What y’u mean?’ he demanded.

‘What I say. Why should I sorry, Mr Cecil?’

This was a poser. ‘But I thought you liked me?’ he answered, as the best way of meeting her question.

‘I doan’t dislike y’u.’

‘But that is not what I ask you. I thought you said you like me when you came here first, an’ now you wouldn’t talk to me last night, and you tell me you only don’t dislike me. I don’t understand you!’

‘Doan’t bother try, then,’ she answered in a cheeky tone.

‘But I must try. Don’t you know I love you?’

She laughed. ‘Love me for what?’

‘You makin’ fun, Jane!’ he exclaimed irritably. ‘You treat a fellow bad. Didn’t you love me when you came to Kingston?’

‘No. But I didn’t have no sense, an’ I was new. Dat is why y’u could do as you like wid me. But now dat I learn fo’ meself, it’s just as well I tell y’u de trute.’

Here was plain speaking with a vengeance, and Cecil felt that there was no pretence about it. Here was disappointment, here was humiliation. He became savage. ‘What the devil y’u take me money for, then?’ he demanded.

‘I didn’t beg y’u for it; you come an’ give it to me. Ef y’u did know y’u couldn’t spare it, what y’u give it to me for?’

‘You are a damn little thief!’ the youth blurted out, in quite his aunt’s best manner.

Jane rose quickly. ‘If y’u call me a tief I will meck noise in de yard,’ she loudly replied. ‘What I tief fram y’u? Because . . . because — —’

‘What is that?’ called out a voice from the house, and Cecil with a sinking heart recognised it to be that of his aunt!

Mrs Mason had met in the street the friend she had gone to visit. This lady was on her way to pay a sick call, and had walked back with Mrs Mason to the latter’s house, promising to drop in later and have a chat. Cecil had not calculated upon anything of the sort occurring, hence the discovery. ‘What you doing there, Cecil?’ Mrs Mason asked menacingly. ‘What are you raising you’ voice about, Jane?’

Cecil could think of no answer at the moment, and Jane herself was dumbfounded. Mrs Mason understood the situation perfectly, for, though she always blamed her schoolgirls wherever Cecil was concerned, looking to them and not to him to set a good example in moral conduct, she knew that young gentleman’s ways and habits well enough.

‘Cecil, you ought to be ashamed of you’self, talking to a servant gurl like that!’ she exclaimed indignantly. ‘What sort of respect you think them can ’ave for you if you mix up you’self with them? And ’aven’t I told y’u, Jane, that never on any account must y’u raise you’ voice in me yard?’

She discreetly refrained from giving expression in a more explicit manner to what she felt. First, because the new servant who was coming in the morning might not prove satisfactory, and next because she could more conveniently blame Jane for her obviously loose behaviour when she had her alone.

‘Please to walk into you’ room, Jane,’ she commanded, adding, ‘I might ’ave expected it.’

Jane quietly obeyed, while Cecil slunk off, inwardly cursing Jane and his luck and his aunt.

The next morning Mrs Mason was amazed to find that Jane was not up and attending to her duties as early as usual. After calling for some time and receiving no answer, she went herself to the girl's room. It was empty. Jane had disappeared.

CHAPTER XI

IN the life of a large number of 'schoolgirls' in the city of Kingston, 'running away' has formed at least one important incident. It constitutes the refuge of those who are badly treated, or who are tired of working with the same mistress, or who desire to earn some money (if they are not paid by their first mistress, as is very often the case), or who have been induced to exchange a life of drudgery for the comparative though perhaps temporary comfort of an establishment with a 'friend.' It takes more courage than the average girl possesses to go to one's employer and tell her of one's intention to leave. That would probably involve an immediate flogging, or her parents might be written to; she might even be threatened with police supervision—a mere threat, of course—and, worse than all that, there would be the indignant eye of the mistress to encounter—a thing most formidable in itself.

Rather than plainly express her desire, then, the average girl will long continue to work at a place of which she has grown thoroughly tired, and even when she has made up her mind to leave she often keeps putting off the final step as long as she possibly can. But the hour comes at last when it is taken. Some morning the mistress wakes to find that there is no servant to answer her call. Or the girl goes out during the day and does not return. Mrs Mason had had such experiences before; hence when she emerged from Jane's room she knew precisely what had happened. Cynthia and Emma had not yet gone out to their work, and to them she hurried with the tale, 'Jane run away!' she ejaculated. 'An' you can bet that she tef some of me things. What a set of them! You ever see such a race of people!'

In the monotony of lower middle-class Jamaica domestic life, however, even the inconveniences occasioned by the flight of a small servant have their compensation in the excitement afforded by the event. Cynthia and Emma raised their hands in sheer horror at this proof of Jane's iniquity: Mrs Mason's face expressed unutterable astonishment at this latest evidence of depravity on the part of the servant class. Cecil kept himself away from the group, and went on hastily with his preparations for going to his work.

'Well!' said Cynthia, 'I could never have thought it! But you can't trust any of them: they are all the same. An' yet we were so kind to Jane!'

‘But it’s all your fault, you know, Aunt,’ said Emma. ‘I told you when you sent Rachael away that you shouldn’t bother get any more schoolgirls. They are more pest than profit. You ’ave all the trouble with them, you teach them everything, an’ the moment they learn, they pick up themself an’ run away. What’s the use of bothering with them?’

‘An’ mark you, I pay them,’ said Mrs Mason. ‘Most people don’t pay their schoolgurl one penny; but as I know the little brutes will tief and not work well if you don’t give them something, I never make any of them work for nothing. An’ this is all the reward I get for me kindness!’

She moved towards her cupboard: ‘Let me see what she steal, for I am sure she gone away with some of me things.’

A diligent counting over of spoons and knives and forks took place, and an exclamation of dismay from the lady soon informed her nieces that something had been taken. It was a spoon that was missed, but Cynthia remembered that she had taken it into her room the night before, and so the alarm died away. The search had to be given up while tea was being prepared, but Mrs Mason was certain that Jane had not gone off empty-handed; she felt confident that this girl, like one or two others, had at the very least contracted debts in her name at the neighbouring shops, debts which she would be called upon to pay and would repudiate with all the vigour of which she was capable. When her nieces and Cecil (to which gentleman she said nothing) had gone out, she recommenced her search, but found that Jane had actually taken nothing but her own stock of clothes. Nor had she left any debts behind, as inquiry proved. This was rather unusual, and proved that Jane, as Mrs Mason had found out long before, was a decent sort of girl. This added to her anger, for she was sorry that the girl’s services would no longer be at her disposal.

‘You only exchange a bad for a worse,’ she muttered regretfully, and began to think of getting another girl. Then the new servant came in, and the long cycle of Mrs Mason’s troubles and trials recommenced once more.

In the meantime, what had become of Jane?

On the previous night, at about eleven o’clock, when the streets were almost entirely deserted, the girl might have been seen stealing cautiously out of Mrs Mason’s yard with a bundle under her arm. Once outside and at some distance away from her mistress’s place, she changed her rapid, furtive pace into a leisurely walk, for the purpose of preventing suspicion on the part of any policeman who might be more than usually vigilant, and, seeing her with a parcel, be inclined to suspect her of larceny. She strolled towards

the eastern section of the city, and in half an hour had arrived at one of the innumerable yards in one of the numerous lanes of Kingston. She pushed the gate and went boldly in, and entered the third of a long range of tenement rooms which formed the habitations of a good many families.

‘You come?’ was her greeting from a strong-featured young woman of about twenty-three, who was half-sitting, half-reclining on a high bed. ‘I did almost give y’u up. Thought y’u wasn’t coming again.’

‘I had to wait till dem all go to bed,’ explained Jane, putting her bundle on the bed. ‘It look as if dem was goin’ to set up all night! Y’u t’ink dem will find me here?’

‘What if them do?’ asked the other girl, who had had more than one experience of running away in her earlier youth. ‘Y’u not a slave—slavery done away with long time ago. I wouldn’t even bother remember them. Y’u want to wash you’ foot?’

‘Yes. An’ you t’ink I will get a job at Mr Repburn?’

‘Yes, man,’ replied Sathyra (as the other girl was named). ‘Them want two gurls, as I did tell y’u yesterday; an’ I told one of de clerks that I was goin’ to send one of me frien’s, an’ that him must put in a good word for you. Him say all right. De work is not too hard, an’ if you quick you can make a shillin’ a day, an’ even more. It’s a good job, if y’u can keep it. You must try an’ be friendly wid everybody: that’s the way to get on.’

Sathyra’s philosophy was perfect, but she was not herself known as a peaceful person. She had fought the battle of life with a fair amount of success hitherto, however, and that gave her the right to offer advice to mere beginners.

‘I am goin’ to meck friends wid everybody,’ Jane assured her. ‘Fun is better than quarrel. It wasn’t my fault dat me an’ Miss Mason couldn’t get on; but even if we did get on I glad I leave dat sort o’ work. Y’u doan’t get noten for it, an’ you is a slave all de time.’

‘It’s better to work in a orfice,’ Sathyra agreed. ‘Most orfice woman get five shillin’s a week, an’ some get six. Dat is what I get, an’ de work is not too bad. And sometimes you get a little present. Y’u can come home soon in de evenin’, an’ y’u can keep you’self tidy all day. Besides, you have every Sunday to you’self, an’ y’u get every public holiday. So, y’u see, it suit a man! Yes, me love, when Sunday mornin’ dawn I can turn over in me bed an’ stretch meself, an’ sleep little more. There is nobody to call out, “Satyr, where y’u is? Y’u don’t lookin’ after de coffee yet?” There is nobody to watch me when I come in an’ when I go out. An’ if I want to go to every picnic, I can go; if I choose to sleep all day when it’s a holiday an’ I don’t

want to go out sporting, I can sleep. An' to tell you de trute, I really love me bed. I like comfort!'

'Y'u have a nice bed,' said Jane, glancing at the enamelled iron bedstead raised on four bricks, and noticing that Sathyra viewed it with obvious pride.

'Yes; it is so-so,' complacently replied Sathyra.

'An' what is more, I buy it meself. I have it three years now. When I get a little present, a shillin' or two shillin's at a time, I put it down till it reach one pound ten, an' I buy dis bed. So it is me own property, an' nobody can ever say that them had to give me a bed, as I didn't have a thing to sleep on.

'There is noten like having you' own things, for when y'u have a disposition like mine, an' anybody trouble you too much, y'u can send them about them business.'

Jane had an uncomfortable feeling that some part of this speech might be intended for her, though, ostensibly, Sathyra had in mind the opposite sex.

'I goin' to save up an' buy a bed too,' she suggested.

'What for?' asked Sathyra graciously. 'Y'u don't need to, if you an' me is friend. De room can't hold two bed, and this one is big enough for de two of us. You don't trouble 'bout a bed now. Save what money y'u get, an' buy some nice dress, and sometimes we can go to picnic an' sport together. Just as cheap to enjoy you' life when y'u can an' when you is young, for who is to know when y'u goin' to dead? If y'u can eat well, an' drink well, and have a good frock to put on when you going out, y'u have something. But when y'u have to work, like you been workin' wid dat woman you just leave, it's better y'u dead.'

'Yes,' agreed Jane heartily; 'but dat done away wid now.'

'It is finish and completed,' yawned Sathyra. 'Well, it must be after twelve o'clock, so we better go to bed now,' and Jane approved.

The thought of earning a shilling a day—six shillings a week, if she worked on Saturdays—filled the heart of Jane with inexpressible joy. Here were riches and comparative independence within her grasp; here was escape from domestic servitude; here was a future made bright with hope. She thanked God very devoutly that night. It was only two weeks before that she had met Sathyra, and a casual acquaintanceship, begun in a Chinaman's shop, had rapidly ripened into friendship in the course of a day or two. Jane told Sathyra of her troubles, and Sathyra, with the memories of her own early youth still fresh in her mind, listened sympathetically. She was living alone just then. Her last 'friend' had left her rather suddenly, having had a

dispute with her on the subject of expenditure; her one child had died some two years before, and her craving for companionship, as well as financial considerations, made it necessary that she should have some one to share her room and her living expenses with her, go to picnics with her, converse with her, and help to make her happy.

‘Why don’t y’u leave you’ employer?’ she had one day suggested to Jane.

‘But where to go to?’ was Jane’s very natural question.

‘You can stop wid me till you get a job. I am workin’ downtown. There is no vacance where I am now, but I will tell y’u if I hear of anything.’

And Sathyra did hear of something within the next couple of weeks. Not far from the office where she worked was an establishment belonging to one of the liquor merchants of the town. Here, on the average, some twenty girls and women were employed in the corking and labelling of bottles, and changes in the personnel of the staff were not infrequent. Sathyra heard that two assistants were wanted, and went immediately to bespeak one of the vacant positions for Jane. This was on Friday. Meeting Jane on the following day, by arrangement, she told her of the job she had secured for her. It was she who had planned Jane’s escape, as the latter shrank from boldly defying Mrs Mason and walking out of the yard in the full light of day, a method of taking leave which Sathyra at first advised and would have much preferred.

Thus aided and abetted by her friend, Jane had made her great essay towards freedom and financial betterment. It had never occurred to Mrs Mason, when she was sending Amanda about her business, that Jane’s programme had been already mapped out and that the hour of her emancipation was at hand. Cecil had not divined that what he termed the ‘rudeness’ of Jane was but the first expression of her feeling of independence. Jane would have gone in any case on that Sunday night, would have gone whether Amanda had been sent away or not, whether or not Mrs Mason had held the terror of a Monday morning reprimand over her head. She had not the slightest intention of being turned off ‘like a dog.’ And fortune had so arranged it that she should leave a poor situation for a good one.

The change pleased her. She was engaged on the Monday morning at the liquor establishment, and turned in to work at once. Seated on a box in front of a sort of counter laden with bottles, equipped with a batch of labels and a jug of mucilage, she plunged into her task. She was but one of a line of other workers. Her job was simple, quickness being the only qualification for the work after she had been shown how to paste the labels on. Sometimes the women sang, a Catholic hymn preferably, though most of them were

Protestants; at other times they talked, but conversation was not always easy when they wanted to get through a lot of work. They were paid by results, a shilling a day being the average amount earned; but a very quick girl could earn more, one or two making as much as eight shillings in six days.

The other girls became friendly with Jane after the first hour or so. Learning her name, they addressed her as Miss Burrell; indeed, it was a matter of etiquette with them to speak to one another as Miss So-and-So, only close personal friends calling each other by their Christian names. This was a change from (and an improvement on) the customs and manners of domestic service, and Jane highly appreciated it. She had gone up more than one step on the social ladder.

From seven till twelve she worked, then they ceased for an hour for lunch. Lunch cost her threepence, it being provided by a woman who came in with a tray filled with little plates, each plate containing a bit of stewed meat or some boiled salt fish, a piece of yam or sweet potato, and some rice. It was not a large meal, but it would serve to sustain her until dinner-time; she ate it with the knife and fork supplied by the caterer, and, the meal over, she lounged on her box, placing her back against the wall of the building, stretched out her legs, and composed herself to rest, like the most of the others, for the balance of the hour.

Everybody chatted gaily as though not one of them had a care in the world. They screamed with merriment over some feeble joke, such as when one of them declared that she would never marry a cigar maker because she did not smoke, or when another affirmed that she would not marry at all because she could not undertake to support a husband. Jane laughed with the rest; she thought it fine to be addressed as 'Miss'; the work was tiresome, her back ached her; but what an emancipation it was from Mrs Mason's petty tyranny!

'Where y'u was before y'u come here, Miss Burrell?' asked one of her neighbours when the general conversation lagged a little.

'I was workin' wid a lady, but I leave her. She follow me up too much,' was Jane's reply.

'Tcho! dat is a life wouldn't suit me at all,' commented her questioner. 'I wouldn't be a servant to anybody—I would prefer to sell fruit in de street. Them want to treat you too bad, ma'am, an' de work is hard. This work hard too,' she added reflectively; 'but you can earn more money, and you is you' own mistress after five o'clock.'

'Them employ y'u all the time?' asked Jane.

‘No; sometimes there is noten to do, and then them knock you off. However, what’s de use of fretten, me love? God is in heaven, an’ we mus’ trust to Him. Besides, some of us lucky enough to have a back force.’

The expression was new to Jane.

‘What is a “back force”?’ she asked.

The innocent query drew forth a scream of laughter from those who heard it. These called out to the others:—

‘Miss Burrell want to know what a “back force” is!’ and then exploded anew. Such simplicity was as astonishing as it was diverting. Then one girl condescended to explain. ‘It is a “friend,”’ she said.

So once again Jane learnt that the inevitable solution, or partial solution, of the problem of living for most women was to be found in assistance from a ‘friend.’ There was, it seemed, no other way, for few of these young women earned enough to live easily upon, and their wants were always increasing. She reverted to the question of domestic service. ‘I doan’t like to work in a house,’ she stated with conviction.

‘But some lady is very kind,’ said one of the girls to her. ‘Them treat y’u well. I never work with them myself, but I know some who is very kind.’

‘True, my love,’ agreed another; ‘but I wouldn’t like de work: it doan’t suit me. I prefer to be me own mistress.’

This was the general sentiment, and had Jane been a judge of character she would have perceived that these young women were either of a more independent disposition or of a somewhat better class than those who remained domestic servants nearly all their lives. They were rebels; they had no humility in them; in their own way they had aspirations; they wanted to be free. Most of them (city born) had never been domestics. One or two others had early emancipated themselves from that form of service. On the whole they knew very little about it, but that little was sufficient for them. As for Jane, her experience had been a hard one, and so she could cordially agree with the views of her new acquaintances.

At one o’clock they straggled back to work, and from that hour until five they pasted labels and hummed hymns, only stopping now and then to have their bottles inspected and checked. Sometimes there was a sharp dispute between them and the man who examined their work. Their inveterate inclination was to think that he was cheating or that he wished to be unreasonable. Jane shared the sentiments of her colleagues, and once during the day she even ventured upon a feeble protest against the man’s complaint. She was quite wrong, but this effort at self-assertion pleased her. She had already begun to feel herself ‘her own woman.’

She was thoroughly tired when she reached home that afternoon, and for some time she sat idly by the threshold of her little room, watching Sathyra prepare dinner for both of them. Sathyra placed a small box very near to the door, and under the single window which the room possessed. On the box she set a little iron stove filled with burning charcoal, and on this an iron pot. She sat beside the impromptu fireplace, a second box forming her seat, and in a very short space of time she had peeled the bit of yam, scraped the four sweet potatoes, and stripped the skin from the stout ‘green’ plantain that was to form the staple of their evening meal. It was a salt-fish dinner: half a pound of salt fish and three farthings’ worth of pork fat would be adequate flavouring for the breadkind. Sathyra would not ask Jane to assist her just then, knowing that the girl had been tired out by work that was strange to her; as for herself she was accustomed to cooking her meals after going home, and to doing her own washing after that, and Jane would be able to help in a very short time. She talked as she worked; talked business.

