

***GEORGE
MOORE***

A warm, close-up photograph of a woman with long, wavy brown hair and sunglasses perched on her head. She is smiling broadly and hugging a young child with light brown hair. The child is also smiling and looking down. They are outdoors, with a sandy beach and the ocean in the background under bright, sunny light.

***ESTHER
WATERS***

George Moore

Esther Waters

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I

She stood on the platform watching the receding train. A few bushes hid the curve of the line; the white vapour rose above them, evaporating in the pale evening. A moment more and the last carriage would pass out of sight. The white gates swung forward slowly and closed over the line.

An oblong box painted reddish brown and tied with a rough rope lay on the seat beside her. The movement of her back and shoulders showed that the bundle she carried was a heavy one, the sharp bulging of the grey linen cloth that the weight was dead. She wore a faded yellow dress and a black jacket too warm for the day. A girl of twenty, short, strongly built, with short, strong arms. Her neck was plump, and her hair of so ordinary a brown that it passed unnoticed. The nose was too thick, but the nostrils were well formed. The eyes were grey, luminous, and veiled with dark lashes. But it was only when she laughed that her face lost its habitual expression, which was somewhat sullen; then it flowed with bright humour. She laughed now, showing a white line of almond-shaped teeth. The porter had asked her if she were afraid to leave her bundle with her box. Both, he said, would go up together in the donkey-cart. The donkey-cart came down every evening to fetch parcels.... That was the way to Woodview, right up the lane. She could not miss it. She would find the lodge gate in that clump of trees. The man lingered, for she was an attractive girl, but the station-master called him away to remove some luggage.

It was a barren country. Once the sea had crawled at high tide half-way up the sloping sides of those downs. It would do so now were it not for the shingle bank which its surging had thrown up along the coast. Between the shingle bank

and the shore a weedy river flowed and the little town stood clamped together, its feet in the water's edge. There were decaying shipyards about the harbour, and wooden breakwaters stretched long, thin arms seawards for ships that did not come. On the other side of the railway apple blossoms showed above a white-washed wall; some market gardening was done in the low-lying fields, whence the downs rose in gradual ascents. On the first slope there was a fringe of trees. That was Woodview.

The girl gazed on this bleak country like one who saw it for the first time. She saw without perceiving, for her mind was occupied with personal consideration. She found it difficult to decide whether she should leave her bundle with her box. It hung heavy in her hand, and she did not know how far Woodview was from the station. At the end of the platform the station-master took her ticket, and she passed over the level-crossing still undecided. The lane began with iron railings, laurels, and French windows. She had been in service in such houses, and knew if she were engaged in any of them what her duties would be. But the life in Woodview was a great dream, and she could not imagine herself accomplishing all that would be required of her. There would be a butler, a footman, and a page; she would not mind the page—but the butler and footman, what would they think? There would be an upper-housemaid and an under-housemaid, and perhaps a lady's-maid, and maybe that these ladies had been abroad with the family. She had heard of France and Germany. Their conversation would, no doubt, turn on such subjects. Her silence would betray her. They would ask her what situations she had been in, and when they learned the truth she would have to leave disgraced. She had not sufficient money to pay for a ticket to London. But what excuse could she give to Lady Elwin, who had rescued her from Mrs. Dunbar and got her the place of kitchen-maid at Woodview? She must not go back.

Her father would curse her, and perhaps beat her mother and her too. Ah! he would not dare to strike her again, and the girl's face flushed with shameful remembrance. And her little brothers and sisters would cry if she came back. They had little enough to eat as it was. Of course she must not go back. How silly of her to think of such a thing!

She smiled, and her face became as bright as the month: it was the first day of June. Still she would be glad when the first week was over. If she had only a dress to wear in the afternoons! The old yellow thing on her back would never do. But one of her cotton prints was pretty fresh; she must get a bit of red ribbon—that would make a difference. She had heard that the housemaids in places like Woodview always changed their dresses twice a day, and on Sundays went out in silk mantles and hats in the newest fashion. As for the lady's-maid, she of course had all her mistress's clothes, and walked with the butler. What would such people think of a little girl like her! Her heart sank at the thought, and she sighed, anticipating much bitterness and disappointment. Even when her first quarter's wages came due she would hardly be able to buy herself a dress: they would want the money at home. Her quarter's wages! A month's wages most like, for she'd never be able to keep the place. No doubt all those fields belonged to the Squire, and those great trees too; they must be fine folk, quite as fine as Lady Elwin—finer, for she lived in a house like those near the station.

On both sides of the straight road there were tall hedges, and the nursemaids lay in the wide shadows on the rich summer grass, their perambulators at a little distance. The hum of the town died out of the ear, and the girl continued to imagine the future she was about to enter on with increasing distinctness. Looking across the fields she could see two houses, one in grey stone, the other in red brick

with a gable covered with ivy; and between them, lost in the north, the spire of a church. On questioning a passer-by she learnt that the first house was the Rectory, the second was Woodview Lodge. If that was the lodge, what must the house be?

Two hundred yards further on the road branched, passing on either side of a triangular clump of trees, entering the sea road; and under the leaves the air was green and pleasant, and the lungs of the jaded town girl drew in a deep breath of health. Behind the plantation she found a large white-painted wooden gate. It opened into a handsome avenue, and the gatekeeper told her to keep straight on, and to turn to the left when she got to the top. She had never seen anything like it before, and stopped to admire the uncouth arms of elms, like rafters above the roadway; pink clouds showed through, and the monotonous dove seemed the very heart of the silence.

Her doubts returned; she never would be able to keep the place. The avenue turned a little, and she came suddenly upon a young man leaning over the paling, smoking his pipe.

"Please sir, is this the way to Woodview?"

"Yes, right up through the stables, round to the left." Then, noticing the sturdily-built figure, yet graceful in its sturdiness, and the bright cheeks, he said, "You look pretty well done; that bundle is a heavy one, let me hold it for you."

"I am a bit tired," she said, leaning the bundle on the paling. "They told me at the station that the donkey-cart would bring up my box later on."

"Ah, then you are the new kitchen-maid? What's your name?"

"Esther Waters."

"My mother's the cook here; you'll have to mind your p's and q's or else you'll be dropped on. The devil of a temper while it lasts, but not a bad sort if you don't put her out."

"Are you in service here?"

"No, but I hope to be afore long. I could have been two years ago, but mother did not like me to put on livery, and I don't know how I'll face her when I come running down to go out with the carriage."

"Is the place vacant?" Esther asked, raising her eyes timidly, looking at him sideways.

"Yes, Jim Story got the sack about a week ago. When he had taken a drop he'd tell every blessed thing that was done in the stables. They'd get him down to the 'Red Lion' for the purpose; of course the squire couldn't stand that."

"And shall you take the place?"

"Yes. I'm not going to spend my life carrying parcels up and down the King's Road, Brighton, if I can squeeze in here. It isn't so much the berth that I care about, but the advantages, information fresh from the fountain-head. You won't catch me chattering over the bar at the 'Red Lion' and having every blessed word I say wired up to London and printed next morning in all the papers."

Esther wondered what he was talking about, and, looking at him, she saw a low, narrow forehead, a small, round head, a long nose, a pointed chin, and rather hollow, bloodless

cheeks. Notwithstanding the shallow chest, he was powerfully built, the long arms could deal a swinging blow. The low forehead and the lustreless eyes told of a slight, unimaginative brain, but regular features and a look of natural honesty made William Latch a man that ten men and eighteen women out of twenty would like.

"I see you have got books in that bundle," he said at the end of a long silence. "Fond of readin'?"

"They are mother's books," she replied, hastily. "I was afraid to leave them at the station, for it would be easy for anyone to take one out, and I should not miss it until I undid the bundle."

"Sarah Tucker—that's the upper-housemaid—will be after you to lend them to her. She is a wonderful reader. She has read every story that has come out in *Bow Bells* for the last three years, and you can't puzzle her, try as you will. She knows all the names, can tell you which lord it was that saved the girl from the carriage when the 'osses were tearing like mad towards a precipice a 'undred feet deep, and all about the baronet for whose sake the girl went out to drown herself in the moonlight, I 'aven't read the books mesel', but Sarah and me are great pals,"

Esther trembled lest he might ask her again if she were fond of reading; she could not read. Noticing a change in the expression of her face, he concluded that she was disappointed to hear that he liked Sarah and regretted his indiscretion.

"Good friends, you know—no more. Sarah and me never hit it off; she will worry me with the stories she reads. I don't know what is your taste, but I likes something more practical; the little 'oss in there, he is more to my taste."

Fearing he might speak again of her books, she mustered up courage and said—

"They told me at the station that the donkey-cart would bring up my box."