‘Dis room is eight shillin’s a month, and you will pay half. About five shillin’s a week should give us breakfast in de morning, an’ dinner—sometimes it may be six shillin’s, if we get anyt’ing extra. You will have to pay for you’ own lunch downtown, which is one an’ sixpence a week, so you will only have a few pence leave over for snowball^[9] or a car ticket. But we can’t do no better. I doan’t think you will ever earn much more than six shillin’s a week at the start: however, somebody may fall in love wid y’u an’ then you will be all right.’

^[9] ‘Snowball’ is a mixture of crushed ice and syrup sold on the streets of Kingston.

‘I doan’t think anybody gwine to fall in love wid me,’ Jane observed, crooking one of her legs and crossing her hands over the knee. She did not believe what she said, but wanted to hear from her friend the latter’s opinion of her charms and prospects.

‘You is all right,’ returned Sathyra, glancing at her for a moment and nodding her head. ‘You are young an’ y’u have good looks. You are all right.’

Jane was flattered. She wished to return the compliment.

‘You all right too,’ she replied. ‘But you doan’t have nobody now?’

‘Not now; but it must be soon. I never too long widout an admirer. But I doan’t use to tecking any-and-everybody, an’ as I have a good job I can

afford to pick and choose.'

The breadkind being nearly ready, Sathyra tied the salt fish in a clean bag and plunged it in the pot. All along the front of the range of rooms cooking was going on, and in the gathering darkness the line of lights from half a score of stoves gave a touch of picturesqueness to the simple, homely scene. Some of the people of the yard were washing their clothes, some were standing by their room-doors waiting patiently till dinner should be ready; others were tidying up their little rooms. The smallest number of persons in a room was two, while as many as six could be found in one of these places. These six represented a family. Where only two occupied a room, they were either a man and his wife or two women who had clubbed together for companionship and urgent reasons of economy. Although living in the same yard, some of these people were strangers to one another. They knew each other by sight and name, but there was no particularly friendly intercourse between them beyond a courteous salutation and an occasional brief conversation. The yard was like a section of a street, and one chose one's friends without regard to proximity.

Sathyra soon lifted the pot off the fire, threw the bit of pork into a frying-pan, and placed this upon the blazing coals. The sharp fizzing sound and pleasant odour of the melting pork whetted the appetite of the girls, and Jane, considerably rested, busied herself to help in the final preparations for their meal.

She went into the room and brought out three plates, into one of which the salt fish was put, the melted fat being poured over it. Into the other two plates the breadkind, equally divided, was served. Jane carried the three laden plates inside, while Sathyra scooped the live coals out of the stove and extinguished them, putting them aside for use on the following morning. This done, she followed her friend into the room, beat up the fish with a fork so as to mix it well with the grease, divided it between herself and Jane, and sat down on a chair (the plate in her lap) to eat it. They ate with forks, slowly, and with evident enjoyment. It was, if coarse, a palatable and sufficient meal. More than ever did Jane feel satisfied with her newly-won freedom and independence.

When dinner was over and the plates put away, Sathyra suggested that they should take a walk, and this they did after tidying themselves up a bit. Sathyra was never slatternly, and Jane had a good deal of vanity in her composition. She took some pains with her appearance, and now that she was her own mistress she could indulge her tastes to the extent of her financial capacity. It was, therefore, two very decent-looking girls that went out for a walk that night, and two thoroughly contented girls that returned.

They had wandered about the streets for an hour so-so, going nowhere in particular and seeing nothing of unusual interest; yet they had enjoyed the walk because of the absolute lack of restriction on their movements, on their goings out and comings in. They were well satisfied, too, with one another. There was, for that day, no fly in the ointment of Jane's satisfaction.

Yet the novelty of all things mundane wears away sooner or later, and Jane's new life could be no exception to the rule. In about a week she had become accustomed to it; in less than a month she found that her work was hard and tedious, that she could not always earn six shillings a week, no matter what exertions she made, and that there were a lot of disagreeable things to put up with both at the downtown establishment and at home. It was impossible for two young women of different temperaments to live together without some friction, and Jane soon discovered that Sathyra had a sharp temper. Jane had now to do her full share of the cooking and of such other household work as had to be performed, and had, of course, to wash her own clothing, not being able to pay to have it done. Thus her time on week days was fully occupied; only on Sundays did she find leisure to indulge in that spacious indolence so attractive to those who live in a tropical climate and who love to revel in the sun-warmed air.

Sunday was a great day for her. She began it with a more sumptuous breakfast than usual; a breakfast of chocolate and bread and avocado pear, or bread and roasted salt fish, with perhaps a bit of hard cocoa-nut flavoured with 'new sugar.' Dinner she had at one o'clock, usually rice boiled with pease, seasoned plentifully with escalion and cocoa-nut milk, and served with a small piece of salt beef or pork. At six in the evening she had supper, and after that she went for a ride on one of the tram-cars, or went to church with her friend. Returning home, she would spend a little time in talk, and then to bed.

Once or twice she went to a picnic. Routine was the order of her life; but it was not so much variety that she craved, as an easier time and better clothes to wear. Half-unconsciously, her mind often ran on her chances of getting some help from some one who might like her. She did not formulate the proposition boldly in her mind: she did not determine to seek for a 'friend,' she did not deliberately wish that any one should come and plainly propose to set up housekeeping with her. The influence of her parents' admonitions was still fairly strong upon her. But she was not by any means the same girl that had left the country only a few months before; she saw most things now in a different light.

Her father had warned her to 'keep herself up'; she had learnt that most persons regarded that as practically impossible in the circumstances with

which she had to cope. She did not think over these things as clearly as we state them; she did not think about them at all. Clear thinking was not a characteristic of hers; she simply looked at life differently now, without even quite knowing that she did so. She was aware that, on the whole, she was luckier than most girls of her age, for how many of them earned even half a crown a week? Yet, considerable as were her wages, she found it just sufficient to keep her. With the characteristic insouciance of the West Indian peasant, however, she did not allow even the immediate future to trouble her much, or for more than a few moments at a time. She lived in the day and for the day.

But if the novelty of all things earthly wears off after a while, it is equally true that changes take place even in the most apparently uneventful lives. Jane's life, seemingly uninteresting to the outsider, had already been eventful, and was soon to change still more.

CHAPTER XII

‘A YOUNG man is comin’ here dis evening to see me,’ Sathyra casually remarked one morning to Jane, as both of them were going down to work. ‘I expect him ’bout seven o’clock.’

‘Him is a stranger?’ inquired Jane.

‘Yes; I meet him about a week ago when I was comin’ home from me work; but we didn’t have much talk. Since dat time I see him two times, and last night him ask me where I live, and say him would like to make de acquaintance of a young lady like me, as him thinkin’ of gotten married. So I laugh, an’ tell him that where I live was too poor to receive visitor, and dat I didn’t believe him could fall in love with a plain-lookin’ gurl like me. But him swear him never love anybody like me before, and, as him press me hard, I tell him to come here, but that I have a frien’ living wid me, so him must behave himself.’

‘That is good,’ said Jane heartily. ‘Y’u think him really gwine to married you?’

‘Tcho! That’s what them all say; but it only go t’rough one ear and come out t’rough the other when them say it to me. Who gotten married now? De best t’ing a gurl can do, when a young man want to be friendly with her, is to “eat him out” as much as she can. Teck all you can get, for all of them is alike. However, him coming this evening. Seven o’clock.’ Then Sathyra went her way.

Had Jane possessed more worldly wisdom, she would have seen in this piece of information a hint that that evening two would be company and three a crowd. She would even have guessed that the time might be approaching when she might have to seek new quarters. Nothing suspecting, however, she was on the scene when the young man arrived. He was rather tall and pleasant looking; he had a loud laugh, a big mouth, no hair on his face, and a habit of agreeing with everyone. He was received in the room by the girls, and was duly and formally introduced as ‘Mr Sampson’ to Jane.

‘Pleased to know you, Miss Burrell,’ he said, as he shook hands; then he seated himself carefully on the strongest-looking of the three chairs Sathyra owned, and placed his feet where his new boots could be seen to the greatest advantage.

‘Very pleased to know any one from de country. Your friend told me you are from Mount Salas, an’ I have a cousin who know Mount Salas.’ He laughed loudly as he concluded this little speech, and Sathyra, all smiles, observed:—

‘Didn’t think you was coming again.’

‘No, don’t say that!’ protested Sampson in an aggrieved tone of voice. ‘When I say I are goin’ to do a thing, mark ten! This is an unexpected pleasure, Miss Morrison, an’ I wouldn’t have missed it for anything.’

He had no difficulty in reconciling a carefully arranged visit with his declaration as to the accidental character of it; he meant a compliment, and his words were taken as such.

Sathyra was genuinely pleased. It was some months since she had had a beau, and admiration was the very breath of life to her.

‘Y’u had any difficulty in finding de place?’ she asked him, secretly wishing at the same time that Jane would find some reason for going out.

‘None at all; dere is no part of Kingston I don’t know, from de East to de West, and from de Nort’ to de Sout’. I am use to walkin’ about, especially at night time. If it is a dance, I am there; if it is a wake, I am ditto. All y’u have to do is to give me a number, an’ if it is twelve o’clock, and de night is dark as pitch, I am finding my way.

‘Besides,’ he continued, ‘I wouldn’t lose dis opportunity of comin’ to see you, don’t care where you live. If a man can go to sport, him can pay a sociable visit, especially when his affection pull him all de time. There isn’t man who wouldn’t walk till him is foot-tired to see a young lady like you, Miss Morrison!’

‘Tcho! y’u talkin’ stupidity!’ briskly returned Sathyra, though Sampson easily saw that his flattery had touched her keenly. ‘Dat is all words, an’ I know dat when a man say a thing to a gurl, him don’t meant it. Him only say it to sweet her up for a time; an’ she will find out her mistake ef she foolish enough to believe him. Whether you say good or say bad, it’s all de same to me, Mr Sampson. I am use to it.’

‘I know y’u use to it,’ said Sampson positively; ‘you must be receive a lot o’ compliments every day. But what I say I mean, an’ it’s not everybody can say de same.’

‘Dat is true enough,’ said Sathyra, and glanced again at Jane. The latter showed no signs of leaving, not being, as a matter of fact, in the habit of going out in the evenings by herself, and not yet realising that her company was not desired by Sathyra.

‘An’ how y’u like Kingston, Miss Burrell,’ asked Sampson, turning to Jane; ‘how y’u like everything?’

‘Pretty well, Mr Sampson,’ she answered; ‘I doan’t been here too very long yet, but as I go on, I get used to de place. You born here?’

‘But y’u don’t tell us what’s de news, Mr Sampson,’ interrupted Sathyra. ‘You go about a lot, so y’u must be hear all that’s goin’ on. What is strange?’

An invitation like this commended itself to Sampson. Immediately he opened an animated conversation on a divorce case he had been reading of that day in one of the city’s newspapers.

‘I con’t understand why husban’ an’ wife don’t get on together in Jamaica,’ he said, addressing Sathyra. ‘Marriage is a very holy an’ sacred state; but if people con’t get on, then I say, why them married?’

‘Ask me, no!’ agreed Sathyra. ‘But what you to expect, me dear sir? Everybody run an’ get married after de earthquake, because them hear more earthquake was coming. An’ now them is in it, an’ can’t get out of it, them is gotten divorce. All those fool that was frighten because de ground shake an’ kill a few people, is frighten about somet’ing else now! Them have enough to frighten about!’

‘Then stop!’ exclaimed Sampson admiringly; ‘y’u mean to tell me you didn’t frighten for de disaster?’

It was Sathyra’s pride to be considered a sceptic. She was a sinner who did not wish to be saved by grace or by anything else. She often described herself as ‘a hard woman,’ and had even been known to express doubts about the existence of a hell. She answered calmly:—

‘The earthquake kill who it was to kill, an’ whether y’u ’fraid for it, or didn’t ’fraid for it, couldn’t stop it.’

‘Well, to be sure!’ protested Sampson, ‘I never meet anybody like you yet!’

It was not long since one-half of Kingston had been destroyed; evidences of its destruction were still plainly visible in the lower section of the city; consequently many persons talked of the recent earthquake as of something that could hear what was said and take action accordingly. To Sampson and many others like him, the earthquake was a living, personal force, a malignant enemy to be feared. Sathyra was more rationalistic; she had imbibed the modern spirit. She dreaded an earthquake while it was happening, but regarded it with no deeply superstitious feelings. Sampson was one of those who had become converted during the earthquake period, and he, too, would have married could he but have selected one lady who, more than the others, had a claim to his name and a part of his earnings

(which for some time before then had been nil). As it was, he could not make a conscientious choice; and after a month or so had passed, and no other destructive shock had occurred, he made up his mind that celibacy and not marriage should be his portion. This laudable determination was much honoured in the breach, and at least thrice since the 7th January, 1907, he had been 'engaged.' He now wished to become 'engaged' once more; but he had to confess to himself as he listened to Sathyra that her scepticism bordered on the blasphemous; and he, though much given to the use of profane language, when in a temper or in a jocular mood, never talked lightly of sacred things like earthquakes, which he looked upon as being of an extremely revengeful nature.

The earthquake had to be respected, for he had seen its handiwork, and had even benefited by it. By representing himself as one of those who had lost heavily in the disaster, he had managed to get gratis a set of carpenter's tools from a committee which gave assistance to all and sundry with a charming lack of discrimination. He had also secured some clothes and been fed for a few weeks at the expense of the Assistance Fund. All this duly considered, it might seem that Sampson had excellent reasons for wishing for another earthquake. But he knew that two of his friends had been killed in the last one, that another friend had been severely injured, and that an acquaintance had been arrested on a charge of looting, and sentenced to prison. This last happening had convinced him of the utter injustice of all human tribunals, the others were to him a warning of what might be his own fate should another earthquake occur. Consequently, while he admired Sathyra's superb courage, he felt that he was running a great risk to be sitting in the same room with her while she thus glibly consigned the earthquake to the realms of natural phenomena. He was not sure that it might not vindicate its power and majesty at any moment.

'You bold for true, Miss Satyr!' he exclaimed, after a pause. 'You talk like those people that read books. But I don't think it is good to study too much, like them. What is man compared to God? What you say, Miss Burrell?'

'I doan't read at all,' Jane answered quite simply and truthfully. 'I wasn't in Kingstown when de 'quake was killin' people; but I feel it in de country too, an' it was bad. I 'fraid for it,' she added emphatically.

'Me, too,' said Sampson heartily. He was pleased to find such support. Perhaps, too, the humble avowal of both of them would avert any possible danger.

'Well, every man to his own order,' said Sathyra a little contemptuously. 'But y'u can't deny that all them people who was 'fraid for earthquake is the

same ones that married an' begin to get divorce already. You watch! You will find plenty more divorce before long.'

'What was to-day case about?' asked Jane, who had as yet no knowledge of the proceedings of the local courts.

Sampson laughed. Nothing would have pleased him better than to have gone fully into details. Had he been talking with only one of the girls he would have ventured, comparative stranger though he was, to do so. But he had come in the capacity of suitor for Sathyra's hand, and, company being present, he did not like to be too explicit in conversation. It might not be appreciated where more than two were gathered together.

'Jealousy was the cause of de whole t'ing,' he explained. 'De man was jealous an' him meck a row an' beat de woman, an' she leave him an' went to somebody else. Instead of tryin' to live loving and like man an' wife, them live like puss an' dog. Now if I was to get married, I know how I would live. Don't y'u agree wid me, Miss Burrell?'

Sathyra was quick to notice that Sampson had addressed his question to Jane and not to her. It was Jane, too, who had agreed with him as to the terrible nature of earthquakes. And Jane persisted in remaining in the room. She drew in her lips sharply, her usual method of showing annoyance.

'Jane will agree wid you, yes!' she said, and something in her tone gave the other girl a touch of surprise.

'I don't know how you would live, Mr Sampson, so I can't very well agree wid you,' was Jane's reply to his question, the only obvious one in the circumstances.

'But you should agree wid him; him want you to agree wid him,' said Sathyra; 'Isn't that so, Mr Sampson?'

Sampson had sufficient experience to realise that Sathyra had become jealous of his attentions to Jane. The latter, he saw clearly, was still a simple, straight-forward girl, while Sathyra had little left to learn of the world to which both she and he belonged. A man like Sampson would try to make love to half a dozen young women at once; the number of his conquests was a matter of pride with him. He had not been trying to interest Jane without an object. Sathyra knew this quite well; and as she had determined to 'eat him out,' knowing that marriage was a million miles away from his mind, as too it wounded her vanity to see that covert attentions were being paid to a girl who lived with her almost on sufferance, she was beginning to get angry and did not care who saw it. Timidity was not one of Sathyra's weaknesses.

Sampson was something of a diplomat in his way, so he sought to give an answer that should satisfy Sathyra and not displease Jane.

‘Well, so to observe, I are glad when anybody agree wid me,’ he replied. ‘I likes you to agree wid me, Miss Morrison, an’ I likes Miss Burrell to agree wid me also. Everybody have an opinion, an’ we suppose to give our opinion. Oderwise —’

‘Tcho! Dat is all foolishness!’ interrupted Sathyra, with brutal frankness. ‘Why not say that y’u like Jane? She will be pleased to hear.’

Jane scented a serious quarrel, and wished to avoid it. ‘I doan’t want Mr Sampson to like me,’ she declared sharply. ‘I can walk for meself.’

‘We all can walk for ourself,’ said Sathyra, ‘but sometimes we want other people to walk for us. Anyhow, I think I am gwine out, an’ I will leave you two to enjoy you’self together.’

Sampson saw that she had no intention of leaving the room, even for a moment; but Jane was not so sophisticated. She got up.

‘Mr Sampson come to see you, not me,’ she said; ‘so I better go. I couldn’t meck y’u leave you’ room on my account.’

She swung out of the room indignantly, and went through the gate. Sathyra made her go without the pretence of an effort to prevent her. That was what she desired. She was even more direct with Sampson.

‘Y’u told me,’ she said to him, as soon as Jane had disappeared, ‘that y’u wanted to come an’ talk to me, an’ now I see that y’u want to talk to that gurl. It must be either one thing or the other. Y’u can’t come to my place an’ carry on wid anybody else. It mus’ be me, or you mus’ keep out. Just as well we understand one another.’

‘I am surprise at y’u!’ protested Sampson. ‘Y’u think a big man like me could bodder wid a little gal who can’t even live by herself? What y’u teck me for? Well! if it wasn’t fo’ one thing, I would say you insult me. You shouldn’t say them sort o’ funny things to me; I don’t like it.’

Thus volubly, and with an appearance of indignation, did he protest his innocence of any intention of playing her false, feeling all the while that she would not believe him. Nor did she. But being worldly-wise, she looked upon him as a possible (if temporary) financial proposition, and she was not prepared to admit a partner in such a business. She affected, therefore, to be satisfied with his explanation, and turned the talk to other things. He, on his part, hoped to meet Jane again. Sathyra guessed this, and was determined that he should not meet Jane. At games of this sort she was at least as skilful as he, and she did not think it would be at all difficult to deal with Jane.

Jane did not return until about ten o'clock that night, having wandered about the streets quite aimlessly and miserably. She was deeply offended with Sathyra, especially as Sampson did not in the least 'fill her eye,' as she put it to herself. He was still with Sathyra when she returned, but rose and said good-night as she came in; this with a view of intimating to Sathyra that Jane's presence had no attractions for him whatever. Jane, not wishing for an open breach with her room companion, said nothing about the disagreement which had taken place a couple of hours before. Sathyra did not mention it either, but quietly proceeded to undress for bed. She sang, 'They all shall sweetly obey Thy Will,' through her clenched teeth as she took off her clothes, and her manner of singing would have been interpreted by some one of a similar disposition as a declaration of unending war.

There was no conversation between the two girls. Jane felt the electricity in the air. She lay awake for some time; then, just as she was falling asleep, Sathyra quietly said: 'Mr Sampson wants to come an' stop here, and as it is my room, an' it can't hold three people, y'u must try an' find somewhere else to go to to-morrow.'

She deliberately told a lie when she said that Sampson wanted to stay at the same place with her. Such a thing would have been quite alien to his habits. Visit her often? yes; as often as he wished to see her; but stay with her?—oh, no! Sampson had made it the rule of his life never to be directly responsible for the paying of anybody's rent save his own. As it was, he found it irksome enough to be compelled to pay his own.

To have been held legally liable to pay some one else's rent, then, would have been regarded by him as a position intolerable. But the excuse was an admirable one for Sathyra to give Jane—the best imaginable. She was angry too and wished to be brutal, wished to make things as unpleasant as she possibly could for Jane. The latter felt that, and answered with spirit.

'Mr Sampson will has to wait, for I payin' half de rent for dis room, an' I have more right to it dan him. When I get a place I wi' move, but I not goin' to sleep in de street or to go anywhere to please anybody.'

'Oh, yes?' asked Sathyra bitterly. 'So y'u think that because I teck you in when you didn't have bread or a shelter, an' because I get a job for you, y'u have a claim to me premises! Well, we will see!'

At the moment she felt inclined to fall upon Jane, give her a good beating then and there, and turn her, bag and baggage, into the street. But she could restrain her temper and act deliberately; besides it was by no means certain that she could easily get the better of Jane in a physical encounter. She was bigger than the girl, but Jane was well-set-up and strong.

Sathyra said nothing more that night except: ‘Those who laugh last laugh best of all.’

She woke betimes the next morning, dressed, and went out of the room. After Jane had got up and dressed, Sathyra stood at some distance from the door and loudly called out to her,—

‘Jane, beg you look under the glass mug on de table and teck up that three shillin’s and sixpence I put there a little while ago.’

Jane was a little surprised at the friendly tone of Sathyra’s voice; but still feeling indignant, she hesitated to do what she was asked. She returned no answer; and again Sathyra called out: ‘Jane, y’u find de money?’

This time Jane thought that she might as well oblige the young woman she was staying with, and who, perhaps, now wished to be friendly once more. She went to the table, lifted the jug, and found nothing. She answered shortly: ‘No money is here.’

‘Hi! But how can y’u say no money is there when y’u saw me put it there?’ called back Sathyra loudly, with astonishment in her voice. ‘And why y’u teck so long to answer me?’

As was to be expected, this conversation had attracted the attention of some of the people in the yard, and these now paused in what they were doing to hear what Jane would say in answer. She flared up at once.

‘When did I see y’u put any money anywhere? You must be crazy.’

‘Hum!’ exclaimed Sathyra. ‘Dis look funny. I mus’ go look after me money.’

‘Y’u right, ma’am,’ sympathetically observed one of her neighbours, who was quite prepared to convict Jane of thieving on the evidence of her own predilections for other people’s property.

Sathyra marched ostentatiously into the room, went up to the table, and began with much clatter to move the jugs and glasses on it. She searched diligently, while Jane looked on; naturally she found nothing.

‘Miss Burrell,’ she said in a loud voice, ‘could y’u please tell me where me money gone to?’

‘What I know ’bout you’ money?’ demanded Jane quite as loudly. ‘Y’u forward to ask me such a question! I don’t believe you had a farden on de table.’

‘Den you mean to tell me I are a liar, after y’u tief me money?’ asked Sathyra, edging dangerously up to Jane. Her gesture as well as her words were provocative, and it flashed upon Jane that Sathyra’s deliberate intention was to accuse her of theft and possibly provoke her to an assault.

She felt frightened, terribly frightened. To be accused of theft was almost synonymous with being sentenced to prison. Already she saw herself being dragged off by a policeman, and dashed to the door to escape Sathyra, not because she was afraid of her personally, but because she wanted to have witnesses and wished to protest her innocence in the open. As she moved towards the door, Sathyra threw herself against the table, and sent one or two cups and plates crashing to the floor.

Jane got outside, but Sathyra had achieved her object.

‘Look how dis gal assault me!’ she screamed out to the assembled people, ‘and how she mash up me things!’ Then she too flounced out of the room and called upon everybody within a radius of five hundred yards to witness the wretched and mean advantage that had been taken of her. Jane in the meantime was crying and sobbing, and calling upon God to be her witness that she had done Sathyra nothing and had not even seen the colour of her money.

Most of the folk in the yard sympathised with her. They knew Sathyra from of old, and had no love for that lady. But one or two, wishing to win the favour of Sathyra, or simply because they desired to condemn some one much better than themselves, twisted their lips, pursed them up, looked at Jane as one who had passed the limits of human wickedness, sighed aloud, then declared that they would not interfere, that it was not their business, that they had nothing to do with the matter, but that they would not like any one to touch a penny of their money.

Still it was clear that the sympathy of the yard was with Jane. She was a decent, polite, decorous girl, and the elderly men especially regarded her with approval. It was one of these (popularly known as Father Daniel, and not without some authority amongst those who knew him) who now came up to Jane and told her to cease her crying and go down to her work.

‘I don’t believe you tief anybody money, me chile,’ he said with genuine sympathy; ‘you just go down to you’ work, an’ try an’ get anoder place to sleep to-night. If y’u caan’t, I will give you a catch^[10] when you come home.’

^[10] A bed for the night.

‘Yes,’ agreed some of the women standing by; ‘doan’t cry, but go down to you’ work in peace.’

Jane mechanically prepared to do as they advised. Sathyra, seeing that Jane was not friendless, decided to say nothing more just then.

But she was of a revengeful nature. She was determined that Jane should not come back to the yard, and that Mr Sampson should have no opportunity of meeting her. Getting leave from her employer during the forenoon, therefore, she went to the police station in Sutton Street, and asked to see the sergeant-major of the detective force.

She was shown into the room where that functionary sat in the seat of authority, surrounded by the lesser satellites of the detective department. He looked up at her, taking her measure in a glance or two.

‘What you want, ma’am?’ was his direct and simple question.

She launched out upon her tale, told how Jane had seen her put the money down, how Jane had denied all knowledge of it, how Jane had ‘backed against her,’ smashed her things, and thus added assault and destruction of property to barefaced theft.

‘Then this gurl,’ she was continuing, when the sergeant-major interrupted.

‘Why not say she was your friend, and that you quarrel?’ he asked. ‘About some young man, no?’

Sathyra started. She did not know that cases like hers had very often come before this detective, who knew that such stories as she told were very often lies.

She answered boldly. ‘It don’t matter whether she was me friend or not. She had no business to tief me money.’

‘No,’ agreed the sergeant-major, grimly. ‘Private Dickson,’ he called to a subordinate, ‘just take a walk to where this young woman live, and inquire into this case for me. You want us to take your friend in charge, I suppose?’

‘Yes. She is working at No. 201 Lower Orange Street.’

‘All right, missis; let me take you’ statement first.’

He began to cross-examine her. Had she and Jane had any words lately?

She wished to say no, but remembered that Sampson might be subpœnaed to give evidence in the case, and that he would probably be compelled to give a truthful version of the episode of the night before. She hesitated for a moment while trying to frame a suitable answer, and in that moment of hesitation was lost.

‘What did the two of you quarrel about?’ asked the detective; ‘about your sweetheart, no?’

‘We didn’t have any quarrel.’

‘But there was a disagreement?’

‘Well, if you want to put it like that.’

‘When did it take place?’

‘Last night we had a few words, but that have nothing to do with what I come to you about.’

‘Oh, no, missis? But you see, it looks funny that after the two of you have a row, you should charge a girl that is living in the same room with you with stealing your money. Who saw you put the money on the table, and how are you going to identify it?’

This was a poser. Sathya had no answer.

‘I see how it is,’ remarked the sergeant-major laughing. ‘Well, tell me what you want me to do. If you take my advice you would go home quietly and leave your friend alone; for I don’t see how you are going to prove your case.’

He looked at her keenly, knowing beforehand what her answer would be.

‘Since you say that, I can have nothing more to say,’ replied Sathya morosely. ‘I know I miss my money, but I suppose I must lose it, since you say so. All right; you needn’t bother arrest her.’

She turned and left the room. As she went out one of the detectives called after her: ‘Don’t make any more row with your friend!’ She was now aware that they had seen through her concocted story, and great was her respect for their wonderful ability. But greater still was her annoyance with them. And more bitter than ever was her dislike of Jane.

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN SATHYRA walked into her yard that evening, after a day's experience that she had found very annoying, she was surprised to find that Jane had arrived before her, and had actually moved out of the room the few things she possessed. Jane, in fact, had risen to the occasion; she had decided that it was impossible for her and Sathyra to live together any longer, and had proceeded to make arrangements for an immediate removal.

Her character for decency and trustworthiness stood her in good stead at this crisis. She explained her situation to some of the girls and women at the liquor establishment, persons with whom she was on good terms and whom she had assisted in one way or another at different times. More than one of these offered to share a room with her as joint-tenant; a couple even told her that she could stay with them until she got a place of her own. But her dispute with Sathyra was too new, the cause of it too common, for her to wish just then to share any other woman's apartment. She rightly guessed that her working friends would have gentlemen coming to see them at some time or other, and this might lead to a repetition of the painful experience she had just endured.

She had another plan. She borrowed a few shillings from her friends, struck work at twelve o'clock, and went out and bought a canvas cot. Thus was a bed secured. She then went home, after engaging a man to take the cot to the yard in which she lived; arrived there, she took her scanty possessions out of the room in the presence of Father Daniel and some others (for fear she should be further accused of stealing), then went next door, where she knew there was a room to rent.

It was a tiny place, just big enough to hold her cot, a table, and a chair. These latter things she had not, but one or two boxes served to take the place they would have occupied. The rent of the room was four shillings a month; and though she could not pay this amount in advance, as was the custom, she was allowed to move in on condition that at the end of her month the money would be forthcoming.

Sathyra was relieved to find her gone, though, with the inconsistency of human nature, she regretted that Jane had shown herself so resourceful. She was still unpleasantly near, too, so that if Sampson wished to pay her attentions there was nothing to prevent him doing so. However, realising

that this could not now be prevented, Sathyra shrugged her shoulders and awaited events. 'If she wants to teck him, she can teck him,' she said, with fine philosophy.

But Jane did not want Mr Sampson.

For the first time in her life she was thrown absolutely on her own resources. She had lived under Mrs Mason's care, such as it was; she had shared a room with Sathyra. She had come to Kingston under Mrs Mason's protection, and had left Mrs Mason to go under the protection of Sathyra. But now she had to depend upon herself entirely; she was her own mistress in every sense of the word. She was lonelier than she had ever been before; yet, on the other hand, she felt far more independent than she had ever done. She had her own room. And she was only a little over sixteen!

But she looked a woman. A very young woman, it is true; but not at all like a raw, growing girl. Her education and development had proceeded rapidly. She had passed through several stages of city life in a very short space of time.

She was now her own mistress—upon six shillings a week. As a domestic servant, if she had even earned three shillings a week, and been given her food, she would have been better off. She knew this, but she had no desire to return to domestic service.

The struggle to make two ends meet grew more severe as the weeks went by and Jane found her clothing wearing out. A Syrian packman with whom the people in the yard dealt became her special providence in that he agreed to let her have fifteen shillings' worth of goods, to be paid for at the rate of a shilling a week. The things she took from him could have been bought for cash in any of the shops for eight or nine shillings; but, apart from having to wait till this amount should be accumulated, there would always be the temptation to spend money in hand, a temptation which Jane had already experienced and yielded to in the past. But a shilling a week for rent, and another for clothing (for some few weeks at any rate) made necessary a retrenchment in her expenditure on food if she were to have anything left for picnics, car-rides, and those other forms of recreation which helped to make life pleasant to the people of her station. She managed ingeniously. Instead of continuing to take lunch from the general caterer at threepence per day, she ate bread and raw salt fish instead, or bread and fried fish, or a pint can of hominy, none of these costing more than penny-half-penny a day. For this change of diet she had an excuse ready: she told her fellow-workers that she did not care for cooked food during the day. This

excuse, which was transparent to every one who heard it, was accepted as if perfectly true; some of the girls even observed that they too did not think that cooked food agreed with them during the day: 'it was too heavy for their chests.' Poverty created a bond of sympathy between these workers; they understood one another's struggles well enough, and had all, more or less, to make little economies at one time or another. On her lunch, then, Jane saved ninepence a week, and she had already arranged with one of the women in the new yard to supply her with tea in the morning and with dinner for two shillings and sixpence per week.

This left her with ninepence to spend as she pleased; but the food she now ate was by no means as nourishing as that she had got from Mrs Mason, or as that which Sathyra had managed to procure. Thin soups and rice figured prominently in the weekly menu; the frequent appearance of boiled green bananas and breadfruit recalled the diet of her earlier days; herring often took the place of salt fish, and fresh meat was a rarity. The latter she did not miss much; accustomed for so many years to 'salt things,' she had not yet acquired much of a taste for fresh beef, and probably never would.

She never invited any one into her room. She was ashamed of it. She had no furniture, and she did not want the people in the yard to know it; they knew it, of course, and one or two of them, not liking the reserve of the girl, were prepared at the first opportunity to abuse her about her poverty: one had even taken the trouble to tell a near neighbour that Jane was 'as naked as a bottle.' But she made friends of others—the mothers especially—by taking a kindly and genuine interest in their little ones. Some of these women worked out as domestic servants, leaving their babies in the care of an elderly person, who was supposed to look after them and feed them at a fixed charge for each of one shilling per week. It is to be feared that these babies received but nominal attention, the old caretaker having matters of her own to attend to. As the mothers did not usually return from work before seven o'clock, and sometimes later, Jane would frequently spend an hour or so in playing with the babies, hushing them when they cried, and nursing them to sleep. Compliments were paid to her on this score.

'You is training for when y'u have you' own baby,' laughingly said to her one evening a grateful parent; 'an' dat shouldn't be long from now.'

'It will be long,' replied Jane, 'for I wouldn't like——' she stopped short, realising she was about to say something that might give offence.

'Y'u right,' said the woman, understanding the drift of her unfinished sentence. 'It is really hard to have to work and mind a baby at de same time; but we all have to teck what come. You don't know what you' luck is gwine to be.'

‘But we mus’ try an’ do de best we can for weself,’ said Jane; ‘dat’s why I want to keep myself out of trouble. I like children, but what’s de use of havin’ dem if y’u can’t support dem, an’ have to work hard all de same? Don’t y’u see it’s better y’u doan’t have none?’

‘Dis child’s fader gone to sea,’ said the mother, by way of defence and explanation, ‘or it would be all right; howsoever, as it born I can’t sorry, for dat would be a sin. But you don’t wrong when you say y’u wouldn’t like to have to work and bring up you’ pickney,^[11] for all de time you is at you’ work you have to be t’inking of dem, an’ sometime y’u teck an imagination and believe all sort of accident happening to dem. Dat’s why I thank you for helpin’ de old lady wid Jim.’

[11] Children. A corruption of ‘piccanninies,’ which is itself a corruption of two Spanish words: *pequeños niños*.

‘Tcho! dat’s noten,’ said Jane simply; then, inspired by maternal instinct and aspiration, she launched out into a statement of her ambitions for herself and her family, should she ever have one.

‘Ef I had any children,’ said she, ‘you know what I would like? I would like to have a nice little house, wid about two room, quite new and pretty; an’ I would like about four children. I doan’t t’ink I care for any more, for, y’u see, if you have plenty, them will give y’u a lot of boderation, but if you have just t’ree or four, you can look after them well. Then I would like me house to have some nice furniture, like what Miss Mason, de lady I was workin’ wid when I first came to Kingston, did have. I would wash de children two times every day, in de morning an’ in de evening, an’ when them grow big I would tie them hair wid blue ribban an’ teck dem out for a walk. When dem grow big, I would send them to school every day, an’ every Sunday I would send them to Sunday school. When people see them, them would ask, “Who children is that?” an’ somebody might say: “Dem is Miss Burrell children.” By this time, now, I am one side hearin’ de whole thing; an’ you can guess how I feel please an’ proud! I would dress whenever I go out, an’ I wouldn’t allow one of my pickney to go out into de street widout boots. When them get big, I would teach them to learn de piano— —’

She was interrupted by the laughter of her listener.

‘You fly high,’ said the latter, ‘you’ head really big! Y’u want piano too!’

‘Why not?’ asked Jane half apologetically, but swiftly coming back to earth again. ‘Why can’t we black people have piano too? I would like to

learn to play meself, but I know I don't have de money, so it's no use fretten over it. But if you can get you' children to learn it, doan't y'u see you would be wrong not to do it?'

'Yes; dat's if you can do it,' said the woman, who entertained no illusions about the future. 'But how you gwine to do it? We poor people mus' praise God if we can get a bread.' She paused to kiss her little boy all over his face, to which caress he responded by slobbering hers all over with saliva. 'I am satisfy,' she continued, 'ef I can teach Jim a trade when him grow big. If it hard to meck a livin' now, it may be worse hard by-and-by. But of course you young, so you can believe a lot o' t'ings if y'u like.'

The moonlight streamed down upon the yard, throwing into relief every part of it, revealing the dilapidated fence, the ramshackle row of rooms, the little superior two-roomed cottage on the other side of the yard, the odds and ends of things scattered about. The poverty of the place stood confessed, and Jane, seated on a box by the threshold of her friend's room, had before her eyes the material evidence of the sort of life which the most of her class must live. Not improbably, some of them had dreamt dreams such as hers; their fancy had been as free. But they had come to this, and their fate, if not accepted without an occasional protest, was nevertheless accepted, and not deemed too unhappy by them.

'I wonder why black people so poor?' she asked—a question identical with that she had put to her mother many months before.

'Dat is what nobody can tell,' returned Jim's mother. 'P'rhaps it's because when slavery was goin' on, de white people teck everyting. Them have all de land an' all de house, while poor we have noten, an' have to work hard for a bread.'

'My fader have land, too,' observed Jane proudly, 'and ef it wasn't dat I want to be independent, I could go back home. But him didn't get it for noten like de white people. Him buy it.'