"The donkey-cart isn't going to the station to-night—you'll want your things, to be sure. I'll see the coachman; perhaps he is going down with the trap. But, golly! it has gone the half-hour. I shall catch it for keeping you talking, and my mother has been expecting you for the last hour. She hasn't a soul to help her, and six people coming to dinner. You must say the train was late."

"Let us go, then," cried Esther. "Will you show me the way?"

Over the iron gate which opened into the pleasure-ground, thick branches of evergreen oaks made an arch of foliage, and between the trees a glimpse was caught of the angles and urns of an Italian house—distant about a hundred yards. A high brick wall separated the pleasure-ground from the stables, and as William and Esther turned to the left and walked up the roadway he explained that the numerous buildings were stables. They passed by many doors, hearing the trampling of horses and the rattling of chains. Then the roadway opened into a handsome yard overlooked by the house, the back premises of which had been lately rebuilt in red brick. There were gables and ornamental porches, and through the large kitchen windows the servants were seen passing to and fro. At the top of this yard was a gate. It led into the park, and, like the other gate, was overhung by bunched evergreens. A string of horses came towards this gate, and William ran to open it. The horses were clothed in grey cloth. They wore hoods, and Esther noticed the black round eyes looking through the eyelet holes. They were ridden by small, ugly boys, who swung their little legs, and

struck them with ash plants when they reached their heads forward chawing at the bits. When William returned he said, "Look there, the third one; that's he—that's Silver Braid."

An impatient knocking at the kitchen window interrupted his admiration, and William, turning quickly, said, "Mind you say the train was late; don't say I kept you, or you'll get me into the devil of a pickle. This way." The door let into a wide passage covered with coconut matting. They walked a few yards; the kitchen was the first door, and the handsome room she found herself in did not conform to anything that Esther had seen or heard of kitchens. The range almost filled one end of the room, and on it a dozen saucepans were simmering; the dresser reached to the ceiling, and was covered with a multitude of plates and dishes. Esther thought how she must strive to keep it in its present beautiful condition, and the elegant white-capped servants passing round the white table made her feel her own insignificance.

"This is the new kitchen-maid, mother."

"Ah, is it indeed?" said Mrs. Latch looking up from the tray of tartlets which she had taken from the oven and was filling with jam. Esther noticed the likeness that Mrs. Latch bore to her son. The hair was iron grey, and, as in William's face, the nose was the most prominent feature.

"I suppose you'll tell me the train was late?"

"Yes, mother, the train was a quarter of an hour late," William chimed in.

"I didn't ask you, you idle, lazy, good-for-nothing vagabond. I suppose it was you who kept the girl all this time. Six people coming to dinner, and I've been the whole day without a kitchen-maid. If Margaret Gale hadn't come down

to help me, I don't know where we should be; as it is, the dinner will be late."

The two housemaids, both in print dresses, stood listening. Esther's face clouded, and when Mrs. Latch told her to take her things off and set to and prepare the vegetables, so that she might see what she was made of, Esther did not answer at once. She turned away, saying under her breath, "I must change my dress, and my box has not come up from the station yet."

"You can tuck your dress up, and Margaret Gale will lend you her apron."

Esther hesitated.

"What you've got on don't look as if it could come to much damage. Come, now, set to."

The housemaids burst into loud laughter, and then a sullen look of dogged obstinacy passed over and settled on Esther's face, even to the point of visibly darkening the white and rose complexion.



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A sloping roof formed one end of the room, and through a broad, single pane the early sunlight fell across a wall papered with blue and white flowers. Print dresses hung over the door. On the wall were two pictures—a girl with a basket of flowers, the coloured supplement of an illustrated newspaper, and an old and dilapidated last century print. On the chimney-piece there were photographs of the Gale family in Sunday clothes, and the green vases that Sarah had given Margaret on her birthday.

And in a low, narrow iron bed, pushed close against the wall in the full glare of the sunlight, Esther lay staring half-awake, her eyes open but still dim with dreams. She looked at the clock. It was not yet time to get up, and she raised her arms as if to cross them behind her head, but a sudden remembrance of yesterday arrested her movement, and a sudden shadow settled on her face. She had refused to prepare the vegetables. She hadn't answered, and the cook had turned her out of the kitchen. She had rushed from the house under the momentary sway of hope that she might succeed in walking back to London; but William had overtaken her in the avenue, he had expostulated with her, he had refused to allow her to pass. She had striven to tear herself from him, and, failing, had burst into tears. However, he had been kind, and at last she had allowed him to lead

her back, and all the time he had filled her ears with assurances that he would make it all right with his mother. But Mrs. Latch had closed her kitchen against her, and she had had to go to her room. Even if they paid her fare back to London, how was she to face her mother? What would father say? He would drive her from the house. But she had done nothing wrong. Why did cook insult her?

As she pulled on her stockings she stopped and wondered if she should awake Margaret Gale. Margaret's bed stood in the shadow of the obliquely falling wall; and she lay heavily, one arm thrown forward, her short, square face raised to the light. She slept so deeply that for a moment Esther felt afraid. Suddenly the eyes opened, and Margaret looked at her vaguely, as if out of eternity. Raising her hands to her eyes she said—

"What time is it?"

"It has just gone six."

"Then there's plenty of time; we needn't be down before seven. You get on with your dressing; there's no use in my getting up till you are done—we'd be tumbling over each other. This is no room to put two girls to sleep in—one glass not much bigger than your hand. You'll have to get your box under your bed.... In my last place I had a beautiful room with a Brussels carpet, and a marble washstand. I wouldn't stay here three days if it weren't——" The girl laughed and turned lazily over.

Esther did not answer.

"Now, isn't it a grubby little room to put two girls to sleep in? What was your last place like?"

Esther answered that she had hardly been in service before. Margaret was too much engrossed in her own thoughts to notice the curtness of the answer.

"There's only one thing to be said for Woodview, and that is the eating; we have anything we want, and we'd have more than we want if it weren't for the old cook: she must have her little bit out of everything and she cuts us short in our bacon in the morning. But that reminds me! You have set the cook against you; you'll have to bring her over to your side if you want to remain here."

"Why should I be asked to wash up the moment I came in the house, before even I had time to change my dress."

"It was hard on you. She always gets as much as she can out of her kitchen-maid. But last night she was pressed, there was company to dinner. I'd have lent you an apron, and the dress you had on wasn't of much account."

"It isn't because a girl is poor——"

"Oh, I didn't mean that; I know well enough what it is to be hard up." Margaret clasped her stays across her plump figure and walked to the door for her dress. She was a pretty girl, with a snub nose and large, clear eyes. Her hair was lighter in tone than Esther's, and she had brushed it from her forehead so as to obviate the defect of her face, which was too short.

Esther was on her knees saying her prayers when Margaret turned to the light to button her boots.

"Well, I never!" she exclaimed. "Do you think prayers any good?"

Esther looked up angrily.

"I don't want to say anything against saying prayers, but I wouldn't before the others if I was you—they'll chaff dreadful, and call you Creeping Jesus."

"Oh, Margaret, I hope they won't do anything so wicked. But I am afraid I shan't be long here, so it doesn't matter what they think of *me*."

When they got downstairs they opened the windows and doors, and Margaret took Esther round, showing her where the things were kept, and telling her for how many she must lay the table. At that moment a number of boys and men came clattering up the passage. They cried to Esther to hurry up, declaring that they were late. Esther did not know who they were, but she served them as best she might. They breakfasted hastily and rushed away to the stables; and they had not been long gone when the squire and his son Arthur appeared in the yard. The Gaffer, as he was called, was a man of about medium height. He wore breeches and gaiters, and in them his legs seemed grotesquely thick. His son was a narrow-chested, undersized young man, absurdly thin and hatchet-faced. He was also in breeches and gaiters, and to his boots were attached long-necked spurs. His pale yellow hair gave him a somewhat ludicrous appearance, as he stood talking to his father, but the moment he prepared to get into the saddle he seemed quite different. He rode a beautiful chestnut horse, a little too thin, Esther thought, and the ugly little boys were mounted on horses equally thin. The squire rode a stout grey cob, and he watched the chestnut, and was also interested in the brown horse that walked with its head in the air, pulling at the smallest of all the boys, a little freckled, red-headed fellow.

"That's Silver Braid, the brown horse, the one that the Demon is riding; the chestnut is Bayleaf, Ginger is riding

him: he won the City and Suburban. Oh, we did have a fine time then, for we all had a bit on. The betting was twenty to one, and I won twelve and six pence. Grover won thirty shillings. They say that John—that's the butler—won a little fortune; but he is so close no one knows what he has on. Cook wouldn't have anything on; she says that betting is the curse of servants—you know what is said, that it was through betting that Mrs. Latch's husband got into trouble. He was steward here, you know, in the late squire's time."