'Y'u better off than poor buckra,'^[12] said the other woman. 'Your pupa might leave a piece of land for y'u; den perhaps you can get you' piano,' and again she laughed a little at Jane's ambition.

^[12] 'Poor buckra': a poor white man.

'I doan't expect noten,' answered Jane. 'Pupa have oder children, an' me big brother may get everything when him come back home from Colon. I

have to look for meself, an' I not going to throw meself away like I see some other gurls doin'.'

'You right, me love,' sighed the older woman, carefully rising with the little Jim, who was now asleep in her arms. She regarded Jane as a visionary who would soon realise the folly of wishing for impossibilities.

'Your life is long, an' you have a good job. But ef you didn't have one y'u wouldn't talk so. Poor people caan't talk 'bout piano. It's enough if dem can get a bread.'

Jane told her good-night, not in the least offended by her outspokenness. Down at the place where she worked the girls talked much as she herself had been doing: they were all looking forward to better times. She preferred their view of the future to that of Jim's mother.

There were others in the yard besides this woman to whom Jane was something of a puzzle. They could not understand why she should prefer to live by herself; they said 'she had heart,' and in that they said truth. It required courage to do as she did; but behind that courage was vanity, the desire to attract attention and to shine in the eyes of those who knew her.

Next door was Sathyra; so when Jane went out she took good care not even to glance in the direction of her late residence. Similarly, Sathyra pretended as if no such person as Jane existed when they chanced to pass each other in the street. Yet Sathyra knew all about Jane that was to be gleaned by apparently casual inquiry, and Father Daniel kept Jane informed as to how life went with Sathyra, the old man's method of conveying information being through the fence which separated the two yards, a wooden fence some parts of which had here and there fallen away through old age and the activities of industrious young people searching for small bits of firewood. Father Daniel had taken a fancy to Jane, and so had his wife; both more than once invited her to come over and sit with them of an evening. But Sathyra lived in that yard, and Jane could not forget that charge of theft which (as she believed) might have sent her to the prison if she had not had friends who took her part against Sathyra. She feared as well as disliked Sathyra. As for Mr Sampson, she hardly gave him a thought.

That gentleman had been told by Sathyra when next he saw her that Jane had stolen her money and gone about her business. He had shaken his head sorrowfully at the news, declared his belief that there was no limit to the depravity of girls from the country, and concluded in his own mind that Sathyra had robbed Jane, and driven her from the premises. He took care not to inquire where Jane might be, for he knew Sathyra would not tell him the

truth; he accepted the situation, feeling that his friendship with Sathyra would not be of long duration. For, if her aim was to 'eat him out,' his object was to avoid being eaten out; and in these circumstances harmonious relations were impossible.

It was Father Daniel who brought the news of the final separation between Sampson and his 'intended' to Jane one evening. He gave it through the fence, about six weeks after Jane had set up as an independent tenant.

'De young man leave dat gal dat did say you tief her money,' said the old man to her. 'Dem had a big row last night, an' I thoughted she was goin' to beat him. She say that all him give her since she know him is one ten shillin's, and dat if him ever venture to come back to her place she will dash him wid hot water. So y'u see, me child, dat God revenge y'u. Trust to Him, an' leave everyt'ing to Him, an' you will be all right.' Jane heard the news with genuine delight. Sathyra would miss her now, just as (she had no doubt) Mrs Mason missed her still.

Thus the weeks slipped into months, and by the end of the third month Jane felt she had had more than enough of the life she was living. She was sick, weary, unutterably tired of her loneliness. She began to go about at nights; she attended practice dances and wakes, and at these she attracted the attention of the young men and found some pleasure in their society; but when they ventured upon intimate conversation she repulsed them. Her timidity was gone, but pride (a greater safeguard) had taken its place, and she knew well that these youths were not much better off than herself. Indeed, from her point of view of what men should earn, she considered them to be in a worse position than herself: they had little or nothing to commend them to her serious appreciation.

Sometimes she thought of her home in the country; and far away it seemed, up there amongst the mountains, half-lost, dreaming its monotonous, half-idle existence away. She wondered how her friends were getting on, what had become of her sister, whether Mrs Mason had written to tell her mother that she had run off without a word: all this she thought of at intervals, but with no regrets; she did not wish to return; and she felt that, if her people had heard what she had done, they must have accepted the fact as quite natural. She longed for change; but a going back to the old life as a country girl was impossible now. Often she wondered if any young man would fall in love with her, not one like Cecil or Sampson, or the young fellows she knew, but some person whom she could really care for. She was looking out for a mate, though not conscious that she was doing so.

Not often now did she think of getting married. She had learnt by this—indeed, she had always more or less understood—that marriages were

comparatively rare events in the life of the people, and she accepted the fact without a protest. Yet still she desired 'to keep herself up,' and this feeling, now the result of pride and not any longer of the old parental admonition, prevented her from drifting into any sort of connection with any one, even when the temptation to do so was at its strongest.

But day by day the wish for something new, for a change in her life, grew greater. She thought of removing: that at least would be something in the way of novelty. But to remove would mean the payment of a month's rent at the end of the month, and the immediate payment of another month's rent in advance to her new landlady. The financial obstacle was insurmountable: she had to abandon the idea. She became dejected, wretched; she grew visibly thin.

She too had come to find that for one's respectability one often pays a price. But still she revolted against the idea of 'throwing herself away.'

CHAPTER XIV

ONE MONDAY morning when she got down to work she found the girls already there in something like a flutter of excitement. As a rule, the changes which took place at Mr Repburn's moved them not at all; they had no interest in the establishment beyond doing their work and getting their wages on Saturday afternoons. But this morning a new man was to take the place of the old supervisor or foreman, who had been transferred to some other branch of the same establishment; and as this man would directly have to do with them, they confessed to some curiosity as to his disposition.

In advance, they were antagonistic.

'I wonder what sort o' boss him will be?' asked one young woman, familiarly known to her friends as 'Chichi.' 'Maybe him is one of those sort o' people who is never satisfied.'

'Boss?' queried another, 'boss? I don't see we have any boss here at all. If y'u say him is the foreman, well, I can understand y'u; but "boss" is anoder thing altogether. The only boss I know is Mr Repburn himself, an' he is not interfering wid anybody. An' I may just as well tell you, me love, that if dis new foreman, or "boss" as you call him, is goin' to be ignorant, I meck up my mind to clear out an' leave de work.'

'Hi! what's up!' exclaimed Chichi. 'Things must be all right with you if y'u can leave like dat.'

'No; I don't know what I will do if I leave here, but dat wouldn't hinder me. My mother still alive, an' so long as she have strength an' can work, I can't starve.'

'But why them bring a new man in de place?' asked Jane. 'We was all gotten on so nice wid Mr Charley. Why them discharge him? I doan't like new people meself, but I can't afford to chuck up me job too easy.'

'I doan't think them discharge him,' said Chichi. 'I heard Saturday evening that him was goin' somewhere else.'

'An' fancy him didn't say a word about it to any of we!' observed the lady who had already begun to prepare for departure at any moment that the new foreman should offend her. 'Them don't count people in dis place. Them treat y'u as if y'u was a stick. Y'u mean to say Mr Charley couldn't even say, "Good-bye, dog," when him was goin' away Saturday night? An'

now this other man will do de same. In another country it is different; only in Jamaica your labour don't count.'

She knew no other country; nevertheless she was satisfied that labour elsewhere was more highly regarded than in Jamaica, and her audience agreed with her.

'What kind o' man him is?' wondered Jane. 'Him is old like Mr Charley?'

'I doan't know,' answered Chichi, 'but I hear him is a married man, so him can't be too young.' Chichi had evidently been making some inquiries about Mr Charley's successor.

'It's not because him married him must be old,' objected Jane; 'doan't young man get married too?'

Chichi was about to make some reply when the entrance of the person under discussion prevented any further direct reference to him. He proved to be a man about forty years of age, well-set-up, and just a shade above black. He had an energetic manner. He was well dressed and was plainly a responsible sort of person. He said good-morning to the assembled girls and immediately set himself to work. Acting on the principle that a new broom should sweep clean, he had everything put in order at once, muttered now and then his disgust at the conditions which he found, wondered if any care had ever been taken of the place, and confirmed the girls in their opinion that he was likely to prove a disagreeable supervisor to work under.

At lunch-time they held a solemn council and positively asserted that he was likely to prove a tyrant.

'Y'u can see how him begin already!' protested Jane; 'him is gwine to find all sort of fault; if I can get anoder situation I will leave!' Her determination was applauded by the rest, though most of them knew it was but rhetoric.

'I am goin' to be rude to him!' declared the girl who had already said that with her mother to help her she could afford to be independent; and it was clear that she meant her words. The truth was, she was rather tired of working at the same place and was rather glad of an opportunity to show her independence. She carried out her threat that very afternoon, but, before she could hurl her resignation at the new foreman, he told her that she had better take her hat and go. His promptitude in dealing with insubordination gave pause to the other workers. During the remainder of the week they were in a subdued and chastened frame of mind, and he on his part gave them no particular cause for offence.

Jane especially had no reason to complain of his treatment. He was very lenient with her, he was positively kind, he was friendly. She felt pleased with him. She confidentially admitted to the girls one day, while they were at lunch, that she preferred him to old Charley.

‘There’s one in the ring,’ thereupon sang one of those to whom she spoke; ‘there’s another in the ring,’ chanted a second comrade. The others laughed.

‘What y’u mean?’ asked Jane, worldly-wise enough now to know that these expressions contained a significant implication. ‘I only say what all of you know. Him doan’t turn out so bad as we did expec’, an’ we all ought to glad of it. What y’u singin’ about?’

‘Oh, Miss Burrell! don’t form like you don’t understand!’ cried Chichi. ‘Doan’t y’u see that Mr Curden like you? There is one in the ring!’

‘And, as she like him, there’s another in the ring,’ laughed the young woman who had sung this line before.

Jane was nettled. ‘Y’u forget him is a married man?’ she demanded. ‘What I goin’ to do wid him?’

‘That’s not making much difference in these days,’ declared Chichi with conviction.

‘It meck a difference to me,’ replied Jane. ‘A gurl would be very foolish to have anyt’ing to do wid a man when she know him can’t do anyt’ing good for her; an’ I am not a fool. I doan’t want anybody wife to pray God for me. I have enough boderation already, an’ if I go and teck up some more it would be my fault. So dere is nobody in any ring; y’u can teck my word for dat.’

‘That’s what you say now,’ Chichi answered. ‘That’s what you tell us. But y’u not goin’ to tell Mr Curden dat?’ Then seeing that Jane was seriously getting angry, she remarked: ‘But it’s none of our business, Miss Burrell; we only meckin’ a little fun. Everybody mus’ follow her own mind.’

‘Yes, it’s nobody business but Miss Burrell’s own,’ agreed another girl. ‘But y’u mean to say, Miss Burrell, dat y’u would have noten to do wid Mr Curden?’

‘True!’ protested Jane. ‘Him is ole enough to be me fader, an’ him is a big married man. What I gwine to do wid him?’

‘Sometimes we say one thing an’ do anoder, you know,’ sagely commented her interlocutor; ‘an’ you can never know what y’u goin’ to do in dis world till you do it. We can only wait an’ see. But I hope y’u don’t think we are too fast!’

‘No, I doan’t say you too fast, for I know you doan’t mean anyt’ing,’ Jane replied; ‘but, you see, I am right not to let anybody couple me name wid a person dat I doan’t have noten to do wid, for presently y’u begin to hear a lot of t’ings about me, an’ none of dem true. If a t’ing is true, you can’t mind it, for it is you’ own fault; but when it’s not your own fault you must vex. P’rhaps it may come to Mr Curden hearing dat I say him like me, an’ him may go say I impertinent. And I wouldn’t like dat.’

‘Him wouldn’t say you impertinent at all,’ Chichi answered with conviction. ‘Him would like to hear it. You may not see what we see, but it’s true all de same. Y’u think him would be so polite and kind ef him didn’t want you to like him? Why him don’t do it to nobody else? You have only to say de word an’ you will be all right.’

‘I don’t want to be all right wid any married man,’ Jane again protested, and she meant it.

‘So you say,’ said Chichi, ‘an’ you right. But I wouldn’t quarrel wid de foreman: it doan’t pay. Besides, as everything is goin’ now, there’s not much use in being too particular. What you doan’t do another one will do.’

‘But dat’s no reason why every one should do it,’ interpolated a girl who had not hitherto taken part in the conversation, and who shared Jane’s views in this particular matter.

‘That is what I say meself,’ Jane asseverated, proud to find that her doctrine of moral perfection was not regarded as mere nonsense. ‘It’s not because one man tief dat anoder is to tief, for oderwise everybody would be in prison.’

‘Everybody who they catch,’ gaily commented Chichi. ‘That is the difference. Some do a thing, an’ nobody know, and when other people do it, them find them out. It all depends.’

And here the conversation turned upon luck and chance, and continued till it was time for the girls to go back to their work.

But Jane now had something to think of. She had noticed the foreman’s consideration and had been pleased with it; she had attributed it to kindness. The reason why she had not imagined it to have any peculiar significance was because he was so much older than herself, and his position so high a one. Above all, he was married. But now that the girls had put upon his attitude towards her a construction quite different from her own, she was inclined to think they were probably right; even while she was arguing with them she had been by no means convinced that they were wrong. And, if the truth must be told, she felt flattered. It was something to be proud of, this; it proved to her that she had been quite right to set a high value on herself.

But she grew cautious also. From that evening she began to leave work punctually with the other girls, and to walk home with one or the other of them; and this because Mr Curden had more than once of late kept her talking on the sidewalk of the building after the day's work was done. He hadn't delayed her for long, nor had his conversation extended beyond a few commonplace remarks and a compliment or two. 'But that must be only a beginning,' she sagaciously remarked to herself, and she knew now that the girls had taken note of the circumstance and had come to a definite conclusion upon it. If she were to avoid having her name connected with that of the foreman she must leave with the others, and must not be seen talking with him.

But he noticed the change. After a few days he found an opportunity to remark to her one morning:—

'Y'u seem to be in a great hurry to leave in the evening, Miss Burrell; what's the matter?'

'Nothing, Mr Curden,' said she; 'only, I live far.'

'Where y'u live?' was his question, which she had not foreseen.

She gave him her number correctly—as a matter of fact he knew it already—whereupon he said, casually, as it seemed—

'I must come an' see you some spare evening or the other.'

Here was a ticklish proposition, but Jane's wits were equal to the emergency.

'I doan't know if me parents will like it, Mr Curden. I never invite any visitor to them place.'

The other girls knew that Jane's parents did not live in Kingston, but Curden had as yet made no inquiries of them about Jane. And as it was quite natural that she should be living with her own people, as indeed he had all the time believed so, he did not dream of doubting her word. Nor had he any intention or desire to visit Jane at her own place. The offer to do so was merely what he would have called 'a feeler.'

'I am sorry for that; but you are big enough to have a place of you' own now; don't y'u think so?'

Jane's work was being checked, and she and Curden were standing at some little distance away from the other persons in the room. He talked very quietly, so that his words might not be overheard; Jane answered in a similar tone of voice.

'No. I am quite comfortable. I couldn't live by meself, an' there is no necessity, for I am well look after.'

The checking continued slowly.

‘But it’s better to be you’ own mistress than to have to be under other people all the time. You can’t stand that much longer?’

‘I like it so,’ said Jane, and her positive assertion made the foreman suspect that it was intended as an answer to his unspoken proposal.

When Jane returned to her seat to resume her labelling, there was a smile on the face of every girl. They had not heard a word of what had passed between her and Mr Curden, but the mere fact that a conversation had been carried on in an undertone was more than sufficient for their active imaginations. They looked wise though they said nothing. And Jane understood their look.

Nothing more passed between herself and Mr Curden for a few days after this; but he was cold and distant and very exacting in his supervision of her work. This a little alarmed her; but she was only sullen when he was by, pouting her mouth and showing that she could be annoyed as well as he. She instinctively understood that though he did have power to dismiss her he would not exercise it now: she had not openly offended him in any way. Yet she was secretly afraid of even doing so, she was not in the position of the young woman he had summarily discharged so soon after his arrival. He might believe that she lived with her parents, and that was a help. But if, offended with her, he should get rid of her — —

She dismissed the thought of such a contingency. She would not worry about the future until actually obliged to do so.

CHAPTER XV

IN JANE'S yard the monotony of life was broken mainly by births, deaths, removals, and the coming of new tenants; deaths were on the whole rare events, the coming and going of tenants were the commonest. The migratory instinct was strong in the people; some of them would live for three or four years in the same yard, then suddenly there would come upon them a strong inclination to seek new quarters, and during the next year or so they would remove two or three times before settling down in one place once more for another term of years.

The little two-roomed cottage in the yard had been empty for quite a little time, it being of the nature of an aristocratic residence, at a rental of fifteen shillings a month. It had been inhabited by a superior family of four, who had occupied it for some years and had removed a month or so before Jane went to live in the yard. That it was to be rented again (as Jane now heard) did not interest her in the slightest; for she knew that its occupant or occupants would not give her a second thought, considering that her room was the smallest in the yard, and the worst furnished.

What did concern her was the illness of Jim, the baby whom she most cared to nurse and look after when she came home from work. What ailed him was not positively known: the people in the yard said he had marasma, a generic term which they applied to all forms of disease which they were unable to determine more particularly. And in truth it was a wasting away from which the little fellow suffered: either he had eaten too much dirt in his peregrinations about the yard, or his daily meals of condensed milk and cornmeal pap had not agreed with him, or too many malarial mosquitoes had feasted on him, or, perhaps, a combination of cornmeal pap, dirt, and malarial mosquitoes had proved too much for him.

Whatever the cause or causes of his ailment, he was very ill, and the women in the yard, awakened to sincere sympathy, gravely shook their heads over his condition and prophesied the worst. On the other hand, his mother hoped for the best, talked of taking him to the hospital, made up her mind to take him to the parish doctor, put off doing so, applied home remedies, and refused to believe that he would not shortly get well. But Jim only worsened, and then, for a whole week, his mother had to remain at home with him (having put some one in her place to do her work at the

house where she was employed). The child died early on a Saturday morning, in its mother's arms, and the yard was informed of the death by the wailing of the poor woman. Jane was amongst the first to offer sympathy and to enter into consultation as to how the burial was to be arranged.

It was understood that the mother had no money: it was also understood that she did not wish to beg for her little boy a pauper's coffin and grave.

'I doan't blame her,' said one of the women standing in the group which discussed this latest phase of events in the yard. 'She not a pauper, for she been workin' all de time, an' she never beg anybody noten. An' when you go an' ask de city for anyt'ing, you have to answer all sort of question, so dat, ef y'u doan't have de grace of God in you' heart, you can't keep you' temper.'

'Then what she goin' to do?' inquired Jane, who knew better than any one else the straitened circumstances of the bereaved mother. 'She don't get no money dis week, as she doan't work. She have to pay de person she put in her place.'

The group considered the problem in silence. A pauper's grave, like the almshouse, shocked their sense of pride: it was the ultimate misfortune.

'P'rhaps we could help her,' Jane suggested timidly. 'How much de funeral will cost?'

'Not much,' said a man who was preparing to leave for his work. 'She can get a grave fo' four shillin's, an' a few other things wouldn't cost more than another five or six shillin's. I have a few piece of board in me room,' he continued, after a brief pause, 'and when I come home this evening I will knock up a little coffin for her.' He was a carpenter by trade, and the coffin was to be his contribution to the funeral. A murmur of appreciation followed him as he went through the gate.

'I can give— —' Jane stopped a moment to reflect how much she could afford to contribute. 'I will give a shillin',' she decided, and it was felt generally that her offer was a generous one.

Thus the hat went round, some giving sixpence, some threepence, and by this means four shillings were collected. It was then that attention was concentrated upon the new tenant of the two-roomed house in a most favourable manner. He had moved in but three days before and had proved to be quite a young man, not more than twenty-five years of age; and as he had taken a separate house and brought no one with him, the other tenants had concluded that he was either about to get married or was unusually extravagant. Being approached timidly by Jane on behalf of little Jim's funeral expenses (with apologies, for he was still a stranger), he surprised

every one by donating four shillings to the fund. All eyes were fixed upon him as he made his way to the gate, and he was well aware that his generosity had made him a marked man and a power in the yard. He had completely eclipsed the carpenter, for ready money counted for more than labour and odd bits of material in the minds of these people. 'Him is a gentleman,' emphatically proclaimed an elderly woman after he had left, and that was also the opinion of the others.

Jim's mother was already well aware of what was going on, and, though deeply grief-stricken, she nevertheless felt her importance as an object of commiseration and sympathy, and took no part in the collection of funds. Jane it was who was left to manage that branch of the business; and she too became so pleased with the important function she discharged that she undertook to buy the baby's shroud during the day, and take the body to the cemetery. She got down to work late that morning, and had to explain the reason to Mr Curden.

'It is your baby?' he pleasantly asked her, reverting to his former friendly manner.

'You know it is not,' she replied, tossing her head; 'y'u only say dat to say something.'

'What I have to say to you is more important than that,' he murmured confidentially. 'A girl like you shouldn't be livin' in a common yard. Besides, I hear it isn't true that you live with you' parents. Why you tell me an untruth like that?'

So he had found out the truth! Jane answered nothing, and Curden laughed. She suspected that he had been questioning the inquiring, loquacious Chichi (which was true). She also felt that the knowledge he had obtained was indubitably power.

However, it was much that he had made no fuss about her being an hour late for work, and in Jim's mother and her poverty she had an object lesson which she was not slow to understand. Where was the baby's father? Curden at any rate was a man on the spot, a man who could not easily disappear and leave no trace behind. But she did not think long upon this matter. To wait until what should happen did happen was a less disturbing line of conduct.

At lunch-time she bought the bit of lawn that was to make Jim's shroud, and that evening, while the kindly carpenter was making the little coffin, she and another young woman in the yard made a shroud. The baby was to be buried the next morning, the mother having arranged about the grave during the day: the body lay in the room under a sheet and covered with pieces of

ice; the door and the windows of the room stood open, and a few chairs scattered about the yard proclaimed the intention of some of the people to sit up with Jim's mother as a token of sympathy and as a means of passing a night in pleasant companionship and in the luxury of a grief not their own.

To-morrow was Sunday. To-night, therefore, they were not obliged to sleep. This was not to be a regular wake, for the dead one was but a baby after all, and the mother could afford no refreshment; but it was pleasant to sit and talk, to sympathise, to deplore the hard lot of the poor, to reflect aloud that in heaven all would be reunited, and that there would be no night there, no weeping, no parting, no care, no want. Occasionally they would sing a hymn, quietly (for it was only a baby that was dead), and it was while they were in the midst of this exercise that the gentleman who had so generously given four shillings that morning towards the expenses of Jim's funeral entered the yard.

Vincent Broglie was not proud. Although in the receipt of thirty-five shillings a week and known at the job printing office at which he worked as an expert compositor and a steady workman, standing next to the foreman; although brown in complexion (even if somewhat plain-looking), and always well-dressed, as became a man who earned as much as thirty-five shillings a week, he did not give himself airs. His face was frank in expression, he was open-handed; consequently he was a favourite with a large number of young ladies, on whom he lavished all his spare cash. He had taken the two-roomed house in the yard, not because he was about to get married (as some of the tenants had erroneously supposed), but because he liked to treat himself well and loved to make a show. Coming in now and finding a number of persons assembled at something like a function, he stopped and said good-evening pleasantly, whereupon one of the men rose and offered him his seat. Vincent took it as the singing ceased, and in a moment he found himself regarded as the acknowledged though undeclared president of the gathering, as a gentleman to be treated with respect.

'When the burial going to take place?' he asked, more for the sake of saying something than because he really wanted information.

'To-morrow morning at seven, sir,' some one answered him. 'As it dead soon this mornin', it have to bury soon to-morrow.'

'The mother going to the funeral?' he next asked.

'No, sir.' After a moment's hesitation his informant added: 'I doan't think she have sufficient good things to wear.'

'She beg me teck it to the cemetery in a 'bus,' said Jane, 'but I doan't want to go by meself. Somebody else will have to go wid me.'

No one seemed disposed to undertake this duty; at any rate, no one offered to do so.

‘She doan’t have no relative in Kingston,’ pursued Jane, ‘so of course we have to do what we can to assist her. She in de room cryin’, and she is right to cry, for it was a nice little baby, an’ if it did live it would have turned out good. However, we can only say, “Thy will be done.”’

This pious sentiment met with warm approval from those who heard it, which induced Jane to ask once more, ‘But who will go to de burial ground wid me?’

Vincent was a man of impulses, and his natural tendency to sudden inspirations was much strengthened at that moment by the glass of whisky he had had shortly before going home. He had greatly facilitated by four shillings the respectable burying of Jim; he saw himself treated just then as the chief personage of the yard; one to be respectfully addressed and deferred to. Hence, acting on a thought which occurred to him as Jane ceased, he blurted out:—

‘I will go to the funeral.’

He had a fondness for funerals—so had all his friends and acquaintances, so had all the people in the yard; so have all, or nearly all, the people of Jamaica, as a matter of fact; though it is a fondness for the funeral of a grown-up person as a rule, a funeral with a hearse, a decorated coffin, a parson preceding, and several cabs and buggies bringing up the rear. A baby’s funeral, if the baby’s parents are poor, is a simple, unspectacular sort of affair, and really not worth while attending from the point of view of personal exhibition and social enjoyment. Ordinarily, Vincent would not have thought of following this one, much less of assisting prominently at it. But circumstances had suddenly led him to make the offer, which Jane proudly and gladly accepted the moment it was made.

No sooner were the words spoken than Vincent regretted the utterance of them. He was somewhat gratified at the same time, however, by the chorus of praise which greeted his magnanimous offer. Two persons immediately ran to tell Jim’s mother of the great good fortune that was to be Jim’s on the following morning, and that lady came forth herself to thank him humbly and respectfully. He went to bed soon after, leaving the others discussing his wonderful merits; and early on Sunday morning, faithful to his promise, he was up and dressed in full black. Jane had attired herself in a nice, neat white dress (for which a Syrian packman had not yet been fully paid), and a white straw hat. One of the women lent her a bit of black ribbon to wear as a sash; and very becoming she looked as she took her place in the one-horse cab that was to form the funeral *cortège*.

As the coffin was lifted out from the yard to the cab, there was a sympathetic hush on the part of every one. Accustomed as these people were to death, it lost nothing of its awe and solemnity for them when the last leave-taking came to be made. The sobs of the mother touched them to silence; one or two stole to her side to comfort her. Tears stood in Jane's eyes, and Vincent himself, endeavouring to look calm and unconcerned, had a straitened, somewhat foolish expression on his face. He took his seat in the cab beside Jane; one-half of the coffin rested on the vacant seat which Jane faced, the other end of it pressed against her knees and was thus prevented from slipping. A few loiterers in the lane looked on with sober countenances, the men silently taking off their hats. Then the cabman lifted his reins, and at a funeral pace the horse moved off towards the burial ground.

The public grave-digger committed Jim's body to the earth, and the public reader consigned his little soul to God. Then, their task completed, Jane and Vincent re-entered the cab and were briskly driven back in the direction of the yard. They had talked but little on their journey to the cemetery, a serious demeanour being requisite on such an occasion. But now they laughed and chattered and enjoyed the ride, and Vincent even joked about the part he had played in this burial, and said how highly amused his friends would be when he should tell them about it. Jane felt that this was one of the treats of her life; she was proud to be driving in a cab, proud to be driving with such a person, proud that he didn't think himself too good to be seen in public with her; and her laughing face showed her pleasure. They were not far from home when, turning a corner, and still chatting gaily, they had to pull up quickly to allow a car to pass. Both Jane and Vincent stared at the people in the car. Amongst the passengers, and looking full at her and her companion, was Mr Curden, Jane's admirer and chief.

CHAPTER XVI

‘I SUPPOSE you think you are smart, eh?’

‘I doan’t understand y’u, Mr Curden.’

‘You understand me well enough. You can’t tell me y’u didn’t see me yesterday, and y’u know I see you.’

‘Yes, I did see you, when I were coming from de burial ground, but I doan’t know what that have to do wid smartness. I told you I was goin’ to a funeral on Saturday mornin’, an’ when you saw me yesterday I was comin’ from de funeral. So I doan’t see what you can mean about I think I am smart.’

‘You needn’t form that you don’t understand what I am saying, for I see in your face that y’u do. Why didn’t you tell me plain the other day that you have an “intended”? First, y’u say you are living with you’ parents, and I find out that you’ parents are not in Kingston at all; now you want to talk about a funeral when I am talking about your young man. What you pretending for?’

‘I have no young man, Mr Curden,’ answered Jane. ‘The gentleman y’u saw me wid yesterday mornin’ was a young man dat living in the same yard wid meself, an’ him and me teck de dead baby to de cemetery. I never know him before.’

Mr Curden laughed scornfully, to intimate that whoever else might be deceived by such a story, he was not likely to be.

‘Well!’ he exclaimed, shaking his head slowly as he looked Jane full in the face, half-angrily, half-admiringly, ‘you are a soon one, though! You look so quiet and so innocent, as if butter wouldn’t melt in you’ mouth; and you like to live with you’ parents, and you must go home early every evening! You belong to church too, don’t you? An’ your pupa take round the collection plate? And you teach in a Sunday school?’

Jane’s lips trembled with anger, and it was all she could do to keep from bursting into tears. It cut her to the quick to be ridiculed like this, and with her feeling of anger and sense of humiliation was mingled the fear lest the foreman should find some excuse for sending her about her business. She answered him nothing, but waited to hear what next he might have to say.

He saw that she was angry, and thought that, perhaps, she might be speaking the truth in regard to her relations with the young man with whom he had seen her the day before, though he was naturally inclined to be suspicious.

‘If that young man is not your intended now,’ he said after a moment’s silence, ‘I suppose him want to be?’

‘I doan’t know anyt’ing about dat. I tell you I doan’t know noten about him. Him is a stranger, an’ it is only two days ago that we become acquaint. If it wasn’t dat de baby die in the yard I doan’t think we would have speak to one anoder. It’s de God’s truth I am telling you, Mr Curden, an’ you shouldn’t doubt me.’

‘The only way I won’t doubt y’u is if you promise me you won’t have anything to do with him. You promise?’

‘That is easy,’ returned Jane, heart-glad of the more favourable turn which the conversation was taking. ‘I doan’t believe him want to have anyt’ing to do wid me, an’ I know I doan’t partickiler to have noten to do wid him. I doan’t give him a thought!’

Curden did not think it at all likely that the young man should not wish to have anything to do with so prepossessing a girl as Jane: he argued from the particular to the general, and the particular was himself. But he thought it was just possible, though not probable, that she might not care to have anything to do with the young man. One thing at any rate was clear: she wished to stand on good terms with him (Curden), and that showed that as yet there could be little between her and the fellow he had seen her with. He knew by experience that if Jane really had an ‘intended’ she would have answered him very sharply, even if she had not gone so far as to abuse him. She would not so tamely have submitted to his jeering.

‘I believe what you say,’ he assured her. ‘I was only teasing you. That young man isn’t better-looking than me’—as a matter of fact Vincent was plainer-looking than Curden—‘and he can’t fix you up better than me. So if y’u want a friend—an’ you must want one—you needn’t bother with him. Why don’t you let me give you a place?’

The proposition was out now, and there was no use pretending not to understand it. Jane hung her head. Curden waited. ‘What you say?’ he asked at length.

She took refuge in delay.

‘I can’t tell you now. You must wait little.’

‘But why can’t you tell me now? You want to give the other fellow a chance?’

‘No!’ protested Jane; ‘doan’t I tell y’u I have noten to do wid him? Why y’u go on sayin’ de same thing over and over? I tell you to wait, for y’u can’t expect me to do everyting in a hurry, an’ there is plenty of time.’

She was speaking very familiarly now, a change which he noticed with pleasure. She was playing the coquette, was keeping him off for a while; but what she had said indicated plainly that she did not intend to answer no.

‘All right, then,’ he replied smilingly. ‘I don’t see what you waiting for, but I won’t press you. Don’t keep me longer than a week though!’

‘A month,’ declared Jane, nodding her head with the expression of one who had the upper hand. ‘If I can wait, you can wait too;’ then she half-walked, half-danced back from Curden’s desk to her seat; observing which, the other girls said nothing. This was the longest conversation the foreman had had with Jane, and it appeared to them to be the most important. Matters having reached such a stage, they felt it would be neither wise nor safe for them to interfere with what was ‘not their business.’ Mr Curden was a man of prompt decision, and they were not indispensable. Besides, they were rather familiar with such incidents.

And Jane? She knew she could not keep him a month for his answer, and that he did not intend to wait so long. She had said that Vincent was nothing to her, and that was true; she had said that she was nothing to him, and that was still more true. But she had been proud to be seen driving with him yesterday, he was much younger than this man, he was single, he was generous too, and was probably quite as well paid as the foreman. But how would that help her?

She did not want to accept Mr Curden’s offer, but she could see no way out of the difficulty. ‘What to do?’ she asked herself several times that day as she sat at her work. Curden had said that she put him off because she wanted to give Vincent a chance, and she had protested against the suggestion. Yet, as she thought the matter over, it was always with reference to what Vincent might do. She wondered if he liked her, and concluded that he did, on no other ground than that afforded by hope. Her promise to the foreman did not affect her in the slightest; she was determined to break it if she could. ‘Him tecking an advantage of me,’ was her comment on his behaviour, and she resented the being taken an advantage of.

But what was she to do? She had thought out no clearly-defined plan by the time she got home that evening; nevertheless her actions showed that some intention had begun to form itself in her mind. After having her dinner, she carefully dressed herself in the frock she had worn to Jim’s funeral the day before, discarding only the black ribbon, for which she substituted a sash of red. She surveyed herself as well as she could in the sixpenny

looking-glass she had bought (and secreted) while still working with Mrs Mason; she was satisfied with the reflection shown in the mirror, and with tremulous heart she strolled into the yard, knowing that the care bestowed upon her person could hardly fail to be remarked by the other tenants. She took a seat on a chair by the bereaved mother's room, ostensibly sitting there for the purpose of condoling with the woman. But her eyes were fixed on the gate, and she started expectantly whenever it was pushed open. 'She waiting for somebody,' said the tenants who observed her, and they had no doubt who it was that she waited for.

She remained sitting at the same spot for quite an hour before Vincent made his appearance.

Naturally, seeing Jane, he paused to say good-evening, and she rose to talk with him.

'Good-evening, Miss Burrell,' he said, smiling; 'got over the funeral yet?'

'Long ago, Mr Broglie,' Jane replied brightly; 'and you get over it too?'

'It didn't affect me,' he laughed; 'I have plenty of things to occupy me mind just now. Besides, it's only women that are always talking about funerals.'

'A gentleman like you will always have a lot to think about,' said Jane; 'but poor me have noten to do but work. You are independent.'

'I am not,' he assured her; 'but I will soon be more able to be. That is what I am busy about now.' He looked wise and portentous.

'Yes; an' while you can make you'self all right, a poor gurl like me have to remain all wrong,' said Jane. 'I have it hard, for I have nobody to help me, while as you are a man them can't teck an advantage of you as them like.'

'What? Anybody taking an advantage of you?' he asked; 'or is it only what you females are always saying?'

Should she tell him? And how? As these questions flashed through her brain, Vincent, who did not imagine that she had been complaining of anything particular, remarked, almost without stopping to let her answer his last question:—

'You are dressed up this evening; going out?'

'After I doan't have anybody to teck me anywhere,' she answered. 'It's lonely for me to go out by meself.'

The suggestion was so obvious that Vincent could not possibly misunderstand it. He smiled and touched her lightly on the cheek.

‘I have an engagement to-night,’ he said, ‘or I would take you for a car-drive. However, some other day.’

He moved off as he spoke.

‘All right, Mr Broglie,’ she called after him. ‘I am goin’ to remind you of you’ promise.’

‘Good!’ he called back, and went into his room.

This conversation between Jane and Mr Broglie had not been unremarked by other persons; as a matter of fact, some of the tenants had done their best to overhear every word of it. In more than one room that night it was made the subject of laughter and comment. ‘She is tryin’ to get a good “intended,”’ was the general conclusion; ‘but a young man like him don’t want a gurl like she. Him can get better.’

‘She is young but she is bold,’ was what was also said; ‘she not waiting for him to court her; *she* courting him.’

Jane guessed pretty closely what was being said, and resented this interference with her business. There was a perceptible coldness in her manner the next morning when she greeted some of her neighbours. On their part there was a display of meaning smiles, and one or two of them sneered. But of course they said nothing, having long since learnt the wisdom of pretending to mind their own business.

Mr Curden was very nice to her that day, asking her if she had made up her mind yet, and if she had dreamt of him last night. She replied spiritedly: ‘I didn’t even think of you!’ which pleased him much, as, in his opinion, her manner signified that she had been thinking of nothing else. She began to dislike him now, and her dislike took the form of wishing to see him well beaten. Severe corporal punishment was Jane’s conception of poetic justice.

That evening she dressed again; but this time she waited for Vincent outside the gate. He saw her as he came up the lane, and knew she was waiting for him. ‘That girl is laying herself careless with me,’ he observed to himself; nevertheless he was pleased and flattered. He was a favourite with the sex, and many of those he knew would have looked down upon Jane. But he saw that she was a very decent girl, and it came into his mind that it might not be a bad thing to add her to the number of ladies to whom he was more or less attached. But courting meant expenditure with him, for he was not mean. And just then he had neither time nor money to spare.

‘Waiting for me?’ he asked when he reached the gate. ‘Don’t you know I am a bad man?’