Then Margaret told all she had heard on the subject. The late Mr. Latch had been a confidential steward, and large sums of money were constantly passing through his hands for which he was never asked for any exact account. Contrary to all expectation, Marksman was beaten for the Chester Cup, and the squire's property was placed under the charge of a receiver. Under the new management things were gone into more closely, and it was then discovered that Mr. Latch's accounts were incapable of satisfactory explanation. The defeat of Marksman had hit Mr. Latch as hard as it had hit the squire, and to pay his debts of honour he had to take from the money placed in his charge, confidently hoping to return it in a few months. The squire's misfortunes anticipated the realization of his intentions; proceedings were threatened, but were withdrawn when Mrs. Latch came forward with all her savings and volunteered to forego her wages for a term of years. Old Latch died soon after, some lucky bets set the squire on his legs again, the matter was half forgotten, and in the next generation it became the legend of the Latch family. But to Mrs. Latch it was an incurable grief, and to remove her son from influences which, in her opinion, had caused his father's death, Mrs. Latch had always refused Mr. Barfield's offers to do something for William. It was against her will that he had been taught to ride; but to her great joy he soon grew out of all possibility of becoming a jockey. She had

then placed him in an office in Brighton; but the young man's height and shape marked him out for livery, and Mrs. Latch was pained when Mr. Barfield proposed it. "Why cannot they leave me my son?" she cried; for it seemed to her that in that hateful cloth, buttons and cockade, he would be no more her son, and she could not forget what the Latches had been long ago.

"I believe there's going to be a trial this morning," said Margaret; "Silver Braid was stripped—you noticed that—and Ginger always rides in the trials."

"I don't know what a trial is," said Esther. "They are not carriage-horses, are they? They look too slight."

"Carriage-horses, you ninny! Where have you been to all this while—can't you see that they are race-horses?"

Esther hung down her head and murmured something which Margaret didn't catch.

"To tell the truth, I didn't know much about them when I came, but then one never hears anything else here. And that reminds me—it is as much as your place is worth to breathe one syllable about them horses; you must know nothing when you are asked. That's what Jim Story got sacked for—saying in the 'Red Lion' that Valentine pulled up lame. We don't know how it came to the Gaffer's ears. I believe that it was Mr. Leopold that told; he finds out everything. But I was telling you how I learnt about the race-horses. It was from Jim Story—Jim was my pal—Sarah is after William, you know, the fellow who brought you into the kitchen last night. Jim could never talk about anything but the 'osses. We'd go every night and sit in the wood-shed, that's to say if it was wet; if it was fine we'd walk in the drove-way. I'd have married Jim, I know I should, if he hadn't

been sent away. That's the worst of being a servant. They sent Jim away just as if he was a dog. It was wrong of him to say the horse pulled up lame; I admit that, but they needn't have sent him away as they did."

Esther was absorbed in the consideration of her own perilous position. Would they send her away at the end of the week, or that very afternoon? Would they give her a week's wages, or would they turn her out destitute to find her way back to London as best she might? What should she do if they turned her out-of-doors that very afternoon? Walk back to London? She did not know if that was possible. She did not know how far she had come—a long distance, no doubt. She had seen woods, hills, rivers, and towns flying past. Never would she be able to find her way back through that endless country; besides, she could not carry her box on her back.... What was she to do? Not a friend, not a penny in the world. Oh, why did such misfortune fall on a poor little girl who had never harmed anyone in the world! And if they did give her her fare back—what then?... Should she go home?... To her mother—to her poor mother, who would burst into tears, who would say, "Oh, my poor darling, I don't know what we shall do; your father will never let you stay here."

For Mrs. Latch had not spoken to her since she had come into the kitchen, and it seemed to Esther that she had looked round with the air of one anxious to discover something that might serve as a pretext for blame. She had told Esther to make haste and lay the table afresh. Those who had gone were the stable folk, and breakfast had now to be prepared for the other servants. The person in the dark green dress who spoke with her chin in the air, whose nose had been pinched to purple just above the nostrils, was Miss Grover, the lady's-maid. Grover addressed an occasional remark to Sarah Tucker, a tall girl with a thin

freckled face and dark-red hair. The butler, who was not feeling well, did not appear at breakfast, and Esther was sent to him with a cup of tea.

There were the plates to wash and the knives to clean, and when they were done there were potatoes, cabbage, onions to prepare, saucepans to fill with water, coal to fetch for the fire. She worked steadily without flagging, fearful of Mrs. Barfield, who would come down, no doubt, about ten o'clock to order dinner. The race-horses were coming through the paddock-gate; Margaret called to Mr. Randal, a little man, wizen, with a face sallow with frequent indigestions.

"Well, do you think the Gaffer's satisfied?" said Margaret. John made no articulate reply, but he muttered something, and his manner showed that he strongly deprecated all female interest in racing; and when Sarah and Grover came running down the passage and overwhelmed him with questions, crowding around him, asking both together if Silver Braid had won his trial, he testily pushed them aside, declaring that if he had a race-horse he would not have a woman-servant in the place.... "A positive curse, this chatter, chatter. Won his trial, indeed! What business had a lot of female folk——" The rest of John's sarcasm was lost in his shirt collar as he hurried away to his pantry, closing the door after him.

"What a testy little man he is!" said Sarah; "he might have told us which won. He has known the Gaffer so long that he knows the moment he looks at him whether the gees are all right."

"One can't speak to a chap in the lane that he doesn't know all about it next day," said Margaret. "Peggy hates him; you know the way she skulks about the back garden and up the

'ill so that she may meet young Johnson as he is ridin' home."

"I'll have none of this scandal-mongering going on in my kitchen," said Mrs. Latch. "Do you see that girl there? She can't get past to her scullery."

Esther would have managed pretty well if it had not been for the dining-room lunch. Miss Mary was expecting some friends to play tennis with her, and, besides the roast chicken, there were the c  telettes    la Soubise and a curry. There was for dessert a jelly and a blancmange, and Esther did not know where any of the things were, and a great deal of time was wasted. "Don't you move, I might as well get it myself," said the old woman. Mr. Randal, too, lost his temper, for she had no hot plates ready, nor could she distinguish between those that were to go to the dining-room and those that were to go to the servants' hall. She understood, however, that it would not be wise to give way to her feeling, and that the only way she could hope to retain her situation was by doing nothing to attract attention. She must learn to control that temper of hers—she must and would. And it was in this frame of mind and with this determination that she entered the servants' hall.

There were not more than ten or eleven at dinner, but sitting close together they seemed more numerous, and quite half the number of faces that looked up as she took her place next to Margaret Gale, were unknown to her. There were the four ugly little boys whom she had seen on the race horses, but she did not recognize them at first, and nearly opposite, sitting next to the lady's-maid, was a small, sandy-haired man about forty: he was beginning to show signs of stoutness, and two little round whiskers grew out of his pallid cheeks. Mr. Randal sat at the end of the table helping the pudding. He addressed the sandy-haired man as

Mr. Swindles; but Esther learnt afterwards his real name was Ward, and that he was Mr. Barfield's head groom. She learnt, too, that "the Demon" was not the real name of the little carrot-haired boy, and she looked at him in amazement when he whispered in her ear that he would dearly love a real go-in at that pudding, but that it was so fattening that he didn't ever dare to venture on more than a couple of sniffs. Seeing that the girl did not understand, he added, by way of explanation, "You know that I must keep under the six stone, and at times it becomes awful 'ard."

Esther thought him a nice little fellow, and tried to persuade him to forego his resolution not to touch pudding, until Mr. Swindles told her to desist. The attention of the whole table being thus drawn towards the boy, Esther was still further surprised at the admiration he seemed so easily to command and the important position he seemed to occupy, notwithstanding his diminutive stature, whereas the bigger boys were treated with very little consideration. The long-nosed lad, with weak eyes and sloping shoulders, who sat on the other side of the table on Mr. Swindles' left, was everybody's laughing-stock, especially Mr. Swindles', who did not cease to poke fun at him. Mr. Swindles was now telling poor Jim's misadventures with the Gaffer.

"But why do you call him Mr. Leopold when his name is Mr. Randal?" Esther ventured to inquire of the Demon.

"On account of Leopold Rothschild," said the Demon; "he's pretty near as rich, if the truth was known—won a pile over the City and Sub. Pity you weren't there; might have had a bit on."

"I have never seen the City," Esther replied innocently.

"Never seen the City and Sub! ... I was up, had a lot in hand, so I came away from my 'orses the moment I got into the dip. The Tinman nearly caught me on the post—came with a terrific rush; he is just hawful, that Tinman is. I did catch it from the Gaffer—he did give it me."