‘You don’t look bad,’ she replied. ‘There is many worse than you. Y’u promise to teck me for a drive last night; so I dress in case you wanted to go to-night.’

‘Not to-night,’ he answered. ‘I have to go out presently, and to-morrow morning I am going to Montego Bay.’

This was calamitous news. ‘When y’u coming back, Mr Broglie?’ she asked, her disappointment betraying itself in her voice.

‘Not before Saturday. I have to arrange some business connected with the strike. You hear about the strike?’

She had not, but she had some idea of what a strike was; she connected it with losing one’s job.

‘But what you have to do wid a strike?’ she asked him, thus touching upon a subject that was very near to his heart at that moment.

‘Everything,’ he assured her. ‘All the people in my trade going to strike, and we are going to win too. We have put up with a lot, but now no more advantage is going to be taken of us.’

The mention of that word advantage reminded Jane of her own grievance against Curden.

‘Worse advantage can be taken of a gurl than a man,’ she replied. ‘If I was to tell y’u what them trying to do wid me, you would sorry for me.’

Vincent was somewhat pressed for time that evening, but as he and his colleagues were just then preparing to utter a vigorous protest against the existing conditions of labour, his sympathy went out to all workers of no matter what class.

‘Tell me about it,’ he said; ‘they are trying to rob you?’

‘Worse than that,’ said Jane, glad to have the opportunity of enlisting him against Curden. ‘It’s bad enough if them rob you; but when— —’ She stopped short, not quite knowing how to tell her story.

‘When what?’

‘I doan’t know what to say, for y’u may think it is my fault. You know a man name Curden, Mr Vin?’

‘No; what about him?’

‘Him is de foreman at de place I workin’ at, an’ him is a married man. Him over forty, an’ just fancy what him say to me yesterday?’

‘Well, how can I know if you don’t tell me?’ asked the young man impatiently.

‘Him want me to—to— —’

She stammered, hesitating, and Vincent burst into a peal of laughter.

‘Oh! I see,’ he said. ‘Him want you, and you don’t want him, eh? Well, why don’t you tell him so? You don’t like him?’

‘No. But I can’t afford to quarrel wid him, for him is low enough to discharge me if him get vex. That is why I say that worse advantage is taken of me than you.’

‘That’s what you say, but you don’t know,’ asserted Vincent; ‘but of course you are not in a safe position. What you going to do?’

‘I doan’t know. I want you to advise me.’

‘I can’t do that. A man shouldn’t advise anybody else if him can’t back up his advice; and if I was to tell you to send Curden about his business, and you lose you’ job, you would blame me. I am sorry for you, though. Well, I have to be moving on, as I got some important business to attend to. Perhaps it will be all right with Curden. Don’t fret.’

He nodded to her and went inside, leaving her profoundly depressed. She had asked him for help, and he had none to give. He had shown, if not said, that her predicament was none of his business, and had left her to manage her little affair as best she could. She remained standing there till he came out again, but he did not stop to speak to her this time. He had a portmanteau in his hand, and merely told her good-night as he hurried away.

CHAPTER XVII

JANE went to work next morning feeling that she had nothing to expect from Vincent in the way of assistance or advice. He had gone away for a week, gone to a town a hundred miles distant, and before he returned she might be forced to give Mr Curden a definite answer, which, if she wished to keep her situation much longer, could not be one that would displease him. Nevertheless, with still a glimmer of hope in her heart, she looked forward impatiently to Vincent's return. Saturday came, and, as she had feared, the foreman asked her what she had to say to him: he had waited a whole week.

'You have had plenty of time to consider,' he remarked, 'and you must have made up you' mind to one thing or another.'

'Didn't I tell y'u you must wait a month?' asked Jane, still endeavouring to put off the day of decision.

'You simply playin' with me, that's what it is!' snapped Mr Curden. 'If y'u don't want to say yes, say the other thing; there is as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it, and I am not going to kill meself because of you. But I don't mean you to make a fool of me any longer.'

He was angry, and she was driven into a corner. She boldly resorted to lying.

'You know quite well I mean to say yes,' she returned, as though angry, 'but you want to quarrel wid me. Don't you know I have to give notice at the place where I am living; besides, why should y'u have you' own way all de time?'

'You give notice yet?' he asked suspiciously.

'Yes. The month was up yesterday, so I told de landlady I would be leavin' at the end of dis month.'

'You needn't wait till the time is up before you leave,' said Curden. 'You can pay the rent and move as soon as I get a nice place for you.'

'All right,' said Jane, but her voice did not sound very cheerful.

'You know,' said Curden slowly, looking her in the face as if trying to read her thoughts, 'you know, I believe y'u are only fooling me?'

'That is because you want to believe so,' said Jane. 'Howsoever, you will see.'

This conversation took place on the piazza after they had left work for the day, and Jane went home feeling that Curden was succeeding in taking an advantage of her. He had not threatened her once, but threats were quite unnecessary. However, she could seek for another position during the coming week; perhaps Mr Broglie might be able to get her one. She would ask him.

She did not see him when she got home, though she heard he had returned in the afternoon. He must have come in very late that night, for though she lingered about the yard until near eleven o'clock, there was no sign of him. But on the following morning there was excitement in the yard, and the author of it was Vincent.

At an early hour men began to come in, and these seated themselves on chairs arranged in front of Mr Broglie's house. When about ten persons had arrived, Mr Broglie rose and formally addressed them, speaking as though they were not visitors merely, but a public meeting and a committee in one. He had a still larger audience in the tenants who clustered round to hear what the gathering and speech-making were about, and it was plain enough that he was speaking to this audience as well as to the men who had specially come to consult with him.

It was also evident that the latter had heard before all that he had to say. It was of a Printers' Union that he spoke, and of an approaching strike, and the burden of his remarks was a denunciation of tyranny and oppression, and the praise of a man who, it appeared, had suddenly risen up on behalf of the downtrodden workers.

Much did he speak on the rights of labour, on the duty of men to fight for what was due to them, and on the value and strength of unity. The people in the yard listened with profound admiration, the men invariably saying 'Hear, hear,' when Vincent used some word whose meaning was decidedly vague. Not the last to applaud him was Jane, who hoped that he might notice her appreciation. His speech over, one of his visitors rose to address the meeting, then another and another, and as man after man added his quota to the rhetoric, which was as music in the ears of the speaker, no one who heard but must have perceived that they all were facing something of a crisis with evident enjoyment and with perfect certitude.

And, for them, it was indeed a serious crisis that threatened. No more hard-working body of men and women could be found anywhere than the compositors of the Jamaica printing offices; their hours were long, their work required intelligence, and their pay was small. Their condition was not enviable; yet it had been steadily improving during the past two years, and bade fair to continue to improve. Unfortunately for them, at about this time

there appeared in the island a gentleman of an ambitious and speculative turn of mind, and extremely loquacious. He determined to organise a strike, and spoke much to that effect. By means of this strike, he argued, or even a mere threat of a strike, the pay of the compositors would at once be doubled, their working hours considerably decreased, and the printing offices would pass under their control.

His propaganda was wonderfully successful. Kingston had just won a great fight against the English Insurance Companies, which had refused to admit claims for insurance money, their contention being that the fire which had destroyed the business section of the city had been caused by the recent earthquake. The policyholders had, on the other hand, gone far towards proving that the fire had caused the earthquake; they banded together, fought the Insurance Companies, won the battle, and thus gave a splendid illustration of the value of co-operation and unanimity of conviction. The example was contagious, and the suggestion of a strike amongst the compositors of the island was caught up with enthusiasm. Vincent had travelled to Montego Bay to enroll members for the Union there, and this meeting in the yard was a sort of friendly reunion on the part of some of those who wished to talk over the certainty of their success and the glorious future which awaited them.

One of the speakers mentioned in the course of his address that he had heard or read somewhere that in 'the olden days' compositors were entitled to wear swords. He seemed to suffer from a sense of special grievance in not being allowed to wear a sword, though, as there was no law to prevent his doing so, his annoyance did not seem to be firmly rooted in reason. He dwelt with emphasis upon that little matter of the sword. The absence of swords seemed to typify for him the departed glories and fallen fortunes of the men of his profession—he insisted upon saying 'profession,' no other word appearing to him to be quite so appropriate. The people in the yard listened to him attentively and were impressed by his earnestness. When he ceased, a few of them (all men) assured him loudly that he had spoken 'good words,' and expressed a desire to go on strike themselves. One was a storeman, and he wanted to know what might happen to him if he too should join the Union with a view to striking. His lady, overhearing the question, tartly pointed out that he would probably achieve starvation, a form of success which did not appear to appeal to him.

It was this meeting, and the general conversation which followed, that determined Jane to attempt a very bold thing indeed. While Vincent and the other speakers were dwelling upon the certainty of the employers being beaten, she had thought a strike must be a splendid demonstration of

independence, to say nothing of the pecuniary advantages of it. But when, after the speeches had all been delivered, she heard Vincent and his friends wondering at the astonishing and unbusinesslike stubbornness of the employers, she remembered Mr Curden's short way of dealing with recalcitrant employees, and began to fear that Vincent might be treading a very perilous path.

He went out with his comrades to have a drink, but returned towards six o'clock in the afternoon. He was not a quarter of an hour in his room before he came out again; as he passed out of the gate, Jane, who was waiting outside, deliberately stopped him.

'Beg pardon, Mr Vin,' she said, 'but I want to ask you something about dis strike.'

'You don't want to strike too?' he asked her, laughing.

'No; but I wanted to know if you can lose, an' what will happen if y'u lose.'

'Well, we can lose, I suppose,' he replied, rather pleased with the general interest which the coming strike seemed to be creating in the community. 'We can lose, but I don't think we going to lose.'

'But suppose y'u lose? What will happen?'

It was not the first time that the question had been put so directly to Vincent; but he refused to believe in the possibility of defeat. He waived the question aside.

'We can't lose,' he declared positively, forgetting his admission of a moment before. 'I am going to a meeting now.'

A thought struck him, and he acted on it. 'You want to come?' he asked Jane. 'Plenty of girl compositors go to the meetings. Put on your hat and come, if you like.'

Jane rushed into her room and was out in a couple of minutes. Such great fortune she had not hoped for, nor expected. To be seen at a public meeting with him—the very idea was intoxicating. She preened herself as they walked along, he volubly explaining to her, with a wealth of absolutely incorrect detail, the origin and development of Unions and strikes.

The meeting was held in the principal room of a large house in the lower part of the town, and was attended by a number of enthusiastic persons, male and female, who had been captured by the rhetoric of the labour leader and strike organiser, and by his wonderful promises and assurances. This worthy indulged in generalities culled from cheap American publications. He bade his hearers be steadfast, immovable, abounding in the payment of subscriptions towards the strike fund (of which he was the treasurer). There

was no doubt whatever in his mind that they would win; he was convinced that, practically speaking, they had won already. His hearers cheered him again and again, and almost all of them left that meeting feeling that victory must be theirs.

Jane not being a member of this lately-formed Union, and not understanding one-fifth of what had been said by the speaker, was sceptical as to the success of the effort which so many persons had determined to make. Had she understood more, she too might have been enthusiastic. As it was, the one thing that stood out in her mind was the fact that 'Mr Vin' was running the risk of losing his job through doing something that almost suggested physical violence. He was going to 'strike,' and that, she now believed, was clearly a desperate and dangerous thing to do.

Remembering his promise to take her for a ride on the tram-car some day, Vincent suggested to Jane that, instead of going home at once, they should go for a ride round the belt-line: 'that is, if you not afraid Curden will see you and quarrel with you,' he added.

'I doan't care what him choose to do,' she declared stoutly; 'but if you could get a job for me, it would help me.'

'I may soon be looking for a job meself,' said Vincent gaily; 'Monday next week I will be out on strike.'

'You mean you really goin' to leave you' work, Mr Vin?'

'Yes; didn't you hear what we said at the meeting a little while ago?'

'But it seem to be all foolishness dat man was talkin'. If you leave your good job wid a lot of other people, none of them can help you; an' suppose any one go behind your back an' ask for it; what you would do?'

This aspect of the matter Vincent did not care to dwell upon, especially as the possibility of it had occurred to himself more than once. He had little to complain of personally; he had joined the Union through a love of excitement and because he had been induced by the labour leader to identify himself with it. Since then he, like most of the other members, had refused to think of the possibility of defeat, and had declined to allow any one to suggest it to him. But here was Jane, the last person in the world to understand such matters, taking the pessimistic view.

'We can't lose,' he again declared positively, 'and we are not going to lose. So we needn't talk about that.'

A car coming from the opposite direction rushed past at this moment, and Vincent noticed that Jane shrank back in her seat, turning her head the other way.

She resumed the conversation.

‘But y’u just said that you might be lookin’ for another job you’self, an’ you wouldn’t say that if you did sure you was goin’ to win. If I was in a good situation, it would teck a lot to meck me leave it. I would let the other folkses do what them like, but I would go me own way. It is hard to get a job when you leave one.’

She shrank back again, another car happening to pass, and this time Vincent was moved by the circumstance to ask her what she was afraid of.

‘Is it Curden you don’t want to see you?’ he inquired, guessing the reason of her fear.

‘Yes; him saw me an’ you when we was comin’ from de funeral the other day, an’ him talk about it. That is why I want to leave my place, but I am not independent like you. I can’t walk out, for when I do dat there is nobody to help me. It is all very well, you know, Mr Vin,’ she continued confidentially, ‘it is all very well for a lot of people to get up an’ say what them goin’ to do; but you know how Jamaica people stand: them will tell y’u one thing to-day an’ do another to-morrow; an’ if you depend on them you will find out you’ mistake before long. I doan’t forget how Sathyra treat me, an’ ever since dat time I am careful. If you find y’u have make a mistake when you make it already, what you goin’ to do? P’rhaps de very same man dat was talking so big to-day may go an’ try to get you’ job when you is well out of it!’

This was the common philosophy of the working classes, but it came from Jane’s lips with force and emphasis. It was so true that Vincent didn’t want to hear it. For days and weeks he had been trying to think of only one issue to this effort on his part and on that of his colleagues. He had heard that some were already wavering, he had heard that type-setting machinery was to be imported by the masters, he knew that no sign of yielding had been given by them. But these disquieting facts had been ignored at the meetings of the Union, which now took place every day, and sometimes twice a day. He had taken Jane to one of these gatherings to convince her of the strength of the movement, and she had come away incredulous! He felt annoyed. This insistence of hers on the possibility of the strikers being beaten, and on the probability of some one playing him false and securing one of the best positions in his line, was the more irritating because of its very reasonableness. Then, for a mere girl to suggest that he was acting foolishly—he who had taken so prominent a part in the Union and had made such excellent speeches—was nothing short of impertinence.

‘If I was you,’ he said deliberately, ‘I would look after meself and Curden, and wouldn’t interfere with things I don’t know nothing about. If you are afraid of Curden, I am not afraid of *my* employer, and I know how to manage my own business.’

He lapsed into silence after this, and Jane perceived that she had gone too far. They finished the rest of the ride in silence, she involuntarily shrinking back when they passed another car. When they reached the crossing where they were nearest home, he stopped the car and said he was going farther on. She alighted by herself, he rather derisively expressing the hope that she had not been seen by Mr Curden. The ride had been a failure. Angry, and feeling insulted, Jane marched home, saying to herself that Vincent was a fool. She cried in her room that night through sheer vexation.

He, on his part, condemned himself for having taken any notice of an ignorant little girl in whom his familiarity had bred contempt. She had forgotten herself entirely! He went to another meeting that evening, and there the enthusiasm was even greater than usual. He dismissed Jane and her impudence from his mind as he listened to the same speeches he had heard so often during the last four weeks or so.

Yet Jane had sent an arrow into the brain of Vincent, and there it rankled. Suppose the strikers should lose? He dismissed the suggestion from his mind, but somehow it would obtrude itself again and again: suppose he should lose? Jane had no sort of connection with the employers. She was simply a girl who lived decently by herself and who, he knew, liked him. She had asked him a disconcerting question with the sole idea of warning him. It was very foolish of her, yet—suppose he should lose?

CHAPTER XVIII

MR CURDEN beckoned to Jane in a somewhat mysterious manner when the girls were leaving their seats at noon the next day. Jane had been silent and thoughtful all during the forenoon. Vincent's annoyance of the evening before, her forced acceptance of Curden's proposal, her dread lest he should have seen her in the car with Vincent—of all this she had been thinking while at work, and with every moment her misery and depression had increased. Her colleagues had noticed her abstraction. They attributed it to something done or threatened by the foreman, and, though not at all willing to lose their situations by interfering with matters that did not concern them, they were quite ready to take Jane's part against constituted authority should she directly appeal to them for sympathy and aid. Cowards they were not, and even their prudence could not be depended upon to prevent them from making a demonstration of disapproval on the impulse of a moment's indignation.

It was this disposition to throw all fear of consequences to the winds, even if they should regret having done so an hour afterwards, that imposed a kind of check upon their masters. To deal with one of them was easy enough: to deal with all of them was entirely a different matter. And you could never be certain that they would not all take fire at a grievance, real or imaginary, without a moment's warning. Had Jane appealed to them that morning, putting her case before them plainly, they would have talked loudly about it (calling no names), made a song out of it, given the foreman to understand clearly that they knew all about it, and thought he was taking a mean advantage of one of them, and thus would have compelled him to leave Jane alone for a time. Knowing how they could and would talk, he would not have dared to persecute her further, or to interfere with her just then. The truth becoming plainly known, he might have been reprimanded by his employer and have been heartily laughed at by all who heard of the matter.

The reprimand he might not have minded much. The laughter would have cut him to the quick. But, in the end, Jane would have had to go. Some really good reason would have been found for sending her about her business. The assistance of the other girls, rendered to-day, would hardly have been tendered a second time: we get tired of helping others. Jane knew only too well that no permanent dependence was to be placed on her

colleagues, and, as a matter of fact, did not intend or wish to provoke a quarrel with Mr Curden. There was nothing to be gained by that; Vincent was unsympathetic and even angry, and there was nothing in the world to prevent her from breaking with Curden the moment she wanted to do so in the future, and found herself able to do it without material loss. When she obeyed his furtive summons, therefore, the fear uppermost in her mind was whether he had seen her the evening before in the car. She was trying to think out an excuse as she waited to hear his possible remonstrance.

His first words reassured her, though of themselves they were not pleasant to hear.

Mr Curden pointed to a heap of bottles that had to be labelled that day, with a view to giving all curious persons to understand that his interview with Jane was strictly about business; needless to say, he deceived no one. Looking away from her and towards the bottles, he modulated his voice so that no one should overhear his words.

‘I saw a nice place that would suit you well,’ he muttered, ‘on the Beaconsfield Road. It face the street, and there are some other rooms in the yard, but that won’t interfere with you. It is a quiet, secluded spot; quite peaceful. You better go and look about it this evening; inquire the rent—it can’t be much—and if it’s reasonable, I will give you the money and you can take it to-morrow.’