The plates of all the boys except the Demon's were now filled with beefsteak pudding, potatoes, and greens, likewise Esther's. Mr. Leopold, Mr. Swindles, the housemaid, and the cook dined off the leg of mutton, a small slice of which was sent to the Demon. "That for a dinner!" and as he took up his knife and fork and cut a small piece of his one slice, he said, "I suppose you never had to reduce yourself three pounds; girls never have. I do run to flesh so, you wouldn't believe it. If I don't walk to Portslade and back every second day, I go up three or four pounds. Then there's nothing for it but the physic, and that's what settles me. Can you take physic?"

"I took three Beecham's pills once."

"Oh, that's nothing. Can you take castor-oil?"

Esther looked in amazement at the little boy at her side. Swindles had overheard the question and burst into a roar of laughter. Everyone wanted to know what the joke was, and, feeling they were poking fun at her, Esther refused to answer.

The first helpings of pudding or mutton had taken the edge off their appetites, and before sending their plates for more they leaned over the table listening and laughing open-mouthed. It was a bare room, lit with one window, against which Mrs. Latch's austere figure appeared in dark-grey silhouette. The window looked on one of the little back courts and tiled ways which had been built at the back of

the house; and the shadowed northern light softened the listening faces with grey tints.

"You know," said Mr. Swindles, glancing at Jim as if to assure himself that the boy was there and unable to escape from the hooks of his sarcasm, "how fast the Gaffer talks, and how he hates to be asked to repeat his words. Knowing this, Jim always says, 'Yes, sir; yes, sir.' 'Now do you quite understand?' says the Gaffer. 'Yes, sir; yes, sir,' replies Jim, not having understood one word of what was said; but relying on us to put him right. 'Now what did he say I was to do?' says Jim, the moment the Gaffer is out of hearing. But this morning we were on ahead, and the Gaffer had Jim all to himself. As usual he says, 'Now do you quite understand?' and as usual Jim says, 'Yes, sir; yes, sir.' Suspecting that Jim had not understood, I said when he joined us, 'Now if you are not sure what he said you had better go back and ask him,' but Jim declared that he had perfectly understood. 'And what did he tell you to do?' said I. 'He told me,' says Jim, 'to bring the colt along and finish up close by where he would be standing at the end of the track.' I thought it rather odd to send Firefly such a stiff gallop as all that, but Jim was certain that he had heard right. And off they went, beginning the other side of Southwick Hill. I saw the Gaffer with his arms in the air, and don't know now what he said. Jim will tell you. He did give it you, didn't he, you old Woolgatherer?" said Mr. Swindles, slapping the boy on the shoulder.

"You may laugh as much as you please, but I'm sure he did tell me to come along three-quarter speed after passing the barn," replied Jim, and to change the conversation he asked Mr. Leopold for some more pudding, and the Demon's hungry eyes watched the last portion being placed on the Woolgatherer's plate. Noticing that Esther drank no beer, he exclaimed—

"Well, I never; to see yer eat and drink one would think that it was you who was a-wasting to ride the crack at Goodwood."

The remark was received with laughter, and, excited by his success, the Demon threw his arms round Esther, and seizing her hands, said, "Now yer a jest beginning to get through yer 'osses, and when you get on a level——" But the Demon, in his hungry merriment, had bestowed no thought of finding a temper in such a staid little girl, and a sound box on the ear threw him backwards into his seat surprised and howling. "Yer nasty thing!" he blubbered out. "Couldn't you see it was only a joke?" But passion was hot in Esther. She had understood no word that had been said since she had sat down to dinner, and, conscious of her poverty and her ignorance, she imagined that a great deal of the Demon's conversation had been directed against her; and, choking with indignation, she only heard indistinctly the reproaches with which the other little boys covered her—"nasty, dirty, ill-tempered thing, scullery-maid," etc.; nor did she understand their whispered plans to duck her when she passed the stables. All looked a little askance, especially Grover and Mr. Leopold. Margaret said—

"That will teach these impertinent little jockey-boys that the servants' hall is not the harness-room; they oughtn't to be admitted here at all."

Mr. Leopold nodded, and told the Demon to leave off blubbering. "You can't be so much hurt as all that. Come, wipe your eyes and have a piece of currant tart, or leave the room. I want to hear from Mr. Swindles an account of the trial. We know that Silver Braid won, but we haven't heard how he won nor yet what the weights were."