Jane fenced a little.

‘But what about furniture? Y’u can’t get a place wid noten in it?’

‘That is all right. When you get the place you can buy some furniture. You can get the furniture after you make you’ other arrangements. I will have the money ready.’

There was no further objection to urge after this; Jane nodded her head and went to her lunch.

That evening, at about eight o’clock, she took a walk to the Beaconsfield Road to look at the house which Mr Curden had found out and had commended to her. As he had said, it was situated in a quiet and rather unfrequented part of the city; it was a single room, but detached and facing the street; on inquiring what was the rent asked for it, she was told ten shillings a month.

For herself, she would have preferred a house in a livelier part of the town, but this place was clearly Mr Curden’s choice. She told the woman who was in charge of the yard that she would come back the next evening with the first month’s rent, and on the Tuesday morning she informed Curden that the place in Beaconsfield Road would do as well as any other,

but that she would not find it convenient to move into it before Monday morning next. For one thing, she had to get a dress which she had given out to make, and which would not be finished before Saturday afternoon (local dressmakers having acquired the habit of completing their work on pay-day). Then she did not want to leave her present home too suddenly, as this might give some persons the impression that she had reasons, not very creditable to her, for hastening her departure. These were genuine objections on her part to immediate removal, for though she had told Mr Curden that she had already given notice of leaving her room, she had as a matter of fact not yet done so; and having left both Mrs Mason and Sathyra in a hurry, her pride revolted at the idea of another departure which might suggest flight. Deep down in her heart, too, was a reluctance to say good-bye to the yard where she had met Vincent, and where he still lived.

‘Very well,’ said Curden; ‘that will suit me. You must carry the month’s rent to the landlady to-night; then next week Monday I will give you some money to get some pieces of furniture, and you can remove what you have at the same time. You can’t come to work that day, but that will be no difficulty, for you can get the day off.’

‘Don’t you better give me the money for the furniture Saturday evening?’ Jane remarked. ‘How can I get it on Monday if I don’t come to work?’

Mr Curden thought a moment. The amount which he had determined to spend on furniture was two pounds, and he did not wish to trust Jane for too long a time with so considerable a sum. With two pounds in her hands on Saturday night, and her week’s wages, it might enter her head to refuse to come back to work and to have anything further to do with him. He saw quite clearly that there was no enthusiasm in her acceptance of his proposals; she entered into the arrangements with reluctance. It was a case of necessity with her; remove that necessity, even if but temporarily, and she would throw him over without a moment’s hesitation. He expected that in any event she would do so some day, but what might happen in the future did not disturb him. On his side, he did not intend this connection to be permanent.

He decided not to place in her hand the money for the furniture before it was absolutely necessary to do so.

‘You can come down Monday morning,’ he said, ‘and ask me to let you off for the day. Then I will give you the money. I can’t give it to you before, because I won’t get it before Sunday night. You can buy what y’u want on Monday, and go up to the place to receive it; and you can get everything fixed up. I will see you in the evening.’

‘All right,’ said Jane, ‘dat will do.’ And that evening she went and rented the one-roomed house.

The meetings of the compositors were very frequent now. Their committee met continuously in the hall where the Union men assembled; the members of it took their meals on the premises, and at almost any hour of the day, and up to eleven o’clock at night, there was something in the nature of a speech being delivered. The most enthusiastic members of the Union were the men who were out of work, and had been so for some time. Their support was moral, for it was long since they had been in a position to contribute financial aid to anything; steady work had never appealed to them, it being regarded by them in the light of tyranny and oppression. They had been admitted into the Union for reasons of policy: the idea was to prevent them from taking the places of the regular workers when these should go on strike. They would, of course, receive assistance during the strike, and this occurred to them as being so eminently fair an arrangement that they were ceaseless in advocating extreme measures at once; it was they who most loudly declared their intention of ‘buying out’ the newspaper offices as soon as these should have been compelled to suspend operations, and already they saw themselves in control of all the offices. They were very fierce in their denunciation of any suggestion of compromise; they were prepared to heap contempt upon any one who should show signs of timidity at this crisis. Their devotion to the cause was nothing less than beautiful. Yet, in spite of their enthusiasm, it was evident that, as the fateful Saturday approached, a few of the compositors were wavering. To reanimate the courage of these a great meeting was called at noon on Wednesday, and special addresses prepared.

From this meeting only three or four of the Union members were absent, and this for the first time since the printing offices had received notice of the coming strike. Their absence was remarked, for they happened to be amongst those suspected of vacillation. It was generally felt that they were withdrawing themselves from the movement, and the thought of this defection gave more than one man present a twinge of uneasiness.

But this soon gave way to the old transports of enthusiasm. The labour leader was a good speaker, and to-day he did his best.

‘We have funds,’ he said, as he came to the end of his speech. ‘We have enough money of our own to last us for two months, and an agent of the American Federation of Labour will be here in two weeks’ time to offer us

assistance.' He dramatically drew a letter from his pocket as he spoke, and waved it in the air; as he did so the audience burst into loud applause.

'What have we to fear, then? What are any of us frightened for? The employers say they won't meet us? Well, we will buy them out!'

At this, those members of the Union who had nothing to lose in the way of situations, and whose determination was therefore unmovable, rose as one man and cheered the speaker. For a minute and more the only words that could be heard were, 'Buy them out! Buy them out!'

'Yes,' continued the orator, 'we will buy them out; and then what will become of these people who "rat" to-day? Do you think we are going to have anything to do with them? Do you think so?'

The workless members of the Union were very certain that they would have nothing to do with any one who should 'rat.' They made that clear with one thunderous 'No!'

'We have gone too far to go back now,' the speaker went on. 'Any man who draws back will only be a tool in the hands of his master, and we will treat him as a coward and a traitor: we will give him — —!'

He left unuttered the punishment to be meted out to the backslider, and prepared to end his remarks.

'The whole island is with us. All the tradesmen are sending us words of encouragement. They tell us to go on and win, and we are going to go on and win. The people in Montego Bay have told our friend and fellow-member, Mr Broglie, that they are behind us. But I had better let Mr Broglie speak for himself. He will tell you what everybody is saying about this strike!'

Vincent rose on this invitation, and for a little while he could not make himself heard, so enthusiastic was his reception. The noise was music in his ears. He flung out his right hand as he began. Whatever the consequences of the approaching strike, there could be no doubt that the agitation was affording unlimited enjoyment to those taking an active part in it.

He told the meeting what most of those present had heard before: how he had gone to Montego Bay, how the composers there were enthusiastically on the side of the Union, but had decided not to strike just then, there being no urgent necessity to do so. They would, however, if necessary later on, be glad to assist the Kingston strikers with money; in the meantime they were looking on, and they strongly advised their Kingston brothers to go on and win.

Somehow, it seemed to Vincent even as he spoke that the people in Montego Bay had not rendered them much help after all. They had treated

him very well, had hailed him as a hero, had seen him off with acclamation, and when he returned to Kingston it had been with the feeling that the second town in the island was ready to support anything that the Kingston compositors might propose. He had told the committee this, and the Union members; had told them this rhetorically; and they had been as content as he himself with the result of his mission, being quite ready to accept fine words as deeds. They knew that the printing offices would be disorganised by the strike. Beyond this palpable fact they did not see or care to see. They laughed at the threat of introducing linotype machines. They had never seen such machines at work; consequently they could not imagine hand-workers being replaced by them. They knew it would take some time to train compositors, and, in the interval, what would the offices do? As they saw no escape for the employers, they persuaded themselves that they had nothing to fear. And now America was sending them aid—or a labour union man, which, to them, amounted to the same thing. American dollars would soon come pouring into Jamaica, and all because the local Compositors' Union had a few weeks before affiliated itself with an American Union. They fed themselves up with words, and Vincent had done the same as much as any one else of them.

But as he spoke now he felt doubts crowding into his mind. As a matter of fact they had assailed him before, and he had fought them off. Since Sunday he had not spoken to Jane, and would listen to no one who would not uphold the cause of the Union; but, try how he would, the question would force itself upon him—suppose the strikers should lose? It was in his mind at this moment; he had seen the letter from America which his leader had produced so dramatically a little while ago, and he knew that it contained no promise of financial help: a man was being sent to inquire into the affairs of the local Union and to assist to organise it properly; that was about all. A week ago, he himself would have seen in that letter the promise of monetary assistance; now that he was on the brink of losing what he knew was a good situation, his own rhetoric failed to convince him.

Yet he spoke on.

‘Wherever I have gone to, I have heard the same thing. Our labour has been robbed, and everybody sympathises with us. Those who don’t sympathise know why they don’t. They are getting something for it, or they are robbing other people like us. But we don’t mind what they say; they can’t frighten us. We are going to win. We can’t lose!’

He ended upon that note, and the applause was tremendous. Everybody shook hands with everybody else when the meeting broke up, and Vincent left the hall with an air of pride and satisfaction. He went back late to his

work, fully determined to give 'the boss' a piece of his mind should the latter say anything to him about his overstaying his hour. But not a word was said to him. He was a good workman, and his employer was genuinely sorry that he had joined a movement which, even if it succeeded, could not help him personally. It was not until Saturday night, when he went to get his wages, that 'the boss' attempted to talk to him about the strike.

'Can I say a word to you, Broglie?' he asked.

This was just what Vincent wanted to avoid; but, without being positively rude, he could not refuse to hear what Mr Deemster had to say to him, and his mind was not now inflamed by recent speeches.

Mr Deemster took him aside.

'I am sorry you are going away, Broglie,' he began. 'I thought you would have changed your mind at the last moment, and I don't think you have thought carefully over what you are going to do. You get a good pay here, and you know you are comfortable. You are a good man, but you have allowed yourself to be led away by those other chaps who—'

'How long you going to stay there, Broglie, talking to that man?' called out one of his colleagues of the office. The men were in a belligerent frame of mind, for they had hoped for surrender on the part of the employers that evening. All day they had been mutinous, and now that they saw Vincent talking to Mr Deemster they were becoming suspicious.

'I am coming,' he called back, and made a movement as if to go.

'Well, come along then, and don't let that man talk stupidity to you. It is no fun now,' the same man answered roughly.

Vincent felt ashamed of this rudeness. 'Don't mind what him say, sir,' he said to Mr Deemster; 'I am hearing you.'

'I have nothing more to say to you, Broglie,' replied Mr Deemster. 'If you have made up your mind I can't stop you from doing what you want to do. But you will find in a few weeks that you will be in a bad position, and even if I might like to do something for you then, I might not be able to. If you choose to come back on Monday morning, you can do so. I leave it all to you.'

Vincent shook his head slowly. 'I am sorry to part, Mr Deemster,' he said, 'but it can't be helped. We printers suffer a lot, and even if I am all right, it is not so with a lot of us. We must take our chances.'

'Very well,' said Mr Deemster, and then the men went out.

They went to a meeting. For hours that night did they consult and make speeches, and wonder what the offices would do; but now that the final step had been taken, there was fear in the hearts of most of them. The enthusiasm

had quite evaporated. A reaction had set in. There was as much noise as ever, and that section of them which looked forward to a few weeks of sustenance out of the strike fund was as loud as ever in expressing its determination to buy the employers out. Vincent got home at about twelve o'clock, and in spite of the whisky he had drunk that evening he could not forget the warning which Jane and his employer had given him. Again and again he asked himself the question: 'Suppose the men should lose, suppose they should be beaten?' And he suspected that some of them were also asking that vital question.

He went out the next morning early, not returning till after nightfall. There was another great meeting of the strikers to be held that night; but all day there had been meetings, and he had had enough of them. When he got home he found Jane waiting for him; she came up to him as he entered, and addressed him first.

'Ask you' pardon, Mr Vin, but I thought as I would tell y'u good-bye,' she said, and she held out her hand.

'You going away?' asked Vincent. 'Oh, yes; I did hear from somebody in the yard this week that you was leaving, but I was so busy I didn't give it a second thought. Where you going to?'

'To a place in Beaconsfield Road.' She described the locality and the house, which had no number.

'We'll miss you,' he returned. 'But I must come and see you sometimes. Why you leaving?'

'You won't miss me, neither you or anybody here, except Miss Lucy, de lady who did have the baby dat you an' me carry to de burial ground. An' you mustn't come to see me, for dat will bring confusion.' Jane spoke with a break in her voice.

'Phew!' whistled Vincent. 'I see! You going to Mr Curden, no?'

'Yes,' said Jane, a little defiantly. 'Can't do better, an' it's no use forming independent when y'u know that y'u can't afford it. That's why I say you mustn't come where I am living, for Mr Curden wanted to quarrel wid me about you already, and now that him is paying my rent, him will be worse. But,' she added, after a thought, 'I may see y'u sometimes all the same. You goin' to live here long?'

'To tell you the truth,' said Vincent, 'I don't know. We strike yesterday evening, and if we lose I will have to leave here!'

'Y'u mean to say you really leave, Mr Vin?' exclaimed Jane. 'Y'u leave your good, good situation for noten at all? What you do it for? But I mustn't ask you, for it is de same t'ing dat you vex wid me about last Sunday. I ask

you' pardon, but you really meck a mistake, Mr Vin. What you gwine to do now?'

'You needn't ask me pardon,' said Vincent, 'for you didn't mean any harm. I am sorry I was vex with you. Well, what is done can't be undone. Let us talk about something else. When you going?'

'To-morrow, an' I wish it was never! I hate dat man! I wish it was you, Mr Vin!'

She had not intended to say this, but she felt it, and the words had slipped out of her mouth before she was aware of them. She was not ashamed of them, however; love-making is explicit enough on the part of both sexes in Jamaica.

'Me!' exclaimed Vincent. 'Well, there is many a worse girl than you, Jane; and to tell you the truth, I like you. But that was all very well some time ago. Things may be hard with me now.'

'I doan't mind that,' said Jane eagerly. 'If y'u tell me not to go to dat man Curden, I won't go. It doan't matter to me if y'u don't have anyt'ing now. It is not because you have or you doan't have a job that I like you, Mr Vin. If I love you an' you love me, it's all right. I doan't mind for anyt'ing else!'

Vincent had been made love to many times before, but on those occasions he had been in a good situation. This was a unique experience for him. He was troubled in mind, too, and felt the need of sympathy.

'You are a good girl, Jane; you not only looking for what you can get from a man. You are the kind of girl a man can depend on.'

'Yet y'u goin' to let me go to Curden.'

'Not a bit of that!' said Vincent with emphasis. 'I am goin' to make you teach Curden a good lesson for his forwardness and cheek!'

Monday came, and Mr Curden waited anxiously for Jane to make her appearance. He was rather pleased when an hour or so' passed, and she was still absent. 'She is fixing up her things,' he remarked to himself, and when another hour had flown he was still content. But at ten o'clock he felt that she should have come by then, though she still had lots of time to buy what she wanted and to fix up the little house in Beaconsfield Road. At eleven o'clock he became decidedly impatient; but a little while after he was all smiles as he saw Jane enter the building, dressed as if for a special purpose.

He put his hand in his pocket, taking out the money for her and concealing it till he should be able to slip it into her hand. As she was late,

he had to make some remark for the benefit of others.

‘You not in time this morning, Miss Burrell,’ he called out loudly, while she was still at some distance from him; ‘what’s the matter?’

Instead of going up to him, as he expected, Jane walked up to where the girls were sitting.

She tapped Chichi on the shoulder.

‘I am off, me love; I am off, young ladies. I come to tell you good-bye.’

They all stopped working at once to learn the cause of this unexpected announcement on the part of Jane. As for Mr Curden, he was at a loss to understand what she could mean.

‘Y’u going away?’ asked Chichi.

‘Yes, my dear; it seems as if because y’u can’t like some people y’u working wid, you can’t keep your job; but I am all right, an’ as I doan’t want to be friendly wid any common sort of man, an’ to throw away meself, I meck up me mind to leave here. You must all come an’ see me sometimes. Doan’t you know where I am living?’

Curden heard it all, and not a word had he to say. And not a word would Jane say to him. Every one present knew that Jane was leaving because of him, and every one realised that she must have bettered her position, so merry and confident and scornfully defiant were her looks.

‘You must come an’ see me *and* my beau,’ she remarked, this being her parting shot. ‘Of course, I can’t come back here, where I may be ordered outside. But dat don’t matter. I am off. Don’t fo’get to come!’ She went out of the building with a magnificent flounce, leaving the girls tittering, and whispering to one another. She never even looked at Curden, who realised with dismay that she had made him the laughing-stock of the whole establishment!

CHAPTER XIX

ANY one passing along the main street in Campbell Town, an interesting little suburb to the north-west of Kingston, on a certain Saturday night about two years ago, might have noticed in one of the little wooden houses which abound in the 'Town' an unusual display of light. Had the passer-by paused to observe the reason of this, he would easily have seen, by simply looking into the house, that a celebration of some sort was in progress, and that a good many guests were present. The frail fence of wood and mesh-wire stood not more than four feet high, and behind it, not farther than a couple of yards away, was the single-story house of two rooms, with its two front sash-windows thrown wide open. On the walls of the room thus exposed to the public view sprigs of croton and other evergreens were hung; overhead swung festoons of coloured paper; on a long table covered with a white cloth were two or three flower-pots, and these were full of white roses and red, with bits of elder-flower, sprigs of lace-plant, and tubes of flowering cañas.

Bright was the little hall, and merry were the dozen or so of persons who were crowded in it. Men and women, some dark, some slightly fairer, they were all well-dressed; the men in tailor-made suits, the women in white muslin, and in pink and blue. The latter wore ribbons in their hair, and there was a gleam of gold ornaments against a background of firm and healthy flesh. One could see from outside that they were eating cake and drinking wine and aerated waters. The sound of their voices came clearly into the street, and now and then distinct sentences could easily be made out. One, indeed, could have heard everything being said had one chosen to lean against the fence, and this action, far from being resented, would have been much appreciated by the people inside. For, if the truth must be told, the entertainment, celebration, or whatever you may choose to call it, was one to which it was desired to call public attention. And public attention meant the attention of the neighbours and of any decent person who might happen to be passing.

Listen attentively: one of the men is speaking.

'Yes,' he says. 'I am never tired of remembering how I save my job. I told you about it before, didn't I?'

‘I never hear it yet, Mr Broglie,’ replies one of the young women; the others have heard it often, as they hasten to declare.

‘Well, it was like this. When I went down to work the Monday morning after the printers’ strike—you remember the strike?—it was only me and another young fellow that was there. I felt a little ashamed to begin as usual; but I had had a talk with Jane the night before, and I couldn’t fo’get what she said to me about suppose I lose me job. So, sir, I walked in. “Turning in to work, B.?” the boss ask me. “Yes,” I said, “just as cheap.” “You right,” he said, “those people who gone on strike sure to regret it. You stick by me and I will stick by you. I am glad you follow what I said to you on Saturday.”