"Well," said Mr. Swindles, "what I makes out is this. I was riding within a pound or two of nine stone, and The Rake is, as you know, seven pounds, no more, worse than Bayleaf. Ginger rides usually as near as possible my weight—we'll say he was riding nine two—I think he could manage that—and the Demon, we know, he is now riding over the six stone; in his ordinary clothes he rides six seven."

"Yes, yes, but how do we know that there was any lead to speak of in the Demon's saddle-cloth?"

"The Demon says there wasn't above a stone. Don't you, Demon?"

"I don't know nothing! I'm not going to stand being clouted by the kitchen-maid."

"Oh, shut up, or leave the room," said Mr. Leopold; "we don't want to hear any more about that."

"I started making the running according to orders. Ginger was within three-quarters of a length of me, being pulled out of the saddle. The Gaffer was standing at the three-quarters of the mile, and there Ginger won fairly easily, but they went on to the mile—they were the orders—and there the Demon won by half a length, that is to say if Ginger wasn't a-kidding of him."

"A-kidding of me!" said the Demon. "When we was a hundred yards from 'ome I steadied without his noticing me, and then I landed in the last fifty yards by half a length. Ginger can't ride much better than any other gentleman."

"Yer see," said Mr. Swindles, "he'd sooner have a box on the ear from the kitchen-maid than be told a gentleman could

kid him at a finish. He wouldn't mind if it was the Tinman, eh, Demon?"

"We know," said Mr. Leopold, "that Bayleaf can get the mile; there must have been a lot of weight between them. Besides, I should think that the trial was at the three-quarters of the mile. The mile was so much kid."

"I should say," replied Mr. Swindles, "that the 'orses were tried at twenty-one pounds, and if Silver Braid can beat Bayleaf at that weight, he'll take a deal of beating at Goodwood."

And leaning forward, their arms on the table, with large pieces of cheese at the end of their knives, the maid-servants and the jockey listened while Mr. Leopold and Mr. Swindles discussed the chances the stable had of pulling off the Stewards' Cup with Silver Braid.

"But he will always keep on trying them," said Mr. Swindles, "and what's the use, says I, of trying 'orses that are no more than 'alf fit? And them downs is just rotten with 'orse watchers; it has just come to this, that you can't comb out an 'orse's mane without seeing it in the papers the day after. If I had my way with them gentry——" Mr. Swindles finished his beer at a gulp, and he put down his glass as firmly as he desired to put down the horse watchers. At the end of a long silence Mr. Leopold said—

"Come into my pantry and smoke a pipe. Mr. Arthur will be down presently. Perhaps he'll tell us what weight he was riding this morning."

"Cunning old bird," said Mr. Swindles, as he rose from the table and wiped his shaven lips with the back of his hand; "and you'd have us believe that you didn't know, would you?"

You'd have us believe, would you, that the Gaffer don't tell you everything when you bring up his hot water in the morning, would you?"

Mr. Leopold laughed under his breath, and looking mysterious and very rat-like he led the way to his pantry. Esther watched them in strange trouble of soul. She had heard of racecourses as shameful places where men were led to their ruin, and betting she had always understood to be sinful, but in this house no one seemed to think of anything else. It was no place for a Christian girl.

"Let's have some more of the story," Margaret said. "You've got the new number. The last piece was where he is going to ask the opera-singer to run away with him."

Sarah took an illustrated journal out of her pocket and began to read aloud.



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Esther was one of the Plymouth Brethren. In their chapel, if the house in which they met could be called a chapel, there were neither pictured stories of saints, nor vestments, nor music, nor even imaginative stimulant in the shape of written prayers. Her knowledge of life was strictly limited to her experience of life; she knew no drama of passion except that which the Gospels relate: this story in the *Family Reader* was the first representation of life she had met with, and its humanity thrilled her like the first idol set up for worship. The actress told Norris that she loved him. They were on a balcony, the sky was blue, the moon was shining, the warm scent of the mignonette came up from the garden below, the man was in evening dress with diamond shirt studs, the actress's arm was large and white. They had loved each other for years. The strangest events had happened for the purpose of bringing them together, and, fascinated against her will, Esther could not but listen. But at the end of the chapter the racial instinct forced reproof from her.

"I am sure it is wicked to read such tales."

Sarah looked at her in mute astonishment. Grover said—