‘Well, sir, it was all I could do to remain in the place during that day. It was so peculiar with everybody gone away, and only me and another fellow workin’. I felt sort of small, you know; but the boss was in the office most of the time, talking friendly-like, and so I remained. When I left the office in the evening, I meet a few of the people who strike, and they began to tease me; so I went straight home, and after about two weeks the whole thing was over. The Union leader went away, and some of the men find out that they had been deceived, and came back. My pay was raised, for I had to do a lot of work, and the boss made me foreman about six weeks after.

‘And that wasn’t everything either—no, sir! It was through that same strike that Jane an’ me came together. She was always warning me about the strike, and telling me that I would lose me job, and what made me make up me mind at last to go on quietly with me work was when she told me about a man at the place she was workin’ at, who was treating her bad and forcing her to come to him. His name was—aam—aam—what was that man’s name, Jane?’

‘Curden,’ answers one of the ladies present; ‘but why y’u bother going back so far? Nobody want to hear all them old story and things!’

‘Yes,’ continued the speaker imperturbably, ‘Curden; that’s the name. I know him too, though I never speak to him. A most ignorant-looking man working at Repburn’s place. I believe they will soon kick him out. You know what I hear him do one day? I hear— —’

‘But, Vin,’ interrupts the lady who has just answered him, ‘you talkin’ all sort of foolishness that doan’t have nothing to do with what you was telling you’ friends!’

‘Oh, yes! I was forgetting. Well, as I was telling you, Jane told me the whole story, and I could see that she wanted me to assist her, for she knew I was a man with a big heart, and a gentleman. I was so disgusted with that low fellow Curden that I thought I would teach him a thing or two, and the

only way to do that was not to give up me job, for when a man out of a job in this country, it better him dead!’

‘True word!’ was the exclamation that burst simultaneously from the lips of the men who listened to the speaker.

‘So I thought the whole matter over that night, and the next day I told her that on Monday morning she should go down to where Curden work, and send him to the devil independently. I told her I would sacrifice everything, and keep my job to help her, and I would look after her. You think she wasn’t glad!’

‘Not glad at all!’ interrupts the lady sharply. ‘It was you who was glad not to leave you’ job, like them other foolish people was doin’, and if it wasn’t for me you would have really leave it! I would have been all right, for I was independent of Curden an’ you’self. I can always work for meself!’

‘Hear her talk now!’ the speaker resumes; ‘but she didn’t talk like that at the time, though! However, I made up me mind and settled down, and to-night we are celebrating our first birthday. Tell me the truth now; what you think of the kid?’

‘Oh, he is sweet,’ comes in a chorus from all the ladies, while the men show their appreciation of ‘the kid’ by reaching out for the decanters of wine on the table.

‘Nice little child,’ resumes Vincent; ‘and though he is only one year old, to-day—or stop, yesterday, no?—Well, whether it was yesterday or to-day don’t matter, for as I was saying, I was sayin’ — —’

‘You better not teck any more wine, Vin,’ says Jane with a laugh; but it is Jane transformed. In her white muslin dress, with her hair done up with ribbons, wearing high-heeled shoes and looking as though she had been born to entertaining guests, Jane is not very like the little girl we have seen sitting mute and frightened as she drove into Kingston with Mrs Mason. She is not much like the girl we saw sharing apartments with Sathyra. She looks very much to-night as if she has ‘kept herself up’; her body is now fully developed; she has the lover she cares for, and in the other room lies ‘the kid’ whom all the women declare to be the ‘dead image’ of his father, while all the men see the mother chiefly in his lineaments. It is Jane perfectly contented at last, and dreaming of no higher fortune. It is Jane, who now herself employs a schoolgirl, who submissively calls her ‘Miss Jane,’ and obeys her slightest command.

‘You are right,’ says Vincent, with semi-sober gravity. ‘I won’t take any more wine. Since you advise me about that strike, I always take your advice when you are right. But mark, boys, I never follow her when she is wrong.

No, sir, I say a man must rule his household, or he is not a man. Jane, I don't think another glass would hurt me?"

Jane says nothing to this, but keeps the wine away from him.

'Well, give me some kola then. But I can't always let her have her own way,' he continues, as he sips the non-alcoholic drink.

'That is right, Mr Broglie,' agrees one of the lady guests. 'We ladies mustn't 'ave our own way, though we 'ave it all the same. Mrs Broglie— —'

'She is not Mrs Broglie,' Vincent corrects her, having a passion at this moment for strict accuracy of statement.

The assertion surprises no one, for the fact is known to all. It disconcerts no one either. Jane merely says: 'I not lookin' for that title, me child,' and stuffs a piece of spongecake into her mouth. 'Some day it will come,' asserts the lady who was speaking.

'Why not?' asks Vincent, suddenly fired with the desire to do something new and daring, something that should make him a marked man among his acquaintances for quite a long time. 'Why not? Gentlemen and ladies, what you say about my getting married?'

'Why not, to be sure?' chorus the ladies. The men attempt a cheer, but modify it somewhat, not knowing but that a similar sacrifice may be expected some day of those of them that are unmarried, and thinking Vincent not sufficiently sober to be aware of what he is saying.

'What do you think of it?' he asks, addressing them portentously.

'Well,' answers one man, rendered courageous by port wine, 'marriage has *many* disadvantages.' He is one of the two married men present, and his wife is at home. He feels that he can speak with authority.

The other married man says nothing, but looks at Vincent with an expression of profoundest sympathy.

The bachelors, reflecting that, after all, it is not they who are proposing to get married, and wishing to gain the approval of the ladies, now launch out loudly in praise of matrimony. 'It's a grand thing,' says one of them, in a tone of voice which betrays an utter lack of conviction.

'Best thing in the world,' says another, whose practical attitude towards marriage must lead one to conclude, after this remark, that he is too unselfish ever to want the best things for himself.

'Well,' says Vincent, 'I am going to get married. Jane, you hear that?'

But Jane is already being congratulated by all the ladies; it is now Mrs Broglie, and Mrs Broglie, and Mrs Broglie from every one of them. The guest who at first used the 'title' when speaking of Jane a little while ago, is

now very anxious to claim credit for having 'made the match'. She repeatedly says, 'Well, just look how I called you "Mrs Broglie," and now you are going to get married!' Vincent surveys the scene proudly. He has created a sensation. He is the master of the situation.

And Jane? What does she say? Secretly proud as a peacock, she merely tosses her head as if her coming marriage mattered nothing whatever to her.

'Tcho!' she exclaims, 'it's all the same to me, me dear,' but no one is deceived by her attempted assumption of indifference.

Daddy Buckram carefully helped himself to another drink of old Jamaica rum, mixed it with but a few drops of water, slowly drank it, and resumed the burden of his remarks.

'Tell her for me, sister, that I always did know she would keep in mind de good advice I give her when she was goin' to know de world. Jane was a gal I teck an interest in from she was ever so small' (he held out his right hand, palm downwards, about two feet above the floor, to show Jane's height at the time he first saw her), 'and if it wasn't fo' that, she couldn't turn out so good.'

'Quite so, sah,' agreed Jane's mother, respectfully smiling her approbation of the old gentleman's claim to be the chief author of Jane's good fortune. 'No doubt of it, Daddy, you advise her well.'

'Yes; I told her to behave herself, an' I remember I say to her, "If sinners entice thee, consent thou not." An' when dat lady that took her away from here write you to say that Jane run away, what said I to meself? I said, "Buckram, that little gal remember you' advice; she know why she run away. Don't fret about her." An' now, don't you see I was right?'

As a matter of fact, when the news of Jane's sudden departure from Mrs Mason had come to the village, the old man had privately expressed the opinion that the girl had always been bad, and that he had expected nothing different. But now he had forgotten that little incident completely.

'Jane is a good gal,' observed her father proudly; 'I want to see dat little gran'chile she have. I am teckin' two pair of fowl for it, an' a pig.'

'When you got her letter, Broder Burrell?' inquired the old Elder.

'Yesterday, Daddy, an' we starting next week to see her; we wi' stay in Kingstown a whole week till she married.'

'She have most of her t'ings already,' explained Jane's mother. 'All she want is a wedden dress, and she say de dressmaker is hurryin' up wid dat.'

‘Yes, we must be clothe in de wedding garments,’ commented Daddy Buckram. ‘Pass de bottle for me, broder. Stop! not too much water, it spoile de liquor. Too much water don’t go well wid rum.’

He sipped his drink, smacking his lips with loud appreciation, then took up the bottle and slowly read the label pasted upon it.

“‘Myers’s Rum,’” he ruminated; ‘I hear ’bout dat rum for some time now. It’s a good rum, Sister Burrell; it warm de stomach, and de flavouring of it is just what I like!’ He looked at the bottle thoughtfully and repeated, ‘It’s a nice rum.’

‘I are goin’ to put some of it in a little bottle for you, Daddy,’ said Mrs Burrell, anxious to please the old man. ‘Y’u can teck it wid y’u when you goin’ home.’

‘That is very kind of you, sister; you’ thoughtfulness show you’ kind heart. It is not everybody would think of such a thing.’

He, however, had been thinking of it for the last fifteen minutes, and had done everything he could in the way of suggestion to bring Mrs Burrell’s thoughts into harmony with his own. He watched her pour some of the liquor into a pint bottle with obvious satisfaction; and when she corked the bottle and handed it to him, he again observed that it was a fine rum and had put his stomach in excellent condition.

‘Those who have no wedding garments cannot be bidden to de feast’, he continued unctuously, taking up the burden of his previous discourse. ‘But you are bidden, and it must meck you’ head feel proud to think that a chile of yours keep herself up, an’ remain virtuous in spite of the tribulations and trials of a city like Kingston, till at last she goin’ to married to a gentleman. Well, I always tell dese pickney gal up here dat if they hear what I say, them will be all right, an’ Jane prove it. Tell her I send me blessing for her, sister, and dat she mus’ remember de ole man sometimes, an’ send all de good she have for him. Don’t fo’get me message. I am saying good-night, Sister Burrell.’

‘Good-night Daddy,’ said Mrs Burrell, respectfully helping the old man to the door.

‘Walk good, sah,’ advised Mr Burrell.

‘Dat’s a good man,’ said Mr Burrell, as the form of the Elder disappeared among the shadows of the rocks and trees.

‘Jane have a lot to thank him for,’ agreed his wife.

‘Aunt!’ almost shouted Cynthia, rushing up to Mrs Mason the Sunday after Daddy Buckram had sent his blessing for Jane—‘Aunt, guess what I heard in church this morning?’

Cynthia’s sister was but a little behind her, and it seemed to be a race between them as to who should first communicate the precious news which had, it was clear, thrown them both into a state of excitement.

‘What’s it?’ asked Mrs Mason quickly; she suspected scandal, and was never averse from listening to it.

‘Guess who is going to get married?’ asked Emma triumphantly, dexterously coming to the front as the bearer of important tidings.

Both girls waited impatiently as Mrs Mason ran over in her mind the names of those of her acquaintance who might be in the way of matrimony.

She mentioned a few of these persons, but her nieces shook their heads emphatically; there was here some mystery beyond her solution, as she saw in a minute or two.

‘Who is it?’ she asked at length, not being able to think who it could be; ‘anybody I know?’

‘Yes,’ said Cynthia; ‘you remember that girl— —’

‘Who run away from you?’ asked Kate, completing the question, and thus sharing in the joy of surprising her aunt.

‘Well, so many of them run away from me—the little wretches—that I can’t tell which of them you mean,’ returned Mrs Mason sententiously. ‘Is it the last one? But it can’t be she, for she is more likely to go to prison than to get married. Who it is?’

‘Jane! Jane Burrell!’ exclaimed both Cynthia and Emma at once. ‘Her banns give out to-day. We could hardly believe our ears when we heard it. Fancy Jane getting married!’

‘Wonders never cease,’ commented Mrs Mason. ‘Over three years now we never heard a word about that gurl, and to-day we hear she is to be married! I don’t know what wont happen next!’ Mrs Mason spoke as though quite prepared now for any extraordinary visitation which fate might have in store.

‘Remember I told you about a year ago that I thought I saw her downtown in a store?’ said Emma. ‘It must have been she, though she was quite like a woman, and had on a spanking piece of a dress. But I wonder what make her give out her banns in Coke Church, for she not a member there, and I never see her there.’

The strangeness of this proceeding on Jane's part put them to thinking, but it never entered their minds that Jane had deliberately told Vincent to have her banns published in that church because Cynthia and Emma, and Mrs Mason occasionally, went there. Jane had never forgotten that, and she dearly wished that her former mistresses should know of her great triumph. But a greater pleasure still was in store for her.

'If the wedding is in the evening, we must try and go to see it,' said Emma to her sister. 'After all, Jane wasn't a bad girl. You will go, Aunt Charlotte?'

'Am I in the 'abit of going to see nager people weddings?' asked Mrs Mason with overwhelming dignity. 'You can do what you like, but there is nothing extraordinary in a servant wedding.' Then she relaxed a little. 'I am glad she going to get married, for that is what most of them never do. But she was a decent gurl when she was here, and she owe a lot to me. I try my best with her, and now she reaping the benefits of it.' Mrs Mason thereupon determined that Jane's success in life should in future be pointed out to all her schoolgirls as proof positive of the happiness that came to those who walked in the path indicated by Mrs Mason.

When Cecil came in later in the day, he also was told the news about Jane, which, he graciously remarked, was better than he could ever have expected to hear about her. He did not take the trouble to add that he had seen her several times since she had run away, but that she had taken no notice whatever of him.

His sisters found out that the wedding was to take place at half-past five on a Wednesday afternoon at Coke Church, and, accordingly, they were there long before the bride could make her appearance. As is usual on such occasions, there was a small crowd of sightseers assembled in the churchyard, and some members of it commented audibly on the appearance of the wedding guests as they arrived.

Clearly it was 'a big wedding.' The guests were many. They came in carriages, the coachmen wearing white favours, the heads of the horses being decorated with rosettes of white silk ribbon. Most of the men wore dress suits, with black derby hats; one or two wore morning coats; and the women were resplendent in pink and blue and cream dresses, were covered with lace, and glistening with cheap jewellery. There was one young woman who flounced up the broad steps of the church in a manner that caused the crowd to stare, which was precisely her intention. In a flaring blue dress and high-heeled blue shoes, and carrying a big bunch of red and white roses in her hand, she stationed herself by the church door and calmly surveyed all those that looked at her—in her we recognise Celestina. She too had been

invited to come and see Jane married, so that she might take back to the country a properly exaggerated account of Jane's wedding, and she had come.

The guests continued to arrive, and the spectators to pass remarks on them; then, presently, there was an eager movement amongst the crowd. This was occasioned by the arrival of Vincent and his best-man, and now the spectators were able to indulge to their heart's content in loud expressions of opinion on his appearance and on the manner in which he bore himself.

Next to the bride, he was the most important personage of the day. He felt this himself. He had bestowed much thought on the fitting of his evening coat, the polish of his patent-leather shoes, the whiteness of his new kid gloves. On the day previous he had held animated arguments with his friends as to whether or not he should go to church smoking a cigar, and at one moment he had inclined to the affirmative, and at another had decided against the cigar. He was no smoker, yet that mattered nothing to his friends. The majority of these had decided, putting it to the vote as it were, that it would never do for him to go to be married as though he were a boy and not a man, and this way of considering the matter had eventually determined him to sacrifice personal comfort to the exigencies of a manly appearance. It was also his friends who had solemnly voted that only a Machado 'For Gentlemen' cigar would be appropriate on such an occasion: 'a man,' said one of them, 'should have the best, when him is going to be married or going to be hanged.' So with a fine cigar between his lips (his best-man being also similarly provided) and sitting in a carriage with an assumption of being at ease, he had driven through the streets to the church. He had attracted attention—that was part of the enjoyment of the proceedings. Repeatedly he had been enthusiastically hailed as 'Mr Bride' by the crowds who had rushed out of yards and houses on hearing that a wedding procession was passing down the street. He sprang out of the carriage with the look of a man to whom getting married was an everyday occurrence, yawned as though slightly bored by the whole affair, tossed away his cigar and walked slowly up the steps and to the door of the church, his best-man lagging a pace or two behind so that the people should have a good opportunity of appreciating him also. These all agreed that Vincent carried it off very well indeed; and now there was no one left to come except the bride and her father.

Jane's mother was to remain at the house where the wedding feast was spread, to protect it, and Jane's sister had come with Celestina. There was nothing to keep back the bride, but minute after minute slipped away, and still there was no sign of her. Jane knew that they would be anxiously

expecting her, and she had too keen a sense of dramatic values to lessen the period of restless expectation by a second. More than once Vincent's best-man drew his watch out of his pocket, consulting it with a thoughtful air, as though every moment were of importance now. Other gentlemen consulted their watches. Those ladies who wore watches consulted them also, holding them long enough in their hands for every one to see.

'Half-past five,' at last said the best-man: he looked serious.

'Not quite,' said Vincent; 'my watch says twenty-eight past five.'

'Wrong!' returned the other, determined to argue the matter out. 'I set mine by the twelve o'clock gun to-day, so I must be right. Hope nothing serious happen to you' bride.' Two ladies audibly expressed their fear that something serious had happened.

'It might be a good thing if——' began one of them, but what her suggestion was to be will never be known, for at that moment there was a cry from a ragged contingent of watchers in the street—

'She coming!'

Every man, woman, and child in the churchyard and by the door bent forward at the word, catching sight as they did so of an open carriage which dashed at full speed down the street towards the church. The coachman drove in grand style, and pulled up his horses magnificently in front of the wide-open gates. As he did so the spectators burst into a chorus of approval.

'God bless you, my dear!'

'Oh, she look pretty!'

'How her ole fader must be proud!'

Jane heard, and her heart almost stood still, so intense was her delight. Then, with her long veil streaming behind her, an orange-blossom wreath bedecked with silver leaves crowning her head, the heavy train of her white satin dress impeding her movements, she was handed by her father out of the carriage. Her bridesmaids hastened to arrange themselves behind her and to lift the train; at the church door they paused for a moment, and at that moment the organ pealed forth a wedding march and the choristers began to sing.

Up the long aisle the procession proceeded, everything appearing blurred and indistinct before Jane's eyes. She heard the singing and the music, knew that she was to be married at last; but her mind was in a whirl, and, as she afterwards expressed it, 'it was all just as if she had been standing on her head.'

She gave the answers she was told to give, the ring was slipped on her finger; she was Mrs Broglie—'the title' was hers in very fact! Then there

was some signing of names to be done, and congratulations to be received, and her father manifested a strong disposition to make a speech in the church, and had to be prevented.

It was over now. Down the aisle on the arm of her husband, her veil thrown off her face, the organ sounding triumphantly. At the door of the church she stopped for a second, and as she did so a shower of rose petals fell over her. Instantly she recognised who had thrown them, and lingered to speak.

‘Let us congratulate you, Ja—Mrs Broglie,’ Emma said, hastily correcting herself. ‘We came to see your wedding.’

Herself and her sister put out their hands, and Jane’s cup of joy was full.

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TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Jane: A Story of Jamaica*, by Herbert G. de Lisser.]